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Intersection of *Ubuntu* pedagogy and social justice: Transforming South African higher education

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Background: Universities, globally, and in South Africa, continue to be confronted with demands for transformation, humanisation of pedagogical practices and to embrace social justice.

Aim: In this article, we bring to the surface possibilities of *Ubuntu* pedagogy within a social justice framework. We intersect Collective Fingers Theory and Social Justice Theory to propose the notion of *Ubuntu* pedagogy, which draws from African philosophy of *Ubuntu*. We argue that *Ubuntu* pedagogy provides an alternation to the current pedagogies that draw from European theories for teaching and learning in the South African higher education context. We put forward that, *Ubuntu* pedagogy, when embraced with understanding and dignity it deserves, has the potential, firstly, of initiating students from other cultures other than African cultures to the values of *Ubuntu* and, secondly, of reconnecting students with their values and cultures, but it has a capacity to cultivate social justice values of equity, recognition and fair participation amongst students from diverse social backgrounds.

Setting: South African Higher Education.

Methodology: The authors draw from literature to position the article within *Ubuntu* philosophical framework and social justice lenses. Themes emerging from literature are as follows: Intersection of *Ubuntu* philosophy and social justice, *Ubuntu* pedagogy and transformation in higher education and guiding principles for possible implementation of *Ubuntu* pedagogy.

Results: At the intersection of *Ubuntu* pedagogy and social justice, classroom practices are designed to respond to students' cultural competencies and to embrace all linguistic repertoires that students bring to the classroom for learning. Students are treated equally and with dignity and respect regardless of their social backgrounds.

Conclusion: We argue that higher education classrooms in post-apartheid South Africa should enable equal access, equity and inclusivity for all students. We therefore recommend *Ubuntu* pedagogy as a culturally and socially just pedagogy for transformative higher education classrooms. This article contributes to the continuing dialogues about transformative pedagogies, decolonisation and social justice in South African higher education.

Keywords: *Ubuntu* philosophy; *Ubuntu* pedagogy; social justice; Collective Fingers Theory; epistemic violence; epistemic freedom.

Introduction

Transformation agenda remains at the heart of debates in South African higher education (Badat & Sayed 2014; Blignaut 2020; Leibowitz & Bozalek 2016; Maistry 2021). Subsequently, there is a call for transformative pedagogies that are culturally responsive and cognisant of social justice issues in higher education (Blignaut & Koopman 2020). In the meantime, Blignaut (2020:1) is concerned about the slow pace of transformation in South African higher education. There is no complete transformation in higher education without redressing ways of enacting the curriculum and without re-centering social justice issues such as equal learning opportunities, fair participation and language equity (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2016; Maistry 2021). Higher education pedagogical practices in South Africa continue to draw from the Western Eurocentric views, which undermine and dismiss indigenous philosophies such as *Ubuntu* as false assumptions and a simple illegitimate African thinking (Letseka 2014:334). Such negative assumptions about African indigenous knowledge systems result in students from African cultures feeling unwelcomed and alienated in higher education (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018:8). In fact, Ndlovu-Gatsheni refers to this rejection of knowledge that African students bring to higher

education as 'epistemic violence'. Epistemic violence is considered as 'violence at the level of curriculum, including pedagogies, perpetrated by untransformed and alienating higher education landscape'. Heleta (2016:48) concurred that epistemic violence is an unacceptable form of oppression and marginalisation directed at indigenous students to make them feel inferior and undeserving of higher education.

In response to 'epistemic violence' in higher education Chilisa (2016) called for 'epistemic freedom', which departs from social justice and human rights perspectives. Chilisa (2012) asserted that 'epistemic freedom' is not an event, but a process that involves enactment of decolonising research and pedagogical methodologies as means of achieving 'epistemic freedom' by formerly colonised people, women and indigenous people whose knowledge systems remain rejected and marginalised. In similar ways, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) defined 'epistemic freedom' in the following way:

> Epistemic freedom is different from academic freedom. Academic freedom speaks to institutional autonomy of universities and rights to express diverse ideas including those critical of authorities and political leaders. Epistemic freedom is much broader and deeper. It speaks to cognitive justice; it draws our attention to the content of what it is that we are free to express and on whose terms. Epistemic freedom is about democratising 'knowledge' from its current rendition in the singular into its plural known as 'knowledges'. It is also ranged against overrepresentation of Eurocentric thought in knowledge, social theory, and education. Epistemic freedom is foundational in the broader decolonisation struggle because it enables the emergence of critical decolonial consciousness. (p. 18)

