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Conceptualising Community Engagement through the lens of African Indigenous Education

Abstract

The conceptualisation of "community engagement" at Higher Education in South Africa remains a topic for debate in the transformation agenda. South African Indigenous knowledge has been transmitted and perennially refreshed through educational pedagogy that are characterized by a sensitivity to African Philosophy, axiology and the spirit of Ubuntu. This article presents a qualitative critical review from the perspective of African indigenous education of the conceptualisation of community engagement. Community engagement is explored as a contemporary pedagogical counterpart to the indigenous pedagogies that supported African epistemology and axiology and community engagement is positioned within a natural evolution of the South African indigenous education and human development framework. Since children are the most vulnerable and affected community it is postulated that a student-centred framework for community engagement would offer an empowering praxis for a new South African Indigenous Education. Community engagement conceptualised within African Indigenous Knowledge Systems is argued as a means towards authentic transformation giving "voice" and "agency" to communities across all levels of education. Within this framework, the article affirms the use of indigenous concepts and practices within a transformed education system where Higher Education assumes a key role-player in human development from the cradle to the grave.

Keywords*: African indigenous education; Ubuntu; indigenous axiology; indigenous pedagogy; humanizing pedagogy, child-centred*

1. Background

Community Engagement – The Pillar tossed on the Top of the Ivory Tower

The 1997, Education White Paper 3, in driving an agenda for the transformation of Higher Education, stated as a national goal, "To promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes" (South Africa, 1997:10). At institutional level, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were to demonstrate social responsibility of institutions and their commitment to the common good (South Africa, 1997). Furthering this agenda,

Community Engagement replaced the notion of community "service" as a move away from a hierarchical connotation and community engagement was positioned as a third pillar alongside Teaching and Learning and Research. Significantly, the Higher Education Quality Committee, established in terms of the 1997 Higher Education Act, then included "knowledge-based community service" as a basis for programme accreditation and quality assurance.

Since 1997, however, universities have been struggling with implementation of the transformation agenda. By 2010 the Council on Higher Education (CHE) noted that reporting on community engagement indicated "… outreach that entail engagement with a wide range of communities but these activities are uncoordinated and are the result of individual initiative, rather than of strategically planned, systematic endeavours" (Kagisano, 2010: iii). A difficulty that may be recognised is that at the outset, universities were required to operationalise community engagement, *before* coming to grips with the concept of community engagement itself.

Historically, teaching and learning and research distinguished traditional universities in South Africa as institutions for knowledge production, advancement and dissemination; churning out skilled labour and a proliferation of academic scholarly research. These activities, which supported the Eurocentric principles of "academic freedom" in the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge sake within a Positivist world - view, cast universities as "Ivory Towers" with academic communities functioning at a distance from life in the community. The transformation agenda in effect called upon the university community to undergo an ideological shift which may be described as a transformation of the "academic soul" (Kagisano, 2010: iv) of HEIs. The implication of the implementation of community engagement strategies was that the landscape of Higher Education (HE) activities would broaden into the diaspora of diverse socio- economic and knowledge systems that are prevalent within South African society. Clearly, such a fundamental contradiction with the traditional university archetype necessitates transformation, which would necessarily articulate through a new set of teaching and learning frameworks and policies, as well as through the concomitant attributes, skills and competencies of graduates.

In a recent study (Bhagwan, 2017) on how community engagement was conceptualised by academics and administrators at six universities across South Africa, four themes emerged: Context, Process, Mutually beneficial relationship and Knowledge production. It was observed that individual institutional culture continues to contribute to diverse and differing conceptualisations of community engagement. These may include volunteerism, service learning, participative action research and social entrepreneurship. Evidently, universities remain challenged by the dissonance between existing institutional culture and the philosophical implications of community engagement. There seems to be the lack of a coherent vision or theoretical frame to synchronise and support the transforming trajectory of HEI's. This subverts the potential influence of community engagement to initiate transformation of HE at a fundamental level as envisaged by the 1997 Education White Paper 3. There is instead the potential that within narrow conceptualisations, community engagement could even decline towards a means to advance personal agendas for measurable recognition and performance by both students and academia.

At an international level, the notion of community engagement as a 'Third Mission' of HEI's apart from teaching and research had gained ground (Laredo, 2007). Transforming universities in Australia had operationalized community engagement as 'engaged citizenship' through the nine dimensions of teaching and learning, curriculum design, policies, research,

external relations, social and cultural engagement, partnerships with school and educational providers, economic engagement and organization and participation of students (Winter, Wiseman and Muirhead, 2006). There seems to be, however, different drivers for community engagement at universities in developing countries compared to developed countries. A study by Bernado, Butcher and Howard (2012) compared community engagement at a university in the Philippines (developing country) to that of an Australian university (developed country). It was found that the socio-political conditions of marginalized communities were a significant driver for a "needs based" model in the Philippines where the role of the community engagement unit was to respond to the diverse and critical needs of the community such as disaster relief as best that they could. On the other hand, the Australian university conceptualised a "mission based' model in which staff and students collaborated with the community to achieve mutually agreed goals integrating community engagement into teaching, learning and research. A significant observation by Bernado et. al. (2012), is that leadership at HEIs played a critical role to leverage the direction of community engagement from a 'set of practices of doing things, toward a philosophical belief of the universities reason for being', embedding community engagement in the identity and image of a university. However, Bernado et. al. (2012) also noted that trends in the literature on community engagement in developed countries such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia indicate that institutional networks have been established among universities with the aim of pursuing community engagement as an area of (engaged) scholarship, essentially an ambit of research. This assimilation of community engagement into strictly research paradigms could advance a more structured framework for community engagement but within the context of inherited institutional culture, could perpetuate the hierarchical positioning of universities as knowledge creators distinct from the community.

