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Introduction: 
Imagining the Postcolonial

Jennifer Lavia and Sechaba Mahlomaholo

“…For the power to create and innovate remains the greatest guarantee of respect and recognition.”

—Nettleford, 1970, 227

We begin by imagining! Perhaps more accurately stated, we begin by “reimagining” as we take the opportunity presented in this book to realize two aims. First, we want to contribute to reinvigorating postcolonial discourse with these chapters serving as a dialogue among contributors and with the reader. The book also serves as an epistemological and methodological encounter with the wider social discourse, underlining urgent and unfinished business. Our second aim is to push the boundaries of postcolonial perspectives, seeking to expose and provoke, deconstruct and reconstruct, centering education as cultural practice and acknowledging it as occurring within community. During our preparation of this book, we have come to recognize that imagination is essential when considering postcolonialism, because it is necessary to accommodate a wide range of critical perspectives, which are potentially allied theories concerning the conditions of postcoloniality.

Our contributors offer, in a single volume, disparate critical assessments that challenge traditional Western accounts of knowledge and engage in a cultural politics of education. Indeed, we set out to highlight the importance of culture as a human right for communities that have been traditionally treated as if they mattered less than others, showing how these communities conceive of their lived experiences as cultural expressions of marginalization, oppression, and resistance.
When we invited contributors to this volume, we asked them to consider these central, interrelated questions: Can education contribute to the cultural confidence of peoples and communities who have endured centuries of oppression and marginalization? If so, what is education, and what is education for, given such historical circumstances? In responding to these questions, we hoped to find, like Kanu, “multiple modes of theoretical representations [emerging] from alternative perspectives on postcoloniality grounded in a dynamic variety of life experiences” (2006, 4). Not only do the chapters provide expressions of postcolonial imagination, they do so by making central to the postcolonial discourse the voices of the colonized through autobiography, citizenship, curriculum critique, critical pedagogy, community development, indigenous perspectives, changing identities, postcolonial aesthetic, and resistance. Interwoven in these critical spaces of engaged difference are analyses of theory and practice of the postcolonial—community cultural wealth, liberation pedagogy, indigenous schooling and knowledge systems, language acquisition, race, class, identity, and agency. We acknowledge the link between culture and learning in the attainment of knowledge and accept that this link is central to the process of decolonization.

Before highlighting the contributions in this book, we wish to unpack how we have chosen the title. The title, *Culture, Education, and Community: Expressions of the Postcolonial Imagination*, brings with it five interrelated themes—culture, education, community, postcolonialism, and imagination. In elaborating on our meanings, we will address culture, education, and community as a collective theme to mediate the epistemic power of everyday lived experiences. The latter two themes will be discussed subsequently to explore how we have come to understand the power of imagination within postcolonial contexts.

**Culture, Education, and Community**

According to Bourdieu (2006), “[t]he social world is accumulated history and if it is not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles, one must reintroduce into it the notion of capital and with it, accumulation and all its effects” (105). Central to the statement by Pierre Bourdieu is the idea that individuals do not come to a social encounter as *tabula rasa*, but rather, they embody an accumulation of knowledge, skills, and experiences—social energy,
which has a potential capacity for reproduction and transformation. Education as a cultural practice, read in light of Bourdieu’s claims, positions our discussion in the realm of cultural inquiry and contributes to an understanding of our practice as critical arrangements of community, commitments, obligations, and connections.