Echoing Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) on the importance of critical consciousness about issues of equality and social justice in education are Blignaut and Koopman (2020:82) who argued that issues of social justice in education cannot be swiped under the carpet, especially amongst teacher educators as they play an important role enacting the curriculum. In fact, Blignaut and Koopman (2020) emphasised that:

> If teacher educators do not undertake this important task of focusing critically on social justice, their students will run the risk of perpetuating racism, stereotypes, and existing inequalities and thereby reproduce the old prevailing hegemony and the existing social order characterised by inequity and injustice. (p. 82)

It is upon these debates and insights by Blignaut and Koopman (2020) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) that other South African scholars (Heleta 2016; Le Grange et al. 2020; Maistry 2021) call for urgent transformations in South African higher education that will put an end to epistemic injustices that devalue indigenous knowledge systems such as *Ubuntu* whilst promoting scientific knowledge. In this article, we argue that the discrimination and marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems such as *Ubuntu* in higher education and the persistent preference of Western scientific knowledge systems remain a throbbing issue, especially for people from indigenous knowledge systems. We therefore

join transformational scholars such as Maistry (2021) and Le Grange et al. (2020) in their call for socially just higher education, especially in South Africa.

In defence of *Ubuntu* philosophy in education as a social issue, Ramose (ed. 2002) proposed that despite *Ubuntu* philosophy being a significant and a powerful education instrument that has been used for many centuries by indigenous African communities to educate, guide and maintain positive human interactions and relationships amongst African indigenous people, it has been excluded and oppressed in formal educational arenas in favour of Western philosophies. Ramose (ed. 2002) contended that such rejection of *Ubuntu* philosophy has prevented this indigenous knowledge from being effectively transferred to the next generations. As a result, Ramose (ed. 2002) thought that educational contexts such as universities are the most suitable for the restoration of *Ubuntu* philosophy to its rightful position: that of being at the centre of preserving African values amongst young people. Ukpokodu (2016) holds similar thoughts, he asserts that it is through *Ubuntu* pedagogy that *Ubuntu* philosophy can be accorded an honourable and fair recognition. Besides, Metz (2011) observed that *Ubuntu* philosophy represents social justice in the sense that it embraces social values of inclusion, participation and respect for all and as a pedagogical tool, it has a potential to preserve indigenous knowledge systems and practices amongst students and restore their identities (Le Grange 2011).

In consideration of the arguments raised by scholars (Le Grange 2011; ed. Ramose 2002; Ukpokodu 2016) on the connections between *Ubuntu* philosophy and social justice, this article builds on such debates to advance justifications for the rethinking of teaching and learning in higher education from *Ubuntu* pedagogical perspective. We argue that *Ubuntu* philosophy, which is an indigenous knowledge system and way of life for African people, when embodied with esteem and dignity it deserves, has the potential not only of restoring indigenous values, heritage and cultures amongst students, but also *Ubuntu* philosophy has a capacity to promote values of co-existence and social cohesion amongst students from diverse backgrounds.

It has an ability to promote values of social justice such as inclusivity and fair participation amongst students (Letseka 2014:547). We suggest that an understanding of *Ubuntu* philosophy and social justice is essential for appropriate implementation. In the following section, we thus begin by unpacking, first, the concept of *Ubuntu* philosophy and its intrinsic values and principles. We then move to the concept of social justice and we attempt to position it within the context of higher education, where we argue, it belongs. We draw from Mbigi's (1997) Collective Fingers Theory and Social Justice Theory (Fraser 2008) to propose for *Ubuntu* pedagogy, which draws from the indigenous *Ubuntu* philosophy, as a transformative approach that can bring about co-existence, respect, inclusion and social justice in

higher education classrooms. Later in this article, we suggest practical guidelines for possible and effective implementation of *Ubuntu* pedagogy in diverse higher education classrooms.

