

'AND THE LINGUISTIC MINORITIES SUFFER WHAT THEY MUST?'<sup>1</sup>:  
A REVIEW OF *CONFLICTS IN CURRICULUM THEORY*  
THROUGH THE LENSES OF LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION<sup>2</sup>

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*Conflicts in Curriculum Theory: Challenging Hegemonic Epistemologies*

João M. Paraskeva / Palgrave Macmillan US / 2011

*Curriculum Epistemicide: Toward an Itinerant Curriculum Theory*

João M. Paraskeva / Routledge / 2016

This review of João Paraskeva's (2011) work in *Conflicts in Curriculum Theory* constitutes an analysis focused on selected key-concepts and themes that traverse the author's work. It aims at analysing his specific contributions on the need to deterritorialize and to the decolonize the received field in curriculum studies and, most specifically, in language teacher education in Portugal, as in elsewhere in the European and North-American academic world. Additionally, this review highlights how these contributions can be used to further advance an agenda for transformative and emancipatory language education.

Parakeva (2011) presents a profound and harsh criticism of the way Western, US, and Canada-based dominant and specific counter dominant curriculum theories and theorists have been systematically ignoring existing knowledges and social realities beyond what the author calls the Western-Eurocentric cosmovision. The book lays the foundations of his proposal for an Itinerant Curriculum Theory (a proposal that he would later develop in *Curriculum epistemicide: Toward an itinerant theory* [Paraskeva, 2016]). This review uses the speculative essay (Schubert, 1991), a form of written philosophical inquiry that uses the knowledge and lived experience of the author to illuminate dimensions of the problem under study. The speculative essay provides an analytical and interpretive procedure to advance knowledge in curriculum studies and language teacher education. The selected dimensions for this review of *Conflicts in Curriculum Theory* are personally significant and directly

'speak' to the author's experience (see Shubert, *ibid*) as a language teacher educator and researcher in Portugal in the following ways: (1) the concept of *curriculum epistemicides* highlights the hegemony of epistemologies derived from Western-European dominated, US- and Canadian-based curriculum studies field, which excludes all forms of existing knowledge and social realities beyond a Western-European cosmopolitanism; (2) the concept of *epistemic colonization* helps to unveil the pervasive hegemony of the English language in shaping thought and forms of knowledge that are accepted as scientific and valid thus contributing to *global linguistic genocide* (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009); and, (3) the concept of ICT serves as a powerful analytical and practical tool for understanding and changing (language) teacher education in nations such as Portugal.

### *On Curriculum Epistemicides*

As stated by Sousa Santos (2008), the asymmetry of knowledges and how these knowledges relate to one another is an epistemological difference that manifests itself not only as such, but also as a political difference. In its utmost form, the asymmetry of knowledges 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 that are still in place today in not so subtle forms. (para. 36)<sup>3</sup>

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). This is largely due to the prevalence of an abyssal thinking created by a combination of colonialism, neoliberalism, and patriarchy. In framing his argument, Paraskeva travels extensively through the 'other side of the epistemic abyss' (identified by Boaventura Sousa Santos), unveiling it, and construing a compelling argument for inclusion of a wider diversity of knowledges in curriculum theory and practice, schooling, teacher education, and education research. 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, but have been systematically obliterated in Western, male dominated curriculum theory and practice discourses.

As argued by Paraskeva, deterritorializing the curriculum and teacher education fields cannot be done without counteracting linguisticides or "epistemological euthanasia" (2016, p. 238) carried out by the colonial powers in the past (but still going on in the present). Linguisticides are a form of epistemicide exerted on indigenous languages. By targeting indigenous languages, linguisticides eradicate indigenous knowledges in a particular sociolinguistic group. In order to properly effectuate linguisticides, colonialism needs to operate within linguicism(s), that is, within "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)" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988, p. 13). Phillipson 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" (1997, p. 239).

