

# Chapter 10

## Reimagining Multicultural Education: Needed Transformations at the Epistemological Level

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Multicultural education has actively endeavored to undermine inequalities and imbalances by offering pedagogical frameworks for accounting for and managing cultural diversity. However, foundational literature on multicultural education seems to be dominated by Western scholars, mainly American. This assumption is not in alignment with the objectives of critical education which seeks to stymie power imbalances and grant visibility to less popular individuals along with their cultures, understandings, and perspectives. That is why it is important to ask questions about whether multicultural education has exhibited any signs of seeking to stymie the hegemony of Western episteme in terms of its theory and praxis. This chapter argues that it is necessary to include other epistemologies in multicultural education theory and praxis in order to realize global cognitive justice. The main aim is to make a case for the possibility of further developing multicultural education by integrating other knowledges and ways of knowing.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The changes brought about by globalization have not only considerably increased immigration, neoliberal attitudes and economic exploitation but also exerted a significant impact on education in various contexts (Spring, 2014; Stromquist & Monkman, 2014). The theory of multicultural education has sought to establish lacerations in the long-continued power imbalances (Banks, 2004; Sleeter, 2010; Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014). However, these attempts to undermine colonial-like relations among cultures and, thus, individuals might not have been multicultural themselves. In other words, it seems, at this point, defensible to argue that the prominent conceptions and theorizations in multicultural education do not reflect multiculturalism in terms of knowledge production which is dominated by US scholars' research, e.g., James A. Banks, Meira Levinson, Shirley Steinberg, Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay among others. If we come to realize that multicultural education has been theorized and informed primarily by Northern-Western ways of knowing (Garcia & Baca, 2019), we can make a case for the idea that theory of multicultural education may not be as multicultural as it is supposed to be, at least in terms of knowledge representation that drives the wide range of studies, knowledge and practical application of multicultural education.

Western thought continues to dominate most scientific domains rendering epistemologies of the south (Sousa Santos, 2018) marginalized and situated within border thinking (Mignolo, 2018). Going beyond the normative understandings of the western narrative of modernity necessitates considering other epistemologies that have been unrecognized (R'boul, 2020). In particular, Asian, African and Caribbean philosophical and epistemological traditions may contribute other insights to multicultural education that may not have received substantial attention. This alternative perspective can ameliorate the scope of analysis by providing a different way of knowing and introducing other cosmologies into the global discourse of knowledge (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) about multiculturalism and multicultural education (Talbani, 2003). A field that seeks to promote social justice has to reflect these principles in terms of its theory first. As long as the main theorizations are coming from western sources and the theory itself remains western-centric, the extent to which multiculturalists can be confident in the possibility of undermining power imbalances should be questioned..

The usual ethics underlying any engagement with multicultural education are liberal and influenced by western thought (Miled, 2019). Western hegemony in multicultural education scholarship can be relatively broken by dissemination of, for instance, Islamic knowledge and ethics, which encourage activism, social justice, tolerance and intercultural exchange. Focusing on other non-popular perspectives from the global south (Sousa Santos, 2014) can draw attention to other understudied dimensions of multicultural education including the religious and the cultural knowledge that students bring to the classrooms. Managing cultural diversity may also entail managing religious diversity that is often the main basis of discrimination in non-western contexts; that is why other non-popular perspectives are highly pertinent to such discussions especially with regards to the discrimination and 'Othering' towards religions and non-Western worldviews (Poulter et al., 2016)

With the unprecedented cultural and religious diversity, there is a need to better understand the educational thought other than Euro/American-centred history of intellectual thought and spirituality (Sabki & Hardaker, 2013). This chapter is informed by the necessity to ensure epistemic justice (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007) in multicultural education in terms of not only its theory but also its objectives. It aims to (a) evaluate the prominent theories in multicultural education and the extent to which they are either informed by western or non-western epistemologies, (b) draw upon postcoloniality and geopolitics

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of knowledge scholarship to substantiate the need to consider a reimagining of multicultural education, as a field of inquiry and activism, moving away from its skewed dynamics of knowledge production, and (c) elaborate on how the inclusion of other epistemic alternatives can ameliorate the scope of multicultural education in terms of both theory and application.

