College of Education Faculty Scholarship   College of Education

2015

Working within the Tensions of Disability and Education in Post-Colonial Kenya: Toward a Praxis of Critical Disability Studies

Brent C. Elder
Rowan University

Alan Foley

Follow this and additional works at: https://rdw.rowan.edu/education_facpub

Part of the Disability and Equity in Education Commons

Working within the tensions of disability and education in post-colonial Kenya: Toward a praxis of critical disability studies

Brent C. Elder[a*] and Alan Foley[b]

[ab]*Syracuse University, New York. Corresponding Author- Email: bcelder@syr.edu*

This paper explores emerging and evolving critical approaches to inclusive education development work in the postcolonial, global South context of Kenya. Taking an ontoformative (Connell, 2011) perspective of disability, we view disability as a dynamic process inherently tied to social contexts and their fluid effects on disabled bodies. Thus, not all impairments are a natural form of human diversity, and many are imposed on bodies in underdeveloped countries through oppressive imported Western practices. In this paper we present our work not as models of 'what to do' or 'what not to do' in development work. Rather we offer a reflection on the evolution of our understanding and approach to this work from being merely 'progressive' (while further exporting Northern theory), toward a more critical and self-reflexive approach. We hope this is a starting point in a dialogical process of mutual knowledge production between the global North and South that leads to better ways of conceptualizing and supporting people with disabilities in the global South.

Keywords: Critical Disability Studies; Postcolonialism; Kenya; Decolonizing research; Ontoformativity; Neoliberalism

Introduction

Disabling the indigenous population was then, as now, specifically related to colonial power (Meekosha, 2011: 672).

In this paper we explore our emerging and evolving critical approaches to inclusive education development work in the postcolonial, global South context of Kenya. We began writing this paper in response to a pointed question from a colleague following a brief presentation of some of our work with teachers and students in Kenya. Our colleague asked, 'Your research in sub-Saharan Africa sounds neocolonial to me. What makes you so sure you are not perpetuating colonial oppressions?' This question forced us to confront the paradoxical nature of the work we have been doing. We agree that development work is inherently neocolonial (Bishop, 1998; Espinosa-Dulando, 2004; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Owuor, 2007; Sandoval, 2000); however, we believe that remaining unresponsive to social injustices (e.g. denying disabled people[1] access to education) can be as detrimental as the structures of Western

imperialism.

We use the concept of vector of similarity and continuity and vector of difference and rupture (Hall, 1990) as a lens to materialize the effects and tensions between the Northern academy and Southern indigenous knowledge in our own work. We are mindful of Meekosha's (2011) observation that 'contemporary debates in disability studies in the Northern Hemisphere have tended to ignore the lived experience of disabled people in much of the global South' (670), and this work is an attempt to confront the 'centrality of colonialism' (671) in educational practices in Kenya.

We consider the inclusive education work in Kenya described in this paper to be political and progressive and, as our projects unfolded, increasingly informed by the theory and philosophy of critical disability studies. From the beginning, our goal as able-bodied, white, Western men engaged in such research was to learn about culturally appropriate, transnational, collaborative educational approaches that could lead to better outcomes for disabled people in Kenya. While we never claimed to 'know' what was right for the people we were working with, we began our work adopting an uncritical conception of disability studies. This uncritical approach interpellated the logic of western, neoliberal reform and privileged our position as Northern academics.

We believe that the continuing exploitative effects of colonial capitalism require us to continue this work, but that we must invite examination and discussion of our work in an increasingly globalized world. We present our work not as models of 'what to do' or 'what not to do' in development work. Rather we offer a reflection on the evolution of our understanding of this work from being 'progressive' while still potentially interpellating the logic of colonialism and further exporting Northern theory, toward a more overtly critical and continually self-reflexive understanding.

We present vignettes from our experiences working with teachers and students in Kenya. We critically discuss these vignettes to trace the evolution of our critical orientation toward this work. We began our work in Kenya aware of the effects of colonialism and not wanting to be colonizing, but without a paradigm beyond recognizing our privileged positions and how to disrupt hegemonic practices imposed by the global North. While progressive in intent, we were still Western academics enacting Western theory in the global South. We use this as a starting point to reflect on how this type of work can evolve over time to include a dialogical process of mutual knowledge production, to question the implications of this evolution, and to explore what this evolution looks like in practice.

Throughout the paper, the authors refer to themselves collectively as 'we' when reflecting on their practice and the collaborative work of this paper to critically discuss their work; however, much of their work in Kenya, while often occurring at the same time, was conducted individually or with other colleagues.

