Whose Knowledge and Ways of Knowing?
Humanizing Education through Contextualization

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Abstract

Education is a double-edged sword in that it can be used for liberation as well as oppression. In welcoming the Finfinne Journal, this paper aims to address this issue by reviewing related literature and reflecting on personal experiences as a student, teacher, teacher educator, educational researcher and education consultant in Ethiopia. The paper uses Paulo Freire's thesis on liberatory pedagogy as a theoretical lens. While more rigorous research is needed, the experiences presented here suggest that education in Ethiopia does not sufficiently target the production of liberated individuals, as defined by Paulo Freire. The paper concludes by identifying issues for future research in this area.

Keywords: contextualization of knowledge, curriculum, humanization, liberation, pedagogy.

1. Background: Education, Knowledge and Identity

Since the introduction of formal education, the question of how to educate the children of a nation has been of great interest. Today, several related questions remain unanswered. Among the important ones are: who should run schools; what should be taught; how teaching should take place; what the ultimate indicators of success in schooling and learning are; and how these indicators are set. Underlying these questions are interests that can be local, national or global. Thus, a related question is how these interests should be negotiated. Another area of dispute in the operation of schools is how aspirations of individuals and societal/community developmental needs are mediated. There are also broader conceptual disputes over the purpose of schooling. For example, people may disagree on whether schooling is a right for children and a duty for the government, or whether it is a means of forming human capital for a country and promoting national integration and the development of national character. Clearly, these purposes overlap. However, some systems tend to prioritise one purpose over another, and this prioritisation is often influenced by ideological intentions. For instance, Ethiopia's pro-socialist military government (1974–1991) prioritised the political function of education, viewing it as a means of contributing to the development of the country. In contrast, the EPRDF government's policy discourse (1991–2018) emphasised human capital formation for the emerging economy. Despite Ethiopia's ratification of several international commitments on this issue, a rights-based approach to education has not been adopted in policy discourse.

Regardless of how schools are conceptualized, knowledge remains central to their purpose. It lays the foundation for acquiring skills and values. Knowledge can be

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explicitly articulated, codified, and transmitted through various media, such as textbooks. Alternatively, knowledge can be tacitly acquired through experience, practice, and observation (e.g., learning to ride a bicycle through practice). In addition, knowledge can be an aspect of the shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that characterize a community (e.g., acquiring the social norms of a particular community). Under normal conditions, schools are expected to provide access to these diverse forms of knowledge acquisition (i.e., explicit, implicit, and cultural, respectively). Unfortunately, this is not a neutral, apolitical, or ahistorical undertaking. This is why one of the most important questions asked to understand what knowledge learners are exposed to is: "Whose knowledge?" A related question is "What form of knowing is promoted?" In welcoming the Finfinne Journal, this paper aims to address these issues through a review of related literature and reflections on personal experiences as a student, teacher, teacher educator, researcher and education consultant in Ethiopia. The paper aims to demonstrate that formal educational practice, centred on knowledge and knowing, reflects the ideological setup of the nation, and that education practitioners intentionally or unintentionally promote this in their everyday classroom undertakings. Central to the paper's theoretical argument is Paulo Freire's (1971) thesis on liberatory pedagogy.

Although there is a claim to the universality of knowledge in some cases despite the diversity of cultural interpretations, much of human knowledge is historically, culturally, and individually situated. For example, consider the knowledge and ways of knowing of various indigenous societies (often conquered) compared to Western knowledge, which was carried home through various means, including colonization, 'civilizing missions,' and globalization. This same logic was applied in nation-states that tried to establish unitary systems by suppressing the diverse ethno-linguistic compositions of societies. In such countries, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity was considered a threat to national integrity. Thus, the intention was to create one set of national characteristics (thought to serve as a national glue) through nation-building projects. Thus, every attempt was made to silence diversity in public discussions, including in educational spaces. Eshete (1980: 10) described the situation in Ethiopia as follows:

> The [imperial] regime was absolutely forgetful, and at times spiteful, to the many nationalities that made up Ethiopia. Their language, their culture, and religion had been forgotten, and while Amharic served as the only national language of administration, education, justice, etc., Coptic Orthodox Christianity was the state's considered religion. And in spite of the diction "Religion is a private affair, the nation is our common concern" often repeated by the government, other religions were given little or no significance…

