
In Namibia, schooling has long been a site of contending politics. With the introduction of European-style schools throughout the mid-late 19th century, the German colonial regime and their missionary enablers intended for (the very few) schooling institutions to produce subservient laborers. Additionally, the administrators of apartheid understood the importance of schooling in their racist state-building project: Verwoerd penned Bantu Education early in his career and his successors remained fixated on fostering structural advantage and disadvantage via educational mechanisms. Yet, schools in Namibia have also been sites of resistance to colonial power. During the anti-apartheid movement, country-wide student strikes halted exams and supported union activists, advancing the cause. However, schooling for “liberation” is also contended. For example, SWAPO’s education infrastructure in exile camps prioritized anti-colonialism at the expense of addressing other oppressive social institutions, notably patriarchy.

The edited volume Democracy and Education in Namibia embraces this legacy of contention. The authors argue that it is a mistake to equate independence, liberation, democracy, and electoral politics. The book takes up philosophical conversations from both Euro-American and African traditions about the meaning of democracy. It problematizes the concept and uses these theoretical tools to help us wonder whether Namibian realities fit within “democracy”. Generally, the authors accept that Namibia has made much progress toward democracy since the end of apartheid, but all emphasize that there is still much work to do.

This edited collection is commendable for its ability to navigate lofty theory (ie. Kant and Nyerere) alongside its constant reaffirmation of praxis. Most of the authors draw on some variety of Freirean “conscientization”, emphasizing the importance of people’s ability to recognize and conceptualize the injustices around them. Because this book is aimed at pre-service teachers (among others), there are a plethora of both classroom and policy recommendations to accompany the authors’ critiques. Additionally, each chapter begins with “Focus Questions” encouraging readers to consider one’s own positionality and viewpoints before reading the next “critical appraisal.” The Focus Questions are engaging and provocative and would be useful for...

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both the individual reader and for an instructor facilitating an undergraduate or graduate seminar on educational foundations (in Namibia or beyond).

While in many ways the book feels like a sequel to Amukugo’s earlier influential writing on schooling in Namibia, it has many important differences. While Education and Politics is — in my reading at least — a historical text, Democracy and Education is analytic and far-reaching. In this book, there is very little summary of schooling history since 1990. The exception is Chapter 6 (not until the halfway point!) in which Amukugo reviews some pre-1990 schooling history and describes what she sees as SWAPO’s contemporary subsumption into neoliberal capitalism and positivist schooling, exemplified by the questionable pursuit of standardized testing policies. Successfully adhering to the “and Beyond” in the title, the authors primarily use Namibian contexts as case studies to engage with broader philosophical discussions about democracy, justice, and educational praxis.

Half of this edited volume’s ten chapters are written by Amukugo, while the remaining five are by other contributors. In addition to brief introduction and conclusion chapters, Amukugo’s contributions review diverse approaches to “Democracy,” “Education,” and set the scene of “Namibia.” Chapter 2 surveys some philosophical approaches to social justice from the materialist, idealist, pragmatist, and feminist traditions. It reviews thinkers such as Plato, Amartya Sen, John Dewey, and Immanuel Kant.

Amukugo encourages readers to take seriously Claude Ake’s critiques of liberal democracy, especially in the context of Africa.

Chapter 4 reviews “conceptual issues in education”. It launches from Nyerere’s provocative critique of normative schooling and his calls to design intentional and locally-responsive institutions. Amukugo summarizes some major theories of schooling and relays the longstanding debate between education-as-reproduction and education for transformation. Amukugo draws on T.T. Moyana to advocate for critically transformative education which would be incubated in schools and radiate out into wider society.

Amukugo’s final chapter — as mentioned above — reviews some of the major developments in Namibian schooling since 1990. She traces how SWAPO’s liberatory rhetoric faltered under a political economy of liberal capitalism and positivist schooling. She also describes the higher education landscape in Namibia and the context from which UNAM and NUST emerged. Finally, she criticizes the Harambee Prosperity Plan for the ways it de-links “vocational” education from “regular” education. She questions whether an integrated approach could ever be realized within the constraints of capitalist liberal democracy, which in her assessment, “not only breeds inequities but is also the very cause of ‘fragmentation’ problems within the education system” (p. 81).

The remaining five chapters take on major themes within the philosophy of education (schooling and authori-
tarianism, decolonial futures, human rights, inclusion, and feminist insights) but are grounded in Namibian context. Chapter 3—penned by the late Pempelani Mufune—argues that schooling and democracy are not inherently linked. He points to the simple fact that classrooms themselves are often authoritarian spaces—the teacher or principal (or the standardized test) control what is taught, when it is taught, and the quality of learning. If school was really a democratic institution, there would be more ways for children to control their own learning. Schools may extol the value of democratic systems; however, until democratic practice is implemented, schooling will continue to contribute to Namibia’s “elitist democracy” which practices electoral politics and has a mostly free press, but in which citizens often cannot meaningfully participate in or revise power structures.

