

Chapter 33

Educating Highly Able Students from an African Perspective: A Focus on Indigenous Cultures of Zimbabwe's Views of Giftedness

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ABSTRACT

Basing on Cabral's (1973) legendary practical wisdom to return to the source, in the quest to broaden existing understanding of giftedness and improve the education of gifted students, the chapter examines indigenous conceptions of giftedness espoused in Bantu cultures of southern Africa. As informed by insights gleaned from research on Ndebele, Shona and Vhenda cultures' views of giftedness, indigenous cultures' views warrant attention as they promise to enrich the education of gifted students in amazing and intriguing ways. The chapter offers specific recommendations for educating highly able students including a Dynamic and Interactive Process Model of Talent development (DIPM) grounded in indigenous cultures of southern Africa currently generating interest in gifted education.

INTRODUCTION

It may sound ridiculous, if not nonsensical, to talk about going backwards in order to move forward, but when Cabral's call, *Return to the Source* (as cited in African Information Service, 1973), is brought into context, this piece of practical wisdom is difficult to ignore. Mugo (cited in Ngara, 1992), defines *Return to the source* as "reaffirming as well as reviving/evolving those ethics and aesthetics of African heritage that are conducive to the growth of collective as well as individual humanity" (p. xiv). Similarly, Ngara (2012) interprets *Return to the source* as a renaissance call to revisit the *African ways of knowing* in the quest to decolonise African minds, reassert their independence and creativity, and restore their true sense of personhood and dignity (*ubuntu/unhu* in Ndebele/Shona). In Cabral's view, *Return to the Source* is a call to revisit the African heritage with a view to establish the clues to the continent's de-

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velopment challenges. Hence, without fully understanding and embracing the true tenets and ethics of African hood (*ubuntu/unhu*) in the educational enterprise, there is no guarantee that any effort will propel meaningful development on the continent any time soon. *Return to the source* does not mean turning the clock of civilization back to the Stone Age era or wishing to live in caves like our ancestors (Ngara, 2012). Neither does it imply an uncritical romanticisation of *indigenous knowledges* at the expense of meaningful development in this fast changing and globalized world in the third millennium. According to Nakashima, (2000) indigenous or local knowledge refers to:

... a complete body of knowledge, know-how and practices maintained and developed by peoples, generally in rural areas, who have extended histories of interaction with the natural environment. These sets of understandings, interpretations and meanings are part of a cultural complex that encompasses language, naming and classification systems, practices for using resources, ritual, spirituality and world view... (p.433)

Nakashima's definition shows that indigenous knowledge is intricately related to how people experience, understand and impact their world. Despite the recognition of the centrality of indigenous knowing to the African's personhood, identity and survival (e.g., Cabral, 1973; Mpofu, Ngara & Gudyanga, 2007; Shizha, 2005), indigenous knowledge has often been misunderstood, denigrated and ignored by both the colonial masters and the present curriculum developers in Africa (Ngara, 2012). In this regard, Zimbabwean teachers in particular stand accused for stereotyping indigenous knowledge as "backward... retrogressive, unauthentic, and unreliable since it could not be verified by scientific methods" (Shizha, 2005, p. 202). The questions to be asked here are: Why can indigenous knowledges not be verified by science? Who has attempted to prove indigenous knowledge' claims and disproved them? If no research exists on the subject, the nagging question then is: Who really should be tasked to prove/or disprove indigenous knowledge claims if it is not the same teacher? With African teachers still confused by a colonial mentality of self-denial, self-doubting and self-cursing, it is lamentable that the nobility of spirituality centred wisdom embraced in the African heritage will not be realised. According to Ngara (2012), "spirituality is simply the African paradigm for expressing extracognitive phenomena such as inspiration, passion, feelings, beliefs, intuition and vision and compassion." (p.137)

Similarly, Shavinina and Ferrari (2004) argue that extracognitive phenomena refer to

[...] four interrelated and at the same time obviously different components. These are: a) specific intellectual feelings (feelings of direction, harmony, beauty and style), b) specific intellectual beliefs (e.g., belief in elevated standards of performance), c) specific preferences and intellectual values (e.g., the 'invertible' choice of the field of endeavour by certain geniuses and internally developed standards of intellectual working), and d) intuitive processes. (p.74)

In light of this understanding, indigenous conceptions of giftedness cannot be fully understood outside spirituality centred wisdom. In this regard, indigenous knowledge has been continuously developed by gifted individuals from the past. Many human inventions and discoveries shaping this world did not necessarily originate from the science laboratory. Was it not possible for some bright and alert individuals of the past to experience or figure out scientific facts far beyond their time by sheer serendipity? In this connection, any scientific concepts that might have been discovered in precolonial societies might

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