Theoretical framework

To help make sense of the postcolonial contexts our work inhabits, we draw on postcolonial studies, critical cultural theory, and critical disability studies in the global South (Barker & Murray, 2010; Connell, 2011; Goodley, 2013; Grech, 2011; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009; Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011). In analyzing our work with Kenyan educators and students, we identify vectors (Hall, 1990) of similarity and continuity- signifiers of the hegemonic dominance of the global North, and vectors of difference and rupture – signifiers of a shift towards privileging knowledge produced by scholars in the global South. We acknowledge the challenges inherent in applying Western theory in postcolonial contexts (Ariotti, 1999; King, 2006; Matshedishoa, 2007; Meekosha, 2011) in our case the colonial education frameworks we encountered. As we trace the evolution of our work toward enacting critical disability studies we look to decolonizing action research methodologies that have clear goals for emancipatory social change (Barinaga & Parker, 2013; Dunbar, 2008; Lather, 1991).

We use critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) to examine data collected on multiple trips to Kenya between 2011 and 2014 where we worked in special primary and secondary schools and with students with disabilities at the postsecondary level. We analyzed the data to explore how segregated education systems are maintained, and to make connections to the historical contexts in which these particular relationships exist. In our analysis, the vector of similarity and continuity maintains the educational system of the colonial era and the metropole.

In the similar and continuous colonial educational system, discourse used to describe students with disabilities constructs them as incapable learners who require segregation and extra funds. This language is not something Kenyan teachers use purposely to disempower students with disabilities, but rather a hegemonic by-product of disability and inclusive education being historically absent from national goals of education (Mwaka, Kafwa, Musamas, & Wambua, 2013).

We are concerned with how the socially constructed nature(s) of disability access come to bear on the practice of access to education for disabled people in the global South. In particular, disability is framed using Connell's (2011) notion of ontoformativity. That is, we frame disability as a dynamic process that is inherently tied to social contexts and the fluid effects of those social dynamics on disabled bodies. Through an ontoformative perspective, it is recognized that not all impairments are a natural form of human diversity, and many are imposed on bodies in global South countries through oppressive politicized Western imported practices.

Rationale and context

There are over 1 billion disabled people globally- the world's largest minority (WHO and

World Bank, 2011). Of this more than 1 billion people, an estimated 80% live in developing countries[2] (UNESCO, 2005). In 2005, UNESCO reported that over 112 million African children were not attending school. These numbers are especially alarming since research shows that access to education increases future income (USAID, 2011) can disrupt the cycle of poverty, and minimize multiple and intersecting factors that exacerbate disadvantage and oppression (UNICEF, 2007). Students with disabilities are even more at risk of not accessing some form of education, and therefore have less opportunity to create a life that is not dictated by poverty (OCHR, 2011). In Kenya specifically, limited access to primary education has been connected to higher rates of illiteracy and poverty (Opini, 2011). Currently 37% of children with disabilities in Kenya receive some form of inclusive primary education. Only 9% go on to receive a secondary education, and 2% access university education (OHCHR, 2011).

The United Nations Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UN, 2006), which Kenya has ratified, requires that disabled people have access to education that is equitable to their non-disabled peers (United Nations, 2006). Similarly, the revised Kenyan Constitution of 2010 prohibits educational discrimination based on a disability label. Specifically, Article 27 of the Constitution (2010) states that:

> The State shall not discriminate directly or indirectly against any person on any ground, including race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, *disability,* [emphasis added] religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language or birth. (24)

Thus, international mandates and Kenyan domestic law do not support segregation of disabled people into separate and inequitable education programs that are considered 'inadequate' and that provide sub-standard outcomes for students (Oyugi, 2011:31). Moreover, the notion of universal rights to education is a Northern concept, and needs to be critically analyzed in the postcolonial context (Bickenbach, 2009; De Sousa Santos, 2002; Meekosha, 2011; Zizek, 2006).

Although the British colonial era 'ended' in Kenya in 1963, not all colonial structures and systems ended then (or evenly), and many are still perpetuating oppressions both implicitly and explicitly today (Ndege, 2009). The 7-4-2-3 British system of education was officially sanctioned in Kenya until 1984 (Ministry of Education, 2008), and the medical model of disability exported with it still exists today. In the British model, students attended primary school for seven years, lower secondary school for four years, upper secondary school for two years, and university for three years (Buchmann, 1999; Ministry of Education, 2008). This model of education was exported to the colonies and was based on static metropolitan Western notions of science (Connell, 2011) and thus predicated on the principles of systematicity, replicability, and predictability.

