

Philosophy for Children: A potential pedagogy for transformative education in Zimbabwean resettlement primary schools

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Zimbabwe is currently experiencing high activity and spending on education as the country updates its primary and secondary school curricula. However, only a few rigorous studies have evaluated innovative approaches that can help transform the curriculum by integrating indigenous languages as intangible cultural heritage and promote educational transformation. This article provides reflections on findings of the larger study to which it contributes, as well as making recommendations for curriculum developers and teachers who may be developing pedagogical approaches without the benefit of an evidence-based implementation of a context-based P4C. The article proposes, based on data from the formative intervention study, that implementing a context-based P4C is effective in strengthening strong community relationships, instilling pride in local heritage, and in advancing curriculum transformation.

Keywords: Transformative education, Philosophy for Children, Heritage language, Critical reflexivity

Introduction

Postcolonial governments have been castigated for their failure to decolonize the curriculum, which has been interpreted as a re-inscription of Eurocentric values and knowledges (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2013; Shizha & Makuvaza, 2017). Following this, there have been calls to decolonize education, one alternative being to include heritage knowledges, worldviews, and languages. Similarly, arguments for and examples of how to implement context-based philosophy for children (P4C) have reinforced calls for educational decolonization (Reed-Sandoval, 2018; Bhurekeni, 2021). Again, various measures, such as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2032), announced in February 2019 on the occasion of the end of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL 2019) in Mexico City, have been established in response to the growing need to preserve, revitalise, and promote heritage languages and knowledges (UNESCO, 2020).

Globally, significant progress has recently been made in some postcolonial nations in terms of incorporating heritage languages and language-related knowledges into

educational policy and practice. In Australia, the Commonwealth Government launched a National Indigenous Languages Policy in 2009 to address the conundrum of language loss in indigenous communities. According to McCarthy and May (2017), the policy's implication has been a growing awareness that languages are a valuable national resource, which has led to an increase in the study of languages other than English. In Canada the government made an effort to atone for its historical legacies by pledging to assist in the revitalization of the learners' heritage languages, and this has influenced development of coherent links between English, heritage language teaching, and other global language policies (McIvor & Ball, 2019). Comparable reforms were carried out in Africa, for example, apart from Tanzania, which imposed Swahili as a national language and language of education immediately after independence (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). In Kenya, 'the Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya' (Koech Commission, 1999) recommended that the medium of instruction, particularly in lower primary, be the learners' mother tongue (Republic of Kenya (GOK), 1999).

Zimbabwe is no exception as the country has also embarked on similar initiatives through implementing the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE, 2014). This policy document noted the need for heritage languages and language-related knowledges inclusion into the curriculum with an emphasis that the learners' heritage language be the medium of instruction, especially at the lower primary school level (MoPSE, 2014). MoPSE (2014), like the Koech Commission (1999), remarked that the use of the learners' heritage language would enhance concept formation and articulation in linguistic communication. However, it should be noted that the inclusion of heritage languages and knowledges has remained a topical issue in postcolonial nations' post-development discourse. This is because, despite numerous recommendations for their inclusion, particularly in education, heritage languages continue to be relegated to an inferior position (see, Shizha, 2010; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). McIvor and Ball (2019), for instance, observe that in Canada "Schools and early childhood programs with indigenous languages as media of instruction are independent and remain marginalized within the larger education system" (McIvor & Ball, p. 15). The same could be said about Africa where research (Shizha & Makuvaza, 2017; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019) concurs that there is an ostensible disconnection between the education curriculum and the continent's heritage languages and other locally situated knowledges and practices.

It has been noted that while indigenous people are perceived as custodians of these heritage languages and knowledges and have since been invited to play a proactive role in initiating and developing appropriate measures for their promotion in development discourse, education systems often do not include curricula and teaching methods that recognize their communities' histories, cultures, and pedagogies (Wodon & Consentino, 2019). Thus, there is a need for a more participatory-oriented and context-sensitive approach to curricula reform to avoid romanticism in developing transformative educational policies. This article provides insights into how I used the philosophy for children approach as a pedagogy for transformative education that values heritage languages and knowledges extant in resettlement primary schools in Zimbabwe.

Brief context of resettlement schools.

The majority of Zimbabwe's resettlement/satellite schools were founded between 2000 and 2005, shortly after the country's compulsory land reform, and are still not formally

registered as schools with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education [MoPSE] (Bhurekeni, 2021). According to government figures, there were 1093 resettlement primary schools last year (Mujuru, 2020). Jenjekwa (2013) and Mujuru (2020) both agree that the schools were established in order to serve resettled farmers in need of basic services such as education and health care. According to Moyo (2017), when the resettled farmers moved on to the farms, there were no schools for their children, so the government set up makeshift schools. The literature is replete with evidence that the learning environment in these schools is depressing (Jenjekwa, 2013; Moyo, 2017; Mujuru, 2020; Bhurekeni, 2021). This is due to the fact that some children in resettlement schools attend classes in abandoned farmhouses, old tobacco barns, and thatched mud huts (Jenjekwa, 2013; Mwinde & Muzingili, 2020). One of the resettlement schools involved in the broader study, to which this article contributes, for example, uses rooms from an old delapidated farm house as classrooms, whereas the other two are struggling to finish construction of classroom blocks left unfinished by a foreign donor organization, with some of the children learning under a tree.

