A SCHOLAR-PRACTITIONER CONSTRUCT IN TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION: SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

Charles L. Lowery  
Ohio University  
Email: loweryc@ohio.edu

Tosin Akinola  
Ohio University  
Email: ta194409@ohio.edu

ABSTRACT
The issues of social justice are ubiquitous phenomena. They cut across a wide range of disciplines, national life, and social markers, and impact differentially on people from different walks of life depending on creed, race, education, social status, and geographical location. Social justice in education within the Nigerian educational system is an area that represents a gap in the research literature when compared with studies conducted that focus on the American educational system. The framing of these issues in America has evolved through various paradigms and currently revolves round school improvement, democratic community, and social justice. Therefore, this inquiry seeks to explore the existence and nature of social justice issues within potential U.S.-Nigerian transnational educational partnerships. As such, we utilize a scholar-practitioner framework as a critical lens to examine and offer notions of interdisciplinarity and integration relating to the complexities of the Nigerian educational system and asymmetrical relationships and tensions within. In detail, it aims to examine how scholar-practitioners as transnational educators frame the critical issues of social injustice within the educational system in regards to democratic learning, equity, and care.

Key words: Democratic community; Interdisciplinarity; Scholar-practitioner; School improvement; Social justice; Transnational education

Transnational Issues of Justice
The issues of social justice are ubiquitous phenomena. They cut across a wide range of disciplines, national life, and social markers, and impact differentially on people from different walks of life depending on creed, race, education, social status and geographical location. Magashi (2015) speaks to the socio-political crossroads at which Nigeria finds itself, stating,

The promises of democratization have heightened individual hopes for a better life and overall social development; however illiteracy is on the rise, population is increasing, poverty is deepening, unemployment is pervasive, and the corresponding socioeconomic crises are plunging the country into a quagmire (p. 66).

Magashi goes on to note that the right to education has been “a key issue reflecting years of neglect in Nigeria today” (p. 66). As well, in 21st century Nigeria, the problems of north-south division and conflict, educational disparities, ethno-linguistic differences and diverse religion created during the
colonial periods (Anyawu, 2011) remain critical concerns. These colonial problems have been compounded in the last 55 years of Nigeria’s independence by policy inconsistency, an unqualified teaching force, an acute shortage of infrastructure and facilities, disparity in educational standards and learning achievements, gender issues, socio-cultural beliefs and practices, political instability, violent conflicts (regional, ethnic, religious), official corruption, mismanagement of resources, politicization of education, lack of seasoned educational administrators, and policy implementation gaps (Adedokun, 2011; Anugwom, 2009; Abimbola, 2013; Akpa, Udoh, & Fagbamiye, 2005). In addition, Ikediugwu (2014) suggests that the most current of the problems facing the Nigerian educational system is that of terrorism, specifically, Boko Haram, with kidnappings and rape, secret cult activities, and the general absence of peace (Loimeier, 2012). Despite all the problems and challenges plaguing the Nigerian educational system, the situation has not been overshadowed by despair.

Specific to our work herein are the potential transnational relationships between Nigerian educational systems and those of the U.S. Social justice in education within the Nigerian educational system is an area that remains a topic in need of exploration through research when compared with studies conducted that focus on the American educational system. The framing of these issues in America has evolved through various paradigms and currently revolves around school improvement, democratic community, and social justice. Therefore, this inquiry seeks to explore the existence and nature of social justice issues within the Nigerian educational system. How the scholar-practitioner concept or model connects theory-to-practice within the complex societal structures of transnational learning spaces to address issues and challenges in the everyday world of an educational leader is the purpose of this paper.