In modern Ethiopia, education was used to facilitate the 'nation-building project'. However, despite being a multicultural country, the goal of education was to teach one national culture. This can be deduced from the following statement by the Ministry of Education at the time (MoE 1955):

> To consolidate the social and political unity of the empire, and to develop its economic resources, it is essential that as soon as possible every man, woman and child in every province should have a minimum of basic education, including the ability to speak, read and write Amharic effectively (in Asres, 1991:6)

This could be a good example of intentional exclusion that targeted the sociologically minoritized populations. The exclusive approach in education can be manifested in various ways, ranging from overt omissions of certain voices to implicit biases embedded in curriculum design and teaching methods. The histories and voices of marginalized people and groups may be omitted or underrepresented, and these groups may be portrayed in a way that perpetuates stereotypes and deficit narratives. This, institutionalization of one-size-fits-all curriculum requirements can also sideline alternative voices. For example, colonial educators in Africa and elsewhere justified their exclusive stance by saying, "The conquered people had neither an epistemology nor a philosophy worth including in any educational curriculum" (Ramose, cited in Msila, 2004)., The colonizers claimed that "Africans possess little or no indigenous knowledge of value that can be utilized in the process of educational transformation" (Msila, 2004). Thus, an imported/imposed elitist culture and language were taken as the norm for educational achievement and success for the children of the dominated population. A Ministry of Education report stated that, in 1950/51, educational administrators recommended prohibiting non-Amharic-speaking students from speaking their native language in school compounds or classrooms (Asres, 1991: 6). This is a sign of overt exclusion. On the other hand, implicit means have also been employed to discourage the expression of linguistic and cultural characteristics of oppressed or marginalized peoples. Language carries culture and the knowledge of its indigenous speakers. Thus, undermining language is similar to undermining the knowledge and culture of the target population. Referring to this, Tektigul1a, et al (2023:204) write:

> In order to truly know the secrets of any national language, it is not enough to know the rules of the language itself; its roots are directly related to the centuries-old history of the ethnic group that speaks this language, its culture, and knowledge of everyday life. … Language serves to hand down the concepts, traditions, and cultures from generation to generation according to the worldview of a definite nation or a group of people.

Therefore, a language that is excluded from public expression or use has little chance of survival. The same can be said of the culture and knowledge it carries. Ntihirageza and Ibrahima (2022) refer to this state of exclusion as 'epistemicide', which is defined as the exclusion or elimination of indigenous knowledge systems. When a language of a community is excluded, the knowledge and culture associated with it are also excluded. Jebessa (2025) writes that epistemicide — the denial of a way of knowing of a community — promotes knowledge that suppresses.

Thus, depending on its stated [as well as unstated] purposes, education can either facilitate suppression or support the liberation and empowerment of the oppressed. That is why many say that education is like a double-edged sword (Ladzekpo (2024), Mtombenia, Shobab and Kwanhi, (2025)). Education facilitates liberation when it enables learners to think for themselves and develop essential life skills, and when learning is set within their context (e.g., culture, linguistic, etc.). This kind of education raises awareness of one's talents and fosters constructive relationships with oneself, others and the physical world. Liberating education helps people recognise their collective interests, common aspirations and sociocultural capital as defining features of who they are and what they stand for. A counter-thesis of liberatory education is

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education that facilitates colonization. According to Nyerere, colonization through education occurs when "an individual is taught to regard himself as a commodity whose value is determined by certificates, degrees, or other professional qualifications" (1975:1). This occurs when education fails to instill self-reliance. Self-reliance encompasses self-sufficiency, the mobilization of domestic assets, locally appropriate economic undertakings, and psychological and cultural independence. Self-reliance is about doing things for ourselves, both in thought and in action. It is about having confidence in one's socio-cultural, spiritual, and physical assets and capital. A self-reliant person could realize his/her moral, social, emotional, mental, and physical self. However, a colonized mentality can hardly display these attributes of self-reliance. An oppressive education systematically undermines the development of self-reliance among marginalized population.

On a social level, a significant instance of education that facilitates the colonization of humanity occurs when it excludes the attributes or knowledge of marginalized or conquered population through omission or misrepresentation. An example of this is Bantu education in the apartheid era of South Africa. The education which was meant for Black people, as Kallaway (cited in Msila, 2004) stated, restricted the development of black learners through limiting the curriculum to manual labor and 'menial jobs. This type of education not only limited learners' intellect but was also used as a tool to spread state propaganda. A passage from Julius Nyerere illustrates how colonizing education operates is presented as follow.