Unpacking *Ubuntu* philosophy

Different African philosophers and scholars have grappled with the notions and constructions of *Ubuntu* philosophy (Broodryk 2005; Le Grange 2011; Letseka 2014; Metz 2014; Mbigi 1997). Firstly, they all agree that it is difficult to translate the concept of *Ubuntu* into English since there is no equivalent meaning. These scholars also concur that during translation into English the concept of *Ubuntu* loses its essence and true meaning. Even though the term '*ubuntu*' is mostly known to come from South African Nguni languages (isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, isiSwati), it exists in different lexes across various Bantu languages of sub-Saharan Africa. In Chewa language of Zambia, the term '*ubuntu*' is referred to as *Umunthu*. In Yao language, Malawi, it is known as *Umundu*. Amongst Tsonga speakers in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Swaziland, they refer to it as *Bunhu.* In Shona language of Zimbabwe, it is known as *Unhu,* whilst Venda speakers in South Africa call it *Vhutu*. Nguni languages refer to it as *Ubuntu* (Letseka 2014; Mbigi 1997). Now, how do all these different African communities understand *Ubuntu*?

Amongst South African philosophers, *Ubuntu* refers to ancient African worldviews associated with humanness or being humane (ed. Letseka 2000; Metz 2014). In explaining 'humanness' or being human(e), Johnstone (1981) in Letseka (ed. 2000) expounded that:

> To be humane suggests that one's conduct is guided by a respect for and tenderness toward other beings. It suggests a prizing of these beings and a desire to protect and nourish them. (p. 547)

Le Grange (2011) argued that it is difficult to define *Ubuntu* in a standard form as 'the meaning is interwoven in the cultural practices and lived experiences of African peoples' (p. 71). Meanwhile, Ramose (ed. 2002:26) stressed that humanity is 'to be a human being and one's humanity is affirmed by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them', hence, a Nguni axiom 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' (I am because you are, you are because I am). At the same time, Mbigi (1997) in his Collective Fingers Theory emphasised that *Ubuntu* philosophy is underpinned by social and human values of togetherness, solidarity, compassion and interdependence. All these constructions of *Ubuntu* philosophy encapsulate social justice principles of respect for individuality 'umuntu' (a person) and his belonging amongst other people 'abantu' (Chilisa 2012; Sibanda 2019). Furthermore, Chilisa (2012) paid more attention to the *Ubuntu* notions of 'I/We' which are more acceptive of interdependence, as opposed to the Eurocentric 'I/You' relationships, which assert individualism.

In furthering the conceptions of *Ubuntu* axiom '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' Mbigi (1997) observed that:

> In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group ... Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am'. (p. 36)

What Mbigi (1997) is arguing for, is that in African cultures an individual is not complete without the group and the group is not privileged over the individual. Equity is fundamental to *Ubuntu*. In his *Ubuntu* theoretical work, Collective Fingers Theory, Mbigi (1997) built on social justice principles of equity amongst members of the social groups. This is how Mbigi (1997) related his *Ubuntu* theory to social justice:

> An African principle behind the Collective Fingers Theory is that a thumb although is strong cannot kill aphids on its own, it would require the collective cooperation and equal contribution of efforts from other fingers. From this African proverb we can construe three meanings. Firstly, like fingers, individual persons need to work collectively and cooperatively to achieve any aspired goal. Secondly, recognition as equals promote willingness to participate. Thirdly, fingers in the proverb can represent core African values, which when internalised and nurtured, can promote a collective culture. The five core values of *Ubuntu* are identified as survival, solidarity spirit, compassion, respect and dignity. (p. 33)

It goes that survival was an essential aspect of indigenous communities as it enabled them to get through harsh environmental conditions, and to effectively do that, they relied on each other. Despite their differences, they needed one another for existence. Solidarity spirit was also fundamental for working together and cooperatively to achieve a common goal. The same goes for compassion that was also important to generate a feeling of belonging and interconnectedness amongst African communities. The Collective Fingers Theory implies that even though there was little formal education for indigenous people centuries ago, *Ubuntu* philosophy provided traditional education for indigenous people whereby they were socialised into respecting one another, being responsible for themselves and towards others and to co-exist. Metz (2011) argued it is relatively impossible to bypass issues of social justice when addressing matters of *Ubuntu*. Therefore, in the following section we intersect *Ubuntu* and social justice.