British colonial power was largely based on the separation and opposition of indigenous notions of tribalism and identity (Parsons, 2012). Underdevelopment and neoliberal policies continue and reinforce colonial practices of categorization, segregation, and control. Contemporary neoliberal discourse that commodifies the educational environment and measures academic performance through high stakes standardized exams (Apple, 2006) also promotes deficit views of disability, and treats students with disabilities accordingly. These effects can be seen in the continued segregation of students with disabilities, and the lack of resources afforded segregated schools globally.

Expressing exactly what colonial/post/neocolonialism is remains nebulous and challenging. These tenuous edges of colonialism make transnational collaboration on inclusive education and disability rights especially unknown. As a result of these remaining colonial education systems, able bodies have the potential to earn capital, so they are valued over disabled bodies. This earning power is what justifies the current segregated education system (Erevelles, 2005).

Method

Participants and data collection

This paper is grounded in our experiences working in Kenya, where we observed the inequity in both the access to and conditions of education for disabled people, during seven visits to Kenya over a four-year period between 2011 and 2014. As teachers dedicated to social justice and as qualitative researchers, we gravitate toward participatory forms of research reflexively and our methods reflect that orientation. Our research is also rooted in praxis - work with teachers and students to improve access to education. A key component of this approach is being available to provide assistance, but also being ready to step aside and actively looking for opportunities to do so. The vignettes that follow provide examples of this approach.
The vignettes we present and other data we reference are drawn from workshops we conducted as well as more formal research activities that were aimed at engaging participants in reciprocal critical dialogue about social justice and community transformation.

Data sources and procedures we utilized include:

- Participant observation data from workshops and school visits conducted with primary and special needs education (SNE) teachers in Western Kenya;
- Observational data from workshops conducted with teachers and students at segregated special schools for students with visual disabilities in Western and Central Kenya;
- Semi-structured interviews with 20 Kenyan university students[3] with visual disabilities;
- Semi-structured interviews with teachers at segregated special schools for students with visual disabilities in Western and Central Kenya;

- Ongoing email dialog with university students with visual disabilities on a range of topics. These conversations were sometimes related to our research (e.g. clarification of observation notes and memos) but beyond 'member checks' also increasingly reflected different relationships we developed with some of the students (e.g. mentoring on applying to graduate programs or Fulbright, sharing about technology discoveries, talking about the World Cup).
- Semi-structured post [classroom] observation conferences conducted individually with teachers from primary and special schools in Western Kenya.
- Paper and electronic surveys of 20 secondary teachers and 40 secondary students at a Kenyan secondary school for the blind.

Data analysis

We use critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) to 'read' data we collected on multiple trips to Kenya working in special primary and secondary schools and with students with disabilities at the postsecondary level. This reading helps us understand how segregated education systems are maintained and to make connections to the historical contexts in which these particular relationships exist.

We believe that discourse maintains larger systems of oppression (e.g. neoliberalism, global capitalism, contemporary imperialism, racism). This happens through everyday discourse. For example, we encountered teachers describing students with disabilities as incapable learners who require segregation and who are a financial burden. We believe this language is not something Kenyan teachers use purposely to disempower students with disabilities, but rather it reflects a hegemonic discourse which views differences of ability among students from a deficit perspective – an artifact of the colonial educational system.

Ethics and Permission

With the exception of Elder's first trip to Kenya in 2011, all research activities have approval at the institutional level (IRB), informed research agreement by participants, as well as research clearance from the Kenyan government through the National Council for Science and Technology. In 2011 while working as a teacher in California, Elder was introduced to a liaison to the Ministry of Education in Western Kenya and subsequently invited to independently consult with educators in the region on inclusive education. This invitation was granted by the local Ministry of Education, which subsequently led to Elder receiving project clearance from the Ministry.

Other portions of this research work were made possible by the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through Higher Education for Development and the Africa-U.S. Higher Education Initiative. The contents of this article are the sole

responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Positionality

We are outsiders in Kenya and are aware of the privilege we have. However, we endeavor to continually reflect on the ways that privilege manifests. From the outset of our work in Kenya, we had no desire to speak for colonized people; however, we felt the work was important to initiate. International collaboration is critical so colonized populations and outsiders have informed allies within their communities (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008), and so there can be a reciprocal exchange of information and ideas. We try our best to be aware of our privileged educated position while analyzing postcolonial structures, and actively investigate how our work may perpetuate colonial, marginalizing, or oppressive systems (McCaslin & Breton, 2008). We hope that our Kenyan colleagues view us as allied others who value local ways of knowing. In the next section of this paper, we reflect on our work with our Kenyan colleagues, and reflect on our current understandings of it.