> We know, or we think we know, that something called « education » is a good thing. … But I sometimes suspect that, for us in Africa, the underlying purpose of education is to turn us into black Europeans, or black Americans. I say this because our educational policies make it quite clear that we are really expecting education in Africa to enable us to emulate the material achievements of Europe and America. That is the object of our activity (Nyerere, 1975:5)

Education that colonizes makes victimized peoples abandon their treasures, including language, culture, family, and ways of knowing, because these attributes are weighed against the dominant standard. These are viewed as constructed norm in that the oppressor values are associated with success, while the subjugated ones are associated with failure — the deficit conception of marginalized people's identities! Salazar (2013:1) recounts her personal experience with the US educational system, which was alien to her Spanish background. She writes, "I was overwhelmed with feelings of shame over the most essential elements of my humanness. As a result, my experience in the educational system was marked by endless struggles to preserve my humanity." The author refers to these feelings of shame as the most essential elements of her humanness: her color, her ways of doing things, her ways of knowing, her ways of thinking, her ways of relating to others, her perception of other humans, nature, and the universe.

The same thing happened in Ethiopia when the government invested all its energy to promote one dominant language, religion, and culture in the name of nation-building (Eshete, 1980; Asres, 1991). Children from other ethno-linguistic groups were discouraged from speaking their own languages in school (Asres, 1991), and even names other than Amharic were considered odd (Boru, 2006). For critical pedagogues, such education is dehumanizing. This theory was first popularized by Paulo Freire. It is an

education that robs one's humanity. It robs one's sense of true self, identity, confidence, and so on. Since the true self does not completely die out, individuals in such situations develop an unauthentic dual identity that often fails to merge (Salazar, 2013). It is not unusual for such individuals to fail to embody either personality. Unfortunately, individuals or groups in such a self-denial rarely succeed unless they completely divest themselves of their linguistic, cultural, and familial resources. Salazar (2013:146) remarks, "The cost of an education is too high if students are required to divest themselves of their language, culture, and family to succeed." This is not uncommon in the Ethiopian school system. One could ask how many Oromo individuals had to abandon their Oromo identity (e.g., language, culture, beliefs, etc.) to climb the bureaucratic ladders throughout Ethiopian history.

In fact, this problem is not confined to ethno-linguistic and cultural exclusion. It can occur in every sphere of human identity formation. The following passage from my personal experience demonstrates how schools fail to prepare children to appreciate and accept economic undertakings that their parents identify with. As a result, school dropouts/graduates learn to abandon what is said to be theirs and where they belong to.

> *A few years ago, while conducting a baseline study for a school improvement project, I came across a response that shocked me. It was May, and I met a farmer in a field where he was working alongside four of his children. During the interview, I asked him why his children were with him when they should have been at school. That was when the farmer gave me the shocking response. He said, "I have five children, and they were all in school. My eldest son finished tenth grade two years ago but couldn't continue with either a job or further education. He couldn't help me with the farming either. He loathed farming. He rejected the idea that farming was part of our identity. Now, my son is nowhere." The farmer said with a deep sense of despair, "That's what I got for keeping him in school for ten years." So, I decided to let my other children drop out of school once they could read and write.*

This passage is about the impact of a poor education, rather than a suppressive education per se. I wanted to cite it here because it says a lot about the role of education in developing a sense of identity and purpose, and fostering an authentic personality. The father said, 'His son is nowhere' — a blurred destiny! In such educational situation the content and pedagogical process that the school provided the son with are causes for concern.

2. Humanization of education

As discussed earlier, oppressive education imposed on learners dehumanizes them. Freire (1970) argues that the only effective avenue for rehumanization is applying humanizing pedagogy. In an educational context, to humanize means to view each and every learner as whole person and to overcome situations in which learners are reduced to mere receivers. As Nyerere mentioned earlier, humanization of education rejects an educational system that teaches individuals to see themselves as commodities whose value is determined by certificates. Humanizing pedagogy is about creating an inclusive and constructive learning environment that values the aspirations, experiences, and

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capabilities of learners. For humanistic pedagogues, students are more than their test scores and grade. They value the holistic development of learners, including not only academic progress, but also their personal and social development, which is shaped by cultural, historical, and intergenerational knowledge. In this sense, successful education is about more than the number or proportion of students who achieve at or above an "acceptable" passing score. Rather, the success of education should be seen in terms of holistic empowerment and potential for subsequent liberation, i.e., humanization.