The prevalence of *linguisticides* and *linguicism* nowadays is clear in what comes to be validated scientific production within education that privileges English above all languages. This prevalence is also clear in the subtractive, disempowering, subordinated educational modes in which linguistic (and ethnic) minorities are educated in schools worldwide. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas bluntly explains the educational situation in this way:

The shitwork needs to be done by somebody in Western countries. The Third World produces much of the raw materials, food, clothing and equipment that we use. The exploitation of those countries now just takes different, more invisible forms than slavery and colonization, but it is equally severe. But we cannot export all of our cleaning, cooking, sweeping, public transport and washing up, or our sick and old, to be taken care of in the Third World, as easily as we export capital. Therefore, the industrial world needs to educate the children of the migrants, the great-grandchildren of the slaves from the colonies, for these jobs. Therefore, minority education needs to be racist and linguicist, in order to force the great-grandchildren of the slaves to continue to take the shitwork. In this it has succeeded. (1988, p. 37/38)

In a 2014 review study of foreign language education studies in the 'grey' literature in Portugal, between the years of 2006 and 2011 (Vieira, Moreira, & Peralta, 2014), my colleagues and I concluded that teacher (and learner) images of languages and cultures are often 'schoolarised', instrumental, ethnocentric, monolithic, and stereotyped. These images reinforce hegemonic understandings of the value of languages and a limited view of their social, cultural, political, and identity role. Other national studies (Andrade & Araújo e Sá, 2006; Andrade, Moreira, & Araújo e Sá, 2007), undertaken with students from elementary school to university, within teacher education programs and courses, in immigrant associations, and newspapers, show that students' images of languages are strongly influenced by the way schooling works. The education system selects certain languages (Portuguese, French, Spanish, or German) to be the object of study. By doing so, it values languages that are associated with more social capital, being more useful, and specifically having a higher economic currency to the detriment of others, including other varieties of Portuguese (Portuguese spoken in South America or in Africa).

In fact, lack of attention to issues of language diversity—thus the prevalence of an abyssal thinking in the colonization of knowledges (Paraskeva, 2011)—has been a weakness in preparing teachers for social justice in Portugal as in elsewhere in the world (cf. Zeichner, 2011; Zeichner & Flessner, 2009). In Portugal, as in many other countries, native language speakers perform higher in literacy studies than students with an immigrant background (CNE, 2011), especially those from ethnolinguistic minorities (Wilkin et al., 2010; Casa-Nova, 2006). Therefore, I concur with Paraskeva when he states that the "overwhelming majority [of teacher education programs] are deeply insensitive to fostering different ways of thinking" (2011, p. 173). They are struck in "a techno-rational meaning as a unique way of thinking" (p. 174); thus, they need "a multicultural approach that adopts an emancipatory content and direction aimed mainly at the multiple articulations of difference" (p. 154). As he states, schooling still does have a long way to go when it comes to "addressing one of most challenging issues that we have before us—democratizing democracy" (Paraskeva, 2011, p. 170), and necessarily, this task is a political struggle for social and cognitive justice. Indeed, "the struggle against epistemicides (...) is a Herculean task, but one that we cannot deny if we are truly committed to a real and just society (...) [as this struggle] is the best way to transform the school and its agents into real leaders in their struggle to democratize democracy" (ibid, p. 169). His words can be applied to Portugal also, when he states that "[t]he overwhelming majority of teacher education programs are deeply insensitive to fostering different ways of thinking since they are imprisoned within irrational licensing requirements and

unjustifiable state demands" (Paraskeva, 2016, p. 193). Teacher education in Portugal needs to be deterritorialized as well, as it still is held hostage to a technological way of thinking. As he contends, teachers and teacher educators in Portugal need to explore "new ways of thinking and feeling and finding ways to produce new and different purposes of mind..." (p. 194).

Epistemicides go on when we look at the way second language education mirrors schooling and education in general; it's not just public schools in the USA that use a combination of meritocracy, high-stakes testing, ability-grouping, low teacher 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 a differentiated curriculum and pedagogy in Portugal, the reality tells a different story. As an English language teacher recently wrote:

'Equality does not mean equity': Of course I have 10 classes of 30 students each and that makes it really hard (or clearly impossible) to think of ways to teach and assess my students according to their specific individual needs, but am I even trying? Do I think about all of my students when I'm planning the lesson or do I just think of the best way I know or the way that had the best result in the previous year?