Context and the problem statement

Engaging learners in philosophical dialogue and critical reflexive thinking is a challenge in today's educational systems because of enduring coloniality that continues to shape the world (see Ndofirepi, 2011; Letseka, 2013; Gregory, Haynes, & Murriss, 2017). However, as I have noted elsewhere in a study (Bhurekeni, 2021), this is only one of the quality educational provision challenges that are endemic in 'resettlement primary schools' in the country (Jenjekwa, 2013; MoPSE, 2014). To be engaged, it turned out that there had to be a strong interlinking between the school curriculum and the learner's life-world (Bhurekeni, 2020). Moreover, classroom pedagogy should strengthen learner agency by enabling them to establish resilient connections with the sociocultural tools and signs that support their cultural heritage (Shizha, 2010). However, in Southern Africa contexts, the tools and signs that support many cultures are not always available in formal educational settings (Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2013). This problem has largely been attributed to the persistence of coloniality in the region, using cultural technologies of domination (Terreblanche, 2014), as is the case in most postcolonial countries. For example, due to coloniality, "teaching and learning reinforce hegemonic and oppressive paradigms which allocate differential social locations to Western and indigenous knowledges and languages" (Shizha, 2010, p. 116). Zimbabwe is currently spending more money on education, as the country continues to upgrade its primary and secondary schools' curricula (MoPSE, 2014).

Considering these continuities of coloniality, I implemented a P4C formative intervention in Sebakwe resettlement schools in Zimbabwe. The formative intervention to which this article contributes builds on the work of Lipman (1991) and Vygotsky (1962), both of whom were interested in the relationship between thinking and its social context. According to Daniel and Auriac (2008), though their approaches were different, they both advocate for the development of critical/higher order thinking skills through peer verbal exchange. Vygotsky (1978) notes that children gain tools for thinking as they acquire a language, as it is that which they use to solve practical problems. This chimes

in well with Lipman (2003) whose work tracks and theorizes as to how learners can learn together via the medium of community of inquiry as a pedagogy. The formative intervention had antecedents towards an Afrophilic⁷⁴ and sociocultural underpinning and is aimed at enabling learners to construct different models of reasonable experiences or truth.

The vantage point of an Afrophilic deliberative heritage-based learning is in the development of socially situated critical thinking skills which translate into improved learner agency via utilization of heritage language and language-related knowledges. Learner agency refers to learners' developing ability to use their heritage languages to express themselves and depict the world around them. Thus, it was hoped as I implemented the intervention that it would cleanse the education system of the colonial antecedents that continue to determine curriculum (Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2013; Shizha & Makuvaza, 2017), and inform the development of a curriculum that is sensitive to indigenous cultural heritage and languages.

The Afrophilic philosophy for children's formative intervention was implemented in line with Shizha (2010) and Siyakwazi and Siyakwazi (2013), who observe that recent developments in education (Zimbabwe included) have heightened the need to enact a culturally sensitive and contextual pedagogy. However, when it comes to basic education, the Zimbabwean government is giving textbooks and other financial grants such as the Schools Improvement Grants (SIG) to speed up educational transformation. A paradox has emerged in which teachers and parents from other parts of the country criticize the textbooks distributed by the government in schools, claiming that the textbooks (particularly the Heritage and LOP- Social Studies), contain inaccurate information about their culture and heritage. According to Gory, Bhatia, and Reddy (2021), "not all teachers and parents were satisfied with the reform" (p. 153), necessitating a need for a shift from content knowledge mastery to higher-order thinking skills and competences (Reimers, 2021). I then implemented a P4C formative intervention in Sebakwe resettlement primary schools to strengthen the curriculum by cultivating critical reflexive thinking skills and a culture of learning (Bhurekeni, 2021). It has been noted elsewhere that the 'context-based P4C' that I used has the capacity to use the learner's cultural history of practice and thus enhance learner agency (Ndondo & Mhlanga, 2014; Reed-Sandoval, 2018).

Despite the remarkable awareness in Zimbabwe of the importance of P4C and implementation of a heritage (both language and practice) sensitive curriculum (Ndofirepi, 2011; Dube, 2020), there have been few rigorous studies that evaluate how P4C as a pedagogical approach in Zimbabwe can help strengthen curriculum transformation by incorporating heritage languages and other intangible cultural heritage. As a result, lack of practical implementation examples of context-based P4C in Zimbabwe has resulted in the MoPSE's slow-pace towards curriculum decolonization, trapping the schools' curriculum in a muddle and always in a state of opacity (Chung, 1996). As a result of the lack of practical implementation examples of context-based P4C

⁷⁴ The Afrophilia lens utilized as start-up capital in this study includes storytelling, proverbs, traditional music, pictures, and metaphors

in Zimbabwe, the approach has become less known and excluded from policy planning and implementation, despite its remarked capacity to sustain locally oriented curriculum reforms (Ndofirepi, 2011; Letseka, 2013; Ndondo & Mhlanga, 2014).

Aware of this, I conducted a micro-literary review of how philosophy for children has evolved in Africa, with a particular focus on how it relates to the use of heritage language and indigenous knowledges and practices, and discovered that the approach has gone through notions of hybridization, with an emphasis on sensitizing the practice to the learner's life-world (Ndofirepi, 2011). Then I examined the findings from the broader P4C formative intervention in order to unpack the potential of P4C in transforming learning at the primary school level in Zimbabwe.

Methodology

Here I offer a critical reflection or reflexivity of the P4C Afrophilia formative curriculum intervention through utilizing data gathering approaches of analyzing documents, observing, questioning, and seeking a diversity of opinion through reflective interviews that allow for an openness to change. Jan Fook (2011) defines critical reflection “as a way of learning from and reworking experience” (p. 56). Thus, the methodology is anchored on day-to-day existence and has antecedents toward critical pedagogy (Mortari, 2015). Critical reflection helped me gain a better understanding of the P4C formative intervention as it enabled me to pay attention to the appropriateness of its intentions and take a closer look at the effects it yields when implemented under conditions extant in the Sebakwe resettlement area. Henceforth, critical reflection in this study signifies the act of giving myself time to think about the meaning and purpose of the formative intervention research that I occupied myself with in the past three years. Mortari (2015) reasons that deep understanding of these issues provides the basis for recommendations concerning continuous adjustments or refinement of the intervention. In light of this one may surmise that critical reflexivity leads to new conclusions, possible changes, and new ideas to inform future planning and actions.

