

Chapter 10

The Imperatives and Challenges of Passing on the Tenets of Ubuntu to the Younger Generation

Oscar Dick Simela
MHLTC, Canada

ABSTRACT

This chapter provides some of the challenges and difficulties that parents face in trying to pass salient features of the African concept of Ubuntu to their children. It starts by presenting a plausible definition of Ubuntu, followed by some learning theories that explain ways by which some people learn new concepts. Additionally, some folklore stories are included in the chapter to illustrate favorite methods used by grandparents for teaching some valuable life lessons to their grandchildren. An attempt is made towards the end of the chapter to summarize some of the things that can be done to facilitate the means by which displaced and fragmented families can still pass on Ubuntu to their offspring.

UBUNTU-DEFINED

Whether we know it or not, it is part of us. Whether we like it or not, it affects our behavior as individuals and collectively as a group of people. Whether we understand its impact on our lives or not, it molds us into better human beings. Whether we teach our children about it or not, we do consciously or unconsciously pass it on. “IT” is the African concept or philosophy of Ubuntu; a concept that defines our very nature as Africans. It is the generally unspoken civic code of conduct that reflects how we relate to one another. The polite demeanor with which we greet each other and the comparable demeanor with which others reciprocate. It transcends ethnic lines that characterize our societies in practically all of Africa, but more so in Southern Africa where it was popularized by both Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu through Ubuntu philosophy and Ubuntu theology (Battle, 1997).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7947-3.ch010

The Imperatives and Challenges of Passing on the Tenets of Ubuntu to the Younger Generation

Ubuntu is a Nguni/Zulu term that means humanity. It highlights and distinguishes our personalities as African human beings. When people look at a picture of an average family showing a father, a mother, and their biological children, they can usually see some resemblance of either or both parents in their children. What they cannot see from such a peripheral view is the humanity in any of the children. That is because humanity or Ubuntu is an abstract and virtuous concept that:

- Is generally said to be morally good
- Is valued as a foundation and guiding principle of moral behavior
- Is a signal of what is right versus what is wrong

Ubuntu embodies personal and community traits and tenets that are learnt and passed on from one generation to another. The transmission of these tenets or traits happens in several ways.

HOW DO PEOPLE LEARN UBUNTU?

Just like so many other personal and cultural values, people learn different values associated with Ubuntu through a variety of learning theories that have occupied the minds of many psychologists and educators over the years. Among these scholars are people like Jean Piaget, a Swiss child psychologist whose major contribution to education was his rejection of the idea that learning was a passive assimilation of knowledge in favor of the proposition that learning was a dynamic process that consisted of a series of stages where an individual constructs his or her own theories of the world. (Graduate Student Instructor Teaching and Resource Center, n.d.). Another scholar that featured prominently in the debate on learning theories was William G. Perry who accepted Piaget's assertion that "learners develop and adapt by assimilating and accommodating new information into existing cognitive structures" (Graduate Student Instructor Teaching and Resource Center, n.d. p.7).

In general, an overview of learning theories compiled by the Teaching Guide for GSIs states that there are three types of learning theories which may be stated as:

- Behaviorism
- Cognitive Constructivism
- Social Constructivism

According to each of these theories,

1. "knowledge is a repertoire of behavioral responses to environmental stimuli"
2. "knowledge systems of cognitive structures are actively constructed by learners based on pre-existing cognitive structures"
3. "Knowledge is constructed within social contexts through interactions with a knowledge community"

(Graduate Student Instructor Teaching and Resource Center, n.d. p.2).

As human beings we are constantly surrounded and bombarded by an endless variety of things that stimulate our senses daily. Over time, we learn to react to each and every one of these stimuli in similar or different ways. According to the Behaviorism theory, each of those reactions becomes a building block

11 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-imperatives-and-challenges-of-passing-on-the-tenets-of-ubuntu-to-the-younger-generation/276727

Related Content

Medical Semiotics: A Revisitation and an Exhortation

Robert Colaguriand Marcel Danesi (2017). *International Journal of Semiotics and Visual Rhetoric* (pp. 11-18).

www.irma-international.org/article/medical-semiotics/183636

Quality Evaluation and Workflows in Transcreation: A Social Study

Oliver Carreira (2021). *Innovative Perspectives on Corporate Communication in the Global World* (pp. 177-194).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/quality-evaluation-and-workflows-in-transcreation/274642

The Emergence of Issues in Everyday Discussions Between Adults and Children

Rebecca Schär and Sara Greco (2018). *International Journal of Semiotics and Visual Rhetoric* (pp. 29-43).

www.irma-international.org/article/the-emergence-of-issues-in-everyday-discussions-between-adults-and-children/202474

Regional Indian Movies in Rs.100 Crore Club: A Semiotic Analysis of the Movie Posters

Lydia G. Jose (2023). *International Journal of Semiotics and Visual Rhetoric* (pp. 1-14).

www.irma-international.org/article/regional-indian-movies-in-rs100-crore-club/319724

Communicating Conscious Business Practice at an Ecologically-Conscious Architectural Studio: A Case of Mr. Zero

Pinaki Nandan Pattnaik and Mahendra Kumar Shukla (2021). *Effective Strategies for Communicating Insights in Business* (pp. 129-140).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/communicating-conscious-business-practice-at-an-ecologically-conscious-architectural-studio/278424