Generalizing the way we teach 30 students with different personalities in a class can't have a good result because the multiculturalism there is obvious and the lesson I planned for one class can't have the same effect on all of them, so I can't expect they have the same learning outcome. (...) how is it possible to evaluate all our students the same way? They are all so different, they have so many different abilities, they are exposed to so many different realities and in the end I give them a single test to evaluate all of them the same way? Is it fair to do this? Is this equality or equity? (J.C., February 2017)

When exploring "new ways of thinking and feeling and finding ways to produce new and different purposes of mind" (Paraskeva, 2016, p. 194), teachers show how they critically exercise resistance to the sly power of ideology (cf. Freire, 2012, p. 130). By being asked to analyse a critical autobiographical text on multiculturalism

(by Au, 2009), to explore a new way of thinking and feeling about her teaching, the teacher above immediately exposes the subordinate educational situation of bilingual/bicultural students in Portugal. However, this is not common in teacher education, as the norm is still a Eurocentric rationality that privileges certain types of 'scientific' text.

### ***On Epistemic Colonization***

The critique of the European paradigm of rationality/modernity is urgent, as the instrumentalization of reason by colonial power has 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 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 2011, p. 175). The "epistemic colonization" that Paraskeva 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 teacher preparation programs in Portugal<sup>4</sup> reveals an impressive majority of European authors of Portuguese, English, and Spanish nationalities. Spanish and English are not only spoken as official or instructional languages in European countries as we all know; they are also present in Latin America, Africa, and Asia; however, there are almost no authors from these geographies.

Clearly, the colonialism of the English language is on-going and prevalent, and in as much as the Portuguese language is concerned, only the European variety in teacher preparation programs seems to be accepted. As Paraskeva argues, 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, of which Portuguese is clearly a member. Linguistic genocide is at the core of every colonial and neo-colonial project (2016, pp. 201-202). Today we also have to take into account what Paraskeva calls "predatory foreign policies instituted by Western nations" (2011, p. 161), considering the

decisive role played by international financial agencies (like the World Bank and others) in determining language policies rather than politicians or educationalists (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999). Ecological imperialism is rampant, and languages do not escape the systematic destruction of biodiversity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009). Ethnolinguistic minorities, largely people of color, are too often the first to be destroyed in school systems given that “other people’s children” (Delpit, 2006) and socioculturally subordinated individuals (Bartolomé, 2007; Darder, 2012/2015) are most likely to receive an education as “children of a lesser god” (Moreira & Zeichner, 2014). Worldwide, the home languages of these children are not valued, respected, or integrated in school; too often these children are subjected to subtractive language education programs that strip off their rights to proper bilingual education. This is also the case in Portugal (Pereira, 2014; Vieira, Moreira, & Peralta, 2014).

### **Searching for ICT in (Language) Pedagogy and Teacher Education**

The concept of Itinerant Curriculum Theory (ICT) constitutes an original perspective on curriculum theory and practice, including teacher education. Of particular importance to ICT is the recognition of an ecology of knowledges and epistemes (drawing on the work of Boaventura Sousa Santos, among others) that, by including epistemological perspectives from the Middle East, Africa, Southern Europe, and Latin America, pushes the field beyond the Western Eurocentric framework that has colonized it. As Sousa Santos, puts it, “academic or cultivated knowledge has a naïve relationship with the knowledge it regards as naïve” (2008, para. 57), for it ignores the way the movements of liberation against colonialism brought “new conceptions of life and human dignity, new symbolic universes, new cosmogonies, gnosologies, and even ontologies [...] new emotions and affectivities, new feelings and passions” (ibid, para. 20).

Paraskeva (2011) takes this perspective to develop ICT further as an analytical device for critically examining the field of curriculum theory and teacher education. He insightfully does this by dismantling the naïvety of a single, general, objective, scientific epistemology founded on a power differential that builds its strength from a colonial heritage. This general epistemology feeds the metaphorical abyss that separates the “North” from the “South”, rendering invisible and silencing the ‘otherness’ in the non-Western side of the abyss. Furthermore, Paraskeva avoids simply switching Western and Eurocentric epistemologies for indigenous, orientalist, southern, or rural ones, arguing instead for “an alternative thinking of

alternatives” (2016, Chapter 7, p. 217). “ICT aims precisely for ‘a general epistemology of the impossibility of a general epistemology’” (Paraskeva, 2016, p. 238)

However, despite these advancements, one weakness of Paraskeva’s (2011) work is that it fails to recognize that actual change in schools and classrooms is already under way. As argued by Foucault, “one does not have the discourses of power, on one side, and the discourses that oppose the discourses of power, on the other” (1994, cit. in Paraskeva, 2016, p. 195). This Foucauldian insight applies to (language) teacher education and to teachers’ daily lives as well. Teachers and students resist, oppose, subvert the official discourses, and create their own counterhegemonic discourses and practices.