According to Freire (1971), education is humanizing when it promotes the liberation of consciousness. The process of liberation begins when learners start to question their situation through dialogue based on their experiences in the curriculum. Contextualizing education, or relating it to context and all its forms, is the basis for this. Education devoid of meaningful experiences for learners is oppressive and dehumanizing. Freire termed such education the "banking model of education." Children need to understand the meaning of what they learn and how it relates to their experience. They also need to understand how the "worthwhile knowledge" selected for them serves as a framework to examine their situation.

Below are selected stories from my experiences that I would like to share with readers. In one way or another, they serve as practical examples of the arguments presented above.

Story I: Could not sense when the earth rotates on its axis.

> *In sixth grade, I learned for the first time that the Earth rotates on its axis. I carefully listened to the teacher's presentation, but it was not clear, if not confusing. I could not sense how that happens. I even woke up in the middle of the night to see if our one-door rural house was facing a different direction because of the rotation. Nothing had changed! The next day, I asked my teacher to help me understand the matter telling him what I did to understand. In response, he asked the class, "Put a louse on your nose." Dance and jump as much as you can." Do you think the louse feels the jump?" Then, the whole class said, "No, it won't feel." Referring to me, the teacher said, "It's the same with you trying to sense the rotation of the Earth." The class laughed at me. I regretted asking the question.*

Years later, when I reflected on the incident, I wondered how the students knew that the louse hadn't felt the jump in the teacher's example. I realised that the teacher was implying that my question was unimportant, even though I was searching for meaning. So was my curiosity! What mattered was remembering what he had told us. The important thing was to prepare for the exam questions so that I could pass and move on to the next level. Admittedly, the particular lesson topic was abstract for our ages. The teacher had fewer means of demonstrating the matter (i.e. the revolution of the Earth around the Sun and its rotation on its axis) in a way that would satisfy our curiosity for practical observation. However, there were ways in which he could have helped us understand the reality, because the lesson aims to deconstruct our intuitive knowledge – that the sun, not the earth, moves. Instead, the teacher encouraged us to accept what he

told us, silently, which Freire refers to as the inculcation of a culture of silence. The teacher may not have done so intentionally. Either way, the lesson became oppressive.

Story II: I teach what is in the textbook

> *Years back, I supervised student teachers who were preparing to become primary school teachers. One day, we observed a first grade English language class at one of the primary schools in Jimma Town. The teacher was trying to teach the English alphabet and words that started with each letter. She asked the children to repeat after her: "A-ant, B-boy, C-camel, D-dog..." The children were curious about the meaning of each word they said. One student asked what a camel is in Amharic and Afaan Oromo. The teacher told him. The students came up with other questions: Where is it found? Is it edible? What other uses do people have for it?" These questions were completely unrelated to the purpose of the session. During our post-observation discussion, I asked the teacher if it would be possible to replace the word with a more common one in the area (e.g., cat). The teacher responded with discontent, saying, "I was assigned to teach what is in the textbook!"*

I thought the teacher had misunderstood the purpose of textbooks, which serve as roadmaps for the teaching and learning process, helping teachers to facilitate their students' learning rather than providing set instructions. This assumption may stem from an undemocratic education system in which educators are not empowered to adapt the proposed content to the learners' context or learning environment. The problem may also be related to educators' incompetence or the exam orientation of the system. By submitting to the prescriptions of curriculum materials (teacher guides and student textbooks), as well as his or her own intuitive choices, the teacher demonstrated that the system does not value students' experiences – a characteristic of dehumanising education.