This chapter will provide an alternative framework for discussing multicultural education through presenting epistemological justice as indispensable to social justice (Rios & Markus, 2011). This has become a necessity considering how the legacy and trajectories of multicultural education have been dominated by western thought (Rios, 2018). With the hegemony of Northern knowledges, we are running the risk of reproducing the same colonial structures (Quijano, 2000; Maldonado-Torres, 2007) in a field that aims to deconstruct and stymie them. Therefore, it attends to the valid question of how it is possible to establish more just dynamics of knowledge circulation in multicultural education. The objective here is to present a higher abstraction of multicultural education by stretching its epistemological boundaries. By deploying Southern knowledges as influential epistemological frameworks in multicultural education, power imbalances can be addressed not only in classrooms but also in the broader context of society and international geopolitics of knowledge. This way, we can simultaneously (a) transform multicultural education to include other epistemological alternatives and (b) work towards establishing epistemic justice in other contexts as well. If epistemic justice is emphasized, teachers and students can exhibit a sense of activism that recognizes treating others fairly means respecting and appreciating their local and indigenous knowledges as well. Theorizing and implementing multicultural education in a way that recognizes epistemic justice is a promising assumption towards more equitable learning spaces and societies.

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

This chapter recognizes that the field of multicultural education has been developed predominantly by Black Americans. These scholars have provided important epistemological nuance to the field that does not endorse the cognitive superiority of western episteme. In particular, a prominent black American scholar who has largely contributed to the foundational principles of multicultural education is James A. Banks. In his response to multicultural education being anti-Western, he indicated that:

*Multicultural education is opposed to the Western tradition. Another harmful misconception about multicultural education has been repeated so often by its critics that many people take it as self evident. This is the claim that multicultural education is a movement that is opposed to the West and to Western civilization. Multicultural education seeks to extend to all people the ideals that were meant only for an elite few at the nation's birth. (Banks, 1993, p. 23)*

It is indeed clear that the contributions of black American scholars have not been entirely informed by western knowledge and frameworks. However, the aim here is to argue for the need for greater epistemological diversity found outside the US, particularly the epistemologies of the south (Sousa Santos, 2014). Continuing to call for more recognition of Black Americans' works is an essential element in developing the epistemological scope of multicultural education, but it is indeed a process of furthering the centrality of the US context in the field. The chapter's rationale is based on the premise that failure to include ways of knowing coming from the less popular contexts would entangle the Global South's

epistemic dependency they would continue to import knowledge that is has been developed mainly within/for the conditions of US society. This chapter conceptualizes Global South as “not just a place (although it is also that), but a condition (of dispossession)” (Shome, 2019, p. 203). The argument here is that the Global South is not a geographical region; it is a status of invisibility. This way, the conception of the “Global South” is inclusive of the “East” as it is presented in postcolonial writings. That is why the Global South can be found within the Global North considering how certain groups and minorities do not enjoy the same degree of recognition in those contexts. I think discussing the epistemologies of the South is inclusive of the epistemologies of marginalized communities in the US.

The concept of ‘epistemology’ is used throughout the sections of this chapter; it is a central element to the range of ideas and arguments presented. This chapter defines epistemology as the theories of knowledge and ways of knowing. It is used more precisely to indicate the type of thinking that is employed to generate knowledge including the methods and sources. The common belief is that non-western knowledges may be anchored in culture, traditions and folklore. Therefore, epistemologies of the south refer to (a) ideas and frameworks that are produced by Southern scholars who have not enjoyed the same academic visibility due to their situatedness within the margins of modernity and knowledge production as maintained by enduring structures of coloniality and (b) scholarship that is informed by local southern conceptualities, culture, ways of knowing, sources and ethics. These include the knowledges that may be developed in alignment with religious principles and consequently how knowledge can be constructed, e.g., Islamic philosophy. In other words, it indicates thinking that is anchored in the logics historically produced and culturally marked by the local realities of Southern contexts. The importance of arguing for the inclusion of these alternative epistemologies is to present models of knowledge-making that are not derivative from the Western episteme and transcend the common structures and methods of how knowledge can be constructed.

The theoretical foundations of this chapter are informed by different traditions of intellectual engagement including postcolonial studies and geopolitics of knowledge. The attempt to discuss how multicultural education is theorized is driven by the perception that knowledge production is dominated by the Global North. Therefore, it is important to examine the extent to which multicultural education knowledge reflects the type of ideas it seeks to emphasize or question. It is safe to argue that the ideologies that underpinned educational theory were biased by the interests, conditions and understandings of the people who developed the frameworks for generating knowledge. Multicultural education should be developed in a way that questions and challenges the dominant perspectives that may have rendered theories informed the particular experiences of those in power.

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION ON MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION THEORY AND PRAXIS: CLASSROOMS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

Throughout my teaching career so far, I have always ensured that the liberal and equitable principles of multicultural education continue to shape my teaching practices. Therefore, exploring foundational texts of multicultural education along with new approaches to managing cultural diversity of classrooms has been a regular activity; the main strategy was to keep updated through articles published in multicultural education journals such as *Journal for Multicultural Education*, *Multicultural Education Review*, and *International Journal of Multicultural Education*. However, I came to realize that the most important

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theories that have shaped multicultural education have been developed and informed by the conditions and experiences of Western communities.