The methodology employed in this study takes one beyond their own understandings and knowledge (Mortari, 2015). In the context of my research, it enabled me and the participants, who included purposively selected 15 parents, 12 teachers, 3 education inspectors, and 15 learners, to integrate our fragmented experiences into a coherent whole (Bhurekeni, 2021). Adult participants were chosen on the basis of their ability to provide rich data sets on the use of the Afrophilia lens in learning spaces. The children were chosen based on the fact that they were in the same grade at one of the schools involved and had signed consent (along with their parents) to participate in the study. Formative intervention workshop notes and audio recordings were collected from participants, as were video recorded P4C lessons with children and lesson observation notes, and audio or video recorded face-to-face reflexive interviews (see Bhurekeni, 2021 for a discussion on this).

All workshops, P4C lessons, and reflexive interviews were conducted in Shona, the heritage language of both participants and the researcher. During translation, the meaning of the word was determined by how language users use them at any given time.

Furthermore, the target audience influenced the decision on which English words to use to represent the original words in the data sets. The goal was to translate the transcripts into English so that they could be communicated effectively to the widest possible audience of English readers.

Most generally critical reflexivity in this research allowed me to expose the power dynamics operational within the classroom in particular and within the Zimbabwean education system in general. As seen from practice, this methodology within an educational context allows insider formative intervention researchers to place themselves and their practices under scrutiny, acknowledging the ethical dilemmas that permeate the research process and their practice in general. To improve validity, I used both the informant triangulation and the time triangulation (Denscombe, 2010) because I utilized a multi-voiced approach in data collection and collected data from multiple sources at different times. Figure 1.0 shows a mind map of the critical reflective cycle within the P4C formative intervention.

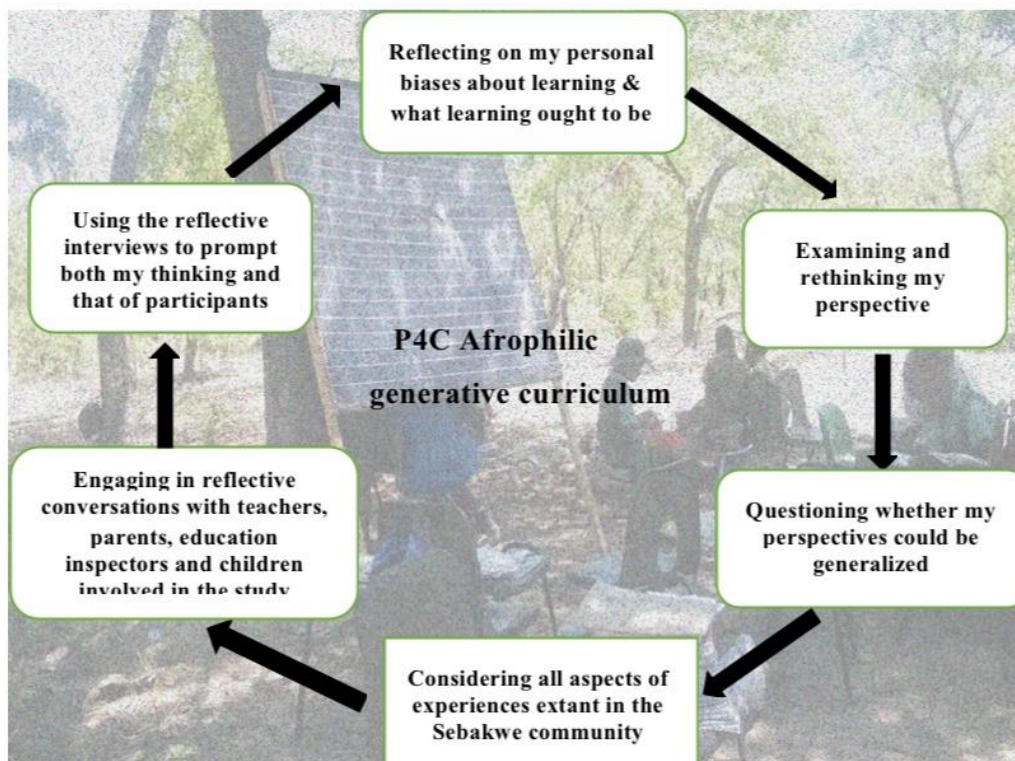


Figure 1.0 *mind map of the critical reflective cycle with Afrophilic formative intervention*

The potential validity problem for this study was the impact of ‘The Hawthorne effect’ (Brannigan & Zwerman, 2001), which occurs when participants change their behaviour because of being part of a research study. This is possible because the participants participated in three formative intervention workshops to select Afrophilia learning artifacts and were aware that they were part of a formative intervention study during face-to-face reflexive interviews, which may have changed their general behaviour or responses to questions. To ensure that this does not have an impact on the reliability of

my data, I made the purpose of the study known. Furthermore, because I was an “insider formative interventionist” (Bhurekeni, 2021), the time I spent with the participants allowed them to become accustomed to being observed and begin to behave naturally. Also, because I used critical reflexivity to solve such problems, especially during the coding and transcribing of the audio and video recorded data sets, my awareness may have reduced its impact (Brannigan & Zwerman, 2001). I understood that the answers I sought in my study could not be discerned without the context of the participants with whom I worked, so I paid close attention to context. Thus, I was alert to the problems embedded in generalized ethical frameworks and their implications for ethical practice⁷⁵ within the context of resettlement schools.