The tide is turning and there are signs that the ‘South is rising’ (see for example the title of the 2013 United Nations Development Programme’s Report on Human Development [Malik, 2013]). In regards to teacher education, self-study research is gaining momentum, action research and teacher research has long been established as a credible and valid mode of educational research, and teacher narratives on their professional thinking and practice are building. One review mentioned earlier (Vieira, Moreira, & Peralta, 2014), among its other collaborative findings that included teachers and researchers, demonstrated how other linguistic and teaching practices are possible. These findings revealed alternatives brought about by plurilingual approaches that reconstruct teacher and learner identity and promote openness to diversity, metalinguistic awareness, plurilingual and intercultural competence, ‘language-friendly’ school environments, and inclusive democratic citizenship and eco-sustainable globalization (see Andrade, Martins & Pinho, 2014).

Vieira (2014) shows how the theory-practice problem (that is identified by Paraskeva, 2011) can be overcome in language education by bringing together six narratives of school teachers on collaborative instructional supervisory practices, developed within a post-graduate language teacher education program. In these narratives, teachers become researchers to better understand their practices and to better serve their students. By giving voice to their students, these teachers’ voices are amplified: they are invited to question the received, break routines, re-create ways of naming the world of language teaching and engage in pedagogical research. As Torres Santomé insightfully contends, “[i]t is much easier to distort ‘others’ when we are unable to interact with them, or when we are unable to hear their original voices, their arguments, and their concerns, among other aspects of their lives”



(2016, p. 524). One just has to listen to teachers' and other educators' voices by having them tell their own stories within a discursive/ narrative/ autobiographical/ life history approach to curriculum development and teacher education. When we listen to their voices, we witness how those voices counteract the power of the single story (Moreira, 2016), disrupt "the silenced dialogue" in the classrooms (Delpit, 2006, pp. 21-47), forge "a critical bicultural praxis" in formal and informal educational situations (Darder, 2012/2015, pp. 221-370), and develop bilingual practices that promote thinking and negotiation skills in both languages while advocating for the use of children's first languages (Estrada & Chacón, 2015).

In a similar research direction, teachers also reveal that, even though they may not share the same (racialized) identities, their and their students' identities are "bounded in social and historical conditions that shape yet do not determine lives" (Jupp, 2013, p. 20), and within these contexts, teachers act as story tellers and weavers of *knowledgespractices* (Süsskind & Garcia, 2011). Listening to teachers' voices also shows how their work can become "curricular creation and acknowledgement of the knowledge of experience" (Süsskind, 2014, pp. 3-4). They show how curricula can be developed as daily creations of the *practitionersthinkers* (Oliveira, 2012) that "transform absences into presences, recognizing in daily curriculum practices emancipatory innovations of an epistemological status that has to be valued" (Oliveira, 2010, p. 28). These, among many other examples, are discrete illustrations of post-abysal thinking and practice that show that research is already being done in classrooms in the direction of decolonizing research, pedagogy, and (language) teacher education as "authentic intellectual-practical pursuits not merely technical know-how to 'get results'" (Jupp, 2014, p. 8). These studies provide examples of the decolonization of university practices and teacher education programs (cf. Paraskeva, 2011, p. 187), of how schools do dare to build a new social order (cf. Paraskeva, 2011, p. 188), of how ICT does make sense and serves a more inclusive and more democratic education by helping to deterritorialize prevailing epistemologies.

Moreover, in reviewing second language education, *Testimonio* research and practice bears witness to the struggle for survival in hostile educational environments for bilingual/ bicultural learners (González et al., 2003). It is "concerned with the praxis of anti-racist and anti-oppressive pedagogies" (Cruz, 2012, p. 462), a form of counter-positivist research with "a subject who has experienced or witnessed great trauma, oppression, forced migration, or violence, or of a subject who has participated in a political movement for social justice" (ibid, p. 461). Carried out