Theories of Critical Multiculturalism, Culturally Responsive Teaching and Critical Race Theory remain the perspectives of scholars who based their analysis on the conditions of western contexts and the extent/type of cultural diversity in those places. That is why the process of applying those theories to my context has entailed the importation of western-based knowledge to non-western space. The teaching context has been in a Southern context which comes with its specificities, challenges, and conditions. An important question here is to what extent these theories are commensurate with the societal and cultural conditions of my context. For instance, in Southern spaces, race may not be the main factor for inequalities and imbalances. Individuals are either privileged or marginalized depending on various factors including class, ethnicity and language. Southern spaces come with their own challenges which need theories that specifically account for these circumstances and conditions.

Then, I felt the need to draw other scholars and educators' attention to the necessity of involving other ways of knowing, especially epistemologies of the south in theorizing multicultural education. This way, we can ensure that multicultural education is indeed multicultural as it is theorized and practised multiculturally. Granting more visibility to Southern knowledges would offer more coverage and accurate characterization of multiple contexts according to their particular conditions rather than assuming the universality of western theories to other places. While this process seems to be achievable, it requires a lot of work from both Southern and Northern scholars and educators. Knowledge coming from Southern spaces has always been there, but it is important for those whose voice is heard to make use of these perspectives and recognize them as valid knowledge. This is a further step to develop multicultural education as it will be enriched by the plurality of perspectives and understandings.

I believe achieving epistemological diversity in multicultural education is particularly important for educators. The ability to find theories that take local conditions into account would help to apply the principles of multicultural education more efficiently. For instance, Hong (2010) called for "collective efforts among educators in the Asia-Pacific region to explore more diversified approaches to multicultural education, as theories and practices based on Western experiences may have limited application to this region" (p. 387). Scholars and educators need to recognize the multiplicity of identities and cultures that exist in different regions of the world. Also, they need to acknowledge that they may be often sources of conflict or foci for controversy. The main idea here is that educators should structure their practices in a way that reflects how "everyone should enjoy fundamental freedoms for without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion; but we acknowledge that basic human rights still do not exist in some parts of the world" (Grant & Khurshid, 2009, p. 26)

Castagno (2009) offered a synthesis of the multiple approaches and definitions of multicultural education found in the literature. The researcher suggested that "the presence of so many similar typologies only serves to confuse the reader and obscure the meaning of multicultural education. This confusion is problematic, as it leaves educators in a place of uncertainty about effective educational practice" (p. 43). Grant & Lei (2001) noted that various global regions are struggling with three major concerns within the field of multicultural education:

"the conceptualization and realization of "difference" and "diversity"; the inclusion and exclusion of social groups within a definition of multicultural education; and the effects of power on relations between and among groups identified under the multicultural education umbrella". Because of the complex multidisciplinary roots of multicultural education (Bennett, 2001), it has been problematic to assume a comprehensive characterization of multicultural education. Yet, regardless of "its specific

connotations, and there are many, the term “multicultural education” speaks to questions of how school children are taught about their own social identity and the identity of others” (Sutton, 2005, p. 98). This chapter is driven by the rationale of the importance of pointing out the Global North and South imbalances in knowledge production in multicultural education. This call should also involve the inclusion of alternative perspectives that have not assumed a central role in theorizing multicultural education. This attempt would further contribute to the development of multicultural education and ensure that is an epistemologically diverse academic field.

## **KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION**

Banks and Banks (2009) provided well-delineated guidelines to enable the transformative potential of multicultural education through focusing on different aspects of classroom life. They argue that

*Multicultural education is a broad concept with several different and important dimensions. Practicing educators can use the dimensions as a guide to school reform when trying to implement multicultural education. The dimensions are (1) content integration, (2) the knowledge construction process, (3) prejudice reduction, (4) an equity pedagogy, and (5) an empowering school culture and social structure. (p. 16).*

Multicultural education scholarship includes other pedagogical frameworks such as anti-racist education (Dei & Calliste, 2000), culturally relevant anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010), culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2010; 2012), anti-oppressive education (Kelly, 2012), humanizing pedagogy (del Carmen Salazar, 2013), the critical and transformative approach (Banks & Banks, 2009; Nieto & Bode, 2016) and critical transformative multiculturalism (Miled, 2019). However, all these frameworks have been developed in alignment with tensions and conflicts within western societies. Limited scholarship has discussed the version of multicultural education in less popular contexts, especially southern spaces.