By positioning the book as a representation of a cultural politics of education, we adopt a mode of cultural inquiry, like Kanu to engage in a practice to destabilize “taken-for-granted categories, representation and truths in educational discourses and practices” (Kanu 2006, 5; see also Hoffman 1999, 464). For example, Darder and Uriate in chapter 4, provide contrapuntal reading of the dominant discourse about new and emerging language acquisition programs in the United States to expose how racialized projects serve the exclusion of working-class communities and are functioning to redress the gains of the past. Here they argue, “There has been a failure to consider the education of English-learners and their language rights with greater analytical depth, despite the manner in which workers are positioned within the U.S. political economy”. Bristol, DeFour-Babb, et al. (chapter 11), focus on the notion of practice, claiming that theirs is not content with technicist, instrumental accounts and strategies, but rather, they move toward a “collective praxis,” prevailed upon by knowledge generation and action. We acknowledge, therefore, that within these contexts, and those articulated by other authors in this volume, cultural critique facilitates: radical inquiry into how culture and society shape us and how we shape culture and society; the necessary exposure of power and control “exercised through a corpus of knowledge”; deconstruction of traditional categories to understanding the nature of unequal distribution of resources; reconstruction of new ways of thinking and acting; and the centrality of situated practice to fulfilling the project of postcolonial imagining (see Kanu 2006; Hoffman 1999; Apple 1996; Giroux 1983; and Young 1971). It is here that we make the link between culture and learning.

As readers will come to realize, one of the epistemic pillars of this book resides within practice theory and more so in advocating for situated practice. Nkoane and Lavia (chapter 3), Bristol et al. (chapter 11), and Singh (chapter 8), and Lingard et al. (chapter 6), for example, all refer directly to the importance of studying indigenous forms of knowledge, thereby emphasizing that learning takes place within multicultural and cross-cultural knowledge exchanges that make public the specificities of the lived experiences of individuals and communities (see Masemann 1990). However, McCarthy (1998)
in writing about the uses of culture sends out a caution not to treat “topics of culture, identity and community simplistically” (148), because we run the risk of becoming complicit with minoritized and under-theorized reading and writing of these phenomena. Rather, in support of the idea of situated practice, McCarthy claims, “the dynamism and heterogeneity of everyday life of the myriad human encounters that produce and reproduce cultures and identities are thwarted in education” (148). Lee shares in signaling the danger of reifying culture when she claims that approaches to understanding practice as cultural difference, cultural deficits, cultural mismatch, and cultural repository all, although locating culture as central to learning, can lead us to miss the opportunity to interrogate that “people participate in different ways in multiple communities” (2007, 10). The cautions of both McCarthy and Lee warrant that we perhaps take a closer look at the culture–learning dialectic of situated practice to establish its circulatory logic.

Theodore Shatzki in forthcoming work, A Primer on Practice (2012), provides a comprehensive account of the field of practice theory, identifying its three central tenets. The first is that practice always occurs within rules and regulations, and we would argue that these act as vehicles through which power and control are exercised. In this way, practice is organized and systemic. The second tenet is that practice as organized activities is rooted in human activity, meaning that its study is essential to understanding “matters such as reason, identity, learning, and communication” (2012). Third, Shatzki refers to “teleaffective structures,” which can be construed as habits, attitudes, dispositions, feelings, and ways of being, doing and communicating. He offers a societist view of practice, to convey the idea that practices are located in sites that occur in bundles of sayings and doings. In summarizing the field, Shatzki (2012) writes, “The domain of ‘practice theory’ is delimited by a conception of practices as organized activities, the conviction that both social phenomena and key ‘psychological’ features of human life are tied to practices, and the idea that the basis of human activity is nonpropositional bodily abilities” (n.p.). In a related manner, making direct reference to education as a practice, Kemmis (1995) asserts that it is a form of power mediated by self-understandings of those who practice and who are affected by that practice. He further argues that practice is constructed in the sense that first, no practice is neutral but rather brings intention with it; second, practice is interpreted; third, it is historically constructed; and fourth, it is politically constructed. These criteria are useful in
understanding the relationship between culture and learning, demonstrating that critical cultural inquiry will of necessity turn our attention to the “cultural situatedness” (Kanu 2006, 6) of all learning. And, as a corollary, all learning holds the potential for the production and construction of knowledge.