Intersection of *Ubuntu* philosophy and social justice

Even though there is limited research that looks at the intersection of *Ubuntu* philosophy and social justice in South African higher education, scholars such as Leibowitz and Bozalek (2016) have explored social justice in the context of scholarship of teaching and learning in South African higher education. Blignaut (2020), on the other hand, continued to

advocate for social justice in the South African schooling system as he believes that curriculum that is anchored on social justice is likely to cultivate compassionate citizens who have enthusiasm for sense of justice and creation of equal opportunities for all. Another important work on social justice and curriculum comes from Maistry (2021) who recently theorised curriculum in South African higher education from the social justice framework. Elsewhere, scholars (Chilisa 2016; Sibanda 2019) have also attempted to explore *Ubuntu* theory and social justice in global contexts such as Zimbabwe. In this study, we largely draw from these recent works on social justice and *Ubuntu* philosophy to bring together these two frameworks in the context of South African higher education. We argue that there is a compelling connection between *Ubuntu* and social justice and that these two terms do not compete, but they harmonise each other. To base our argument, we draw from the notions provided by Sibanda (2019) who contended that *Ubuntu* embodies the essence of humanity in values such as respect, dignity, equity and interdependence. In that way, 'Social justice is part and parcel of what it means to be human' (Sibanda 2019:76).

Like *Ubuntu* philosophy, social justice is more concerned with recognition and acceptance of shared values and resources amongst community members (Metz 2011). Social justice attests to and speaks of the acceptable and shared values of those who call themselves 'abantu' (people). This implies values of togetherness, communalism and respect amongst those who share similar values. Both *Ubuntu* and social justice are shaped by positive human relations, how people in a particular context accept and negotiate values for their togetherness (Metz 2011). The values of *Ubuntu* embrace principles of social justice such as equality (promotes equal opportunities), equity (encourages interdependence) and fairness (brings about equal sharing of resources such that all members survive). Where there is no equal recognition and respect, principles of *Ubuntu* philosophy are compromised (Metz 2011).

In the same way that *Ubuntu* thrives on communalism and co-existence, Fraser (2008) in her Social Justice theory, argued that social justice advances notions of equal participation and fair distribution of resources amongst members in a social context. Expanding on the connections between *Ubuntu* and social justice, Sibanda (2019) contended that:

> Social justice is therefore culturally specific, drawing on shared assumptions about the nature of being, how we arrive at this common understanding and the values that inform what is perceived to be in the best interest of all, and all possible relationships in that context. The importance of the, I/We relationship cannot be over emphasised in this understanding of social justice. Justice, in this light is not based on individual rights but rather the collective rights of the 'WE' in the I/We relationship which are aspects of *Ubuntu* theory. (p. 77)

From these constructions, we understand that living in a socially just, respectful and harmonious environment is central to *Ubuntu*. This is possible when an individual respects himself and others. That also goes for respecting the rights and ideas of others, which are the desired principles of social justice. There are many ways in which *Ubuntu* philosophy resonates with social justice. As a result of the limited number of words for this article, we highlighted a few. Having defended connections between *Ubuntu* philosophy and social justice, we now turn our focus to the pedagogical aspects of *Ubuntu*, which Ukpokodu (2016) conceptualised as *Ubuntu* pedagogy. We situate *Ubuntu* pedagogy within the context of social justice and higher education.

Ubuntu pedagogy and transformation in higher education

South Africa has a long history of racial oppression, segregation and social inequalities as a result of apartheid. After 28 years of democracy, higher education is still grappling with issues of socially just higher education (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2016) and transformative pedagogies (Badat & Sayed 2014). It has been noticed that there is little cooperation, co-existence and social cohesion amongst students from diverse cultural backgrounds in South African higher education (Goduka 2000).