To make the study more context-sensitive, data that was elicited was analyzed using the postcolonial discourse analysis approach. The approach is unique in that apart from using it to analyze the linguistic type of discourse, one may opt to focus on the macro elements of discourse and the politics of discourse (Sawyer, 2012). In this article I focused on the macro approach to discourse as it allowed me to reflect on representation, identity and agency, the nature and role of language in society, and the wish for decolonial studies to give voice to disadvantaged and silenced groups such as the resettlement schools that I worked with. I was able to generate the themes that I used in data presentation and analysis by using postcolonial discourse analysis. Again, the research questions aimed at identifying historical and contemporary barriers to effective learning in the resettlement areas involved, as well as how P4C as a potential transformative pedagogy could address the challenges, influenced the themes.

How P4C has evolved in Southern Africa

P4C, founded as a pedagogical approach by Matthew Lipman, originated in the United States of America. The approach, established in the 1970s, focuses on teaching thinking skills through philosophical dialogue and has since become a world-wide approach (Gorard, Siddiqui, & Huat See, 2015). This global acceptance of the approach depends largely on its ability to help children develop complex cognitive skills and predispositions related to critical reflexive thinking such as: to evaluate, ask questions, criticize, be thorough, and build congenial and collaborative relationships (Daniel & Auriac, 2008). Thus, unlike the discipline-specific philosophy that is much aligned to the teaching “of formal logic stripped of experiential anchors” (Daniel & Auriac, 2008, p. 4), philosophy for children promises to cultivate skills and predispositions that could be located outside the academy. Furthermore, recent research has shown how P4C can be utilized as a decolonial approach in colonial-weighted educational settings (Bhurekeni, 2021). The prospects of this liberatory potential have attracted scholars in southern Africa, as the

⁷⁵ The Philosophy for Children Afrophilia project was conducted in accordance with Rhodes University’s ethics clearance committee code of practice (ethical approval tracking number for the research is 2017.12.08.04), and was approved by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe (MoPSE, letter dated 09 May 2017).

region has for long been under the burden of cultural technologies of domination (Terreblanche, 2014).

Turning now to a nuanced critical reflection on the practice of P4C, we find out that it has emerged as a pedagogical advancement in southern Africa. Discussions of P4C by scholars located in this region are connected by a common foundation, specifically their adoption of the definition of philosophy as a method of thinking even without having to explicitly say it. According to Daniel and Auriac (2008), philosophy as a way of thinking has its roots in Socratic questioning and in pragmatism and its goal is the construction of truth through the ‘sociality of thought’, whereby knowledge and meaning-making are related to immediate context (Derry, 2013).

Now, given the uniqueness of the P4C pedagogical approach and how it promotes development of rational, open-minded thinking in children (Ndofirepi & Cross, 2015), this approach is attracting the attention of various researchers in the region (see Haynes & Murriss, 2009; Ndofirepi, 2011; Letseka, 2013; Ndondo & Mhlanga, 2014). Factors influencing this attention have been explored in several studies. For instance, Ndofirepi (2011) mentions the crisis situation in Africa as one of the reasons for situating philosophy for children within the region. As an ‘edifying philosopher,’ Ndofirepi (2011) cites the superimposition of the colonialist cultural political system on indigenous communities and contends that philosophy for children ought to consider being sensitive to the African child’s life-world. Here, sensitivity to context implies the privileging of contextualized forms of representation through which events and objects are presented in terms of their concrete particularity and inline with the heritage language that embodies their real meaning (Derry, 2013). This falls in line with Lipman’s (1996) emphasis on children’s ability to draw on their own cultural experience and to think abstractly. However, it must be noted that simply including the cultural aspects of the learners is not sufficient, as learners and teachers are encouraged to engage with the culture in a way that reflects epistemological and critical depth (Giddy, 2012).

While Ndofirepi (2011) made recommendations to situating P4C within the African milieu, Murriss (2000) came up with a more applied approach to the practice of philosophy for children. For Murriss (2000), P4C could be done through applying a range of philosophical stimuli that is not solely text. For instance, P4C facilitators/teachers can use picture books, play a piece of music, or show a documentary film. Murriss (2000) concurs with Ndofirepi (2011), Letseka (2013), Ndondo and Mhlanga (2014), and Bhurekeni (2021) that the development of philosophy for children in Africa and the world over has shifted the role of the teacher. Children are now to be seen as co-inquirers in the learning process and the teacher must not “stamp in knowledge” (Green, 2017, p. 38); his/her main focus should be on ensuring that learners are exposed to a conducive but all the same suitably challenging learning environment.

Scholars in P4C (including those from the global south) are constantly looking for the best way to activate the transformative potential of philosophical practice in schools. As a result, P4C has found a place in educational debates centered on the democratic conception of education and the improvement of literacy and learning (Gregory, Haynes, & Murriss, 2017). According to Ndofirepi and Cross (2015), philosophical

practice in schools is a participatory initiative that requires educators to consider learners' interest and create space for them to voice their opinions as contributing agents to knowledge creation. As a result, in addition to advocating for a more localized approach to the practice of philosophy for children, the P4C program in Africa has evolved in a more similar fashion to that of other continents, where it is expected to help children become more reasonable, participative, and critically thinking citizens.