Results: Critical Dialogue and Reflections on Development

Whatever You Suggest We Will Do

Brent Elder – July 2011

> *Fifteen head teachers from local primary and special schools gathered in a schoolhouse in Western Kenya for a workshop I was leading. At this workshop, coordinators in the Education Assessment and Resource Centres (EARCs) in the local Ministry of Education and I asked local teacher leaders to help create the foundations of an inclusive education system. It was a direction largely driven by the EARCs. To start the process, the teachers identified the strengths of the school district. The teachers offered phrases like 'well trained teachers,' 'students are learning,' and 'resourceful educators.' Then the group focused on areas that needed more support from the local and national Ministries of Education. This list was significantly longer than the first. 'Electricity,' 'clean water,' 'food,' 'mosquito nets,' and 'books' were just a few priorities identified by the teachers. From there, the group developed an action plan. The focus of the action plan was on how the district could replicate strengths, and minimize the barriers to the development of an education system that supports more students with disabilities in primary education classrooms. When I asked about*

appropriate first steps, one teacher quickly responded, 'Whatever you suggest, we will do.'

These teacher responses are examples of the fairly frequent, explicit expressions of institutional colonialist discourse I would encounter in these interactions. In response to questions about the needs of their schools, teachers identified basic needs as top priorities.

Reflection

This was my initial trip to Kenya, and I was not yet enrolled in my doctoral program in Special Education and Disability Studies at Syracuse University. My decisions as a 'consultant' were based on my graduate school experiences earning two teaching credentials and a master's in 'moderate/severe' disabilities, my eight years as a inclusive education public school teacher, and my professional affiliations to social justice and disability rights grassroots organizations. Though my professional practice was very much rooted in disability studies, I did not have the academic background to contextualize my teaching practices in that way. Similarly, I would not discover critical disability studies until after I began my doctoral studies a few years later.

When I heard this teacher say, 'Whatever you suggest, we will do,' my first thought was, 'I need to make sure these decisions come from the local experts in education, not from someone who has been in Kenya for a week.' My reaction came from understanding that inclusive school reform in the United States had to come from teachers themselves rather than an administrative mandate. This reaction was distinctly not based in trying to disrupt post/neo-colonial oppressions. As a result, my perspectives on disability and inclusion were unilaterally Western, hegemonic, and more than likely neocolonial. Though I understood the teacher's comment to be connected to class, privilege, and race, I did not have a critical framework to connect this experience to oppressive legacies of capitalism, colonialism, and Western imperialism. Similarly, I was not aware that my decision in that moment was in alignment with concepts rooted in Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR).

Now, having been exposed to critical disability studies, I understand 'Whatever you suggest, we will do' as an explicit example of the discursive structures privileging Western institutionalized knowledge over indigenous ways of knowing and viewing the world. In a different context (e.g., a meeting without a white teacher present), this teacher may have performed his knowledge differently. However, in this example, he provided a response that unquestionably relinquished any of his power and control in the situation. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) would argue that this type of indigenous submission to Western ideas not only

perpetuates colonialism, but also reinforces Eurocentric dominance in an increasingly globalized and neoliberal world. A world where Western knowledge unquestionably represents the standard of wealth, success, and unquestioned Western superiority (Owuor, 2008).

When I first heard teachers discuss the basic needs of their schools (e.g., electricity, clean water, books) I uncritically thought, 'Progress is just slow in this part of the world.' I did not understand that these needs represent the economic oppressions caused by colonialism. Now, after critically reflecting on my time in Kenya and immersing myself in postcolonial and critical disability studies literature, I realize that not having access to clean water, electricity, and enough food after over 50 years since colonialism 'ended' is evidence that oppressive colonial economic systems are still in place. If political and economic structures were developed in postcolonial Kenya that actually served indigenous interests, then these schools would not be without basic needs following a half-century of independence.

Public Shaming

Brent Elder – July 2011

> *A few weeks following the teacher leader workshop in 2011, I observed the reading of the results of the National Exams at a public secondary school. The audience was filled with parents, grandparents, community members, and other invited guests. With much ceremony and ritual, the names of the students who scored the highest on the exams were read aloud. Students stood smiling as their names were called. As a reward for their achievement, a member of the school board passed out pens. The crowd applauded. The students returned to their seats.*

> *The following round of names read aloud were students who scored within the 'average' range on the exam. The school board member gave a speech about hard work and perseverance. They did not receive pens, but returned to their seats with applause from the crowd. The final round of names called were the students who scored 'below average' on the test. Like their higher achieving peers, these students stood, and lined up in front of the audience. This time the speaker focused on the need to try harder in order to find a well-paying job, be happy, and live a successful in life.*

> *Following the speech, a member of the local Ministry of Education asked the students to remain standing. This member of the Ministry was a former special education teacher, and a member of the EARC. His speech began, 'Perhaps you did not perform well on the test because you did not have the proper books to read. Perhaps you did not have a proper pen to write with. Perhaps you needed more support from your*

teachers to understand information that would be on the test…' His speech ended, and students received a pen before returning to their seats.