Story III: A search for purpose

> *We were in 11th grade math class. The topic of the day was "Logarithmic Functions." My friend, who often daydreamed during math class, because he disliked the subject, raised his hand while the teacher was lecturing. Disapproving of the interruption, the teacher asked my friend what he wanted. My friend asked, "What is this 'log' used for? Is it used to fly airplanes?" I can't repeat the disparaging response the teacher gave.*

The teacher was very angry. For my friend, who aspired to become a fighter jet pilot, it was an important question. He was searching for meaning, but he was mistaken. The teacher was not willing to explain the purpose of the lesson, let alone present the mathematical concepts in a way my friend could understand. The teacher just wanted us to know how to manipulate log functions and solve log function problems that might appear in exams. He discouraged us from pondering the reasons behind learning logarithmic functions at that level. I can't describe how worthless my friend felt. Yes, explaining the purpose of the logarithmic function at that level might make the lesson more complicated. It may also seem beyond the scope of the lesson. However, the way

the teacher handled the students' curiosity suggests that the system devalues students' voices, which is a form of dehumanisation.

Story VI: We can locate it on picture

> *Once, I was conducting a needs assessment for a teacher training project supported by a local NGO and to be implemented in South-West Shewa. The goal was to design an in-service training program for teachers. As part of the process, I interviewed children. It was October, and the school yard was green and full of flowers. While interviewing eighth grade students, I asked if they could show me the reproductive parts of any flowers they saw in the schoolyard. All the students I interviewed said they could only show me in a textbook, i.e., in a picture.*

When asked to point out the different parts of a flower, the children did so in a way that was far removed from reality. The students were rural children. Flowers were part of their everyday lives. However, they were not helped to connect the abstract concepts in textbooks to their concrete environment. A picture of a flower is two-dimensional and more abstract than a real, three-dimensional flower. Logically, the difficulty could have been the other way around. If they could not identify the parts of flowers on their parents' farms, what would learning about them theoretically mean? In fact, it may serve one purpose: the paper-and-pencil test. They were just preparing them for exams, not deriving meaning from what they learned. They were not acquiring skills for life. The driving force is, therefore, the certificate. This is another instance of dehumanization through education!

In general, these four stories can be used as examples of dehumanization. We may not sense the biases that led to such a state of educational practices. According to Freirean ideals, however, all pedagogy is political and requires a radical reconstruction of teaching and learning. Moreover, pedagogy must be meaningful and connected to social change, engaging students with the world so they can transform it (Giroux, in Salazar, 2013). Along this line, Freire defines pedagogy as "a complex philosophy, politics, and practice of education that demands a clear ethical and political commitment from educators to transform oppressive social conditions" (Roberts, in Salazar, 2013). Therefore, every educational practice should be considered political, historical, and contextual. The pedagogical situations in the four stories indicate that the learners were deprived of the opportunity to question and test what they experienced in school against their everyday lived experiences. They were encouraged to silently accept what they were told. One possible explanation for the situation is that the pedagogical practices were inherited from educational prescriptions that assumed learners had no worthwhile input in their education and had deficits that needed to be addressed.

Story V: Our land came back home: an instance of contextualized pedagogy:

> *A few years back a resident charity organization was running an Alternative Basic Education (ABE) program for out-of-school children who were too old for formal schooling. The organization used an accelerated curriculum with skill components. For instance, as part of the environmental science lesson, the ABE*

center taught the children how to make compost fertilizer. Then, the children were encouraged to try it out at home with the support from ABE facilitators and project experts as needed. While evaluating the project, I interviewed some farmers. A farmer from a rural kebele near Waliso Town said, "Our land is coming home." He meant that producers of inorganic fertilizers took their land, but now, with the use of compost they were able to reclaim it – able to produce on their land when they could not afford to buy inorganic fertilizers.

It is obvious that with careful planning, the ABE center could use and transform the practice into school lessons to demonstrate how to solve critical social problems. All that is needed is teacher capacity, commitment, and willingness to think beyond preparing children for exams or fulfilling certification requirements. However, there were no evidence on how far the project's initiatives were scaled up. No one is also certain if the farmer who remarked on it has continued to use the lessons his son brought home. In fact, I also don't know if the same effort was made in other parts of the curriculum. What I do know is that this initiative is a good example of how to contextualize the school curriculum and pedagogical practices so that learning constitutes solving real public problems.

Several such episodes can be discussed. Consider the text-based lectures we attended in our rural school classrooms. In physics, we learned about friction, physical and chemical changes, wind direction and pressure, and so on. In geography, we learned about resource conservation, erosion, and crop production. In languages, we learned about dialogue and presentation. All of these topics can be pulled from our rural experiences with our parents, elders, and public spaces. We were taught from textbooks in the most direct way possible so that we could master the content. Our lives were not reflected in the lessons. No one helped us analyze how our fathers managed erosion, how our mothers used wind direction to winnow grain, or how our elders used debates to settle disputes. These are all aspects of the various related topics we studied in the school curriculum.