The Scholar-Practitioner Lens

Scholar-practitioner educational leaders blend the pragmatic motives of the professional realm with the theoretic and scholarly knowledge of academics to name, frame, and solve problems of practice (Shulman, 2005, p. 52). The concept accepts a meaningful interplay between these two words, the scholarly and practical. An analysis of the terms through deconstruction will open a path to a theoretical understanding of the concept frame (Hampton, 2010, p. 186). Scholarship as the work of a scholar is knowledge and wisdom gained and acquired through the scientific study of educational issues and theories. It is the theorizing of answers to the why’s, what’s, and how’s of education to provide knowledge for better understanding and future change (p. 186). The practice is the physical application of knowledge, action in the performance of professional duties. The terms in scholar-practitioner no longer function individually but interdependently, reflecting a deep, interdependent relationship between leadership theory and leadership practice (p. 186).

The scholar-practitioner educational leader employs the practical and applied theories as tools for change because they understand the importance of equity and social justice. As such, the concept of the scholar-practitioner is a paradigm of transformational change that cannot be effectively accomplished through the work of the scholar or the work of the practitioner in isolation (Hampton, 2010, p. 185-186). The combination of strategies and knowledge gained through meticulous academic endeavors with experiences and knowledge inherent to membership in their craft create a basis for effective change-centered practices (Bouck, 2011, p. 203).
Gautam (n.d.) draws from Jenlink (2006), explaining the work of the scholar–practitioner through the metaphor of bricolage. Gautam stated,

‘Bricolage’ as a dynamic conceptual model . . . appears as a product of the theoretical discussion on scholar-practitioner leadership. Bricolage provides a conceptual framework to advance this article. Scholar-Practitioner leadership appeared as a bolstering of democratic practice for/in education and leadership (in press).

This bricolage not only refers to the array of methodological approaches the scholar–practitioner leader embraces for inquiry and conceptual frameworking, but also to the provinces of the leader’s integrated way of recognizing the various social elements that relate directly and indirectly to educational leadership in the educational environment. As well, the realms of scholarship and practitionership create a bricolage of thinking and doing. Gautam (n.d.) created a diagram to speak to the dynamic continuum of the scholar-practitioner educational leader (Figure 1).

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**Figure 1. Gautam’s Scholar-Practitioner Dynamics: A Transformative and Dynamic Model of Educational Leadership**

We expand on Gautam’s work to suggest the inclusion and integration of a transnational component that will complement democracy, cultural awareness, care, and social justice. As Gautam (n.d.) has stated,

Leadership demands of the 21st century are complex. What type of leadership development program best prepares the future educational leaders is a valid question. There remains a divide...
between theory and practice. . . . Bridging scholars and practitioners can be a solution. . . .

[S]cholar-practitioner leaders would be able to bridge the gap for an undivided educational leadership world (in press).

By operationalizing the scholar-practitioner within the school and society of transnational spaces we see a need for innovative interactions in “a complex web of relationships among knowledge, inquiry, practice and learning” (Jenlink, 2006, p. 60). The scholar-practitioner educational leader focuses on creating a democratic school as a place for learning and a democratic society as a space for democratic action and advocacy. These spaces/places, in a transnational sense, without borders, exemplify a need for an extended and imaginative set of values of social justice, diversity, equity, and care as an integrated work to promote equality for each learner (Hampton, 2010, p. 186).

Internationality and Interdisciplinarity

As such, we utilize a scholar-practitioner framework as a critical lens to examine and unpack issues of interdisciplinarity and integration relating to the complexities of the Nigerian educational system and the asymmetrical relationships and tensions within. In detail, it aims to examine how educators and educational leaders frame the critical issues of social injustice within the educational system regarding democratic learning, equity, and care. One possible means of doing this is creating programs and projects that embrace interdisciplinarity as a means of engaging multiple provinces and layers of the educational systems in each nation.

A precise definition of interdisciplinarity is contested and debatable (Ralston, 2011). The notions of interdisciplinarity vary from institution to institution and from one educational level to the next (Boix-Mansilla, Miller, & Gardner, 2000; Klein, 2006). Klein (2006) noted, “Many interdisciplinary curricula developed at elementary- and middle-schools levels . . . are actually ‘pre-disciplinary’ since they are organized around common-sense themes that draw little on disciplinary ways of knowing” (p. 12). However, Klein (2004) provided a broadly accepted definition as “breadth and general knowledge, integration, and synthesis” (p. 2).

Interdisciplinarity has been concomitant with the notions of complexity (Klein, 2006). As Klein (2006) has stated, “ Complexity and interdisciplinarity are linked in a wide range of practices from literary studies, physics, and biology to education, public policy, and environmental studies” (p. 2). Likewise, interdisciplinarity is characteristically “linked closely in schools with the concepts of ‘integrated’ and ‘integrative’ approaches” (p. 12).

Hammond and McCallum (2009) emphasized the notion of interdisciplinarity “within the broader field of subject integration” and recognized that proponents often engage in “research and practice to argue that interdisciplinary approaches provide opportunities for learning to connect to big issues and real life questions” (p. 51). Hammond and McCallum explored interdisciplinarity as a means to bridging the divide between the university and the field, and therefore bridging any perceived gap between scholarship and practice. Specifically, Hammond and McCallum stated, “The relationship between the organization of knowledge and pedagogy and their connection with student’s life worlds is a challenge assumed. . . .”
For this reason, educators must embrace “a range of sophisticated capabilities and skills if they are to design curriculum utilizing both disciplinary and interdisciplin ary ways of knowing” (p. 51). Ultimately, Ralston (2011) provided a more comprehensive overview, an interdisciplinary approach generally aims (1) to bridge between academic disciplines, subdisciplines or schools of thought; (2) to recruit a wide range of teachers, students, researchers, professionals and even technologies in order to gain a more complete perspective; (3) to assemble tools or approaches from multiple disciplines in order to resolve an especially challenging problem; and (4) to cross traditional academic boundaries for the purpose of improved research or teaching (p. 309).

Transnational leadership and learning, and by extension all “borderless” educational settings, presents itself as a critical area of significance for interdisciplinarity. We propose a scholarly practice that will not only integrate an interdisciplinarity of education but one that creates spaces of multiple relationship possibilities. We conceive of collaborative potentialities between universities and colleges with P12 schools for continuity of experience, and also partnerships that break down dichotomies between disciplines and cross political and geographical boundaries.

In this paper we argue that transnational educational and learning as a type of scholarly practice requires an integrated interdisciplinarity, blurring epistemologically defined boundaries and crossing politically determined borders. For innovative partnerships to form between educational leaders in complex systems such as Nigerian and U.S. learning environments, stakeholders must break the barriers between scholars and practitioners to generate academic projects and professional development from diverse perspectives that will foster programs and projects that integrate their expertise in the analysis of theoretical-pragmatic analysis and problem solving. As well, we propose a contemplation of practical ways to integrate theory into real-world and real-life concerns for learners and educators in the transnational space we envision. Concomitantly, we encourage research and scholarly endeavors that investigate ways to inform transnational program design in school-university partnerships in and between the U.S. and Nigerian systems, and aim to gain a deeper perspective into crossing transnational boundaries in program development that enhances a democratic experience for learners and leaders in schools and universities in both nations.

Creating Democratic Community and Space

For the purpose of this paper, we shall explore the everyday connections between theory and practice for an educational leader through the “democratic perspective” lens. The use of the democratic perspective is based on an understanding that no other perspective frames can feasibly allow a scholar-practitioner, an educational leader, to fully operationalize or perform change in injustice, inequality, and acceptance (Bouck, 2011, p. 205; Hampton, 2010, p. 186). The nature of education is in itself democratic, as educational leaders serve as stewards of democracy in education by always being mindful of the concept of the democracy of education (Lowery, 2013, p. 222). The democratic perspective is, therefore, the new center (Furman & Starratt, 2002, p. 105) through and upon which scholar-practitioner and educational leaders’ praxis can thrive.
For true social change to occur it must be democratic (Hampton, 2010). Academic tenets of democratic theory are premised on a notion of an abstract democracy in which all individuals have the right to an equal voice in the decision of a society (Anderson, 2008). Scholars through various forms of inquiry explore the depths, principles, and foundations of education that inform teaching methods, based on the needs of the society and school. Scholars work within the assumption that the American democratic values centers on providing opportunity for all—a system of purported democracy that in reality marginalized and oppressed those outside the dominant class (Bouck, 2011, p. 202).

The practitioner focuses on the actual implementation of the democratic system, an ideal system that pragmatically involves voting, participatory engagement, hierarchical and transactional forms of leadership, and consensus by majority rule (Hampton, 2010, p. 187). Practitioners also focus on policies that benefit the greatest good and the greatest number. Through various forms of academic endeavors—e.g. research, conceptual or theoretical development, philosophy, and criticality—the scholar attempts that work to reveal or find trends or certain paradigms in human interaction. Likewise the scholar-practitioner works with the cyclical interrelation of these two provinces to create a movement toward the “unnmasking of inhumane social and cultural conditions beneath the surface of a self-proclaimed democracy” (Eichelberger, 1999, p. 3). Blending the two concepts in a democratic system brings about a potential collaborative space conducive to true transformation, a transformation born out of theory developed through scholarly work and “inside” knowledge gained through practice (Bouck, 2011, p. 203). As a member of both cultures, the practitioner–scholar/scholar–practitioner is able to translate and create meaning between the two cultures, that of the ivory tower and the ebony field. Through appreciation of the norms, appropriate behaviors, methods, and values embodied in both (Sorensen, 2004, p. 160), the scholar-practitioner is enabled to take up many forms in a bricolage of methods used to interact in the complex web of relationships among knowledge, inquiry, practice, and learning (Jenlink, 2006, p. 60). This requires developing a critical lens to problematize, identify, and question asymmetrical relations in societal and transnational relations to advocate and achieve social change.

Jenlink (2006) described the essentiality of a scholar-practitioner’s criticality of educational systems and practices towards social change as follows:

A critical leadership praxis is used to uncover the subtleties of oppression embedded within the cultural reproduction of society, most often associated with the public school as an often non-critical instrument of society whose function is to prepare the next generation. A critical leadership praxis is also concerned with inequity and injustice that surface within the curricula and instructional systems of schools, as well as asymmetrical power relations that all too shape student and teacher identities along ideological lines that work to control and disadvantage some while advantaging others (p. 59).

As well, Jenlink (2006) posits, “Criticality shapes the leadership praxis, bringing into play a critical philosophical and theoretical lens, thus shaping leaders’ action in the context of their practice” (p. 12). The scholar-practitioner educational leader’s practice, therefore, hinges on creating a viable interplay within any educational organization, including those involving transnational relationships, an interplay
that is capable of exposing inequities and ensuring the just treatment of all sides. From a scholar-practitioner standpoint in everyday context, the theoretical-applied work within a democratic system with static realities is a work constantly in transformation (Freire, 1993, p. 83). Hence, the potential of one side to take on an oppressive nature in relation to the other in every transnational endeavor creates a need for ongoing educational transformation through transformative leadership. The scholar-practitioner educational leader, on a daily basis, must be open to becoming whatever the specific learning environment needs. This includes encouraging opportunities, fostering new experiences, entertaining the thoughts and opinions of others, energizing and motivating the tired and downtrodden, and empowering those perceived or labeled as powerless (Lowery, 2013, p. 222-223).

A metaphor for the creation of democratic community and space can be seen in the interview of one Nigerian soldier fighting against Boko Haram. The interview of the ranger occurs in what could best described as the portico of what was once the departure lounge of the Maiduguri airport before Boko Haram captured the town. The airport has now been converted into the serving supply and de facto staging point of the Nigerian army and the entryway serves as something of a commons area (Vice News, 2015).

The private in the interview voiced that Boko Haram “have been killing the innocent so people are running away from their homes, making them homeless. Those that are in school, they make them run away from school. There’s no business anymore” (Vice News, 2015). He went on to explain,

When Boko Haram started, they were like, burning churches, so people thought they were Muslims. Who are these people? They fight the Christians, they fight the Muslims. So nobody knows about them. We believe they are just, they are devils. They are not Christian. To me they are not Muslim (Vice News, 2015).

When the interviewer inquired about the Muslim-Christian solidarity of his unit, the private replied,

We love each other. The Muslims pray, the Christians sit around and watch them as buddy-buddy. No problem. The Muslims and the Christians, we are all good. We are friends, brothers. We pray together. The Muslims go to mosque [pointing to one area of the portico], the Christians go to church [pointing to another space of the portico]. We pray, finish, we come back [here], no separate. Everybody’s fine. No problem (Vice News, 2015).

The conversion of this space to one of not only preparation and planning but of community and camaraderie, of brotherhood that crosses religious boundaries and unifies differences for a common good, expresses well the work of the scholar-practitioner educational leader. The metaphor is one that speaks to the work of the scholarship and practice coming together to create democratic spaces—to renovate spaces with prior purposes for new community aims—and, moreover, to create spaces in which the aim is to counter injustices with a transformational leadership.
Countering Injustice through Transformational Leadership

A scholar-practionership grounded in social justice, equity, care, and democratic education offers the possibilities of a new and alternative educative narrative. This narrative is one that embraces Critical Theory, constantly challenging itself and rewriting itself based on community needs and democratic progress. In that space, it strives to promote and maintain that no one is privileged. Class, gender, and religion are realities that must be ceaselessly and equitably questioned and respected. Social constructs that define the dichotomies of north vs. south, Muslim vs. Christian, urban vs. rural are topics and targets of critical pedagogy, reflective practice, and multiple methods of inquiry. Cultivation of peaceful partnerships that value and validate one another's political ideologies and cultural world views are necessary in all transnational relations, especially relations that involve diverse populations such as those found in Nigeria and the U.S.

Only by a fully integrated and democratic method of education and learning can efforts fully evade the dominance of corporate and neoliberal globalization often couched in contract agreements and memoranda of understanding between local and global entities and stakeholders. In places where Western education is considered forbidden or sacrilegious, education and learning should remain void of the commercial and de-democratizing models that are so commonly accepted in the Western world. Authentic consideration must be given to inquiry and practice that challenge capitalism and favor collective and participatory consciousness. In its place we advocate a mindset of integration, cultivation, collaboration, development, and participatory problem solving.

Integration. As Capra (1997) well articulated, “The more we study the major problems of our time, the more we come to realize that they cannot be understood in isolation” (p. 3). Scholar-practitionership is about eliminating “the concepts of an outdated worldview” (p. 4), and instead seeking to create alternative spaces for learning and spaces of democratic opportunity and solutions. That is, it is about choices. Leaders and learners have a choice. They can choose to allow governments, which can become corrupted and oppressive, to legislate regulations and legitimate administrative practices. Or they can embrace an integration of the provinces of scholarship and practice and in doing so advocate praxis of learning for social justice and change agency.

In this model, those of the Ivory Towers adopt a willingness to get their hands dirty in the Ebony Fields, and those toiling in the Ebony Fields acknowledge the value of critical inquiry and reflective practice. This integration in and of itself is a form of interdisciplinarity; however, it also implies a contemplation of the impact of educational leadership on all colleges of thought and a respect and recognition for indigenous and divergent ways of knowing and understanding the world. By extension, this includes not only various and varied methods of curricular design and program development but also an assorted array of assessment measures to collect meaningful data and evaluate programs and learning appropriately.

Cultivation. Cultivation is one of the major ways scholar-practitioner educational leaders face the daily challenge of leading for social justice. Cultivation is focused on creating an environment that supports participation, sharing of ideas, and encourages the virtues of honesty, openness, and compassion (Starratt, 2001, p. 338). According to Hampton (2010), cultivation promotes commitment to a common
goal ensuring that all voices are heard and respected through the creation of an equitable environment that not only discusses the need to include all stakeholders, but ensures this desire through inclusionary action.

According to the work of Barlow and Stone (2011), there must be an emphasis on the significance of “cultivating networks of relationships and communications” (p. 17). They suggest a collaborative culture of scholars, practitioners, and individuals that identify at various places along the continuum between that will engage in testing the efficacy of systemic change in a large institutional setting [such as with transnational relations between universities and communities], undertaking reform at multiple levels of scale, disturbing the system in disparate ways while cultivating networks of relationship, trust, and communication that allow for the emergence of new patterns of sustainable practice (p. 27).

**Collaborative culture.** For us, the cultivation of a collaborative culture is connected to the transformational leadership of the scholar-practitioner. The daily interactions of the transformational scholar-practitioner education leader involve creating time for joint planning with stakeholders, and facilitating agreement about objectives, strategies and common goals (Leithwood, 1992; Givens, 2008). Discussions, deliberations, and critique are encouraged to allow completeness of opinions and views for the purpose of inclusive participation. According to Nguni, Sleegers and Denessen (2006), transformational leadership promotes an atmosphere where organizational commitment and extra effort for change thrive. A study by Balyer (2012) supports the notion that a scholar-practitioner transformational educational leader promotes a collaborative learning environment through democratic behaviors.

**Fostering development.** According to Moolenaar et al. (2010), transformational leadership is positively associated with cultivating an innovative climate in educative settings. It motivates stakeholders to do more than they are expected in terms of extra effort and greater productivity. Jones, Felps, and Bigley (2007) posited that a transformational leader influences educator commitment and performance positively. Again, Balyer (2012) found that educational leaders were considered good and effective when they created peaceful atmospheres, considered the needs of others before their own, and provided desired resources. Such leaders held high standards and articulated those standards and, equally, celebrated success in various ways.

**Participatory problem solving.** Educational leaders are engaged with educators and stakeholders on an everyday basis. This includes actively seeking different interpretations of problems while being explicit about their own interpretation (Leithwood, 1992). Further, they engage the group in discussions of alternative solutions, ensure open discussions, and avoid commitment to already preconceived solutions by actively listening to different views (Leithwood, 1992). Balyer (2012) acknowledged the daily role of educational leaders in fostering teamwork in solving problems. He found that educational leaders had a vision for others working in teams; organized gatherings that brought people closer; treated others as special people; were thought of as considerate, caring, and fair; made others feel valued; and were supportive of new methods and ways of doing in the learning environment.

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Conclusion

Again turning to Capra’s (1996) words, the failure of leaders to “see how different problems are interrelated” and their refusal to “recognize how their so-called solutions affect future generations” is a major contributing factor to the trend of universities and other learning organizations adopting strong corporate and capitalist models. Numbers and the bottom line have taken a place at the forefront of concerns over quality of learning, critical thought, and the development of the learner as an agent of change. Globalization has created a need to keep a critical lens turned on transnational agreements and relationships as well. Too often foreign soil is coveted for its natural resources in and on the ground, instead of acknowledging its populations for their potential to build human capital capable of defining their own ways of knowing and able to develop to own forms of solution. Transnational relationships developing between the U.S. and Nigeria need to be founded on participatory partnerships, not on establishing an overshadowing Western presence.

Allowing for a practice-driven scholarship and an informed practice to create spaces of diversity and democracy, varying groups and interests, both national and transnational, can engage in efforts of integration, cultivation, collaboration, development, and problem solving. These creative spaces are open and repurposed porticos where floor space serves as mosque and church, and the warriors who pray there, while they pray apart, can come together as a unit to think and talk, to plan and prepare, and to support one another as citizens standing against the brutality that occurs at their periphery.

Much of the injustice and terrorism that thwart effective education, mentioned at the beginning of this paper, such as that led by Boko Haram, must be examined from interdisciplinary perspectives. Additionally, efforts must be made to recognize the integrated way in which the networks and layers of problems and concerns connect and create these environments. Through the integrated—and by extension interdisciplinary—endeavors of scholarly practice, new paradigms can emerge that not only offset the social injustices in the learning environment but also offer a counter narrative to the dominant image of Western education that in the minds of many is both forbidden and sacrilegious. This hints at transnational spaces that accept new narratives to counter the old, outdated ones that have lead to conflict and concern in the world.

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(Email: jeanfran@ohio.edu)