Reflection

In this moment, I knew that what I observed made me uncomfortable, but I was not sure why. Of course I felt badly for the students who were publically shamed for not scoring high on the national exams, but there was more to it than that. The ceremony was anachronistic and punitive, and clearly valued academic competition and students who could perform well on standardized tests. The shameful look on the faces of students who did not do well on the test made me wish that they had received some accommodations that could have better supported them during the exam. I began to think about how their learning experiences were structured as they were preparing for the test. Were students given choices in how they could show their knowledge of the content? Was instruction given only in a lecture/call-and-response fashion? Was content connected to real life contexts the students could relate to? The questions I asked extended from my U.S.-based experiences as an inclusive educator, not from a critical disability studies scholar immersed in a postcolonial education system.

Though I feel my initial feelings about the exam ceremony have a place in the discussion on the current Kenyan education system, at the time I was not able to connect what I witnessed to a larger historical context. What I understand now is that this event was both a remnant of colonization and a product of neoliberalism in education- both Western exports. The large applause given to the students who performed the highest on the exams represents students that have the highest potential to 'make it' in an increasingly Western globalized world. These students successfully navigated the postcolonial, Western-based education system, despite being exposed to a curriculum that devalues indigenous knowledge. They competed with their peers, and came out on top. They earned the most social capital in their communities while the students who performed below average were shamed for their efforts and blamed for their inability to conform to the rules maintaining foreign epistemologies.

After reading postcolonial and critical disability studies literature, I can identify the Minister's ceremonial interjection as an important public discursive shift. He creates a new discourse in which the testing deficiency is not embodied in the students who did not score well on the test, but rather deficiency is located in the ineffective postcolonial education system. This scenario illustrates the materiality of the environment and ontoformativity operating simultaneously in oppressive and liberating ways.

Segregation and Isolation

Alan Foley – June 2012 – July 2014

> *My work with visually impaired students grew from my personal experience having a parent who is blind and my awareness that there is still limited access to education for people with visual impairments in Kenya (Foley & Masingila 2015; Mugo 2007) and much of the world. Between June 2012 and July 2014, as part of a USAID-funded capacity-building project focused on teacher education, colleagues and I worked with students with visual impairments (blindness and low-vision) at a public university in Kenya and two schools for the blind and visually impaired in Kenya. This work focused on the use of mobile devices (smartphones and tablet computers) as assistive technology.*

> *Of the six schools for students with visual impairments in Kenya, only two offered secondary education, and higher education options were limited. It was not until 2009 that two public universities in Kenya even began admitting blind students. In 2014, there were approximately 50 students with visual impairments at the public university where our project was conducted.*

> *I was struck by the isolation that many of these students experienced as well as their dependence on others for both academic and personal tasks. Blind and visually impaired students go to separate primary and secondary schools and are only allowed to enroll in a limited number of majors at the university. All but one of the 20 students we worked with were studying to be teachers; however, as we talked with them, we learned that many of them had wished to study other topics (e.g., Computer Science, Engineering), but were not allowed to enroll in these programs on the basis of their disabilities. Even at the university, the students associated primarily with other blind and visually impaired students with students with some vision often serving as guides to those with no vision.*

Reflection

A teacher at one of the secondary schools for the blind commented that people in Kenya often still do not want to see or talk about blind people, and that that education and employment options after secondary school for persons with vision impairment (VI) are limited. This perspective has a historical basis. Kiarie (2004:18) notes how 'In Kenya … people with visual impairments, especially those who are totally blind, belonged in the category of people referred to for a long time as *wasiojiweza,* meaning *those unable to take care of themselves'* (emphasis in original).

We were not sure what impact our technology project would have, but the students we worked with quickly found value and began teaching us what it meant. A benefit of the technology we were using was that it also enabled us to stay in direct contact with the students we had worked with, where previously we had to send messages through the campus disability office. We checked in with the students via email periodically:

> [I am] loving the way now I can do so much technologically with minimal or no assistance from someone who has sight' (Isaac, Email correspondence January 2014).

> I communicate with it [iPad mini] frequently by asking questions about weather and other geographical questions. (David, Email Correspondence January 2014)

> In case I have a problem with my iPad ... I ask my friends and they help me out. Otherwise, I go to www.google.com and type my problem. That way I will get information on people with earlier similar problems and responses of those questions by others who had solved those problems. (Maurice, Email Correspondence January 2014)

Increased independence was a constant touchstone for the students using the technology.