Let us reflect here on the Funds of Knowledge Project (see Moll and Greenberg1990; Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti 2005) and its contribution to our understanding of the relationship between culture, education, and community. Setting out to expose the messiness, yet potential for knowledge production of everyday life and by extension research, Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti (2005) elaborate how the Funds of Knowledge Project evolved organically. These researchers, mindful of the proliferation of research that is so often disconnected from the communities about which they write and do research, claimed and named a commitment to facilitating teachers in learning about the communities of their students. Teachers in this sense became the learners, willing to strip back their preconceived notions of their students’ lives to become alert and sensitive to a corpse of knowledge that resided within the students’ everyday experiences. The student experience was central to their ethnographic study that initially involved ten teachers in California. As the study unfolded through the process of paying home visits to students, it was found that the home/household-based artifacts, environments, and encounters generated different types of knowledge. Acknowledging that “the interaction between text and social life, between word and worlds is a constant process,” the project generated its own creative praxis and lexicon, causing participants to develop a new and different attitude (2005, 22) to cultural resources that were to be found within the households. Seemingly inspired by the notion that teaching requires curiosity (Freire 1998), the Funds of Knowledge Project has contributed a material and discursive space to interrogate educational practice, stating in clear terms that the requirement for transformation and change are constitutive of cultural action for social transformation based on the everyday lives of individuals and communities. Learning in this sense can be read as a process of conscientization through deliberate and conscious action. This act, as direct interference into cultures of silence that are perpetrated by dependency social exclusion, is identified and contextualized by several contributors to this volume.

By extending the critique on the ideas of funds of knowledge, Carol Lee credits the Funds of Knowledge Project with providing the groundwork for what she conceptualizes as her notion of cultural
modeling. She argues, however, for a different focus for her cultural project by foregrounding “learning as an ecologically situated practice” (2007, xxiii). In addition to paying attention to the knowledge reservoir gleaned from the social context of everyday experiences, she also articulates a framework for examining and deconstructing how culture occurs within classrooms.

Postcolonial Imagination

We turn our attention now to the subtitle “Expressions of the Postcolonial Imagination.” The word expressions is offered as a space of creativity where specific cases of colonial encounter are represented by various authors. Not all chapters use postcolonial theories in their analysis; however, we believe that in pushing the boundaries of postcolonial thought what we have done is to allow for eclectic expressions that find common ground in their quest to trouble, confront, contest, dismantle, and reconstruct old and new enclaves of colonialism. It is in this sense that we articulate that the postcolonial resides in a field of complexity and contestation. As Stuart Hall (1996) has advised, when he asked the question, “When was the postcolonial?,” in occupying a deconstructed mode, we speak truth to power through our spaces of liminality, allowing for theoretical and methodological rendering of this misnomer. These spaces are interpreted in this book through narratives that relate to the struggle for language rights, critical pedagogy and praxis, cultural identity and the role of teachers and academics, indigenous rights and education, and curriculum reform and change.

As Bristol has highlighted in this volume, “postcolonialism offers the possibility of a new story, a different story, and a contested story,” and it is in this sense that we accept responsibility for positioning the discourse to allow a postcolonial theoretical orientation that can lead to and accommodate other critical perspectives, since most deal with power and uneven relationships (Kanu 2006; Althusser 1971). We share the claim that the scope of postcolonial thought can been seen in its different interpretations and emphases of colonial encounter. These locations include accounts of the struggle for independence and the transformation of colonies into autonomous states riding on the waves of intense anticolonial movements. They also include consideration of the contemporary context, learning from the historical and projecting alternative ways of knowing, doing, and being. By expanding the discourse, we agree with Kanu that “the ‘postcolonial’ becomes the site
where a variety of assumptions accepted on individual, academic and political levels are called into question in the struggle for more democratic social relations” (68).

