Editorial

Embracing Pluriversality for Epistemic Justice in Education

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Universality and Epistemicide

The epistemic tension and epistemicide of the global South due to the supremacy of the epistemologies of the North have a deep-rooted historical philosophical foundation. Aristotle's idea of syllogism, a deductive reasoning, served as a solid groundwork for Rene Descartes to theorize a concept of 'Cartesian dualism,' which again set the philosophical base for Newtonian science (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). These ideas were instrumental in creating intellectual movement in the 15th century and onwards, thereby embracing the powerful ideas of rationalism, dualism, individualism, anthropocentrism, secularism, and capitalism, to name a few. More specifically, the scientism rooted in the Enlightenment movement helped to grow powerful Western modern worldviews with the belief in the ontology of materialism that regards mind-independent matter as the only reality in the world and objectivity as epistemology (Luitel & Taylor, 2019). The universality of these worldviews has actively excluded the multiple onto-epistemic traditions of the peripheral nation-states. This is because the Western modern worldviews are blind towards the metaphysical beliefs of supernatural beings (spirituality), empathy, emotions, values, aesthetics, and ethics, which represent non-Western and Indigenous knowledge and wisdom traditions.

The scientific knowledge industry based on the Western modern worldviews and first-generation colonialism was intertwined and complementary for epistemic exclusion of the global South. The scientific knowledge production was actively supported by the first generation of colonialism. During the scientific revolution, colonization backed by

state power was a mechanism for the extraction of resources from the Indigenous territories, which in turn contributed to scientific knowledge production (Harari, 2014). Further, it has been widely recognized that the 'scientific colonialism' (Chilisa, 2012) and 'second-generation colonialism' of hegemonic disciplinary knowledge discourse have inflicted historic and ongoing epistemic violence against colonized Others, including Indigenous peoples (Le Grange, 2016). Thus, multiple facets of colonialism through disciplinary regimes in education have reinforced Western knowledge, thereby marginalizing, ignoring, and devaluing the non-Western and Indigenous epistemologies.

The disciplinary regimes in modern education with designed programs with domination of Western modern knowledge have fostered the need for compartmentalization of the knowledge systems. Such compartmentalized knowledge systems are considered the epistemological foundation of the capitalist world order (Santos, 2007; Escobar, 2004). It has been able to sustain its hegemony over Indigenous knowledge by establishing itself as the only valid, visible, and existent form of knowledge (Santos, 2014). It has reinforced what Santos (2014) describes as abyssal thinking—a form of epistemological division that maintains the colonial legacy by positioning Western knowledge as superior and Indigenous knowledge as inferior. The abyssal thinking consists of a system of visible and invisible distinctions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge, thereby assuming that Indigenous knowledge is non-existent, primitive, irrelevant, or superstition and causing 'epistemicide,' the killing of Indigenous knowledge systems (Santos, 2014).

With the realization of this epistemic injustice for the global south through disciplinary regimes, in recent years, the scholarships have focused on promoting epistemic plurality as a critique of the domination of the epistemologies of the global north. It doesn't mean to say that the Western epistemologies are wrong, bad, and useless; rather, there is a question of epistemic exclusion, inequity, and underrepresentation of epistemologies of the global South (Santos, 2008). However, the scholars fall short in calling to promote pluriversality (Escobar, 2004) for epistemic justice through decolonizing praxis in education. I, in this brief editorial, argue that the abyssal praxis and pluriversality promote epistemic justice in education.

Promoting Pluriversality in Education

In response to the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge in modern education (Kincheloe, 2001), there is a growing focus on decolonizing education programs/curricula through the inclusion of diverse knowledge systems, including historically subjugated Indigenous knowledge for contextually relevant learning (Shyangtan et al., 2021). But the disciplinary education has tended to fragment Indigenous knowledge into discrete subjects, breaking it into parts and removing it from the context of lived experience, while the knowledge is inherently holistic and relational (Battiste, 2002). Thus, the integration of Indigenous knowledge reinforces the abysmal thinking and practice, thereby assimilating this knowledge with a greater possibility of loss of authenticity or erosion of originality.

