

REAFFIRMING UBUNTU/UNHU MAINSTREAMING IN THE EDUCATION CURRICULA: PANACEA FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL CHANGE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Beatrice Bondai

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Zimbabwe

Thomas Musankuleni Kaputa (PhD)

Department of Disability Studies and Special Needs, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Zimbabwe Open University

ABSTRACT





This theoretical paper reaffirms ubuntu/unhu mainstreaming in the education curricula across the board, that is, from pre-school (ECD) to university level as advocated by diverse researchers, educationists and policy makers. The paper argues among other things that ubuntu/unhu is the foundation of and panacea for sustainable educational change not only in Zimbabwe but in the whole of Southern Africa. The paper reiterates that the epitome of Africanness is only ensured and guaranteed through ubuntu/unhu mainstreaming in the education curricula.

Keywords: Africanness, curricula, educational change, mainstreaming, panacea, ubuntu/unhu.

INTRODUCTION

Holistic or total education which is aimed at the development of the whole person, that is, physically, mentally, spiritually and socially (Nziramasanga Commission, 1999:61), is arguably enshrined in the Ubuntu/Unhu philosophy. Thus, Ubuntu/Unhu philosophy advocates a holistic approach to education in which human character is developed and fine-tuned for sustainable life style (Museka & Madondo, 2012). The Ubuntu/Unhu philosophy is valuable in that it inculcates the spirit of oneness and brotherhood into people (Khomba, 2011). Mandova and Chingombe (2013) maintain that unhu is a social philosophy which embodies virtues that celebrate the mutual social responsibility, mutual assistance, trust, sharing, unselfishness, self-reliance, caring and respect for others among other ethical values. Ramose (1999:52) supports this philosophy when he reiterates that, "We are human through recognizing the humanity of others, and on that basis, establishing human relations with them". In this context humanitarian values are therefore promoted and sustained for the good and benefit of all citizens. Thus, sustainable educational change in Southern Africa is possibly achieved and enhanced when it is founded on the premises of Ubuntu/Unhu philosophy.

It is against this background that this paper explores;

-  the ubuntu/Unhu philosophy in the macro context of Southern Africa
-  among other things the ubuntu/Unhu philosophy as the epitome of Africanness
-  Ubuntu/unhu mainstreaming in education curricula
-  other related issues emerging from the ubuntu/Unhu philosophy.

Finally it makes recommendations to enable the achievement of sustainable educational change in Southern Africa.

Ubuntu/Unhu philosophy in the macro context of Southern Africa

The concept of ubuntu/unhu in Zimbabwe is similar to that of other African cultures (Samkange & Samkange, 1980; Mandova & Chingombe, 2013). Samkange and Samkange (1980) maintain that since there are as many as three hundred linguistic groups with –ntu or a variation in the word for person, all believed to have originated from a single source, it is reasonable to suppose that these groups of the Bantu people by and large share a common concept of ubuntu/unhu. Broodryk (2006:3-4) demonstrates that ubuntu/unhu is present in all the languages of Africa as shown below:

Zulu:	Ubuntu
Shona (Zimbabwe):	(H) unhu
Sesotho:	Botho
Akan (Ghana):	Biakoye
Yoruba:	Ajobi
Shangaan:	Numunhu
Venda:	Vhuntu
Tsonga:	Bunhu
Xhosa (Transkei):	Umuntu
Swahili (Kenya):	Utu
Kiswahili (Tanzania):	Ujamaa
Ugandan:	Abantu
Cape Afrikaans:	Mensligheit
Ngoni, Chewa, Nyanja, Bemba: umunthu (Khomba, 2011)	

Broodryk's (2006) extensive research on ubuntu/unhu in Southern Africa therefore, shows that researchers, educationists and policymakers are not being overambitious when they strongly advocate Ubuntu/unhu mainstreaming in education curricula in Southern Africa. This paper therefore argues that the Ubuntu/Unhu philosophy is indeed a panacea for unity, reconciliation, love and empathy among Africans. These values are important ingredients for educational change in Southern Africa.

The authors however are not oblivious of the fact that there are some ethnic groups and societies in Southern Africa with distinct and unique ways of living. The authors agree with Shizha (2012) that such multicultural settings are healthy as they promote respect for and tolerance towards cultural diversity and an appreciation of cultural diversity without feeling threatened by the culture of the different other. The authors argue that if the Ubuntu/Unhu philosophy is embraced, revered and upheld by macro societies in Southern Africa it subsequently results in educational change so much desired and cherished as its enigmatic and hybrid force and influence permeates all educational, social and political arenas; nurtures and sustains the educational change advocated by researchers, educationists and policy makers.

Ubuntu/unhu - the epitome of Africanness

Samkange and Samkange (1980) extensively wrote about ubuntu/unhu, a philosophy which they strongly believe inspires, permeates and radiates enhanced mental and moral attributes. As indicated earlier, ubuntu/unhu is a social philosophy that embodies virtues that celebrate the mutual social responsibility, mutual assistance, trust, sharing, unselfishness, caring, and respect for others among other ethical values (Mandova & Chingombe, 2013; Samkange & Samkange, 2013; Shizha, 2009; Eze, 2008; Forster, 2007; King & Miller, 2006; Broodryk,

2002; Nziramasanga Commission, 1999). Nziramasanga Commission (1999:62) further reiterates that Ubuntu/unhu is a concept that denotes a good human being, a well behaved and morally upright person characterized by qualities such as responsibility, honesty, justice, trustworthiness, hard work, integrity, a cooperative spirit, solidarity, hospitality, devotion to family and the welfare of the community. Broodryk (2006) notes that Ubuntu/unhu as an ancient philosophy or worldview has its roots deeply anchored in traditional African life. It is the art or quality of being a human being (Murithi, 2006; Bhengu, 1996). Similarly, Mthemba (1996) describes ubuntu/unhu as the key to all African values as it involves humanness, a good disposition towards others and a moral nature. It describes the significance of group solidarity and interdependence in African culture. According to Eze (2008), the core of ubuntu/unhu can best be summarized as follows: *A person is a person through other people*. In Broodryk's (2006) and Shutte's (1993) words this means *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. In Chishona this loosely means *munhu munhu kuburikidza nevamwe vanhu*. This philosophy emphasises the interdependent nature of human beings. It emphasises our interconnectedness as human beings and our inseparability from the world in which we live (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru and Makuvaza, 2014). That is, one's identity as a human being is continuously shaped by other people and our environment. As Samkange and Samkange (1980) note, to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish respectful human relations with others. Chitumba (2013) notes that ubuntu/unhu is a matter of reverence of human nature, the attention one human being gives to another, kindness, consideration and friendliness in relations between people. According to Broodryk (2006), ubuntu/unhu is a communal way of life which deems that society must be run for the sake of all requiring co-operation as well as sharing and charity. Thus, the human individual is inextricably linked to the all-encompassing universe (Mandova & Chingombe, 2013; Khoza, 2012). This undoubtedly ensures sustainability of the society. As a matter of fact, a well-rounded, respectable and respected human being in the African context is the one who is honest, caring, good mannered, regards others, self-disciplined, courageous, tolerant and empathetic (Nziramasanga Commission, 1999). The Nziramasanga Commission (1999) recommends that the school, which is the extension of the home, needs to be devoted to the formation of pupils and students in what it means to have Ubuntu/unhu. It is important to note that the concept 'school' in this regard denotes all educational institutions. This submission brings us to the author's reaffirmation of Ubuntu/unhu mainstreaming in the education curricula in Southern Africa.

Ubuntu/Unhu mainstreaming in the education curricula

Ubuntu/Unhu mainstreaming in education curricula in Southern Africa, is imperative and long overdue as the endeavour has far reaching benefits, especially in as far as realizing sustainable educational change is concerned. Samkange and Samkange (2013) note that ubuntu/Unhu philosophy is used to define 'educatedness' according to the Shona and Ndebele societies. Within the context of this philosophy education should therefore guide people in terms of, for example, what can be said or not said in public, to elders and peers. In this regard, the ubuntu/unhu philosophy sets ethical standards for people's behaviour, conduct, morals, emotions, aspirations, achievements, just to mention a few. The idea being not to oppress or suppress one another but to uphold and promote ubuntu/unhu values which are collective as opposed to individualism. In this regard one's achievements, success, happiness, victory, for instance, are celebrated by the whole society. In the same vein one's loss, failure, pain or ill luck is shared by the whole society as well.

Ubuntu/unhu mainstreaming in the education curricula ensures and guarantees peace, harmony, spirit of brotherhood, togetherness, respect, solidarity, teamwork, unity, reconciliation and hard work among other important values. Museka and Madondo (2012) agree with Broodryk (2006) that these virtues arose from the traditional way of living in Africa which was peaceful and harmonious. In this regard respect was shown not only to other human beings, but also to the communal environment, animals, nature and the supernatural. Broodryk (2006) reiterates that the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood, provides a 'we' feeling which is conducive to cohesiveness and encourages every member of the society, in any country or village, and the workplace to completely identify with the rest of their immediate family/extended family, society or community. It generates a sense of belonging, security and certainty. According to Koka (1996:10), belonging reveals the oneness of people in the saying, "You touch one, you touch all".

Ubuntu/unhu mainstreaming in the education curricula, from early childhood development (ECD) to tertiary institutions, therefore inculcates these invaluable values in Africans and all people in the whole universe. Broodryk (2006) maintains that embracing humanity and humanness is an indication that one has gained vast knowledge of any subject and gaining knowledge is primarily to learn about Ubuntu/unhu and African humanism which is wisdom. Broodryk (2006) further remarks that the biggest lesson Africa can export to the world is how to appreciate these ubuntu/unhu values. Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru and Makuvaza (2014) concur with Broodryk's (2006) remark when they maintain that 'unhu' is not an imported but an indigenous philosophy rooted in the experiences of indigenous Africans that should therefore permeate the epistemological, axiological and ontological underpinnings of Zimbabwean education systems. Arguably, an appropriate epistemology in education should incorporate teaching of skills, translating theory into practice and creating a bridge between school and community. This would make education relevant to life, dignify manual labour and encourage a spirit of self-reliance (Kaputa, 2011). Thus, genuine education fosters ubuntu/unhu values. Curriculum designers, working with all stakeholders of course, therefore have a tall order to ensure that ubuntu/unhu is mainstreamed in the education curricula with the urgency and seriousness it deserves.

Curricula generally specify the main learning content expected to take place during a course or programme of study in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, teaching and assessment methodologies (Marunda, 2015). In the context of this paper, this means that the education curricula should be designed in such a way that Ubuntu/unhu values are inculcated in learners in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, social and work ethics. In some technical subjects like Engineering, Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), mathematics, physics and Chemistry, ubuntu/unhu values and ethos such as diligence, integrity, spirit of oneness and cooperation could be instilled in learners through ubuntu/unhu oriented methodology. It is the authors' contention that if this is done 'religiously', sustainable educational change in Africa and beyond will be realised. It is encouraging to note however, that the localized primary and secondary education curricula have significant and cherished strands of ubuntu/unhu values.

Some of the aims of the localized primary and secondary curricula in Zimbabwe are to:

- ✚ promote, preserve and protect indigenous cultures through the teaching and learning of languages;
- ✚ produce responsible citizens who appropriately participate in family, national and societal activities with the diligence and morality desired; and

- ✚ consolidate skills related to problem-solving, augment cultural identity and foster diversity, national pride and preserve Zimbabwe's heritage and national unity (Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture, 2011).