While the majority of multicultural education literature focuses on tensions arising from cultural differences, research in other contexts may require making use of different categories such as class or religion which are the main reasons for significant polarizations. This is particularly more important in multicultural education because knowledge reflects the social and cultural specificities of people and society from which knowledge has been developed. That is why it is important to acknowledge the knower’s biases and positionality which might, in some cases, limit the possibility of extending particular knowledge to other contexts which are shaped by different variables. A critical discussion of the canon in multicultural education should aim to examine the meaning of difference, culture, ethnicity, race and identity with regards to the extension of available knowledge to other contexts. This is critical here because the second dimension of multicultural education is the knowledge construction process. Multicultural scholars contend that knowledge is both objective and subjective, reflecting the “social, cultural, and power positions of people within society” (Banks, 2004, p. 14). The dimension of the knowledge production process has been precisely discussed in relation to students’ ability to identify the writer’s purposes and perspectives, as well as how to enable them to “formulate their own interpretations of reality” (Banks, 2004, p. 14). The process of combining western and non-western knowledge in both multicultural education’s theory and praxis offers the possibility of assisting students in acquiring more nuanced understandings of cultural diversity and society.

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Grant et al. (2004) reviewed multicultural education research from 1990 to 2001 and they described the field as “troubled” (p. 185), largely due to “conceptual confusion, research epistemological bias, funding, [and] research acceptance in the academy” (p. 200). This way, knowledge production in multicultural education can function as a political tool to maintain or challenge the appropriateness of academic discourses analyzing the type of knowledge and input they disseminate. Scholars’ epistemological orientation shapes the range of assumptions, attitudes and critical lenses through which knowledge is acquired; this could largely result in yielding different findings and analysis of the same issues if other epistemologies and ways of knowing were used. For instance, although scholars of color have shaped the theoretical foundations of education, the literature on multicultural education includes several accounts of the difficulties they have faced to be recognized in education scholarship, e.g., reclaiming the multicultural roots of multicultural education (Au et al., 2016) and the contribution of Latinos to public education through their engagement in Civil Rights Movement (Colón-Muñíz & Lavadenz, 2016). Scholars come with a prior knowledge base that often understands multicultural education only within the context of western societies.

Miled (2019) conducted an empirical qualitative study in one school district in British Columbia, Canada. The study examined “the perspectives of the educational leaders and their understanding of multicultural education and how they implement it in the school district’s teachers’ professional development (ProD) and in-service education” (p. 79). The main aim was to explore the theoretical frameworks that had shaped the participants’ choices and actions in educating and supporting teachers to manage the complexities of diversity and the continuously changing demographics in the school district. The findings highlighted the dominant liberal approach to multicultural education, and also pointed to how the systemic barriers have transcended the tokenistic approach of cultures and how the organizational constraints have moved towards “transformative, critical multiculturalism and anti-racism education in teachers’ training and professional development” (p. 79). Multicultural knowledge and practices contradictorily sustain and aggravate issues of the supremacy of Euro and American-centric knowledge which may render teachers in other spaces reluctant to multicultural education.

The critiques to multicultural education as a field demonstrate “challenges to implementing an education that is multicultural especially when considering students from minoritized and global majority backgrounds” (Rios, 2018, p. 165). This is indeed relevant in today’s circumstances because “knowledge of cultural diversity is fundamental to the effective implementation of multicultural education” (Gay & Howard, 2000, p. 7). In the United States, canonical multicultural education (CME) advocates argue that “schools should view children always as “different, not deficient”, that curriculum incorporate “multiple perspectives”, and that classrooms emphasize the “knowledge construction” process” (Fullinwider, 2001, p. 331). Therefore, it is clear that multicultural harmony necessitates sophisticated cultural knowledge, which undermines assimilationist approaches, as the basis for sophisticated learning. It is also important to pay attention to the principal role that country-specific knowledge plays in framing problems, analyzing relationships and intersections, and subsequently influencing practice in schools. The main idea here is to encourage incorporating cultural and pedagogical knowledge of self and others derived from different epistemologies and ways of knowing with designing multiculturally informed pedagogical practices in classrooms.

## **GEPOLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION**

According to multiculturalists, the main goals of multicultural education include “transforming educational institutions so that students from different racial, ethnic, gender, and class backgrounds may have the opportunity for educational equity and success” (Ngo, 2010, p. 475). However, with the increasing spree of racialization and othering, multicultural education may not be enough (Au, 2017), and although multiculturalism has been associated with social justice because it considers cultural differences as well as personal perceptions while taking into account sociopolitical and economic realities (Lalas, 2007), it may denote postcolonial Eurocentrism that continues to privilege western episteme. Due to power relations in global knowledge production (Demeter, 2020), southern knowledges continue to experience a daily dose of epistemic violence. Following an extensive reading of foundational literature on multicultural education, it is safe to argue that the word ‘epistemology’ has been rare in multicultural education scholarship; which could imply epistemological justice has not been a primary concern in multicultural education

Postcolonial and decolonial scholars have repeatedly pointed out to the dominance of western episteme on most scientific fields rendering Northern epistemologies (Garci & Baca, 2018) as primary perspectives while Southern knowledges are relegated to subordinate views (Sousa Santos, 2018). North and South relations are characterized by deep imbalances at the epistemological level, and this has made Western-centric perceptions of knowledge more dominant and often overshadow underrepresented non-western communities (R’boul, 2021a). The ramifications of power imbalances on knowledge production in multicultural education reflect the conditions that have granted self-ascribed superiority of western views. Foundational scholarship on multicultural education is specifically about cultural, ethnic and racial issues in the US and Canada. This often results in the importation of US-relevant findings to be assumed relevant to other contexts as well. While I do recognize that conducting extensive research in these countries is expected and legitimate due to these nations’ cultural diversity, globalization has rendered other contexts culturally diverse as well. What’s more, these contexts may be characterized by heavier cultural and racial discrimination which make knowledge coming from those spaces useful as well.

The concern is not that multicultural education’s broad objectives are not relevant to southern contexts, but that theorizing multicultural education is mainly Western-American. Therefore, it is safe to raise doubts about the extent to which current multicultural education knowledge is useful to other spaces, whose issues emanate from other categories such as religion and class. This remains defensible even if we acknowledge the major contribution of scholars of color, who have contributed to the development of multicultural education’s theory and praxis. With the current conditions of postmodernity and globalization, it is important to consider the feasibility of imported theory into southern contexts. As a citizen of an African country, I can say that several accounts of multicultural education scholarship do not bear relevance to my local nation’s condition. This is clear since the discriminatory structures and dynamics are basically different from those in the US or Canada.

The perpetuation of the ascendancy of western academic knowledge would further reinscribe the maintenance of dominant structures, skewed geopolitics of knowledge, power imbalances and the enduring inequities that situated the epistemologies and the perspectives of southern spaces at the margins; this would entangle the inferior position of less popular cultures as their ways of knowing are recognized in a field that claims support for equality and social justice. That is why the multiculturalization of knowledge on multicultural education should be encouraged. Multicultural education should not only make use those non-Western knowledge systems but also to “expand the ways in which knowledge is



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shared, learned, and assessed” (Rios, 2018, p. 177); further step will be to eliminate ideologies whose epistemological basis is assimilationist, colonist and racist (Souto-Manning & Winn, 2017).

Social justice is an inherent element and goal of multicultural education (Lawyer, 2018) since “the discourses between teaching for social justice and multicultural education should be mutually associated with one another to more effectively promote social justice” (Cho, 2017, p. 1). In order to empower students from underrepresented groups both intellectually and culturally, social justice conceptions of multicultural education generally begin with “grassroots projects that explicitly recognize a community’s experience with oppression, and draw on that community’s history and knowledge as a source of power” (Sleeter, 2010, p. 14). Publishing multicultural education academic research with a social justice focus requires “academics who are committed to engaging in scholarly activities in ways that promote an explicit social justice focus” (del Carmen Salazar & Rios, 2016, p. 3)

Ghosh & Galczynski (2014) argue that “education is not a matter of accumulating knowledge and skills; it involves acquiring “conceptual schemes”-forming links and understanding ideas. [...] To be educated is to have a voice, which implies knowledge as power” (p. 61). The process of formulating one’s scholarship and pedagogical knowledge solely on major countries-related literature is likely to sustain “purely utilitarian interpretations educational goals” (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014, p. 134). That is why it is more useful and critical to consider intercultural relations among students and teachers. Instead of focusing on multicultural education or culturally-relevant teaching, teachers can embrace interculturally relevant pedagogy that provides a contemporary approach to today’s circumstances (R’boul, 2021b). It emphasizes how students’ cultures, understanding and epistemologies interact in classrooms. This way, teachers can deliver more comprehensive teaching practices that build on the specificities of their classrooms and take into account intercultural relations among students and teachers. In the process of selecting pedagogical knowledge, multicultural teachers and writers have to take into account the skewed geopolitics of knowledge (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) Scholars and instructors are the ones deciding of what it is considered ‘useful knowledge’. Therefore, failing to include unpopular epistemological voices is another form of exercising discrimination. What is more concerning is that solely focusing on knowledge produced by Western scholars would exclude the power struggle, inequities, and resistance of individuals from other contexts that do not enjoy similar recognition.

Since less popular ways of knowing are still largely invisible and unacknowledged in the multicultural education literature, research on multicultural education has to be multicultural in order to “imagine new possibilities for the field, including new voices, new visions, and new contexts” (Nieto, 2017, p. 1). For instance, the integration of indigenous knowledge in multicultural discourse (Marker, 2006) could only be achieved throughout the process of scholarly production. Making a case for critical and emerging discourses in multicultural education literature (Kirova, 2015) necessitates stymieing the marginalization of Southern intellectual thought discourse in foundational scholarship on multicultural education. This endeavor is not only contingent on researchers but also teachers who should be encouraged to seek other ways of understanding and analyzing multicultural education and frameworks for managing cultural diversity.

For example, Islamic philosophy and ethics can be developed into a particular framework or understanding for building knowledge, teaching, or creating just educational contexts. Islamic ethics have emphasized equality in giving rights without any discrimination based on class, race, religion, color, etc. The Qur’an which is the main source of teachings in Islam encourages dialogue with non-Muslims and among Muslims regardless of what type of differences there. The only difference among people is their deeds and morals, not their cultures or races. As Islam does not make a case for racial or ethnic

differences, believers are judged in terms of their actual practices. This assumption may apply to multicultural education as Islam does not delineate any differences among humans. The differences in race, colour, ethnicity, complexion, languages etc. are not seen as systems of discrimination or indicators of superiority, but as an expression of the diversity that Allah has created and to which he granted equality. While, for instance, Muslim schools in secular societies or Muslim minority may be sometimes subjected to inequality and injustice (Shah, 2012), it is clear that Islam has emphasized numerous principles that regulate interpersonal relations. The right to equality and human dignity is granted to all humans since birth. That is why any system of oppression or discrimination is categorically forbidden in Islam.

## **POSTCOLONIALITY AND DECOLONIALITY IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION**

The dominant Western episteme in producing and disseminating knowledge exemplifies “the ascendancies and silences produced by modern science that grants credibility to northern ‘regimes of truth’” (R’boul, 2020, p. 1). In particular, multiple accounts have called for encouraging more epistemological diversity in multicultural education, e.g., decolonial multiculturalism and local-global contexts (Sprecher, 2011) and multicultural education and the postcolonial turn (Hudson, 2003). Multicultural education has to be grounded in postcolonial theory, which recognizes southern spaces’ dilemma of knowledge production. Importantly, calling for more inclusion of less popular knowledges requires acknowledging the limited visibility of non-western ways of knowing in multicultural education. If the field continues to function through the lenses of scholars whose research emanates from the cultural and societal issues in very few countries, then knowledge cannot be blindly imported and used in other contexts which may not suffer from similar issues or their issues are originated from other categories and systems.

Any form of resistance to the hegemonic coloniality of Western thought requires making less popular subjectivities visible (Walsh, 2012) by granting them an important role in shaping multicultural education’s pedagogical practices. Promoting decolonizing pedagogies in multicultural education would ensure that decoloniality deconstructs hegemony of western episteme in theory and praxis. This would also allow theory and praxis to be developed in alignment with ‘Epistemologies of the South’ and ‘Ecology of Recognitions’ (Sousa Santos, 2014) in order to achieve global cognitive justice. Multicultural education’s theory and praxis should seek to stymie ‘dominant structures of knowledge and power’ (Walsh, 2007, p. 26).

For instance, decolonial pedagogy is an educational framework that has been developed by Latin American scholars that advocates for making use of postcolonial and decolonial theory in the pursuit of socially just classrooms. It recognizes the necessity of considering the epistemological aspect of people’s lives and their positionality within the broader society. While most of the multicultural education theory mainly focuses on cultural differences, colonial pedagogy can contribute critical insights about the ongoing struggles against Eurocentric hegemony and its self-ascribed superiority. It is indeed useful for multicultural education scholars to make use of similar conceptions in their accounts as they would be able to offer a different understanding of contemporary issues both in highly multicultural societies and less popular contexts.

Markus & Rios (2018) argue that one aim of multicultural education and human rights is coming to realize education that is inclusive of one’s own cultural worldview. In other words, it is the right to epistemological justice that recognizes their local epistemologies which are a part of their cultures and knowledges. The researchers further contended that the dominant epistemology is largely Eurocentric

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as it is maintained by Western ideals, which have largely positioned non-western knowledges in the margins and rendering their perspectives distorted when they get some visibility. That is why there is a risk of limiting our understanding of reality to certain epistemological lenses. This is particularly a form of epistemological racism that students are likely to be subject to both in Global North and South.