> And the level of independence, because when I am at home I would ask someone, 'Read for me this message.' So now days I am independent, I am able to read my messages; I have a level of privacy. … One of the court executives came asking me, 'How are you able to do your reports? I mean how are you even able to use the iPad?' and I explained to him how I am using the iPad and he is very happy. He … tells me, 'You are an able man.' Yes – because of this assistive technology. (Bernard, Interview July 2013)

We also began working with the office on campus that supports students with disabilities, and encountering gaps where the system could not account for a student's needs. For example, all students with visual impairments, regardless of whether they were blind or low-vision, received the same training and services. We assumed this was an artifact of lack of resources, but also reflected assumptions about visual impairment that perhaps did not consider the individual's experience of the condition. One student noted:

> I am grateful, because I am partially blind so I don't read Braille. For me to be able to access notes, I had to get people to read for me and during exams it was very hard to get someone to read for you. But these days I just get someone when you are free, you read for me then I record them and during exams I just listen to them. I don't look for someone to read for me during exams. So when it is exams, I don't look for anyone. I just sit down and listen to my notes. They are all on my iPad. (Alana, Interview June

2013)

Lack of resources for students with disabilities is not an issue limited to Kenya. In universities in the West, access and accommodations frequently must be rationalized through a cost/benefit analysis where the value of including disabled students is weighed against the cost to the university. I noticed examples of this type of market-based language among university faculty in Kenya, but the scarcity of resources to support disabled students is more than just a rationalization. The same technology companies that employ sweatshop laborers in Asia (and it is not just Apple, but essentially all smartphone makers), and require resources from the global South to cheaply assemble phones which sell at huge margin in the West, have not developed local, affordable, or sustainable options for people in the global South. The products and services available to disabled people living in the global South, if they can be afforded must be purchased from industrialized Northern countries on the 'global disability marketplace' (Meekosha, 2011).

The segregation and isolation visually impaired students encountered was striking to me. As we learned more about the students we were working with, the cause of many of their impairments/disabilities began to seem arbitrary. Of the 20 university students we worked with, about half were low-vision and half were blind. We talked casually with the students about their impairments, and many of them voluntarily shared the circumstances in which they acquired their impairment. One student had an accident that resulted in a detached retina. Because he could not afford treatment or even afford travel to the city for treatment, what was a treatable condition resulted in blindness. Several students mentioned their blindness was the result of childhood illnesses that are treatable in the West. One student was given the wrong medication for an illness putting her in a coma – when she came out of the coma her eye were fused shut and her mother could not afford surgery. All of the students we talked to who were blind acquired their condition, all of the students with low-vision had conditions they were born with.

From the beginning of my work in Kenya, I was aware of the disparity in the prevalence in blindness compared with the U.S. I had a superficial understanding of the global conditions that perpetuate poverty and impairment. Critical disability studies helped me understand that these students' disabilities could not be explained as social constructs - their impairments were not 'natural variations' in human development, but rather directly tied to Northern imperialism, colonialism and globalization (Meekosha, 2011).

Reverse Inclusion

Alan Foley – January 2014

> *In a workshop with six students and two teachers at a secondary school for the blind,*

we assumed the workshop would have a mix of blind and low vision students and sighted teachers. As it turned out, the group was two sighted teachers (which we expected), two students with low vision, one blind student and three students with no visual impairment whatsoever. I was surprised by this and asked the teachers and an observer from the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) why there were sighted students at the school for the blind. The consensus was that because scores on national tests were 'low' at these schools, the decision had been made to admit sighted students to improve outcomes. This process was referred to as 'reverse inclusion.' Reverse inclusion means including a few non-disabled students in classes with disabled students, rather than closing segregated schools and including disabled students in better resourced general schools.

Reflection

I heard the term 'reverse inclusion' on my fourth visit to Kenya, and had been thinking about the ways disabled students were understood and described for quite some time. On my first visit to Kenya, the ways in which faculty at the university described students with disabilities was an initial source of discomfort to me. I remember sitting in a room where our students with disabilities were being discussed, fighting the urge to cringe and wondering if I should say something about their use of language that I felt was dated but also discriminatory. At one point I remember thinking it was a bit absurd of me to be wondering if we should be talking about person-first language or disabled identity, when there were students who did not have books in an accessible format, or could not complete their coursework without another student's assistance, or who were assumed to be 'mentally incompetent' because they were blind.

I struggled with what these words meant and why these faculty members used them. I also struggled with the realization that just because my Western, academic self had found different ways to discuss disability, I did not know the context of this language in Kenya. I realized that my initial impulse to 'correct' this language was not productive. More importantly I came to view my discomfort as a marker of my Western-ness, and arrived at a point where I found disability studies alone to be inadequate to explain what was going on in Kenya.