All this sounds brilliant and insightful as the curricula mirrors the priorities which the country values such as the personal worth of an individual including those with disabilities, the rights of minorities, the ethical and moral values and respect for others and the environment (Marunda, 2015), but the question one may ask is, 'To what extent is all this being realized and emphasised?' The answer to this entire quagmire is commitment to Ubuntu/unhu mainstreaming in the curricula. What is of urgent need is concerted effort by all stakeholders to strategise how to do this. However, Chitumba (2013) notes that on the whole the aims and goals of the current Zimbabwean education mimic the formerly colonized Zimbabweans, so it has an alienating effect. The authors of this paper agree with Chitumba (2013) and Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru and Makuva (2014) that aims and goals of any education system should squarely come from the philosophy of life of the people, in this regard the African people. Arguably, the education system of the Africans should be informed by the ubuntu/Unhu philosophy which as shown earlier espouses values of humanness, that is, unity, empathy, altruism, caring, oneness, kindness, brotherhood/sisterhood and uprightness. Chitumba (2013) proposes use of ubuntu/unhu philosophy as the bedrock upon which university education in Zimbabwe can be based. This noble proposition is applicable and relevant to all education curricula in Southern Africa that is from ECD to tertiary level. Thus, by mainstreaming ubuntu/unhu in the education curricula in Southern Africa, the result is a truly humane community, a community of interconnected beings who respect and care about the welfare of one another.

Limitations of the paper

There are a lot of assumptions in this paper regarding the practicability of ubuntu/unhu mainstreaming in the educational curricula in Southern Africa. These assumptions can only be verified through empirical research. However philosophical discussions should continue on this important issue. According to G.E Partridge in Samuels (2015), philosophy is based upon education as much as education is based on philosophy. This helps to solve educational problems and determines the direction of the curricula.

CONCLUSION

Ubuntu/unhu mainstreaming in the education curricula is the surest panacea for sustainable educational change in Southern Africa as it upholds values such as love, integrity, kindness, empathy, sharing, honesty, self-discipline and tolerance among other invaluable values. Samkange and Samkange (2013) note that the African Philosophy of Education enables us to challenge the status quo in terms of assumptions, beliefs and viewpoints about the function and relevance of education to an educated African. It should also, among other important values, enable one to address and solve problems within the community, thus contributing to social and economic development. Barker (1990) notes that an Ubuntu/unhu oriented education system transmits all the values, beliefs, norms, patterns of behaviour, skills and wisdom from one generation to another. This is important as it guarantees sustainable Ubuntu/unhu laden educational change and thrust in Southern Africa. Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru and Shizha (2012) note that the ubuntu/unhu philosophy is attractive because of the values that it extols such as love for one another, respect for each other, brotherhood and respect for the sacredness of human life. However, there is need for concerted effort from all

sectors to ensure that Ubuntu/Unhu philosophy is mainstreamed in the education curricula. Curriculum designers need to take into cognizance the fact that since time immemorial Africans had culture-specific education that was ingrained in their spirituality long before the coming of Europeans (Museka & Madondo, 2012). The proposition by Mavhunga (2006) to Africanise the school curriculum in Zimbabwe and Msila's (2007) similar call in South Africa, at all levels to break the cycle of peddling values and knowledge system of former colonisers which are largely irrelevant to the African cause, should be regarded seriously. Hence the essence of resuscitating that value by mainstreaming ubuntu/unhu philosophy in the education curricula. All education stakeholders, therefore, need to be aware of the long lasting benefits of this endeavour which is already at the budding stage in other higher educational institutions in Zimbabwe and South Africa. In South Africa, Broodryk (2006) has already set up an Ubuntu: School of Philosophy, so other African States can possibly learn from his ideas and experiences as it would be naive to think that the endeavour is easily achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to achieve positive and sustainable educational change in Southern Africa, the following need to be addressed:

- ✚ All stakeholders in Southern Africa's education, that is, policy makers, parents, teachers, curricula developers and reviewers and students need to take a firm stance regarding ubuntu/unhu mainstreaming in the education system.
- ✚ The education curricula, that is, from ECD to tertiary (colleges, poly technics and universities) institutions, should have a taught component on ubuntu/unhu. This has implications to manpower development, so African States should be committed to train and in-service teachers on ubuntu/unhu.
- ✚ All African states need to commit themselves fully to ubuntu/unhu mainstreaming in the education curricula if positive change in education is to be achieved in terms of moulding people with the following values: love, care, empathy, responsible, hard-working, generous, kind, courtesy, respect, social and work ethics, trustworthy, self-discipline, integrity, solidarity, hospitality, honesty, courage and diligence, just to mention a few.

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