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Africanisation of education and the search for relevance and context

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As the 21st century dawned, some African intellectuals were already contemplating an education system based on African philosophy and African values. These intellectuals were motioning for an education system that would uphold the indigenous knowledge systems (Makgoba, 1996; Seepe, 2004; Higgs and Van Wyk, 2007). This group also contends that through education, African societies will be enhanced if education reflects the local indigenous knowledge systems. Other critics though, believe that africanising education institutions, will not only lower standards, but that it will also be incongruent to globalisation as indigenous knowledge systems will not be compatible with modernisation. The article comprises of a literature study focusing on the challenges arising as a result of several stakeholders, whose proposals include the africanisation of knowledge in formal education institutions in Africa. The article also examines whether formal (africanised) education has the potential to democratise and transform society. As South Africa is gradually changing socially and politically, many see education as a vehicle for improving the political, social and economic landscape.

Key words: Africanisation, African renaissance, African philosophy, indigenous, indigenous knowledge systems (IKS).

A RATIONALE BEHIND AN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

The incipient attainment of educational transformation in South Africa was realised in earnest in the early 1990s; when social and political transformation was evidently irreversible. During the mid-1980s, meaningful debates continued discussions that had started years before, calling for an effective education system that would displace apartheid education. A formation called the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC) was suggesting people's Education a legitimate system that could replace apartheid education. The latter (people's Education), is not discussed in this article. People's Education never became blue print but it was clearly a system that was meant to be formulated by the people and it laid foundation of future education in South Africa. Later on in the 1990s, suggestions surfaced; calling for possible incorporation of an African philosophy or philosophies in education. The current system of education referred to as the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) in South Africa is not a purely africanised version of education. There is a constant mention of inclusion of indigenous system though, which alludes to the acceptance of African philosophy. Ramose (2004) argues about the desirability

and significance of an African philosophy when he avers:

...for at least three centuries since the conquest of the indigenous people in the unjust wars of colonisation the education curriculum in South Africa did not include African philosophy. For the colonial conqueror and the successor in title thereto the indigenous conquered peoples had neither an epistemology nor a philosophy worth including in any educational curriculum.

Bantu education system for black South Africans had been a means of restricting the development of the learners by distorting school knowledge and to ensure control over the intellect of the learners and teachers, and propagating state propaganda (Kallaway, 1988). Black South Africans were contained in a permanent state of political and economic subordination. As early as the 18th century the coloniser was intent on dispossessing the blacks of anything African. Christie (1988) cites Rose and Tunmer who quote George Grey, Governor of the Cape who once said to the British Parliament:

If we leave the natives beyond our border ignorant barba-

rians, they will remain a race of troublesome marauders. **We should try to make them a part of ourselves, with a common faith and common interests, useful servants, consumers of our goods, contributors to our revenue.** Therefore, I propose that we make unremitted efforts to raise the natives in Christianity and civilization, by establishing among them missions connected with industrial schools.

The native races beyond our boundary, influenced by our missionaries, instructed in our schools, benefiting by our trade, would not make wars on our frontiers. [My emphasis (Christie, 1988)].

The Calvinist apartheid education, as reflected above was to continue from this premise. Calvinist education yearned to lead the child, who has a sinful nature to God via a Christian life. In this sort of education, the learners had to obey their teachers, their parents and all others with authority over them, but only "In the Lord." Therefore, what appeared to stand out in this philosophy was that childhood was seen in a negative light and that was as a "not-something" or an "unsomething" (Gluckman, 1981). Ramose (2004) highlights that the so-called civilising and Christianising mission was predicated on a premise comprising the fallacy that precluded the need to consider the inclusion of African philosophy in educational curriculum. For many centuries Africa was invisible; almost a pariah in Western formal education. It is for the latter reason that Ramose (2004) points out that much more literally than metaphorically, educational institutions in South Africa "discovered Africa in 1994"; the year of liberation.

This article explores arguments pertaining to Africanisation of education in South Africa. Focusing on various intellectuals' views, the article investigates whether Africanisation is congruent with democratic and transformation's ideals. Secondly, the article would explore whether an africanised system can be practical and meaningful to the learner. Finally, one is also interested in investigating whether the system of education in South Africa; the NCS is amenable to africanisation of education. There have been several debates for Africanisation and the use of indigenous knowledge systems. Seepe (2004) argues that a radical restructuring of education in Africa which makes education relevant to African challenges can hardly be complete without a serious consideration of indigenous knowledge systems.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Some of the key terms used in this article are construed differently by many people. For the purposes of this article though, the following definitions will be acceptable.

Africanisation of education

Van Heerden (1997) states that africanisation of education is often used in relation to educational reform and in

the sense of bringing African culture into formal schooling. Urch (1968) supports these when he states that Africanisation is a regeneration of that which was good and respected in African culture, "a rejection of sub-servience to foreign masters and the assertion of the rights and interests of the African".

African renaissance

According to Makgoba et al, (1999) African Renaissance is a unique opportunity for Africans to define themselves and their agenda according to their realities and taking into account the realities of the world around them. Furthermore, it is about Africans being agents of their own history and masters of their destiny.

Indigenous

Hoppers (2001) define the term as referring to the root of things; as something that is natural and inborn to a specific context or culture.

Indigenous knowledge systems

Bitzer and Menkveld (2004) define IKS as a combination of knowledge systems encompassing technology, philosophy, social, economic, learning/educational, legal and government systems. These systems are embedded in the culture and history of a people including their civilisation. Furthermore, they cite Hoppers who states that IKS form the backbone of the social, economic, scientific and technological identity of such people.

African philosophy (of education)

This is a philosophy that is linked to an inquiry that explores the epistemology and experiences of the Africans. Waghid (2004) defines this as simply a philosophy that explores the lives of Africans communities and their situations the same way that an Islamic philosophy of education examines the lived experiences and conditions of Muslim communities.

African renaissance and Africanised education

Higgs and Van Wyk (2007) opine that African Renaissance enhances educational discourse in Africa. Furthermore, they trace the emergence of African Renaissance to numerous attempts to reassert distinctively African ways of thinking and of relating to the world. Higgs and Van Wyk (2007) posit:

The African Renaissance has also taken on much significance in recent years with the call for the recognition of indigenous African knowledge systems by scholars such as Hoppers (2001a, 2001b, 2001c) and Seepe (2001a,

2001b). The inference here is the distorted view that Africans possess little or no indigenous knowledge of value that can be utilised in the process of educational transformation. This same inference also presupposes, as is argued by protagonists of an African Renaissance in educational discourse, that the norm for educational achievement and success for African children and students is that of Western European capitalist elitist culture, where the English language is sacralized, and internationalization of bourgeois European values is seen as the idea of progress.

Makgoba et al, (1999) also define African Renaissance as an important aspect in tracing the roots of the awakening of African values. They aver that the African Renaissance is a unique opportunity for Africans to define themselves and their agenda according to their own realities and taking into account realities of the world around them. "It is about Africans being agents of our own history and masters of our destiny" (Makgoba et al, 1999). The African continent requires encapsulating ways of thinking that uphold African values in various structures of the society. Transforming education in Africa would be truly meaningful if Africans realise the importance of that which belongs to the Continent as they utilise the Western knowledge systems. Wirendu (2004) contends that the task of African philosophy of education should be to master the arts of modern living and that an African system needs to address a combination of a number of pertinent components. Furthermore, he points out that Africans need to involve complex of capabilities drawing on African heritage of indigenous knowledge (Wirendu, 2004). "The call for an African Renaissance in educational discourse, therefore, seeks to demonstrate, how indigenous African knowledge systems can be tapped as a foundational resource for the socio-educational transformation of the African Continent, and also how indigenous knowledge systems can be politically and economically liberating" (Higgs & Van Wyk, 2007).

From the earliest to the current African intellectuals, one can see the values that are embraced by African philosophy of education. For a number of writers the idea of an African philosophy conjures a number of terms such as *ubuntu*, humanism, and communalism (Higgs and van Wyk, 2007; Ramose, 2004 and Hoppers, 2001). Whilst this article would not discuss these terms in depth it is crucial to highlight the importance of some of these with regards to an Africanised education. The importance of the concept of *ubuntu* has become prominent under the democratic dispensation in South Africa. It is rooted in African traditional society and philosophy and it means humanness or the quality of being human. It espouses the ideal of interconnectedness among people. In Africa there was always this belief that one lives for the others.

Mbigi (2000) explains that *ubuntu* literally means, "I am because you are- I can only be a person through others." This is supported by Prinsloo (1998) who cites Chikanda's definition that *ubuntu* is African Humanism that in-

cludes alms-giving, sympathy, care, sensitivity to the needs of others, respect, consideration, patience and kindness. The ideals of the concept need to be stressed to learners, preparing them for the future. Mbigi (1997) points out that the concept is both uniquely African and universal for it is implicitly expressed elsewhere in the world. African Humanism is identified with movements of national independence and with the development of collective African identity. The more political side of African Humanism is also referred to as African socialism (Bell, 2002). Under a different section in this article, propinquity between *ubuntu* and democracy is discussed.

Africanised education has its foundations in African philosophy which largely has to do with African experiences, concerns, aspirations and how Africans construct knowledge (Higgs and Van Wyk, 2007). Furthermore, Van Wyk and Higgs (2004) point out that African philosophy should respond to the problems and human conditions in modern Africa. An analysis of education within an African context has to shed light on how Africans learn and construct knowledge and also has to focus on the underlying beliefs and values that constitute education within an African context (Higgs and van Wyk, 2007).

Communal aspects of African philosophy when infused in education can help create a community of learners who glean from one another in an unselfish manner. Early African intellectuals such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania identified the value of society as an extension of the basic family unit (Bell, 2002). Bell also states that Nyerere maintained that the family to which all people belonged must be extended further, beyond the tribe, and the community to the entire society. The late Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, like Nyerere, believed in African socialism and they coined terms such as consciencism and *villagization* (Bell, 2002). Both terms allude to the idea of a collective. They underscore the need to embrace a broad inclusive society. Gyekye (1998) highlights the importance of communitarianism in African socio-ethical thought. He points it out that there are reflected in social structures of African societies. Communitarianism sees the individual as an inherently communal being and is never isolated atomic individual (Gyekye, 1998).

Some Western and African notions though cannot always be thought of as mutually exclusive. Wirendu (2004) stresses the importance of combining Western and African knowledge systems, especially when this can do the Africans good. The possible coexistence and synergy of African knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems is supported by Le Grange (2004) who concedes that IKS should be treated with caution and that people should avoid blind romanticism of IKS. He avers that cultures tend to be permeable and are constantly influenced by other cultures (Le Grange, 2004). Urch (1998) had also earlier stated there is firstly a need to instil a sense of security, if this happens, Africa could borrow from the West without fear that changes wrought would destroy the African character.

Higgs and Van Wyk (2007) argue that colonial subjugation

tion in Africa ignored indigenous African knowledge systems (hence the African identity), because of an inverted mirror of Western Eurocentric identity. "This state of affairs gave birth to numerous attempts to reassert distinctively African ways of thinking and of relating to the world, and found expression in the call for an African Renaissance" (Higgs and Van Wyk, 2007). This urge for Africans to want to embrace an African Renaissance is a conscious attempt to reclaim an (African) identity. This reclaim can be legitimate only if knowledge generated as well as educational purposes formulated respond to the immediate environment of the Africans. Ekong and Cloete (1997) aver that institutions around the world should be responsive to the changes that are taking place in the society. There is also a belief by some that IKS induced education has a liberating effect. Higgs and Van Wyk (2007) write:

The call for an African renaissance in educational discourse, therefore seeks to demonstrate how indigenous African knowledge systems can be tapped as a foundational resource for the socio-educational transformation of the African continent, and also how indigenous African knowledge system can be politically and economically liberating. This means that by virtue of assuming the 'indigenity of culture', the call for an African Renaissance in educational discourse does not connote a detachment from political radicalization and mobilization.

Clearly, according to Higgs and Van Wyk (2007) above, Africanisation of knowledge has a bearing in a number of aspects in society among which are democracy, attainment of an African identity, political and economic liberation among others. Moreover, some literature as cited above sees a potential of emancipatory function of education in Africanised education system.

Africanisation as emancipatory education

Waghid (2004) captures a number of implications for teaching and learning through the utilisation of African philosophy of education. Furthermore, Waghid posits that an African philosophy of education reveals the potential to promote justice, courage and truthfulness in people. "African philosophy of education aims to contribute to the transformation of educational discourse in Africa, in particular empowering communities to participate in their own educational development" (Waghid, 2004). The idea of communitarianism, *ubuntu* and African Humanism mentioned above attests to this. There is a better chance of working with others rather than stress individualism in education.

According to Robert Sobukwe the founder of the Pan Africanist Congress, education should mean service to Africa and should be a barometer of African thought (Mothlabi, 1980). Bantu Biko, the Black Consciousness leader, concurred with this view when he contended that

education should be geared towards raising the cultural, social, economic and intellectual level of all the country's citizens (Mothlabi, 1980). Both views reflect education as a means of opposing the absolute Eurocentric notions of education. The African indigenous knowledge systems are based on ecological relationships in nature. Mutwa (1997) states that in Western civilization, people live in a world of separatism, where things, which ought to be seen as part of a greater whole, are separated. Yet education needs to reflect the unity between various factors of life.

Indigenous knowledge systems have an opportunity to bring forth an inclusive approach to education. The IKS also have a potential of developing the learners in an "African way" which is much different from the Western forms of education. Bitzer and Menkveld (2004) cite Easton, Nikiema and Essama who highlight three areas, meanings and applications of indigenous knowledge in community development. The first of these is that IKS should be conserved and respected since it represents accumulated wisdom of generations of people living in a particular context; secondly IKS embodies a different distinctly African mode of thought; thirdly, IKS serves as a conduit for articulation of what local people know while involving them in the correction of knowledge required for development.

The implications of the above to schools and classrooms are that IKS will present a system that would meaningfully involving learners in the discovery of their own environment. The latter is crucial for the current education system in South Africa, the NCS, because the NCS also promotes a system where learners are active agents in education. When learners and their teachers create knowledge in their local milieu, this is bound to support lifelong learning. IKS as evident above has more to do with the servicing of the community.

How will africanised education transform society?

The value of *ubuntu* is explained above and it reflects a symbol of community which always recurs in African societies. One hardly talks of IKS, African philosophy and Africanised systems of education without shedding light on community and democracy. Several writers have cited the themes of *ubuntu* and African communalism as crucial when one speaks of commonalities in the African experience of life (Van Wyk and Higgs, 2004; Letseka, 2000). The author has observed various classrooms where educators have been trying to unpack the meaning of *ubuntu* to the learners. The teachers facilitating this wanted the learners to experience the African notion of human dignity (DoE, 2001). This Department of Education (DoE) document also points out that equality might require people to put up with those who are different, but *ubuntu* goes much deeper for it embodies the concept of mutual understanding and active appreciation of the value of human difference (DoE, 2001).

Ubuntu is one of the cornerstones of democracy in an African context as it demands one to live for others. Apartheid education has not enabled learners to experience lessons of real democracy. The system did not create critical individuals free from aspects such as racism and sexism. However, currently conscientious educators empower learners by teaching them to participate in society by respecting human dignity. Letseka (2000) points out that people who embrace *ubuntu* are driven by a humanist concern for treating others with fairness. The latter can lead to unity and democracy. The implications for education can be far reaching as one can expect education to produce learners who are concerned with the welfare of others. *Ubuntu* tends to shed selfishness and egocentrism among learners. Educating for communal life that incorporates the notion of *ubuntu* is crucial to traditional African thought and practice (Van Wyk and Higgs, 2004). Furthermore, Van Wyk and Higgs (2004) like Mutwa (1997) cited above, argue that traditional education in Africa is distinguished by the importance attached to its collective and social nature as well as its intimate tie with social and communal life.

Democratic education's characteristic has been briefly explained already. IKS which is part of the African philosophy ensures that education and training begins with people's life worlds (Hoppers, 2004). Whilst the NCS in South Africa cannot be claimed to be an africanised system yet, one can see it is a system that bears a transformative agenda for it is based on the Constitution of the Republic. The system is meant to transform the society. Africanised education fits well with some of the objectives of this system as it also seeks to address inequalities in society. The NCS spells out clearly what the aims of education should be and it outlines the need to utilise indigenous knowledge systems in schools. The latter has implications not only for the learners but also teacher education the will need to be enhanced and teachers empowered as they learn to incorporate the IKS in their teaching. Acknowledging the existence of IKS means that learners will accept the diversity emphasized by the NCS. The Arts and Culture learning area objectives are clearly spelt out in the policy document:

To deal with the legacy of cultural intolerance and to prepare youth for the future, learners need to experience, understand and affirm the diversity of South African cultures. The effect of past imbalances is that there has been a strong influence by international cultures, and weak development and support of local Arts and Culture. Learners need to recognise the value of their own culture.

These latter views also echo the argument that for many decades the African values have been marginalised by education system in favour of Western values only.

Emeagwali (2007) points out that African indigenous knowledge (AIK) (which have been referred to as IKS in this article) whether institutionalised or not, structured or unstructured has specific implications for democratisation

community empowerment and nation building. The potential of an africanised system largely lies on how the learners are taught:

Learners are encouraged and trained to challenge existing relations of power and domination in terms of a transformative epistemology. Awareness of societal ills at local and global levels preoccupies discourse and the curriculum is viewed as an instrument of empowerment. Consciousness raising and so too the development of social awareness become part of the mission of the curriculum and curriculum planning (Emeagwali, 2007).

It has to be stated that it would be a fallacy to state that the AIK alone will address social needs. However, it is clear from the above statements that the introduction of the AIK systems into schools is just one factor that can address questions such as political participation, economic competitiveness and levels of crime. Furthermore, Emeagwali points out that AIK "has implications for sustainable development, capacity building and intellectual development in African the 21st century" (Emeagwali, 2007).

People need not overstate the potential of education by only introducing IKS. As South African society embraces multicultural, non-racial education, people also need to ensure that other sectors of the community work closely with schools to create an effective society based on democratic ideals. Teachers in multicultural classrooms in South Africa should endeavour to use education as a means of enhancing democracy. Nguru (1995) argues that while many factors may have contributed to the political disintegration, instability and sociological division of African nations as well as lack of democratic citizenship, education may have been instrumental in militating against the existence of thriving democracies.

A broad democratic approach is necessary in education if South African youth were to be brought at the same level with learners around the world. Seepe (2004) points out that South Africa lags behind in mathematics and science and he argues that the challenge facing African scholars is to engage themselves in unraveling the mathematical and scientific skills embedded in indigenous technologies and cultural practice of the African majority. Furthermore, Seepe states, "the utilisation of indigenous technology and African knowledge systems is the key to unlocking the door that has prevented the masses from accessing mathematics, science and engineering".

Research done has also shown that when the learner's community and background are taken into consideration, learning is more likely to be effective (Bude, 1985; McDonough and Wheeler, 1998; Rugh and Bossert 1998). The indigenous knowledge systems not only have a potential for democratic living but also for emancipating the individual. The liberatory aspect of any education system is a key in the transformation of society. Freire (1970) uses various terms such as the following (to refer to meaningful education): liberatory social change, dialogue,

freedom, and transformation. These are some of the terms that can be used to describe what can be expected of an africanised system of education.

Commenting on Freire's pedagogy, Frankenstein (1987) argues Freire's contention is that critical education, involves problem posing in which all those involved are challenged to reconsider and reinvent their prior knowledge. Furthermore, Frankenstein avers that the presentation of this critical education should be seen as an exploration intended to help the people's thinking. Therefore, if curricula based on africanisation are tried, there will be a necessity to redefine education's role in the local environment.

Conclusion

This article opened by focusing on what apartheid education wanted to achieve in South African classrooms. Subsequently, it went on to explore the possibilities in transforming the curriculum. A growing number of African intellectuals is acknowledging that time for the recognition of African traditional knowledge in schools is long overdue. Higgs (2003) points out that African philosophy of education needs to empower communities to participate in their educational development since it respects diversity and acknowledges and challenges the hegemony of Western Eurocentric forms of universal knowledge. African philosophy in African schools has a potential of enhancing the learners and teacher experiences in education institutions as they learn more about the local knowledge. The latter will be a deliberate transformative move as the new system attempts to view education discourse differently from that which characterised apartheid education. The call for the use of IKS is also a move to ensure that people empower themselves by utilizing local knowledge.

In his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire (1970) mentions how local people in Brazilian villages used local knowledge to free themselves from political, economic and social oppression. Real education needs to lead to freedom from this restriction as it frees the individual from psychological bondage.

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