Practices like reverse inclusion and the discourse that surrounds them, suggest that the 'problem' are the students with visual impairments and that 'normal' students are necessary to improve outcomes. This is not just a rhetorical issue though. In addition to the neoliberal, marketizing tendencies of high-stakes testing which require school scores be raised, the rationale for reverse inclusion suggests the schools, teachers, the curriculum or the lack of resources and teaching tools in the schools are not the problem, rather the students are. This vignette illustrates that merely changing the way something is described does not change the

larger structural forces that are driving school reform globally.

In the previous sections, we have provided vignettes of our work to illustrate how our work and understandings of critical disability studies and disability in Kenya evolved over time. In the conclusion, we revisit the inherent neocolonial tensions in our work. We also pose questions that we hope will begin transnational and interdisciplinary discussions about the current nature of disability development work in the global South. We hope these discussions lead to opportunities to responsibly move the conversation beyond simply labeling any such work as neocolonial. We are not the only people engaging in such work and would like to know what other scholars, both in the global North and South, are doing to minimize the colonizing impacts of this work.

Conclusion

We begin the conclusion by revisiting our colleague's observation of our work in Kenya: 'Your research in sub-Saharan Africa sounds neo-colonial to me. What makes you so sure you are not perpetuating colonial oppressions?' Though we agree that development work is inherently neocolonial, simply labeling any attempt as 'neocolonial' is insufficient and too one-dimensional. It does not allow for alternatives that may in fact have positive outcomes for communities engaged in such work. The violent colonial history of Kenya cannot be undone, but that does not mean that we do not have a collective responsibility to move forward in more socially just and equitable ways.

Throughout this paper, we have used vignettes as a way to critically reflect on the evolution of our work in Kenya. We view our early work in Kenya as less critical, but not any less important. It is not less important because simply beginning the work has led to opportunities for both of us to conduct future, more critical projects in the region. These critical reflections have led us to better understand the need for a larger presence of Southern perspectives in critical disability studies literature and incorporate that into our future projects.

We understood that engaging in such projects requires reflection. Along with these reflections come new understandings on how to improve one's practices. It is our hope that by acknowledging the evolution of our work in Kenya that this encourages other scholars to share their experiences in doing similar transnational work. By sharing these experiences publically, perhaps new and better approaches to such work can come into being. These approaches could encourage a more dialogical process of mutual knowledge production between the global North and South.

As these types of critical dialogues propagate, perhaps there will be a more equitable representation of Southern literature in critical disability studies. By encouraging such a shift in the flow of information from South to North, we begin to decenter neoliberal and

oppressive Northern ways of knowing, and hopefully open up the potential for better ways of conceptualizing and supporting people with disabilities in the global South. Though this is not the reality at this point in time, we believe that engagement in such dialogues is a prudent place to start.

Notes

[1] We realize that person-first language is commonplace in many professional journals. However, many people in the global South acquire disabilities under artificial and violent circumstances created by Western capitalism and inequitable distribution of wealth (Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011). Thus, we use 'disabled people' as a way to recognize these realities.

[2] UNESCO uses the term 'developing countries' which we recognize is a problematic term. Due to the exploitive Eurocentric economic and political policies put in place by post-colonial governments (Hall, 1990; Mwaura, 2005; Zembylas, 2013), some scholars claim those countries have not been 'developing,' but rather, have been purposely 'underdeveloped.' Mwarua (Mwaura, 2005) notes an 'underdeveloped country' is one 'which has an untapped potential for using more capital or more labor or more available natural resources to support its present population on a higher level of living' (p. 1). This exploitation has been maintained by capitalist systems that favor Western colonizers, and continue to keep many African countries under oppressive and ineffective forms of government (Mwaura, 2005).

[3] The 20 students come from across Kenya. A few of the students come from urban areas (e.g., Nairobi, Thika, Nakuru), but most of them are from rural areas, and some are from fairly remote areas, such as Turkana and Samburu in northern Kenya, Garissa in northeastern Kenya, Narok in southern Kenya, and Busia in Western Kenya.

References

Apple, M. W. (2006). Understanding and Interrupting Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism in Education. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 1(1), 21–26.

Barinaga, E., & Parker, P. S. (2013). Community-engaged scholarship: Creating participative spaces for transformative politics. *Tamara Journal for Critical Organization Inquiry*, 11(4).

Barker, C., & Murray, S. (2010). Disabling Postcolonialism: Global Disability Cultures and Democratic Criticism. *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 4(3), 219–236.

Bishop, R. (1998). Freeing ourselves from neo-colonial domination in research: A Maori approach to creating knowledge. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *11*(2), 199–219.

