

**AERA 2017 Symposium: Decolonizing and De-Canonizing Curriculum Futurity: An Engaged Discussion on João Paraskeva's *Conflicts in Curriculum Theory***

**On linguistic epistemicides and colonization: Looking at subtractive education for bilingual/ bicultural children<sup>1</sup>**

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**Statement of purpose**

The purpose of this literature review on João Parakeva's work (2011, 2016) is to analyse his specific contributions that illuminate the need to deterritorialize the received field in curriculum studies and in teacher education in order to properly address the roots of oppression that underlie the subtractive forms of education that are imposed on bilingual/bicultural students worldwide. It focuses on two key concepts that traverse his proposal for an Itinerant Curriculum Theory (ICT) and highlights how these can be used to further advance an agenda for transformative and emancipatory education for these students.

**Key content**

In this paper, I will highlight 2 significant contributions from João Paraskeva's theory on ICT that help me analyse and deconstruct the situation of bilingual/ bicultural children as I know it, in Portuguese schools, but also in schools worldwide. These are (1)

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a shortened and modified version of the text recently submitted to the Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies.

the concept of *curriculum epistemicides* that arises from the hegemony of epistemologies derived from Western-European dominated, US- and Canadian-based curriculum studies field and that exclude all forms of existing knowledge and social realities beyond the scope of these epistemologies and (2) the concept of *epistemic colonization* that helps to unveil the pervasive hegemony of the English language in shaping thought and forms of knowledge that are accepted as scientific and valid.

### ***On curriculum epistemicides***

As stated by Sousa Santos (2008), the asymmetry of knowledges and how they relate to one another is an epistemological difference that manifests itself not only as such, but also as a political difference. In its most utmost form, it leads to

(...) epistemological fascism because it is a violent relation of destruction or suppression of other knowledges [...]. Epistemological fascism exists under the form of epistemicide, whose most violent form was the forced conversion and suppression of non-western knowledges carried out by European colonialism and that are still in place today under not always subtle forms. (para. 36, translated from the Portuguese).

Drawing from the work of many leading authors in the curriculum field, Paraskeva (2016) characterizes the current epistemological situation as a series of *curriculum epistemicides*, “a capital crime in a society that claims social and cognitive justice (...) a crime against humanity” (p. 162), largely due to the prevalence of an *abyssal thinking* created by a combination of colonialism, neoliberalism, and patriarchy. In framing his argument, he travels *extensively* through the ‘other side of the epistemic abyss’ (identified by Boaventura Sousa Santos), unveiling it, and construing a compelling argument for the inclusion, in the curriculum theory and practice, in schooling, in teacher education, and in

research fields, of a wider diversity of knowledges. These knowledges will humbly recognize and validate the Oriental, African, Indigenous, ‘Southern’ epistemologies that have been *just there* on the invisible side of this epistemic abyss albeit systematically obliterated in Western, male dominated curriculum theory and practice discourses.

As argued by Paraskeva (2016), deterritorializing the curriculum and teacher education field cannot be done without counteracting the *linguisticides* or “epistemological euthanasia” (p. 238), that come with the imperialist ‘epistemological armada’. They are perpetrated by the colonial powers in the past (going on in the present) that, by suppressing indigenous languages, are suppressing indigenous knowledges. In order to properly function, *linguisticides* need *linguicist* ideologies and practices: following Skutnabb-Kangas’ (1988) definition, *linguicism(s)* are “ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal distribution of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (on the basis of their mother tongue).” (p. 13). On the other hand, Phillipson (1997) roots the historical legacy of linguistic imperialism on the linguicism that exists in “processes of resource allocation, of the vindication or vilification in discourse of one language rather than another” (p. 239), processes that are carried out by “‘experts’ from the North and elites in the South” (p. 240). Therefore, *linguicisms* are a form of epistemicide exerted on a particular sociolinguistic group, by more powerful groups, usually associated with other factors such as race, ethnicity, and social class. The prevalence of *linguisticides* and *linguicism* nowadays is clear in what comes to the validated scientific production in education; it is also clear in the subtractive, disempowering, subordinated educational modes in which linguistic (and ethnic) minorities are educated in schools worldwide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988).

Western education and curriculum planning have always emphasised homogeneity rather than diversity, and national curricula have always tried to reinforce national cultures so as to produce subjects with a national identity (Macedo, Dendrinis, & Gounari, 2006, p. 55). This is also what we found out in a review study of foreign/ second language education research studies in Portugal in the ‘grey literature’, covering the period from 2006-2011 (Vieira, Moreira & Peralta, 2014). The analysis of the situation of bilingual/ bicultural students (the Portuguese equivalent to English Language Learners in the USA), indicates that there needs to be a more comprehensive view on the sociolinguistic situation of these students, as well as greater investment in policies, resources and teacher education programmes; even though learning Portuguese as a second language (and bilingualism in general) is a desired and valuable experience that can be put in the service of inclusive democratic citizenship and globalization, findings indicate a huge distance between policies and practices, and two major constraints are pointed out: the established school cultures, where a fragmented, monolingual approach to language education prevails, and the lack of appropriate teacher education that just ‘ignores’ that these student exist.

The epistemicide goes on when we look at the way second language education mirrors schooling education in general; it’s not just public schools in the USA that use a combination of meritocracy, high-stakes testing, ability-grouping, low teachers’ expectations, and an oppressive curriculum to perpetuate inequality among bilingual/ bicultural students (see Valenzuela, 2005; Bartolomé, 2007; Darder, 2012/2015). Even though discursively these students have a right to differentiated curriculum and pedagogy, the reality tells a different story. I believe we can say that bilingual/ bicultural students are indeed *in the other side of the epistemic abyss*.