We wish to emphasize two central ideas in this book. First, historical accounts serve to contextualize and present a framework for postcolonial imagining, and second, by developing a cultural politics of education is to directly link a central concern of postcolonialism, that being unpacking the relationship between knowledge and power. Further Rizvi et al. (2006) disclose: “It is only through education that it is possible to reveal and resist colonialism’s continuing hold on our imagination…Education is also a site where legacies of colonialism and the contemporary process of globalization intersect” (257). In this book, therefore, we have explored this intersection, imagined through common concern for exploring historical and contemporary sites of resistance that lead to the re-installation of cultural confidence for colonized communities.

**Structure of the Book**

Fenway and Fahey (2009, 2) ask two important questions that could guide us to understanding the importance of imagination. They ask: How do we commonly imagine the imagination? How do we understand it in the everyday? The chapters in this book present ways of imagining through collective interpretations of specific circumstances. We would hope that we have forged a community of ideas and practices that have privileged the “generating [of] conceptions of personhood and identity” (Kanu 2006, 68; also see Popkerwitz 2000; Rizvi 2000).

In chapter 1, “Postcolonial Thought,” Laurette Bristol seeks to explore how the theory and methodology of the postcolonial is decolonizing and arguing for its application to education research. Bristol makes connections between culture, education, and research to show how cultural confidence can be forged through what she describes as culturally ethical practice. Positioning education as cultural practice, Bristol comments on the capacity of teachers to become conscious of what their practice reproduces. By providing this cultural account of education and educational practice in the context of Trinidad and Tobago, Bristol’s analysis is important.

The agency of educational researchers is taken up by Sechaba Mahlomaholo in chapter 2, “Validating Community Cultural Wealth Toward Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments,” where
he reflects on how far the rhetoric of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has addressed the promise of a better and more humane and democratic life for South Africans. Using Yosso’s notion of community cultural wealth, Mahomaholo proposes a role for intellectuals and academics—that of forging links with the community to imagining new futures.

Like Mahomaholo, Nkoane and Lavia discuss in chapter 3, “Rethinking Education in South Africa, the country’s context, where they emphasize the role of education as liberatory practice. They begin by providing an historical overview of education in South Africa, showing how in 1953 the Bantu Education Act legalized a separate and racist education system. They draw upon a Freirean notion of liberation pedagogy, arguing that education occurs in community and is hopeful practice. They provide an autobiographical account to show the lived experience of apartheid that rendered the Black masses as less than human and have advocated critical practice—liberation pedagogy as an effort of recovery in a democratic South Africa. In this way, their analysis is important in that, these authors have made explicit that cultural confidence is to be gained through respectful relationships between students and teachers engaged in a critical pedagogy and seeking change on the basis of an anticolonial agenda. Such an agenda is to be found in the developing intellectual curiosity around African indigenous knowledge systems (AKIS).

In chapter 4, “The Politics of Restrictive Language Policies,” by Antonia Darder and Miren Uriarte, who turn our attention to a specific struggle of language restriction in the United States. By historicizing the case of Boston, they illustrate how restrictive language policies have contributed to marginalization of communities of English language learners. The choice of Boston was twofold. First, as they have stated, Boston and Massachusetts schools were among the first to enact legislation making provisions for transitional language programs for the new and increasing Spanish population. Second, the majority of English learners are from histories “that have been deeply marked by colonialism.” Their concern is that the gains made by the previous legislation, where a civil-rights agenda was given privilege, are being displaced by conservative neoliberal measures of restrictive language policies. By elaborating this postcolonial analysis through an empirical study, Darder and Uriate present an important account of social exclusion by examining the relationship between class and race, implementation of restrictive language policies and the location
of English language learners within the economy, politics, education, and wider social fabric of American society.

