

## Chapter 19

# Re-Thinking the Role of Indigenous Systems in Life Skills Education Among the Youth of Local Communities

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### ABSTRACT

*Schools experienced various challenges, and such challenges put the South African youth at risk of self-destructive behavior. The behavior that puts young people at risk, such as substance abuse and lack of educational life skills to mention a few, add to their vulnerability. The knowledge which has been historically repressed and marginalized needs to be given a rightful place in the development and promotion of indigenous knowledge in life skills education of South Africa. Data were collected and qualitatively framed within an interpretivist philosophical view using observation and focus group interviews from purposefully selected key informants who are experts in the area of indigenous knowledge and life skills education.*

### INTRODUCTION

There is a growing worldwide concern among educationists and researchers to integrate indigenous knowledge (IK) into the current education systems. Contemporary literature in education converges towards an urgent need to integrate IK in various teaching and learning disciplines (Owuor, 2007). However, Life Orientation education in South Africa seems to be deprived of enough literature particularly on integrating IK and LO. This could be attributed to the fact that on one hand, many studies (Rooth, 2005; Van Deventer and Van Neikerk, 2008) interrogated much on the nature of LO; student-educator

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experiences and challenges in LO education. On the other hand, IK and integration studies (Cronje, 2014; Jegede and Aikenhead, 2002) are skewed more on science and ecological disciplines.

Therefore, this study reviews and critically analyses local and international literature on LO as a life skill and IK integration publications done in various disciplines for the purpose of finding ways to integrate IK and LO education in South Africa. The study consolidates documents on how education could be used as a vehicle to help the youth.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Colonial as well as apartheid-based education viewed local indigenous knowledge as primitive and insignificant, and taught learners to believe that their cultures and everything African were inferior (Giroux, 1996; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). Throughout the colonial era, school curricula in Africa were structured within the Eurocentric explanations of what constituted scientific phenomena, while indigenous knowledge was portrayed as primitive and valueless (Shizha, 2005). After decolonisation and subsequent independence of many African states, lobby groups campaigned for the transformation of curricula, but it remained unchanged for a long time (Abdi, 2005; Shizha, 2005). There was also very little shift from the Eurocentric definitions of official knowledge and school pedagogy, and the school curriculum was still like European curricula (Shizha, 2005). Therefore, indigenous voices were still, to a large extent, ignored and subjugated, whilst Eurocentric knowledge was continuously visible in educational institutions and in society. The South African system of education was rooted in the country's system of apartheid. Cross and Chisholm (1990:44) state that racist attitudes and differential schooling for black and white have been an integral part of South African history.

In South Africa, the period after 1994 was followed by a process of transformation in all sectors of society, and education was a key focus of transformation. One fundamental change that came with the Constitution of South Africa (1996) was a unified system of education. One Department of Education (DoE) was established and mandated to provide equitable and quality education to all South African children, regardless of race, creed, religion and gender. A new approach to curriculum delivery called Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) was adopted in South Africa, to ensure a more inclusive and quality education for all South African learners (Jansen, 2001). One of the outcomes of OBE is the recognition and integration of Indigenous Knowledge in the content which is taught to learners (DoE, 2007). It is argued that integrating indigenous knowledge in Life Orientation (LO) curriculum will bring about social change in the society and promote justice and equity (Semali and Kincheloe, 1999). However, this could not be easily realised. Instead, the knowledge, values, and practices of the previously oppressed Africans were disregarded and treated with contempt. The curriculum remained largely Eurocentric in its approach and anything African was ignored or relegated (Chilisa, 2012:22).

Empirical evidence shows that educational transformation has been a hot potato in research and discourse for many years, not only in South Africa but also worldwide (Du Plessis, 2005). The inclusion of localised knowledge into LO curriculum has motivated more scholars to conduct research in various parts of the world. Many seminars, workshops and conferences have been held to discuss and debate about the issue of Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) and plenty of literature has been published on the topic. The inclusion of IKS in education, particularly in LO curriculum is not peculiar to South Africa. Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand and the United States are some of the countries where measures have been taken to include indigenous knowledge in their education. This approach has been adopted

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