I don't mean to say that the Indigenous knowledge should not be integrated into modern education systems. But it is crucial to have transformative integration of ecologies of knowledge (Western, non-Western, and Indigenous knowledge), thereby promoting mutual respect of their existence/being. Instead of merely incorporating Indigenous knowledge into pre-existing curriculum dominated by Western knowledge, the students are to be engaged in transformative learning praxis. The transformative learning praxis—grounded in experience, reflection, and perspective transformation—interfaces well with Indigenous epistemologies, which are relational, place-based, and rooted in lived experience, community, and land (McClain, 2024). Further, it is a co-learning model in which formal school systems actively engage community elders and adjust to Indigenous teaching and learning methods (Neeganagwedgin, 2019). Cognitive justice is possible through the emphasis of such transformative integration given to the emergent, reciprocal reconfiguration of knowledge systems in educational settings, in the context of learning, and even in research traditions.

The concept of bricolage in non-positivistic research traditions aligns with the theoretical concept of 'ecologies of knowledges' (as discussed above), which argues for space, respect, and recognition of diverse ways of knowing that have often been overshadowed or ignored by Eurocentric Western epistemology (Santos, 2014). The bricolage signifies "critical, multi-perspective, multi-theoretical, and multi-methodological approaches" (Rogers, 2012, p. 1). It is also "a realization that the frontiers of knowledge work rest in liminal zones where disciplines collide" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 689). It is a metaphor to "embrace flexibility and plurality by

amalgamating multiple disciplines, multiple methodologies, and varying theoretical perspectives" for depth understanding of the phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999, p. 18). This is the notion of pluriversality to be adhered to in the modern intellectual traditions and research, which has not been fully recognized in the modern education praxis.

Pluriversality for Epistemic Justice

It has been widely recognized that modern education has effectively been erasing Indigenous knowledge systems (Rai & Acharya, 2020; Rai & Gaire, 2021; Regmi, 2021; Shyangtan et al., 2021). This phenomenon clearly shows the misrepresentation of Indigenous learners' knowledge in modern schooling. This reflects Kotzee's (2017) idea on epistemic injustice in education, which focuses on wrongdoing against students through such common curricular practices. This systematic exclusion of Indigenous knowledge exemplifies what Wanderer (2017) terms structural testimonial injustice, where certain groups are persistently discredited or ignored within dominant systems of knowledge. The concept of structural testimonial injustice emphasizes the role of social structure in shaping and perpetuating epistemic inequalities (Wanderer, 2017). It is a systematic bias against Indigenous groups that leads to marginalization, devaluation, and unfair discredit of their epistemologies.

The phenomenon of exclusion of Indigenous knowledge in modern education mirrors the hermeneutic injustice against Indigenous students. This also reflects the type of institutional hermeneutical injustice that prevents certain students from expressing themselves in their unique ways (Medina, 2017). Further, hermeneutical injustice occurs "when there are structural circumstances or institutional designs that prevent the use of specific hermeneutical resources and expressive styles" (Medina, 2017, p. 46). The collective hermeneutic resources (Indigenous language, knowledge, concepts, historical narratives, cultural traditions, and so on) of certain groups are excluded due to structural bias (Dunne, 2020). The structure mutes Indigenous students' voices and interpretive abilities, preventing them from co-constructing and sharing meaning (Dunne, 2023).

The pluriversality promotes cognitive justice. The first step towards promoting cognitive justice is the decolonization of the education system through recognizing the 'pluriversality' of diverse knowledge systems, thereby erasing the hegemonic abyssal

line, the boundary between the global South and North, and imagining a world that honors epistemic justice (Santos, 2008). Epistemic justice is possible through recognizing and embracing the diverse ecologies of knowledge (Santos, 2007) beyond dominant Eurocentric Western modern knowledge.

The concept of ecologies of knowledge doesn't involve ignoring or completely abandoning the Western ways of knowing but engaging in critiquing its hegemonic presumption to be the one single dominant knowledge system. It centers on dismantling the old hierarchical relationship between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems while recognizing that all knowledge systems are valued and situated in their own context. It consists of granting equal opportunity to the different kinds of knowledge involved in ever-broader epistemological arguments with a view to maximizing their respective contributions towards building another possible world (Santos, 2014). As viewed by Santos (2014), cognitive justice is possible through a process of intercultural translation, which seeks to create copresence of the diverse forms of knowledge. The intercultural translation identifies shared concerns across cultures, recognizes differences, and creates new forms of understanding. Thus, recognition and respect of epistemic diversity, or ecologies of knowledge, is a step towards cognitive justice as epistemic justice in the context of education.

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