A pedagogy for transformation

As seen in the preceding section, P4C has been introduced in education to provide alternative ways of looking at education and society itself, specifically using the ideas of P4C to see the world from the perspectives of children (Ndofirepi & Cross, 2015). Children, particularly in societies characterized by gerontological thinking, tend to rely on adults to speak for them, and when there are no adults to speak for them, they remain silent, and no one appears to be concerned about their perspectives on the world in which they live. Through the practice of community of inquiry, P4C connects adults with the special capacities present in childhood such as wonder, curiosity, and imagination (Mohr Lone, 2012). The practice of community of inquiry in philosophy for children, in which children's voices are prioritized, necessitates the transformation of the teacher's role in order to transform the classroom into an influential discursive space that can be part of the process of dialogue, social transformation, and engaged citizenship (Murriss, 2000; Ndofirepi & Cross, 2015). Thus, philosophy for children extends the process of dialogue and philosophical engagement to all citizens as the foundation of transformational pedagogy.

Moving to a more practical analysis and considering what philosophy for children might look like, especially in resettlement schools that lack teaching and learning materials (Jenjekwa, 2013), reflects the natural progression of the discussion into transformative approaches to education. Typically, philosophy for children in any learning situation, regardless of the learners' background, supports the notion that both learners and the teacher are creative and autonomous co-inquirers (Gregory, Haynes, & Murriss, 2017). This is consistent with the ideas of Shor and Freire (1987), who believe that knowledge is created and re-created in the classrooms through dialogue between students and teachers. Gregory, Haynes, and Murriss (2017) provide a more profound idea of philosophy for children, arguing that it is a "framework for collaborative exploration of significant questions, for freedom of thought and speech, for participatory dialogue, and for collaborative self-governance" (p. 1). To explore this point further, Echeverria and Hannam (2017) support the position that community of inquiry in philosophy for children is a model of educational praxis, hence it can enable conditions necessary for transformation to exist. Therefore, philosophy for children is noted as an approach that aims to bring about transformation or to motivate collective action to achieve educational transformation by investing in the endeavour to teach children to be reflective critical thinkers in order to question and challenge orthodox educational practices that sustain reproduction of the status quo.

Findings from the formative intervention study

The information presented here is derived from document analysis processes, observations, and the author's own reflective interviews with participants. While the interviews covered a wide range of topics related to the study, I have chosen to narrow my focus on the use of heritage languages and language-related knowledges as these are more relevant for this paper.

Historical antecedents continue to determine the curriculum

On June 26, 2018, I had my first reflective interview with Mbuya VaChihera (81 years old), my study guardian. Mbuya VaChihera explained that colonial formal education was introduced in the area when she was a girl of almost six years old, so she was thought to be too young to go to school. As a result, her parents would hide her in the granary whenever a teacher arrived in search of school-age children. Her interview is presented here to offer the historical context of the education system.

Researcher: *So, when you were older, did you get a chance to go to school?*

Mbuya VaChihera: *Yes, when I was a little older, the teacher came and wrote our names, and our first class was held under a tree.*

Researcher: *Can you say that your learning experiences were the same as before you enrolled for formal schooling?*

Mbuya VaChihera: *It was different because we had been taught to count “motsi, piri, tatu, china, chishanu, tanhatu, tanhatu, chinomwe, rusere, pfumbamwe, gumi) at home, but now in school we would sing “one stone in a line if I add one they add up to two, two stones in a line if I add one they add up to three,” until you reach ten. We couldn't understand because we were now using a different language, ‘English,’ and we couldn't tell what a line was because all we did was sing, so you see my son, language was our main challenge... Even when our parents were instructed to help us, they would do so little guidance because it was not our language.*

Mbuya VaChihera could not walk to school to join others in observing the philosophy for children lessons, so there was nothing else she could say about the philosophy for children pedagogical intervention. She did, however, emphasize that learning about one's culture broadens one's understanding and competitiveness. Her narrative above shows how the dawn of imperial British colonial government in Zimbabwe (around 1890s) was marked by a direct replica of the British system of governance and as a result the education system that was instituted in colonial Zimbabwe followed suit (Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training [CIET], 1999; Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2013). Literacy was the main emphasis within this system of education even though the only available literature was in English (CIET, 1999). During my interview with Mbuya VaChihera, she reiterates that,

“... they (missionaries) wanted us to learn to read and write. We were told that if we go to school, we would be able to write letters for our parents and read the bible, reading and writing were so important to them.”

Subsequently, English has always had a privileged status above African indigenous languages such as ChiShona and IsiNdebele. Hence, it became a language of governance and the main medium of instruction in schools. Of this downgrading of African languages and a blind clinging to the language of imperial British colonial masters, we have a remarkable illustration in the writings of (CIET, 1999).

Colonial governments had allowed the teaching of the major languages, ChiShona and IsiNdebele from grade 1 to University level as subjects. The languages were not used as media of instruction and their status was regarded as inferior to English. English thus remained the official language, medium of instruction in schools, a compulsory subject, and a requirement in all school certificates. Time allocations for ChiShona and IsiNdebele at the University, teachers, and lecturers of ChiShona and IsiNdebele and authors of literary works in indigenous languages were relegated to a lower status compared to their English counterparts (CIET, 1999, pgs. 157-158).

Clearly it is evident that English did not only become a medium of instruction in schools and universities, but it literally became a language of power as it was authoritatively observed as the language of commerce, administration, and international relations (CIET, 1999; Zimbabwe Education Act, 1987). This however created learning barriers especially given the fact that the medium for transmission of most Afrophilia knowledges has largely remained preliterate. The shift to literacy and use of English as medium of instruction led to the abstraction of curriculum from the life experiences of the learners (Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2013). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o illustrates Mbuya Va Chihera’s views when he asserts that the colonial education and the hierarchies of languages that it created brought about a new meaning of education as:

It makes them [the colonized children] see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people’s languages rather than their own (wa Thiong’o, 1986, p. 3).