Buchmann, C. (1999). The state and schooling in Kenya: Historical developments and current challenges. *Africa Today*, 46(1), 95–117.

Connell, R. (2011). Southern Bodies and Disability: Re-thinking concepts. *Third World Quarterly*, 32(8), 1369–1381.

Dunbar, C. (2008). Critical Race Theory and Indigenous Methodologies. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln, & L. T. Smith (eds.), *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* (pp. 85–99). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Erevelles, N. (2005). Rewriting critical pedagogy from the periphery: materiality, disability and the politics of schooling. *Disability Studies in Education*, 65–84.

Espinosa-Dulando, M. (2004). Silent screams: Deconstructing (academia) the insider/outsider indigenous researcher positionalities. In In K. Mutua & E. Swadener (eds.), *Decolonizing Research in Cross-Cultural Contexts: Critical Personal Narratives*. SUNY Press.

Foley, A. R., & Masingila, J. O. (2015). The use of mobile devices as assistive technology in resource-limited environments: Access for learners with visual impairments in Kenya. *Disability & Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology,* 10(4), 1-8.

Gee, J. P. (2014). *How to Do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Goodley, D. (2013). Dis/entangling critical disability studies. *Disability & Society*, 28(5), 631–644.

Grech, S. (2011). Recolonising debates or perpetuated coloniality? Decentring the spaces of disability, development and community in the global South. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(1), 87–100.

Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Kiarie, M. (2004). Education of students with visual in Kenya: Trends and issues. *International Journal of Special Education*, 19(2), 16–22.

Kincheloe, J., & Steinberg, S. (2008). Indigenous knowledges in education: Complexities, dangers, and profound benefits. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln, & L. T. Smith (eds.), *Handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies* (pp. 233-254). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Lather, P. A. (1991). *Getting smart : feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern. Critical social thought*. New York: Routledge.

McCaslin, W., & Breton, D. (2008). Justice as healing: Going out-side the colonizer's cage. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln, & L. T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies* (pp. 511–530). Los Angles, CA: Sage.

Meekosha, H. (2011). Decolonising disability: thinking and acting globally. *Disability & Society*, 26(6), 667–682.

Meekosha, H., & Shuttleworth, R. (2009). What's so "critical" about critical disability studies? *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, 15(1), 47–76.

Meekosha, H., & Soldatic, K. (2011). Human Rights and the Global South: the case of disability. *Third World Quarterly*, 32(8), 1383–1397.

Ministry of Education. (2008). *The development of education: National report of Kenya*.

Mugo, B. C. (2007). *Instructional technology in the facilitation of learning by visually impaired learners in upper primary classes in Kenya*. Kenya: Kenyatta University.

Mutua, K., & Swadener, B. B. (Eds.). (2004). *Decolonizing Research in Cross-Cultural Contexts: Critical Personal Narratives*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Mwaka, M., Kafwa, V. N., Musamas, J. K., & Wambua, B. K. (2013). Interrogating the Achievement of National Unity. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 4(4), 149–156.

Mwaura, N. (2005). *Kenya today-breaking the yoke of colonialism in Africa*. New York: Algora.

Ndege, P. (2009). *Colonialism and its Legacies in Kenya*. Eldoret, Kenya: Moi University.

OCHR. (2011). *United nations convention on the rights of persons with disability Kenya state party report*. Kenya: UN.

Opini, B. (2011). Barriers to participation of women students with disabilities in university participation in Kenya. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 25(1), 65–79.

Owuor, J. A. (2007). Integrating African indigenous knowledge in Kenya's formal education system: the potential for sustainable development. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 2, 21 − 37.

Owuor, J. A. (2008). Integrating African Indigenous Knowledge in Kenya's Formal Education System: The Potential for Sustainable Development. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 2(2), 21–37.

Oyugi, L. N. (2011). *Inclusive Education in Kenya: A Study of Special Education Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Children with Disabilities*. Santa Barbara: University of California.

Parsons, T. (2012). Being Kikuyu in Meru: Challenging the tribal geography of colonial Kenya. *The Journal of African History,* 53(01), 65–86.

Sandoval, C. (2000). *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

UNESCO. (2005). *Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring access to education for all*. Rome: UNESCO

UNICEF. (2007). *Promoting the rights of children with disabilities*. Rome: UNICEF

United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities*. New York: UN

USAID. (2011). *USAID Education Strategy*. Washington D.C: USAID

WHO and Wolrd Bank. (2011). *World report on disability*. Geneva: WHO.

Zembylas, M. (2013). The "Crisis of Pity" and the Radicalization of Solidarity: Toward Critical Pedagogies of Compassion. *Educational Studies*, 49(6), 504–521.