



**CPI: A VEHICLE FOR DIALOGUE AMONG
CIVILIZATIONS**

By:

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August, 2005

INTRODUCTION

Dialogue among civilizations and cultures, the need for which has been underlined more than ever by the events of 11 September 2001, is our business. Such a dialogue is not only the best way for knowing and establishing mutual relation with each other, but is a proper criterion to find common solutions for basic questions of the present and the future. Exchange of thoughts and ideas among thinkers and scholars of various cultures and civilizations is, in this regard, one of the necessities of such an approach; and educators as experts in the dynamics of change in all societies, enjoy a particular place. There is no alternative to dialogue. We have to work hard to make it possible by facing the destructive power of hatred and paralyzing the historical, political, social and human barriers that separate us.

CPI and the North-South Dialogue

A nation's prospect to socio-economic development depends largely on the nation's capacity to produce skilled and trained manpower. In this regard, the role education plays in speeding up development is believed to be crucial. Of course, a century has passed since education, in its modern sense, was introduced in Africa. With the arrival of colonial powers in African countries and Christian missionaries working hand in glove with the colonial rulers, an aggressive campaign of proselytizing was mounted (Rodney, 1976). With the support and collaboration with the colonialist powers, they tried to promote westernization. This they did by trying to dominate schooling and education policy, and by using political tools to produce and impose the leadership of an alienated elite which was African in name and western in thought and behavior. Colonial education was nothing but education for westernization, education for de-Africanization "subordination, domination and the creation of mental confusion" (*Ibid*: 264).

Despite the political withdrawal of the white man from Africa, post-colonial African education still has a striking colonial character. This is manifested by its irrelevances, its elitist and hegemonic nature, as well as its failure to "match the

realities of post-colonial African society and produce well rounded personalities to fit into this society” (*Ibid*: 261).

Critical Practitioner Inquiry (CPI) is an action-oriented pedagogy that evolved out of the womb of Critical Pedagogy. Critical Pedagogy is an approach to the sociology of education which is concerned with a dialectical and dynamic understanding of the relationship between educational theory and practice. It also stresses that the global education system has failed to promote the development of a democratic world. It aims to bring an end to educational reproduction, taking action to provide social and educational transformation. It calls for the end of domination, monopolism and hegemonism, and the empowerment of both the teacher and the learner (Pereira, 2002).

CPI is best viewed as a part of an international movement which is directed to liberate teacher education from hegemonism and monopolism. It analyses issues of power and status in educational research and attempts to narrow the existing wide gap between the worlds of teacher research and academic research. CPI advocates the idea of looking beyond the obvious and conventional, i.e., a critical inquiry must go beyond the mainstream research paradigm, and should develop practitioner knowledge beyond every day tacit common sense about education. It aims at creating a "sustainable preferential right of interpretation that can be exercised by practitioners themselves over their own practice” (Dahlström, 2003:7). That is, CPI aims to enable practitioners have the required degrees of freedom to practice their preferential right of interpretation over their practice.

I should make it clear at this point that for more reasons than one I had a kind of xenophobia towards Europeans and everything European. While attending the First National Institute¹ in late May 2003 I asked myself several questions: Why should CPI be imposed on the practitioner? Who are these northern magicians? Is the CPI their new magic model of education for Africa? As their colonial fathers did

¹ The CPI Masters course I attended was organized through what was called ‘national institutes’ when course participants and course tutors met for lectures, seminars, and tutorials.

a century ago, are these magicians trying to mesmerize us into uncritical importation of an alien paradigm?

I strongly believe that old or new, colonialism is like any other crime of theft felony-and, therefore, if the felon does not repent and reform himself, he goes on living a lie in order to cover up his crime. The colonialists of yesterday sought to justify their craft in the name of doing a duty, the duty to civilize the 'savage' African. However, the northern colonial instructors of "modern" education for Africa proved to be the killers of the pre-existing African education, culture and civilization. To me, colonial schooling, which introduced ready-made technical, ethical and political solutions to the problems of Africa from the viewpoint of European colonizers, was barbarian. It did not create free persons but dependent ones. It promoted the ideas of so-called European civilization, but it degraded and even destroyed African civilization and culture (Mazrui, 1990)

Attending the institute, I went on asking myself questions: As a pedagogical approach is CPI itself not hegemonic? As a philosophy, CPI was not born on African soil and sufficiently moulded by the African environment. And we are a third world country that is not even fully into the first wave of "civilization". The fact that food is our major source of worry at a time when the other world is exploring the space is in itself self-explanatory. So can we afford to follow the direction of the first world magicians, who are well into the third wave of "civilization"?

I used to believe that all educated northerners were behind the hegemonic northern ideology of cultural universalism. Cultural universalism is an ideology that the dominant groups in the modern world economy have used to look at the world mainly from their own cultural perspective, to control economic and cultural resources of dominated people, and to subordinate or destroy multicultures in the name of science and technology (Wallerstein, 1983; Huntington, 2002). But the series of national institutes and the accounts of such critical scholars as Callewaert and Dahlström answered most of my questions and showed me that there are staunch supporters of the southern cause in the northern block. This group of scholars,

knowing the north from within, are playing an essential role in the struggle to counter northern monopoly and hegemony. This is because they not only uncover the evil nature of the northern political order but also indicate ways to struggle against it. For instance, in his well-reasoned exploration of the threat posed by “globalization” or recolonization of the education systems in the third world, Dahlström argues that:

“The present form of informal imperialism characterized by global neo-liberal capitalism and market expansions will move education in third world societies down the technical rationality and market-oriented lane and away from an emancipation terrain of education with severe consequences for the populace of Africa, unless a strategic counter-force is organized” (2004: 1).

I came to realize that unlike their race-intoxicated colonial predecessors, this group of Scandinavians who run the CPI programme are committed scholars who have been trying to resuscitate African education. Yes indeed, socially responsible scholars need to study and understand “all the voices coming from what is essentially a plurality of centers all over the world” (Ngugi, 1993: 11), rather than universalizing and eternalizing the voice of domination and exploitation.

I would now argue that unlike the age-old assimilative philosophies of the north, CPI is open for assimilation and contextualization. CPI can be systematically adapted to fit the current African context and the need to transform unjust institutional and societal structures. I strongly believe that CPI is indeed a pedagogy of hope for Africa—a pedagogy that could serve as a vehicle for dialogue among cultures and civilizations by paralyzing hegemonism, monopolism, and other stumbling blocks to such a dialogue.

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