with bilingual/ bicultural students, *testimonio* has a long tradition in indigenous Latin-American contexts as a form of oral or written narrative account in the first person used to denounce violence, racism, classicism, colonization, patriarchy, oppression, and the pervasive effects of dominant ideologies such as cultural deficit theory and the superiority of Standard English in schools (González et al., 2003; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; DeNicolo et al., 2015). It is “a potential tool to decolonize pedagogical and research practices” (Cervantes-Soon, 2012, p. 374), for *testimonios* constitute counternarratives of students’ individual and collective experiences, of their lives in and outside of school, communicating neglected perspectives, experiences, or histories that rehabilitate the value of bilingual/bicultural students’ history and their cultural capital (DeNicolo et al., 2015). These examples show how, as claimed by Paraskeva, “a relevant pedagogic environment through dialogue and negotiation” (2011, p. 184) can transform the pedagogy (and the pedagogy of [language] teacher education). In this way, emancipation works both ways, as advocated by Paulo Freire when he states that emancipation is a relational and unfinished exercise through which those who teach are also taught (Freire, 2012). School teachers and academic researchers, when working collaboratively, do “violate the methodological canon” (Paraskeva, 2016, p. 207) and “challenge (...) what counts as science” (ibid, p. 206). They are re-writing the cartography of academy-, positivist-oriented dominating teacher research platforms. “[L]earning that the South exists, (...) learning to go to the South, and (...) learning from and with the South” (Boaventura Sousa Santos, 2009, cited by Paraskeva, 2016, p. 209) starts ‘at home.’ It is the professional responsibility of each and everyone of us, as an ethical imperative, to start changing the way we teach, evaluate, and develop research.

### **Conclusion**

As I argued throughout the piece, ‘indigenous’ local knowledges should not be acritically glorified or romanticized: we still need to ask the crucial questions Paraskeva poses (Paraskeva, 2011, p. 181): *Whose knowledge? Who benefits? How classed? How gendered? How democratic?*—while asking other crucial questions such as: *Who speaks and who is heard? Who will listen?* Acknowledging the pervasive effects of *curriculum epistemicides* and *epistemic colonization* within an ICT framework, I argue here that this work does not automatically turn the discourses of linguistic minorities and of given socioprofessional groups into something intrinsically good. As Antonia Darder puts it in her foreword, we all have “to critically understand that the particular curricular epistemologies we embrace, enact, and perpetuate in

schools and society are never innocent or neutral" (Paraskeva, 2016, p. xiii). Therefore, we need to maintain our own constant surveillance of these discourses, while engaging in academic critique.

To sum up, Paraskeva's (2011) disclosure of hegemonic epistemologies in curriculum theory and practice allows "for the building of a new language in which we think of education as a critical source for edifying a more just society and leading to the transformation of the world; a world fuelled by a cultural and economic justice" (Paraskeva, 2016, p. 194). His critique is blunt, relentless, methodical, righteous, uncompromising—it is also intellectually and ethically honest, celebratory and respectful of diversity. His ICT proposal is an extremely useful and relevant tool for analysing and critiquing the situation of schooling for ethnolinguistic minorities and the way language teacher education has been responding (or not) to the needs of these children.

From the above, Paraskeva's ICT project (2011, 2016) brings an eye-opening perspective to the field of curriculum studies and teacher education. Like characters in Lana Wachowski and Andy Wachowski's 1999 film, *The Matrix*, suddenly we know that the reality we thought we knew is no longer, and we have to (re)start our journey for knowledge all over again.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This title is inspired by Yanis Varoufakis' (2016) book *And the weak suffer what they must? Europe, austerity and the threat to global stability*. In this book, the author lays out the historical, economic, and financial situation in Europe after World War II that lead to the current austerity measures imposed in countries such as Greece and Portugal. The systematic dismantling of the Welfare State and the worsening economic conditions that resulted in the aggravated suffering of the poor working classes and of the struggling middle classes are promoted by organizations like "the Eurogroup, where all important economic decisions are taken [...] a body that does not even exist in European law, that operates on the basis that the 'strong do as they please while the weak suffer what they must'" (ibid, p. 221).

<sup>2</sup> This text is a modified and expanded version of the text presented at the AAACS 2016 conference in Washington DC, April 5th-April 8th.

<sup>3</sup> All quotes taken from Portuguese titles on the reference page have been translated by the author.

<sup>4</sup> The catalogues of the programs and courses offered, including the study plans and bibliography, can be consulted in the websites of the higher education institutions.



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