***On epistemic colonization***

As Quijano (1992) states, the basic experience of colonial domination of the ‘conquered’ became the first criterion for stratifying the world population in terms of the power structure; it became the basic mode for socially classifying this population, of interpreting intersubjective and cultural relations between Europe and the rest of the world in terms of binary categories that characterize modernity and rationality. Eurocentric rationality has therefore been imposed as a hegemonic way of knowing, as a way of controlling all other ways of controlling subjectivity, culture, knowledge, and the production of knowledge (Quijano, 1992, 2000).

Therefore, the critique of the European paradigm of rationality/ modernity is urgent, as the instrumentalization of reason by colonial power produced distorted and oppressing knowledge paradigms and deprived all others of their rightful place in the history of humanity’s cultural production (Quijano, 2000) – decolonizing epistemology is required to give way to intercultural communication (Quijano, 1992, p. 19). In this venture, looking at language is an insurmountable task.

As Paraskeva (2011) states, drawing on Bourdieu, “... the official language has been imposed on the whole population as the only legitimate language that is maintained by the dominant curriculum forces that codify it, and the teachers whose task is to teach based on that language.” (Bourdieu, 2001, cit. in p. 175). The “epistemic colonization” that he denounces (Colado, 2007, cit. in 2016, p. 197; cf. Quijano, 1992, 2000), evidenced by the dominance of well-known American authors in the syllabi of Latin-American universities is mirrored, in other countries by the overwhelming presence of Anglo-American authors in the syllabi of teacher preparation programs. A quick analysis of the main bibliography in language teacher preparation programs in Portugal reveals an impressive majority of European authors, of Portuguese, English, and Spanish nationalities. Spanish and English are not spoken as official languages and of languages of

instruction solely in European countries as we all know; they are also present in Latin America, Africa, or Asia; however, there are almost no authors from these geographies. Needless to address here the pressure for publication in English-language journals in the academia, even though there are plenty of high prestige academic journals in other languages (such as Portuguese and Spanish)...

We are indeed experiencing the colonialism of the English language and, in what the Portuguese language is concerned, of the European variety in teacher preparation programs. As Paraskeva (2011, 2016) states, it is not a problem related solely to an English-only movement; it is also a problem of the imperialism of other Western colonial languages, among which the Portuguese. In fact, as Paraskeva (2016, pp. 201-202) remarks, linguistic genocide is at the core of every colonial and neo-colonial project. However, today we also have to take into account what he calls “predatory foreign policies instituted by Western nations” (2011, p. 161), that is the decisive role played by international financial agencies (like the World Bank and others) in determining language policies, rather than politicians or educationalists (as also stated by Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999). Ecological imperialism is rampant and languages do not escape the systematic destruction of biodiversity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009). Ethnolinguistic minorities, largely of color, are too often the first victims of this destruction, regarded in the schooling systems as ‘other people’s children’ (Delpit, 2006), socioculturally subordinated individuals (Bartolomé, 2007; Darder, 2012/2015), the ‘children of a lesser god’ (Moreira & Zeichner, 2014). Worldwide, their home languages are not valued, respected, taught at school, too often subjected to subtractive language education programs that strip them off their rights to proper bilingual education. This is also the case in Portugal.

In the review study mentioned earlier (Vieira, Moreira, & Peralta, 2014), we concluded that teacher (and learner) images of languages and cultures are often ‘schoolarised’, instrumental, ethnocentric, monolithic and stereotyped, which can reinforce hegemonic understandings of the value of languages and a limited view of their social, cultural, political and identitary role. Other national studies, undertaken with students from elementary school to university, teacher education programs and courses, immigrant associations, and newspapers (Andrade & Araújo e Sá, 2006; Andrade, Moreira, & Araújo e Sá, 2007; Andrade, Martins & Pinho, 2014), show that their images of languages are strongly influenced by the way schooling works, by selecting, valuing, and teaching certain languages (Portuguese, French, Spanish, or German) that are regarded as associated with more social capital, being more useful, and specifically with a higher economic currency, at the detriment of others, including other varieties of Portuguese like Brazilian Portuguese or African varieties of Portuguese.

### **Locating the book in a broader field**

João Paraskeva’s work makes significant contributions to critical multicultural education (May & Sleeter, 2010), bicultural education (Darder, 2012/2015), and bilingual/multilingual education for global justice (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009), as it addresses the epistemic roots of the subordinate educational status of bilingual/ bicultural children worldwide. His work aligns with these authors’ by helping to replace a pervasive naïve understanding of reality, within which teachers, teacher educators and academics frequently operate, with a more rigorous understanding of it (cf. Sousa Santos, 2008, para 57; Bartolomé, 2010, p. 49), an endeavor that makes the task of distorting others and subjugating them much more difficult (cf. Torres Santomé, 2016, p. 524).

### **The book's contributions**

Paraskeva's work (2011) helps advance an agenda for transformative and emancipatory education for bicultural and bilingual students in public schooling contexts by adding nuance and poignancy in understanding the origins and prevalence of the forms of structural oppression in schools and in the academia. As a combination of colonialism, neoliberalism, racism, and socioeconomic inequality, structural oppression works upon and within the (subtractive) education of bilingual/ bicultural children, not only in the US, but in Europe as well.

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