In such a situation, education is reduced to the mere transmission of information when it is detached from context and the learner's background. The above examples of teachers pressuring students to accept information as presented, rather than encouraging them to seek meaning, reflect Freire's (1971) two opposing pedagogies: the banking model vs. the problem-posing model of education. The banking model is the pedagogy of the oppressors and involves teachers telling students what they are supposed to learn. This pedagogy is used when learners are expected to learn something different from themselves — to acquire the culture of silence, to receive without question, and to be "them" rather than "us." This pedagogical approach robs learners of their human curiosity and devalues the treasures they brought with them from their community. This aligns with the colonial education discussed earlier. Thus, it works to make them abandon part of their very selves. The opposite of this is problem-posing education, in which teachers and learners engage in dialogue and critically reflect on their lives and communities. One concrete pedagogical/curricular approach that can promote this kind of education is contextualization.

3. Contextualization

Educational programs are graded plans that use curriculum and pedagogy as media to accomplish intended as well as emerging purposes. Curricular and pedagogical propositions contain situated knowledge, changing contexts, and emerging purposes. Therefore, no curricular or pedagogical intentions directly fit all contexts. Therefore, contextualization is employed to ensure a proper fit and prevent education from succumbing to the aforementioned dehumanization. According to Johnson (in Khanal, 2023), contextualization involves various strategies that establish a seamless connection between learning skills and academic or occupational content. This approach focuses on teaching and learning on concrete applications within a specific context that interests the student. Contextualization is the process of embedding knowledge in history, culture, and in philosophical questions and personal experiences. Therefore, contextualizing the curriculum involves relating its content in teaching, and learning processes to meaningful situations, i.e. relevant to students' lives. When the curriculum is contextualized, students' experiences are the fundamental starting point of the teaching-learning process: and every effort is made to help them relate what they learn to their everyday lives. In this process, the child develops a sense of purpose in attending school, which may connect him or her to school. This view of educational practice values the context in which education takes place, including time, place, and conditions under which educators act or in which something operates or happens. The time during which learning happens; the geographical landscape (e.g., desert, semi-desert, highlands, rural, or urban); the learners' cultural backgrounds; the history of the community to which the children belong; and the learners' attributes (gender, language, ethnicity, disability, etc.) constitute the context. It is believed that context gives meaning to how we act, how things work, and how organizations run their daily business. Any modification we make to the curriculum or a prescribed pedagogical approach to relate it to learners or the local context is referred to as curriculum or pedagogical contextualization. This process is guided by the values of prioritizing the whole child, respecting the community's assets, and recognizing the teacher's role in mediating between local and global knowledge.

According to Khanal (2023), decontextualized teaching is the opposite of contextualized teaching. It separates the content from the context, neglecting natural classroom activities and learning. One example of decontextualized teaching is a teaching/learning method that depends on memorization. It is decontextualized because the content is studied or learned without regard for its contextual meaning. Nyerere (1975:12) identified three failings that amplify the decontextualized nature of the African education he referred to.

- (i) *Our failure to develop sufficient self-confidence to reject what we perceive as the world's best (whatever that may mean) and instead select the most suitable option for our circumstances.*
- (ii) *Our apparent inability or unwillingness to truly integrate education and life, and education and production.*
- (iii) *Our inability to overcome the belief that academic ability marks a child or adult as especially praiseworthy or deserving a privileged place in society.*

In essence, contextualization counters grand narratives that subordinate the knowledge, history, and identity of historically underserved populations. That is why contextualization is a tool for decolonization— the decolonization of knowledge. In

terms of educational practices, such as curriculum and pedagogy, contextualization involves counter-storytelling, healing, and reclaiming (Zavala, 2016). Counter-storytelling, which is the first stage in contextualization or decolonial response, involves naming and remembering as a challenge to the dominant narrative imposed on schools and learners through curriculum and pedagogical practices. As we question the space accorded to Oromo knowledge in yesterday's school curricula, we must also question how Oromo children are told the stories of their people today. Are the stories we tell today not just narratives of the past, but also a language of critique?