Little has changed in the postcolonial period (1980-2020) as English has practically remained the language of instruction in schools even after the educational reforms that have seen Zimbabwe taking a heritage-based turn in education (MoPSE, 2014; Bhurekeni, 2020). Rather than repudiate this colonial legacy, as argued in literature, the postcolonial Zimbabwean government embraced English, indicating the endurance of coloniality within the curriculum.

Curriculum withholds the minority at the periphery

The grade 7 timetable uncovers that the subordination of other African languages, such as those excluded from the timetable, had practically morphed into the axiomatic. Even some of the African languages that are represented on the timetable, their time allocation is in the afternoon when children had already written other examinations. The situation is worse in resettlement schools where very few speakers of these minority languages are enrolled and consequently end up being co-opted into registering for one of the dominant languages. It would be interesting for readers to note that this is not the same for other languages such as English, ChiShona, and IsiNdebele. Teachers affirmed that while there is a legislature in which at least 15 indigenous languages are accepted for use in formal education, this recognition is often expressed only in word because English continues to dominate as the language of instruction in schools (Kembo, 2000).

Figure 1.1: 2020 Grade Seven Timetable



ZIMBABWE SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

2020 GRADE SEVEN EXAMINATION TIME-TABLE

EXAMINATION DATE	MORNING SESSION	SUBJECT/PAPER	AFTERNOON SESSION	SUBJECT/PAPER
Thursday, 3 December	9.00 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. (2hrs)	0001/1 English 1	2.00pm-3.30pm (1hr 30mins)	0008/1 Nambya 1
Friday, 4 December	9.00 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. (2hrs)	0002/1 Mathematics 1	2.00pm-3.30pm (1hr 30mins)	0010/1 Xichangana 1
Monday, 7 December	9.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. (1hr 30mins)	0004/1 Shona 1 0006/1 Ndebele 1	2.00pm-3.30pm (1hr 30mins)	0007/1 Tonga 1
Tuesday, 8 December	9.00 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. (2hrs)	0005/1 General Paper 1	2.00pm-3.30pm (1hr 30mins)	0009/1 Tshivenda 1 ^
Wednesday, 9 December	9.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. (1hr 30mins)	0003/1 Agriculture 1	2.00pm-3.30pm (1hr 30mins)	0011/1 Kalanga 1
Thursday, 10 December	9.00 a.m. – 10.45 a.m. (1hr 45mins)	0004/2 Shona 2 0006/2 Ndebele 2 ^	2.00pm-3.45pm (1hr 45mins)	0007/2 Tonga 2
Friday, 11 December	9.00 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. (2hrs)	0003/2 Mathematics 2	2.00pm-3.45pm (1hr 45mins)	0008/2 Nambya 2
Monday, 14 December	9.00 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. (2hrs)	0003/2 Agriculture 2	2.00pm-3.45pm (1hr 45mins)	0010/2 Xichangana 2
Tuesday, 15 December	9.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. (1hr 30mins)	0001/2 English 2	2.00pm-3.45pm (1hr 45mins)	0011/2 Kalanga 2
Wednesday, 16 December	9.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m. (1hr 30mins)	0005/2 General Paper 2	2.00pm-3.45pm (1hr 30mins)	0012/1 Sesotho 1
Thursday, 17 December	1hr 45 mins	0009/2 Tshivenda 2 ^	1hr 45 mins	0012/2 Sesotho 2

Literature is replete with examples of how minority societies are often subjected to such forms of education or how power can be used to deprive learners of languages and knowledges related to their cultural history of practice in favour of the dominant group (Ndhlovu, 2011). Dube (2020) is critical of how state hegemony has affected postcolonial Zimbabwe's language policy at the expense of minority languages.

According to Chabata (2007), the reality in schools did not align with the expectations of the National Constitution that indigenous languages be taught at least up to the first three grades of elementary education. This is mainly because teachers would be preparing learners for examinations which are mainly written in English. From my many years of teaching in primary school, I have also realized that children are more comfortable with reading and writing in a language that they understand, while they find it difficult to read or write in the second language. However as reflected on the examination timetable, four out of the five subjects that are written for the grade seven national examinations are written in the learners' second language. The language barrier is fragmented, and learner agency improved only when the centrality of heritage languages and local heritage knowledges is re-asserted in schools. This is because learning will be a continuation of what learners learn at home.

There is a need to pay attention to the decolonial conflicts on curriculum reform

On July 3, 2018, I interviewed Mr. Kandimire, who had observed the first two sessions of the pedagogical intervention.

Researcher: ... *Let us reflect on use of indigenous languages in school, what is your take on this issue?*

Mr. Kandimire: *Using the vernacular as a teaching method has great benefits for the learner because it is easier to understand and to relate to than foreign languages. Moreover, the language associated with the learner's life experience makes it more realistic for the learner to express themselves in relation to their environment and worldview. Learners take long to grasp concept and to complete grades because of using a foreign language.*

Researcher: *According to your own observation, what do you think is the reason for this easy learning?*

Mr. Kandimire: *Such an education creates a bridge between the home and school, also take note that everyone needs to be given the opportunity to speak and to be listened to, this is what I noticed during your lessons. Again, it is sensitive to the dynamics of power between the learners and the teacher.*