In Chapter 5 Tangeni Iijambo deploys a postcolonial critique of schooling in Namibia. Drawing heavily from Dahl’s conceptualization of cultural values, he recommends emphasis on school localization and democratic classrooms. Iijambo is especially critical of structural adjustment programs which—while less disastrous in Namibia—have defunded and westernized schooling across Africa. He powerfully argues for a more intense decolonization of schooling and use of African knowledge traditions to build on knowledge systems from elsewhere. He highlights the importance of African universities in creating multidirectional knowledge flows, disrupting the North-to-South export model which continues to thrive long after so-called decolonization.

In Chapter 7 John Makala Lilemba continues to build on the contradiction between schools’ democratic rhetoric and authoritarian practice using the lens of human rights. More than most contributors, Lilemba focuses on specific policy and curriculum interventions to better align schools and pre-service teacher training within a human rights framework. He explores how a generally Afrocentric understanding of rights can be infused throughout the school day: in history class, learners would study human rights violations of slavery and colonialism, in geography the right to a healthy local ecosystem, etc. The following chapter by Brown and Haihambo on inclusivity, especially in the context of disability, also provides tangible policy recommendations. After describing the history of “special schools” in Namibia, they argue that it cannot be claimed that there is ‘education for all’ until learners with disabilities have equitable opportunities in school. For the authors, inclusivity is absolutely central to democracy. They ask for more pre-service coursework on inclusivity and implore schooling officials to consider the benefits of mainstreaming, rather than segregating learners with disabilities in self-contained zones.

The final contribution—Chapter 10—is the only empirically grounded study in this volume. Lucy Edwards-Jauch and Ndeshi Namupala adopt feminist action methodologies to investigate the experiences of young women at UNAM with sexual harassment. Interviews with the young women establish that sexual
harassment is widespread on campus. One particularly visceral example is the description of “sexually transmitted marks”, a negotiation between the women and male lecturers who hold power over coursework assessment. While the authors acknowledge that the young women do have some agency in the negotiation, they remind us that patriarchy is a structural and systemic institution of power which creates an inherently uneven social terrain. The chapter also links gender-based struggles to the wider democratic imperative; when women are terrorized in our public forums, their participation in social democracy is inhibited, which helps maintain exclusionary power structures.

While each of the chapters will undoubtedly prompt interesting and important discussions in university classrooms, many intellectual traditions have been left out. Amukugo readily acknowledges this, and certainly no book can do everything. Yet, the brevity of this volume (notwithstanding bibliographic records, the book barely clocks in over 100 pages) begs for more sustained attention to critical and radical thought.

The book often has a slippery equivalence between “education”, “learning”, and “school”. Thinkers from many intellectual traditions such as libertarian, indigenous, and Afrotcentric have questioned these equivalencies. However, Democracy and Education focuses entirely on formal schooling systems. All educational and democratic practices in Namibia which might occur outside the school gates are set aside. I worry that this may implicitly reaffirm school as having a legitimate monopoly on learning, which is certainly a contested position in African and indigenous education foundations. The volume is subtitled “A Critical Appraisal” – and it is indeed critical of schooling – but an even more critical approach might have worked to also decenter formal schooling systems in the

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432-443.
analysis. Attention to this issue might have forced the volume to pay more attention to differentiation of access to and interest in schooling in Namibia. While impressive test scores in Owambo are explored at some length, the lackluster rates of school participation in northern Kunene and among some San communities is almost totally ignored. This, despite a plethora of research — perhaps in some cases fetishizing — San alternative schooling. The role of NGO programs in San schools (and elsewhere in the country) surely has implications for state democracy and sovereignty. Additionally, with the notable exception of Edwards-Jauch and Namupala’s chapter, the book lacks empirical fieldwork. Ethnographic research would certainly help the volume go further in exploring the surprising and contradictory ways that the philosophical themes play out in the everyday (for example, ethnography would give a more nuanced picture of the contradiction between authoritarian action and democratic rhetoric in the classroom).

While these additions might have enhanced this volume, my critiques do not subtract from what is actually in the text. This book should be adopted for pre-service teacher training as it will undoubtedly prompt important reflection on the limits of schooling within a capitalist political economy. The authors are not trotting out old tropes about school as a site of unbounded opportunity, but rather critically examine the promissory narratives that so often arise out of such development-speak. Amukugo and her colleagues have created an important set of "appraisals" which should be read by anyone interested in Namibian schooling systems — whether they are scholar or practitioner.

Jacob Henry
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa