


Chapter 17

Activist Scholarship for Indigenous Pedagogies: A Self-Reflective Study

Maserole Christina Kgari-Masondo

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1850-6363>

The University of South Africa, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The Chapter focuses on humanising pedagogies and empowerment of students with a relevant curriculum to help them engage with the immediate and global communities through active participation. The findings are that contemporary South African Higher Learning lack impact on youths' effective participation in society as disciplines are frequently not serving the wide communities. Using a qualitative case study research methodology, the Chapter draws from the author's reflections as a history lecturer and an Activist Scholar on the use of indigenous pedagogies in teaching. The findings are that the Activism Scholarship is critical and requires Ubuntuized pedagogy as it endorses participation as key in humanization and empowering students with active participation skills in communities.

INTRODUCTION

“A human being is vital not only in force, but also in participation” (Setiloane 1985, p.14).

The concept of participation has been critical in all societies, but for Africans, it is aligned with identity construction and nation-building. However, literature has revealed that consultation normally impedes communities from participating in the making of their societies (Green Future, 2009; Voinea, 2024). Participation is the element of connection, which unites different beings as beings, as substances, without confusing them. It is the pivot of relationships between members of the same community, the link that binds together individuals and groups, the ultimate meaning not only of the unity that is personal to each person but of that unity in multiplicity, that totality, that concentric and harmonic unity of the visible and invisible worlds (Mulago cited in Setiloane, 1985, p.15). This participation is key in bringing interconnectedness of people and nation building which is derived from the philosophy of *Ubuntu* (humanness) which is entrenched in the dictum *umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu* (a person is who they are through others). *Ubuntu* explains that a person becomes a real human being through par-

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ticipation. Hence, Setiloane argues that “a human being is not only vital force, but vital in participation” (1985:14). This infers that what is in the African worldview is human participation with others and the invisible world. This means that community and participation in its edifice are important, especially the ones known to people. Such collaboration between group members lends comfort and healing, which continues outside the official national group setting. Such participation is activism as it promotes safeguarding human rights, care, respect, and peace.

Such an important facet of life embedded in African philosophy is silenced in teaching and learning because of developments in South Africa’s past, which have pivoted issues surrounding identity and knowledge construction encroached in Western epistemology. Since the formation of South Africa as a union in 1910, the colonialists fought to establish a white race-only nation building, which comprised Afrikaners and the English. The apartheid dispensation in 1948 came with rigorous racial discrimination entrenching into law national identity based on whiteness. Then, in 1994, the new democratic dispensation brought a national identity that embraced all races, cultures, languages, and religions. However, the historical roots of the national identity constructed along race did not diminish as it manifested itself in the continual dominance of Western knowledge over other epistemologies. Western epistemology has been acknowledged as the yardstick of knowledge, lowering Indigenous knowledge as unscientific and the ‘other.’ A case in point is the ethic of *Ubuntu*, which is instrumental in reconciliation, development, and nation-building. It is accepted globally in scientific knowledge, but the new constitution and education system do not embrace it as an important value in fostering national identity. *Ubuntu* is pivotal as it focuses on values like love, care, and participation. Such marginalization has delayed progress in South Africa as the rich pieces of knowledge embedded in indigenous ways of knowing are excluded as official ideologies of building the new democratic country. This resulted in a tendency to separate indigenous and Western knowledge - which most recent scholars vehemently dispute because no simple or global benchmarks can be applied to separate the two epistemologies (Bicker, Ellen & Parkes, 2003). As such, the curriculum and pedagogy in South Africa lack critical elements to humanize students, and the solution is in African Indigenous Knowledge. We have struggled in the country with youth who are activists, but they learn about activist research informally in the townships and become “self-uncritical” (Carter, 1991). Hence, we have a lot of violence and other social ills in South Africa and globally.

As such, teaching and learning in this dispensation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, decolonization, democracy, and Covid 19 calls for transformation in many spheres. It requires humanizing pedagogy (Latecka, 2022) and empowering students with a relevant curriculum to help them engage with the immediate and global communities (Waghid, 2002). As an academic, I have noticed that emphasis in Higher Learning teaching and learning is mainly on skills and content, but values and attitudes are left out, which I believe impacts the social ills we are faced with in society – violence, destruction of infrastructure, theft, and so forth. In the contemporary South African educational setting, schools and institutions of Higher Learning portray the above-mentioned depiction as teachings are frequently disciplinary based; the content and skills taught are the driving force of delivering the curricula that are not serving the wider communities as the knowledge used are mainly Western and focus is on European ideals that promote individualism and patriarchal ideals. Destruction of property is normally used as the solution to communicate dissatisfaction with the government or University administrators. Similar tendencies are also found in other sectors of society, like workers in the work environment and communities unhappy with service delivery, all resort to burning tires and destruction of infrastructure, which for them is a sign of participation in fighting for justice. These attitudes toward the destruction of infrastructure require an urgent solution, which I believe lies in education through teaching and learning. Hence, Waghid opines

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