Healing is the next stage in the decolonial response to the dominant narrative. It involves reconnecting with each other (i.e., community) and with the land (Zavala, 2016). This decolonial response aims to restore epistemological diversity and acknowledge that schooling should not expose learners to only one dominant narrative. Therefore, it is sensible to inquire to what extent the curriculum and pedagogical practices include the reconnection of learners to their source communities, land, economic undertakings, and culture. This aspect of the educational process is meant to ensure the relevance of education, guarantee that schooling does not rob learners of their identities, and guaran5tee that learners learn something beyond what is presented as a stepping stone.

The next stage in the decolonial response after healing is reclaiming, which involves reclaiming the epistemological alternatives of historically dominated populations through schooling. As Zavala (2016:) stated, citing DiMauro and Carroll (2014), reclaiming entails presenting clear challenges. For example, it involves addressing practices that objectify or commodify natural resources. Thus, the meaning that the dominated people or community attach to their forests, mountains, rivers, animals, and so on are valued as knowledge systems that are worth including in the school curriculum and pedagogical practices. How is the status of reclaiming in present-day schooling in Oromia? The Oromo people have knowledge, values, and skills that they have developed over generations, such as the values attached to cattle. It is very essential to critically examine these values and skills whether they are included in teaching practices. That the pedagogical propositions in the curriculum materials should encourage the inclusion of the population's indigenous knowledge.

Because schools are detached from the context of the people some parents face a dilemma whether to send their children to school. A father from Borena Zone in Ethiopia once remarked, "Those who go to school are thought to be no longer useful for herding because they have missed important socialization to the herding business due to their schooling." The Borena justify this with the saying: *'Dibichi yeroon qabamte hin diddu'*, which roughly translates as 'a young bull trained at the right time will pull the plough beam well'. If the right time to socialise with the herding business is missed, the children will not become effective herders if they return to their community. This unequivocally depicts the detachment of schools from the community. Such detachment must be addressed if education is to truly contribute to societal progress.

Educators' roles in contextualization **:** When contextualizing the curriculum and pedagogical practices, educators take on the role of a soccer midfielder because they are expected to mediate between culture, home/parents, official knowledge, school norms, and the child, to name a few. Educators (teachers and school leaders) should recognize

any gaps between the curriculum and the child's situation and mediate as necessary. Thus, mediation is said to be one of the most common activities in which teachers and school leaders engage. In fact, mediation is commonly associated with conflict resolution. In the present case, it can be a conflict between global/modern knowledge and indigenous community knowledge; between the culture implied/promoted by the curriculum and the culture within the school environment; between the ways of knowing that the child brings from home/community and those promoted by the school, etc. Hence, in today's educational context, teachers are mediators.

A mediator acts as an intermediary, using his or her competence to transfer meanings from one party to another when these parties do not share the same language (Bulljes, 1991; Bryan, 2003; both cited in Kohler, 2015). Therefore, as well as having a thorough understanding of their subject, teachers are expected to be interculturally competent. They need to have a robust value system that promotes epistemic diversity. The example of the Borena fathers mentioned above, as well as the four stories presented earlier, does not prove that educators act as cultural mediators.

4.   By way of a conclusion

We have seen that education can be used both for liberation as well as for domination. When used for the latter purpose, it becomes a form of colonisation. This type of education can result in self-denial and an unauthentic dual personality or identity. Decolonisation occurs, among others, when education is connected to the child's context, when the curriculum and pedagogical practices recognise epistemic diversity, and when schools prepare students for the present and future. It is crucial that our children receive an education that liberates their minds, hands and hearts. Despite the need for more rigorous research, the few experiences presented in this paper seem to indicate that education in Ethiopia (e.g., its pedagogical assumptions, exam orientation of the system and the value attached to learners' voices) falls short of producing a liberated person.

As a platform for promoting Oromo Studies, the Finfinne Journal offers the chance to challenge the epistemicide that the Oromo nation and other marginalized groups have experienced for generations. Researchers in related fields should consider this when planning their research project (i.e. the contextualization and further humanization of education). They should not only look backwards (and outwards) at what happened and by whom. It is also high time to look critically inwards as well as forwards. This means that educational practices in Oromia and other regions of the country since the political changes of decades ago can be evaluated, so that we do not limit ourselves to a victim mentality. Educators have a moral and professional responsibility to carefully consider the rationale behind current curricular and pedagogical decisions made at all levels, in the best interests of children.

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