Such lack of social cohesion, cooperation and co-existence amongst students from diverse social backgrounds mainly stem from the fact that South Africa during apartheid was divided according to racial and cultural lines. Before 1994, different racial groups were confined into separated areas and attended different schools. Consciously or otherwise, students bring along these social divisions and inequalities when they join universities. One group of students, mainly African students, and to some extent, Indians and mixed race, come from a background of oppression, marginalisation, limited opportunities and exclusion whilst the other group, white students, come from a privileged background of opportunities and higher status in society (Badat & Sayed 2014). Suddenly, all these students come together in higher education and they are expected to harmoniously build relations and live happily. It is not easy to achieve social cohesion without any interventions geared towards promoting social co-existence amongst students from diverse backgrounds. *Ubuntu* pedagogy thus has a potential to promote togetherness, coexistence, respect and cooperation amongst students. Ukpokodu (2016) clarified this in the following way:

> *Ubuntu* pedagogy draws from the *Ubuntu* philosophical values of compassion, care, cooperation, respect and dignity to provide a learning environment that brings together students from different cultural backgrounds to value each one another's cultures, opinions, ideas and learn to cooperate and to co-exist. (p. 155)

From the above Ukpokodu (2016) discussion it emerges that the main tenet of *Ubuntu* pedagogy is that all students,

regardless of the racial, educational, economic and linguistic backgrounds and sexual orientations, all have potential to excel in their learning if their humanity is positioned at the forefront of their learning processes. In furthering his defence of *Ubuntu* pedagogy, Ukpokodu (2016) asserted that:

> As human beings, students naturally aspire to feelings of compassion and care, dignity and respect. *Ubuntu* pedagogy encourages teachers to create empowering learning spaces which affirms, validate and treat all students as dignified human beings. (p. 155)

In this way, Ukpokodu (2016) affirmed *Ubuntu* pedagogy values equity, dignity, compassion and respect of all students in the classroom. It has a potential to bring together students such that they perceive each other as significant others who bring unique backgrounds, experiences and prior knowledge to build on towards the development of new knowledge and create meaningful learning spaces. In that way, all students perceive each other as equal partners and begin to understand that they need each other for effective learning. One is not complete without the other. Hence, the essence of *Ubuntu* pedagogy lies in the recognition of equal partnerships and co-existence between the teachers and students as co-creators of knowledge. Thus, the *Ubuntu* maxim 'umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu' (a person is a person through other people) comes into full blossom in the classroom (Letseka 2014).

Ukpokodu (2016) argued that teachers embracing *Ubuntu* pedagogy provide all students, irrespective of their cultural, linguistic, social class, religion and sexual orientations with equal opportunities to develop and to exercise their full capacities. At the intersection of *Ubuntu* pedagogy and social justice, all students are treated with dignity and respect regardless of their backgrounds. The value of *Ubuntu* pedagogy is to build positive relationships between diverse students and break down the barriers of diversity within the classroom settings (Ukpokodu 2016). These are the goals of social justice in education (Broodryk 2005). Broodryk (2005) observed that *Ubuntu* encompasses values of social justice and promotes relationships between learners breaking down barriers and stereotypes with regard to race, gender, ability, language and culture. For teachers in higher education to fully practice social justice, they should first be influenced by *Ubuntu* values. *Ubuntu*, therefore, can be regarded as a weapon that can be used by teachers to challenge the inequity and injustices.

When higher education teachers understand and embrace *Ubuntu* it is likely that *Ubuntu* values can empower them to combat exclusion and employ pedagogies that aim to reach all students in the classrooms. Inclusive pedagogies thrive on the connectedness between students alone and between their teachers, which all provide a positive learning environment. This, in turn, positively influences students' self-worth, self-belief and achievement. Successful learning depends on these networks of support. Inclusive education is the essence of *Ubuntu* – 'that we live in a delicate web of interconnectedness and interdependence with each other, I am because we are' (ed. Phasha 2016). Like *Ubuntu,* inclusive pedagogies embrace equal participation, cooperation and solidarity amongst students and between students and teachers. In this way, all learners feel a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Ubuntu pedagogy does not only encourage development of all students as individuals, but it also promotes active collaboration between students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds who bring different characteristics and learning needs into the classrooms. In this way, *Ubuntu* pedagogy affirms diversity as an ordinary aspect of development in a higher education classroom. *Ubuntu* pedagogy rejects exclusion, marginalisation and inequality in the teaching and learning spaces (ed. Phasha 2016). These notions of *Ubuntu* pedagogy further solidify the connections between *Ubuntu* and social justices into the learning environments. There is limited information, especially in South Africa, on the pedagogies that depart from an African indigenous knowledge systems framework such as *Ubuntu* pedagogy within the realm of social justice. This study seeks to fill the existing gap. We further provide, in the following section, guidelines for possible implementation of *Ubuntu* pedagogy in diverse higher education contexts, especially in South Africa.