Ensuring a particular level of diversified knowledge production and dissemination in multicultural education theory would further develop the field to examine new horizons and deliver more nuanced analysis. Moreover, the level of epistemic diversity in the enactment of multicultural education praxis would help teachers in dealing with various contexts that are characterized by different circumstances and conditions. The premise here is that social justice, which multicultural education is seeking to realize, is not possible without an epistemological justice that protects the epistemic dignity of historically marginalized scholars, teachers and students. Charlot and Belanger (2003) argue:

*Social justice is not possible without cognitive justice, without recognizing the presence of different forms of understanding, knowing and explaining the world. All forms of knowledge have to be present and valued in relation to one another. Faced with the endless map of knowledges, the conclusion is that it is impossible to have a single general theory about the meaning of education and knowledge. Education needs to be a central task of the political system, and political power should help, not only by funding it, but also by having as a priority the fight against the obscuring of non-Western knowledge and local forms of education (as cited in Chan-Tiberghien, 2004, p. 191)*

This is similar to the knowledge construction process that emphasizes people's right to have access to different epistemologies and ways of knowing in order to enrich and expand their learning processes (Banks, 2009). Multicultural education scholars can benefit from postcolonial theories, e.g., Mignolo & Walsh's (2018) 'thinking Otherwise' and Sousa Santos's (2018) 'alternative thinking'. According to Markus & Rios (2018), epistemological justice can be discussed from a number of perspectives with various orientations, including spirituality (Tisdell, 2006), epistemological diversity (de Sousa Santos, 2007), global competency (Banks, 2009), border epistemologies (Carter, 2010), the human right to pursue the good life (Tai, 2010), and decolonizing epistemologies (Smith, 2013).

This should not be understood as simply adding more input about other epistemologies (Gordon, 1995); it should be about actively incorporating less popular knowledges in theorizing multicultural education. Invisible epistemologies should not only be incorporated in doing research on multicultural education but also in multiculturally-relevant classrooms. Other epistemological systems can further deepen our understanding of how cultural and racial differences come to shape the educational experience. The concern to establish social justice is not only about having all students receiving an equal treatment; it is also about pushing the long-continued structures of coloniality that limit southern ways of knowing from getting more recognition and visibility. Considering all these assumptions, it is safe to argue that "valuing and celebrating diversity – biological, cultural, cognitive, economic, and political – through critical pedagogy, cognitive justice, and decolonizing methodologies becomes a counter-hegemonic alternative" (Chan-Tiberghien, 2004, p. 194).

What it is strongly needed is the development of metacritical awareness of how multicultural education scholarship either undermines the hegemony of western episteme or contributes to the maintenance of colonial-like relations among Northern and Southern spaces. Moreover, multicultural education can develop its tools by setting high expectations of the scholarship being implemented in schools. While the current literature is highly insightful and profound, it could be expanded by drawing on other concep-

tions and views of imagining reality. Although teachers' beliefs may support an equalitarian objective in classrooms by advancing appropriate management of cultural diversity (Agirdag et al., 2016; Samuels, 2018), it is indeed doubtful to what extent students can be safely assumed to be willing to undermine the current skewed geopolitics of knowledge and sociopolitical realities in their classrooms. The integration of alternative epistemologies in multicultural education theory and praxis is a form of transformative knowledge. Instead of only calling for granting visibility of other ways of knowing, scholars and teachers themselves should make use of those knowledges in their pedagogical decisions. Also, teachers need to be careful about what type of knowledge they are implementing in their classrooms. An important way to do this is to integrate multicultural literature since it offers the possibility of bridging cultural gaps (Yakota & Kolar, 2008; Vargasn 2020). If multicultural literature is properly used by selecting appropriate accounts, it can "engage readers toward new discoveries about the world and their varied roles in that world should not be underestimated" (Gibson & Parks, 2014, p. 43). Regardless of how multicultural a classroom is, students bring cultural knowledge to the classrooms; one form of this knowledge is stories or events that have been recounted by their families, cultural contexts or life experience that they have had (Tyson & Park, 2006).

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter calls for the necessity of establishing a research agenda on multicultural education that makes use of alternative epistemologies and knowledges. Instead of recentring the usual theories of multiculturalism, critical race theory, etc scholars have to advance novel scholarship that appreciates southern epistemologies, which could offer nuanced understandings of issues surrounding cultural diversity in education and society. Another important element to consider is that technology integration can contribute to either the diversification or the control of the production of knowledge and how learning takes place (Schneider & Smith, 2014). Teachers should seek ways to use technology to extend ownership of knowledge production and include other perspectives that are not usually incorporated. For example, teachers can make use of interculturally-critical digital storytelling in narrative to promote social justice in their classrooms (R'boul, 2021c). Multicultural education should not be only about providing an education that is just but also about preparing students to function in society through a multicultural perspective. Since multicultural education is has been developed within Western settings, which "grew out of a civil rights movement grounded in such democratic ideals of the West as freedom, justice, and equality" (Banks, 1993, p. 23), it is important to focalize as well the experiences of students who are culturally and racially subordinated in a global scale, not only in the US.

Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony has been used to retheorize our understanding of the hidden curriculum (Jay, 2003) as it enables understanding the ways that the hidden curriculum contributes to the retaining of the dominance of popular mainstream academic knowledge (Banks, 1995). Moreover, as a hegemonic device, the hidden curriculum has functioned as a hegemonic device that has caused multicultural paradigms to reproduce the colonial-like relationships among cultures instead of constructing new paradigms that promote justice (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Another significant issue for reimagining multicultural education that is epistemologically plural is about classroom pedagogy and how the curriculum is developed, structured and delivered. The attempt to equalize the academic achievement rates of all students, specifically minority groups is a delicate process which requires a profound grasp of the macro and micro circumstances of the particular context under the study. That is why a strong

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motive in multicultural education should be the necessity to account for the epistemological dominance of particular cultures over others.

The relationships between humans are likely to influence how different knowledges and epistemologies are either foregrounded or invisibilised. That is why multicultural education has to challenge skewed geopolitics of knowledge as part of its critical multiculturalism theory. If theorizing multicultural education takes place from western sources that center the concerns of prominent countries, e.g. the US, then it is locally multicultural and bounded by the cultural diversity of a specific place and it fails to account for the issues in other spaces. Therefore, to develop multicultural theory and praxis, scholarship on multicultural education has to reflect serious endeavors to bridge the gap between western episteme in multicultural education and less popular spaces. The production of educational knowledge should relate global issues of equity that are discussed in multicultural education to global situations both in western and non-western contexts. Producing globally-aware pedagogical knowledge would contribute to the encouragement of cultural harmony based on the appreciation of other perspectives and ways of knowing. Including other knowledges will offer nuanced ways of managing not only cultural diversity, but also epistemological plurality in order to actively include other experiences, histories and perspectives of various ethnic and racial groups in multicultural education' theory and praxis. For instance, in order to pay more attention to knowledge dissemination in teacher training programs, it is useful to engage in a reflexive inquiry that explores the contradictions, risks, and tensions experienced by teacher educator designing and implementing a multicultural teacher education course with the objective of sharing knowledge production with their students (Cutri et al., 2020, p. 62). Researchers and teacher educators have to provide and use different lenses, frameworks and perspectives for observing and analyzing reality.

Spatial movements have had a dramatic effect on classrooms and schools around the world (Nieto, 2017). This has resulted in, for example, racism becoming “more subtle, systemic in institutions and practised in culture, communication, and absence of representation of diversity and assumption of dominant paradigms” (Miled, 2019, p. 91). Civil wars, invasions, ethnic conflicts and revolutions have resulted in mass migration and an unprecedented number of refugees seeking shelter in other nations. There is indeed a higher risk of perpetuating social inequalities and maintaining the privileged status of western groups in power.

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Epistemological Justice:** Is the state of active inclusion of world's epistemologies in global knowledge production and dissemination. It means how various ways of knowing are recognized and appreciated in academic scholarship.

**Geopolitics of Knowledge:** Is a concept that recognizes the dynamics of knowledge production and dissemination under the rubrics of frameworks of colonial/decoloniality and postcoloniality. It calls for the necessity of considering colonial and imperial differences in discussing global knowledge production and circulation. It is a concept that has emerged from Latin American thinkers' accounts of coloniality, postcoloniality and decoloniality.

**Multicultural Education:** Is an educational framework that recognizes the necessity of accounting for and managing cultural diversity within classrooms and society. It is a pedagogical philosophy that centers equality among all individuals regardless of their cultural and racial backgrounds. Its main goal is to ensure social justice among people by providing multiculturally-aware teaching practices.

**Postcoloniality:** The historical period following the end of Western colonialism; it also refers to different countries' struggles to recover from their colonial history and reclaim their independence and identity.

**Power Relations:** Refers to how power is distributed evenly among different spaces. While Northern contexts have power over different domains, southern spaces are alternative spaces that are still trying to recover from past colonialism and current structures of coloniality.

**Social Justice:** Is the condition of ensuring equality among all individuals regardless of their culture, race, class, or ethnicity. It is the outcome of providing equitable treatment of all individuals by granting them a voice, socioeconomic ability, respect, and justice. Within this chapter, social justice refers to equity among all individuals in the classroom and society irrespective of their culture.

**Southern Spaces:** Refers to the contexts that have been marginalized and silenced through coloniality and current structures of hegemony. Southern spaces are located in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. They are contrasted with Northern spaces which enjoy power over knowledge and economy.