Mrs. Musaengana and Ms. Madimbe were interviewed next on July 5, 2018, and their views on use of heritage languages and language-related knowledges were similar to Mr. Kandimire's. Mrs. Musaengana, on the other hand, emphasized that while it is important for schools to use heritage languages as medium of instruction, English should not be abandoned because children will need it when they travel to other areas where they will be unable to use their heritage languages. While Mr. Sibanda, whom I interviewed on April 4, 2019, appears to agree with Mrs. Musaengana, he contends that "English should not be taken as a measure of intelligence," a point of view that was also expressed during a formative intervention workshop with teachers held on June 21,

2018. Mr. Sibanda went on to endorse the philosophy for children pedagogical intervention, saying:

Our education had an antecedent toward Western culture hence our children are copying other people's cultures. This has an effect on our culture as it has been obliterated, soon we will lose it all, say for example our nutritional foods, some children no longer value them, or they totally don't know some of our small grains. So this initiative of teaching our indigenous cultural heritage builds in our children the Zimbabwean identity... Our cultural experiences also help our children to develop critical thinking skills. Take for example mahumbwe, children would learn a lot of problem solving skills from the child's play, even ngano "folk story", there is so much that our children can learn from the stories... Lessons derived from these activities based on our cultural heritage are what taught us to "vanhu vane hunhu" (good nurtured people).

Ms. Mubaiwa (interviewed on July 17, 2019) believes that it is appropriate for an educational program to draw its content and activities from the learners' cultural heritage in order to reduce foreign cultural influence on the learners. She did, however, advise that the philosophy for children program be sensitive to technology as an emerging aspect of the curriculum.

All interviewees in this section have shown the paradoxes that arise in postcolonial education reforms. The substance of the above findings is that, while reforms have been made to detach the education system from its colonial antecedent, coloniality remains and it continues to influence what goes into the curriculum and the influence that it has on the learner (CIET, 1999). Over the many decades of colonialism, Western logic has been entrenched in the country to an extent that the so-called Western standards are still inadvertently underpinning the education system in Zimbabwe and these undermine efforts that the country has made in attempting to detach from these colonial antecedents. Moreover, from the time of Zimbabwe's political independence, several ideologies about the cultural and historical homogeneity of pre-colonial Zimbabwe were used to legitimize the curriculum standardization and confirmation of a homogenous culture (see CIET, 1999; MoPSE, 2014). I consider the remarks made by the interviewees pertinent for two reasons. To begin with, if what Mr. Sibanda has said is cogent, then it makes this formative intervention an exigency in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Again, the remarks made with concern to English prompts one to infer that language still has a critical role to play in influencing identity; whose language does one need to be identified with on the international, regional, and local arena? Here I argue, as most decolonial scholars have done, that the language one uses does not have to be a reflection of a foreign culture but should be reflecting indigenous human experiences.

P4C inspires inquiring minds and normalizes questioning

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the impact of the formative intervention, two grade 5 learners were interviewed separately on January 29, 2020, both of whom did

not give me consent to use their names for the interviews, so they are coded as janLC2020 and janLC29 in the study.

Researcher: *Good morning, janLC2020. You are one of the learners in the philosophy for children class; how old are you?*

janLC2020: *Good morning, how are you? I'm ten years old.*

Researcher: *How many philosophy for children sessions have you done so far?*

janLC2020: *We've had five sessions so far, and I trust we'll have another one this afternoon.*

Researcher: *You seem so excited. How are the philosophy for children sessions going?*

janLC2020: *Aah, the philosophy for children sessions are so exciting because we will have the opportunity to dialogue and ask each other questions, and we will be speaking in Shona, as opposed to other lessons where we are told to use English. Remember Mr. Sibanda's folk story (ngano)? Everyone can now tell the story, even those who are not in our class, and people are still discussing some of the issues raised that day.*

Researcher: *So that's why you are so excited about today's session. What else can you tell me?*

janLC2020: *Yes, because Shona makes it easier for us to talk about what we want, and because during the sessions we learn about things we don't usually talk about. Even at home, we no longer have time for story telling because we'll be doing homework, so the sessions give us a chance to thinking and talk about other things that are relevant to our lives. They don't keep us occupied with book work.*

Researcher: *So you say they're important in your life, but how? What makes them so?*

janLC2020: *Um, let's say that when we engage in dialogue during the sessions, you learn something and realise its implications for your life. Some stories and proverbs discourage bad behaviour by demonstrating how those who misbehave are treated. As a result, you will easily understand their true meaning in life. Even expressing ourselves is something that we learn through philosophical dialogues.*

Researcher: *Okay, thank you very much for your time. I hope we can meet again after the impending sessions.*

janLC2020: *Thank you.*

According to janLC29, the sessions have augmented her Shona vocabulary, "now I can use some proverbs (*tsumo*) on my own because I was able to grasp their true meaning during the philosophy sessions." Based on these findings, it is evident that the practice of philosophy for children is fundamental in transferring values such as an inclination to

be critical of the information that one is exposed to and giving reasons in support of or against certain points of view (Haynes & Murriss, 2009). This shows that language in philosophy for children is more than just a means of communication; it also shapes the people's way of thinking. According to Lipman (1992), "...nothing teaches children reasoning better than the close and careful examination of the multiform uses of language itself and their consequent discussion of their own observations and inferences" (p.6).