Ubuntu pedagogy: The guiding principles for possible implementation

Ubuntu pedagogy is anchored by six principles that underpin and guide its possible and effective implementation as a transformative and socially just pedagogical strategy in higher education settings: recognition of self and others, building positive relationships, getting students to work cooperatively, nurturing of the students' minds, teaching from a position of love and care and utilising students' linguistic resources to promote meaningful learning (Ukpokodu 2016).

Recognition of self and others

Through participation and interactions humans develop identity and belonging. From an African perspective, teaching and learning suggest that it is through engagement with other people that a person grows more fully human, more truly in their identity. In other words, through participation and interaction with others we see ourselves – 'I participate, therefore I am' (Tutu 2000). In other words, I see myself through others; therefore I feel that I belong. *Ubuntu* pedagogy, therefore, places value in collective learning through interactions and participation. Students understand more of what they know or do not know through interactions with others. Active learning through participation, interactions, sharing of ideas, knowledge and experiences promotes effective learning. Equally, understanding of self and others is critical in a learning process. If you understand yourself, you know your strengths and accept your weaknesses. If you understand others, you also understand their strengths and

weaknesses. A learning process therefore becomes an interdependent and a mutual activity (Le Grange 2011).

Building positive relationships

A second component of *Ubuntu* pedagogy is building a positive relationship. It is this component of *Ubuntu* pedagogy that is responsible for peace and a harmonious learning environment where students respect one another and their teachers as adults within the learning context. Effective learning cannot take place unless students, firstly, embrace one another, and secondly, respect each other as individuals and human beings. Love brings care for one another, sympathy, forgiveness, sharing and peace in the classroom. Love amongst learners ensures that they share not only knowledge, but they also share learning tools and learning spaces with one another (Ukpokodu 2016). Where there is love for one another, there is respect and acceptance plus tolerance for diverse and unique social backgrounds and respect for one another's ideas. When students love and respect each other, there are high chances that they will listen to one another's ideas and thoughts and learn from them. Pedagogical practices anchored by *Ubuntu* bring about kindness, caring, togetherness, solidarity, cooperation and sharing amongst students and teachers, which all promote positive relationships (Metz 2011; Ukpokodu 2016).

Getting students to work cooperatively

Working together is another important principle of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. It promotes unity and team spirit amongst students as they tackle learning problems. Effective cooperation thrives on solidarity, sharing and respect for one another and equal opportunities. In an effective teamwork, each member is important for successful learning experiences. Each member's contribution is important and it is valued. Working together promotes the *Ubuntu* notion of 'for I know, so you know' classroom environment where learners not only take care of each other's physical needs such as sharing classroom furniture and learning tools but they also share knowledge, thus extending each other's cognitive development (Ukpokodu 2016). Supporting one another is a vital component of *Ubuntu* pedagogy. In an African *Ubuntu* perspective, sharing knowledge means I give you what I know, I am giving you what I have so that you can also have because tomorrow I will also need your help. Therefore, *Ubuntu* pedagogy ensures that students work together and assist one another to learn and understand the learning material.

Nurturing of students' minds

Another important element of *Ubuntu* pedagogy is the nurturing of students' minds. *Ubuntu* pedagogy prioritises participative and interactive learning. Students learn best when they interact their ideas, thoughts and experiences with each other. Interaction on the learning material maximises participation. An active learning promotes engagement with the learning material. Students get opportunities to discuss the problems, to ask questions, to debate concepts and to share their thinking and experiences. Such classrooms foster cognitive development amongst learners. They nurture learners' minds and expand their learning opportunities (Letseka 2014).

Teaching from a position of love and care

It is rather impossible to speak of *Ubuntu* without referring to acts of humanity such as love, kindness, sympathy and respect and solidarity. Education without love becomes a mere ideology (Blackwood 2018). Teachers in higher education may draw from a variety of teaching strategies and techniques but if teachers lack love for the students and for the teaching, such efforts fail to inspire students. If good strategies are used by an unloving teacher who spends more time consciously or unconsciously speaking and acting in contrary to love, this may disempower students and they may lose respect for the teacher. That is, teaching that truly inspires, humanises and empowers students not only comes from good strategies and perfect curriculum, but it is also the pedagogy that is love-centred. Teacher's love makes a difference in the presence of effective teaching tools and strategies. Without a loving and inspirational teacher in the classroom, subjects and learning can be boring and irrelevant. 'As one develops towards love, one is capable of loving one's self holistically and because of this holistic love of one's self love, one can love the world holistically' (Blackwood 2018:30). Teaching from a position of love does not only empower students in the classroom, but it also sparks a change for the better in students no matter what the situation is. Teacher's love helps students to preserve in time of academic challenges. Love and care can embrace their students' diverse personalities and they love their strengths and weaknesses in the classroom (Blackwood 2018). Such teachers never doubt the potential and capabilities of their students. Instead they help students grow beyond their intellectual abilities. A classroom that is centred on teacher' love towards students and amongst students is nurturing and supportive. Students are motivated to help one another overcome learning barriers. In that way, students become willing to learn together and share information. Such pedagogy is anchored by *Ubuntu* (Ukpokodu 2016).

Utilising students' linguistic resources to promote meaningful learning: *Ubuntu* translanguaging

In the South African higher education system English language remains the most important resource for access, participation and success. This is despite English being home language to a small group of students, thus, denying majority of students who bring to the universities, languages other than English. At the same time, South Africa is rich in multilingualism with 11 official languages. Many students bring multilingual repertoires into higher education classrooms (Makalela 2016:187). The presence of more than one language makes many higher education classrooms bilingual or multilingual. However, research shows that many higher education institutions, despite accepting

multilingual students into their classrooms and despite recognising multilingualism policies, remain monolingual in their language of teaching and learning which, in the case of South Africa, is English. Higher education institutions continue to neglect languages that students bring with them from home to university classrooms and they persist in using a foreign language, English, for teaching and learning for multilingual students (Makalela 2016:188). Learning in a second language is one of the major learning barriers for second language students. Makalela (2016:188) called for an urgent acknowledgement of students' diverse languages for meaningful learning and teaching in multilingual classrooms.

Embracing language diversity is the ultimate goal of *Ubuntu* pedagogy (Ukpokodu 2016:188). It is through their languages that students make sense of the world and reflect meaningfully. Embracing students' home languages alongside the language of teaching and learning restores students' identity and dignity of their cultural languages. Besides, Makalela (2016) felt:

> [*T*]hat it is time that boundaries that isolate and separate languages are broken so all languages that students bring to the university classrooms could be used for enhancing students' learning. (p. 189)

Multilingual practices such as translanguaging enable multilingual teachers and students to draw from different linguistic repertoires for meaningful and purposeful learning. This type of learning can be transformative. However, successful multilingual practices such as translanguaging require that teachers accept and recognise all languages spoken by students as equal. Linguistic equality means that no language is viewed in a superior way than other languages in the classroom (Makalela 2016:188).

Conclusion

In this article we argued that many years after democracy in South Africa, higher education has not transformed. Pedagogical practices, by and large, still draw from the Western philosophies and world views, despite majority of students in higher education being students from African cultures. We join Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) in declaring this continuous oppression and neglect of belief systems and values that African students bring to higher education as 'epistemic violence'. We also join scholars (Blignaut 2020; Chilisa 2016; Maistry 2021) in their urgent call for 'epistemic freedom' through decolonial and transformative pedagogies. Drawing from Mbigi (1997) Collective Fingers Theory and Social Justice Theory (Fraser 2009) we proposed for *Ubuntu* pedagogy as an alternative teaching method that draws from indigenous *Ubuntu* philosophical values. We argued that *Ubuntu* pedagogy, when embraced with understanding and dignity it deserves, has the potential not only of initiating and reconnecting students with their values and cultures but it also has a capacity to cultivate social justice values of inclusion, recognition of self and others and activate participation. We have shown how *Ubuntu* can foster understanding of self and others amongst learners, build positive relationships,

encourage cooperation and respect amongst learners, inspire teachers to teach from a position of love and care and promote inclusion and social justice for all students and, thus, become a transformative pedagogical method for post-apartheid higher education. We hope to make contributions to ongoing debates on transformative pedagogies, decolonisation and social justice in higher education.

Acknowledgements

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