The ideas of indigenous curricular, minority language and language acquisition come together in chapter 5, “Súil-Eile,” by Simon Warren, who focuses on the Irish context. He positions the specific case of Ireland within a more general context of “the fate of threatened or endangered languages.” While in the case of Darder and Uriate in chapter 4, they focus on how exclusion occurs systemically through restrictive policies around English language acquisition, Warren draws our attention to issues of colonial power with regard to languages that have been minoritized. He articulates a stance that moves beyond the binary of how do Irish people construct a popular cultural politics in the context of opposition between the language of the people and the language of the colonial power. In addition, he argues for confronting the reality of English as the common vernacular of Irish people. Further, Warren challenges the notion of cultural confidence, suggesting instead that interrogating “the sustainability of pursuing a cultural politics of language based on the assertion of minority rights” can be more reliably formulated around a notion of solidarity.

In chapter 6, “Reimagining Lines of Flight in Schooling for Indigenous Students in Australia,” Lingard, Vas, and Mckinlay focus their analysis on schooling for indigenous communities in Australia and provide a critical analysis of contemporary policy concerning these students. They unpack the offering of Noel Pearson’s radical vision, Chris Sarra’s “strong and smart” strategy, and the national and regional policy of “closing the gap.” They also interrogate what it means in their work to take a postcolonial stance and how this stance becomes appropriate as an aspirational project in respect of indigenous education. In reflecting on the central question of the book, these authors conclude that schools alone cannot compensate for centuries of violence and oppression on indigenous peoples. Rather, they argue that reclamation, reconciliation, and resuscitation of indigenous rights and schooling must be pivotal within: a recognition of “the colonial violence of the past and ongoing colonial present,” the conviction that schools can and must make a difference in the lives of indigenous people, “the need to work with Aboriginal funds of knowledge within schools and their communities,” and that a movement toward policy and practice that is decolonizing is essential if “local epistemologies and ontologies are taken up robustly in the culture and practices of schooling relevant to that particular setting.”
In chapter 7, “Border Crossing,” Dennis Francis continues with the theme on race to highlight the experience of nine Indian-white biracial youths in South Africa. Admittedly, a much under-researched topic, Francis presents his findings from empirical study of how these young people articulate their experience of social life. By using life-history research, Francis shows how preoccupied society is about race as identity pointing to the elements that contribute to the cultural confidence of the biracial young people in the study. In this case, Francis uses postcolonial analysis to historicize the experience of apartheid South Africa, showing the persistent preoccupation with race and the resultant expression of these biracial youth to internalize complex representations of their identity.

Basing her thesis on the work of Frantz Fanon, in chapter 8, “Constructing a Nation,” Lorraine Singh continues the discussion of culture, identity, and the South African experience. Singh begins by signaling the need to interrogate cultural difference in light of the colonial experience. Making the point that South Africa “suffered doubly under centuries of colonialism and apartheid,” she argues for “reconstruction and cultural reimaginings,” and begins by scrutinizing the history of education-policy documents with particular reference to arts education. Critical of both the notion of the “rainbow nation” and the “rhetoric of the African renaissance,” Singh engages in a comparative analysis of three versions of the arts education curriculum, illustrating the transient understandings of the notion of “culture” with the most current curriculum policy agenda, dropping the word culture entirely in preference for creative arts. Singh argues that is not merely a matter of semantics but represents a fundamental shift in ideology. Agreeing that school arts curriculum in South Africa has been influential in resistance and countenancing oppressive regimes, Singh makes claims for a South Africans’ funds of knowledge—a curriculum that “offers a space and a way of knowing about our world and how we act in it.” One of the conclusions that Singh comes to in her chapter is that the double oppression of South Africa and the corresponding strategies for reclamation and resurgence indeed provide spaces for hybrid forms of culture—new ways of thinking, writing, reading, being, doing, and relating.

It is an example of this hybrid space, a liminal space, which is highlighted in chapter 9, “Calypso, Education, and Community in Trinidad and Tobago,” where Gordon Rohlehr has produced a creative chapter, using an array of calypsos to provide an historical analysis of education in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Rohlehr’s chapter
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