The emphasis in this paper is on how the learners' heritage language influences the development of deep conceptual meaning shaped by cultural heritage knowledge and the effective application of the concepts in real life situations (wa Thiong'o, 1986). Lipman drew inspiration from Vygotsky, a sociocultural theorist who believed that language is a linguistic tool that humans inherit from their culture, and it objectifies one's private ideas in ways that make them accessible to the whole community. According to Chung (2002), nations rely on education as a mechanism to accomplish national goals. The philosophy for children formative intervention has given pointers that if scaled up it can abet promotion of heritage languages in schools. Hence, I argue that national schools or public education are ubiquitous as an important way to accomplish the goals of the international decade of indigenous languages. This is because the practice of philosophy for children abets cultural transmission and, as evidenced by the interviews, it makes learners more participative and reasonable. Active participation situates the learner as a co-inquirer rather than a passive inheritor of pre-existing knowledge. In light of this, I contend that cultural representation in schools is more realistic when pedagogical interventions such as philosophy for children support and embed learners' cultural histories.

Implications of the findings for policy planning and implementation

From the data presented above it could be noticed that the pedagogical challenges obscuring the Zimbabwean education system are deeply cultural. Henceforth, the need to focus on liberatory pedagogical approaches, and inclusion of contextualized forms of knowledge representation in the curriculum. The integration of philosophy for children with indigenous languages as was done in my study seem to have potential to link curricula to community building and local heritage. Thus, to promote and preserve indigenous languages there is need to ensure implementation of the Education for All policy. Nation-states must therefore aim to enact educational reforms that contribute to the shaping of both the individual and the society; in this way contemporary education would come close to being "a common good" (Lotz-Sisitka, 2017, p. 63). Ensuring the public good status means first enacting a curriculum and pedagogy that reflect socio-cultural bonds between the school and the society (UNSECO, 1996).

Use of heritage languages as a medium of instruction is helpful in ensuring the "development of conceptual vocabulary in these languages to cope with modern technology, the sciences and the arts" (wa Thiong'o, 1993, p. xiv). Thus heritage languages as medium of instruction is a decolonial turn that will help many people realize that the West is not the sole progenitor of formal learning practice. Again,

affording learners of African descent an opportunity to use their indigenous languages in schools is a move towards granting them a hybrid-middle-space from which to assume the “right to name the world for themselves” (wa Thiong’o, 1993, p. 21). This is because philosophical dialogue within the community of inquiry draws from the learners’ personal experience, and through collaboration and feedback from others, critically generates new thinking and learning.

An emerging problem of policy abstraction

The problem of policy abstraction emerged as I was scoping out the implications of the Philosophy for Children Afrophilia formative curriculum intervention on policy planning and implementation. Reasons that lead to policy abstraction, as discussed before, include the non-conducive nature of the current education system. This is because educational policies in Zimbabwe tend to characterize the Zimbabwean community as undifferentiated and homogenous. In my earlier publication I cautioned that this leads to the paradox of superficial interpretation of unhu/ubuntu philosophy of education and advanced a need for deeper analysis of the present reality (Bhurekeni, 2020). The other reason that leads to policy abstraction is that of low stakeholder engagement (including teachers) which offers a poor perception on public opinion, making policies ignore the plurality of contexts and diversity of the communities’ cultural histories of practice. This shapes many policy frameworks in the interest of one group while segregating other groups. As a result, what will be witnessed (as is the case for the Zimbabwean education system) is an insufficient focus on implementation and an absence of a coherent implementation strategy, especially for those groups that were earlier not included. According to Shizha and Makuvaza (2017), government policies in Sub-Sahara Africa are shaped and influenced by a neoliberal anti-people approach. As a result, governments (including Zimbabwe) have imposed policy frameworks on the people without their consent.

Towards a harmonization of theory and praxis

Drawing from the practical implementation of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) Afrophilia formative curriculum intervention it could be surmised that education policy implementation is an evolving process that involves many stakeholders. Thus, as Chimhundu (1997) observes, high quality public policymaking is transparent and open to broad societal participation. By so doing, the implemented program will be able to address societal problems timely and with a minimum waste of available resources. Those in leading positions should not show pessimism and cynical approaches to the inclusion of heritage languages and language related knowledges. It was emphasised that, if education is to play a decisive role in reducing exclusion of individuals who are marginalized in today’s formal schooling due to ethnic or linguistic grounds, it must play an even greater role in integrating intangible cultural heritage and the heritage languages through which they are transmitted into curricula. This emphasis is consistent with Eze (2008) and Hountondji (1996, 1997) who saw an urgent need to live and practice the indigenous cultural heritage in its diversity rather than assume it to be

homogenous. Again in this paper I am aware of the asymmetrical cultural and linguistic relation that was established in the country by the education system, as it dislodged indigenous heritage practices and languages from minority groups to the periphery (Ndhlovu, 2011). In spite of this, caution should be exercised as the MoPSE integrates indigenous heritage and languages into the curriculum, so that other global knowledges are not outrightly rejected. This is because, as stated in the UNESCO report of the International Commission on Education for Twenty-first Century, "...the values needed for twenty-first century ... are rooted in local, national, and global cultures" (UNESCO, 1996, p. 216). Taking cognizance of this, especially considering the international decade of indigenous languages, will ensure effective involvement and participation of all citizens.

Conclusion

The methodology section describes the critical reflection or reflexivity of philosophy for children. My intent in carrying out the critical reflexive work was to find out how the Philosophy for Children Afrophilia curriculum intervention can enable educational transformation. This paper has demonstrated how philosophy for children could be an alternative approach in effecting educational transformation. For institutions and educators working with the heritage languages and language related knowledges, it is encouraged that these local heritage knowledges should not become discursive strategies that give the appearance of change, while at the same time promoting interests that further fragment, co-opt, and defy ancestral collectivities, knowledges, territories, and sensibilities, in the name of transformation, progress, and development. Future research should focus on developing teacher training manuals or booklets for effective and coherent introduction of the philosophy for children program and potential scaling up to other schools and provinces.

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