In the United States of America Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco & Swanson (2012) suggest a more fundamental and central role for community engagement, emphasizing that the 'process' of learning as well as the 'product' of learning are both central to education for democracy and good citizenship. This argument is relevant to the discussion to follow where it is suggested that, from an indigenous, pre-colonial educational perspective, community engagement is both a pedagogical tool and method of knowledge production, which leads to the acquisition of tacit knowledge (values, attitudes and behaviours), implicit knowledge (acquired skills) as well as to explicit knowledge (recorded, stored and accessible). From this perspective, the philosophical underpinnings of the purpose of education in the 21st century comes into focus.

The central argument of this article is that a coherent conceptualisation of community engagement requires a larger framework of concepts to redefine the role of HEIs, locally and globally. For substantive transformation, the context in which engagement with communities occurs compels a respectful attitude towards local indigenous knowledge, philosophical systems and beliefs. In essence, the 1997 White Paper has implications for the *systemic* transformation of Higher Education within the landscape of the South African education system as a whole; a shift into a new and vague paradigm for Higher Education which universities evidently were neither aware that they needed to make nor for which they were prepared. This background suggests that unless community engagement is conceptualised as a core functional activity within a new philosophical framework for Education, it will remain metaphorically speaking a "pillar at the top of the Higher Education Ivory Tower".

It is suggested that a wider lens is needed to refocus the role of Educational systems in the context of transforming realities, both local and global, where the purpose of *Education*

itself falls under the lens. This approach foregrounds the shifting global epistemological and ontological foundations of Education in the 21st century and defines a responsive and transformative role for HEIs. It further seeks to probe the cause of continuing dissonance between the prevailing HE landscape and the societal culture of the new post- apartheid generation of students. This issue surfaced amidst the student "Fees must Fall" protests in 2015 where student voice on the 'decolonization' of HE stirred complacent academics towards reflections on the status of post - colonial education. The critical questions guiding this review and advancement of the conceptualisation of community engagement are:

- How has an Africanized philosophy of education with roots in pre-colonial education paradigms and knowledge systems featured in the conceptualisation of community engagement?

- What are the perspectives from an African philosophy of education that enhance the conceptualisation of community engagement within education for the 21st century?

The problem of systemic assimilation of community engagement into a hegemonic paradigm and identity

The function of an education system, established within colonialist rule in South Africa, would naturally be in alignment with the paradigmatic principles of the hegemonic culture where also, the period of history of the colonizing nations has relevance. The colonial period in South Africa, which began during the age of discovery in the 17th century, was dominated by modernity and modernization. This hegemonic paradigm was characterized by a combination of colonialist "Othering" of indigenous peoples in terms of their race, knowledge systems and religious practices together with the rise of the scientific method and industrialization. The term *othering,* first coined by Spivak (1985) and used by post- colonial scholars, refers to the process of positioning the colonizer in a hegemonic world view apart from the colonized indigenous people. Breidlid (2013), in discussing economic marginalization of colonized nations, draws attention to the simultaneous rise in capitalism during the colonial era, "The hegemonic role of Western epistemology from the 15th and 16th centuries has been interpreted as the bedfellow to the systematic expansion of capitalism into the world economy, which resulted in subalternization, marginalization and Othering" (Breidlid, 2013: 11). Across the planet, the so called "voyages of discovery" led to the decimation of indigenous populations and their knowledge systems. Indigenous communities with an oral tradition of transmitting knowledge and culture, as in South Africa, were particularly susceptible to *cultural hegemony* over more than three centuries of colonialism. Surveys on religious affiliation in 2015 indicate that traditional religions which embodied African philosophy, cosmology and axiology over the millennia are followed by barely 5,4% of South Africa's population (General Household Survey, 2015). In democratic South Africa, "The education system from the missionary to the colonial era, apartheid and beyond continues to erode the values of Ubuntu and the cultural context within which these values are found." (Xulu, 2010: 81)

Within this hegemonic paradigm, the role of universities in knowledge production and skills training for the development of capital and the growth of market economies in the 20th century occurred between two tensions; "…it is a *public* good – one which adds value to society by educating its people, who will then be productive citizens, or a *private* good – one which mainly benefits individuals, who earn more money and enjoy other advantages as a result of their education (Bloom, Hartley and Rosovsky, 2006: 293-308). Under the Apartheid government however, the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (Act 47 of 1953) sought to create

"tribal" universities with curricular designed to entrench black South Africans as labourers. Transformation in South Africa has therefore been largely about democracy and equity but within a context of capitalism and development (Brennan, King and Lebeau, 2004:10). These movements are characterised by a dismantling approach rather than a restorative, healing approach. What is important to note is that the systemic assimilation of community engagement into the hegemonic paradigm may find a place in the philanthropic or "public good" role of Higher Education, however, these conceptualisations retain the power hierarchies that exist between HE and the community and instead advance a discourse of disempowerment. Community engagement's pivotal role in forging an identity in humanness, Ubuntu, and in African philanthropy through relations of caring and sharing, is in-articulated. This cannot be ignored in a rapidly globalizing world where there looms an urgent imperative for an education which connects us globally to our common human identity.

Transformation and epistemic justice through a South African indigenous education perspective

The foregoing discussion precipitates the need in the transformation of HE discourse for a more profound ideological leverage that bridges all stakeholder communities within an integrated education system. It is seen that the conceptualisation of community engagement, itself occurs in the ivory towers of academia, in the absence of the 'soul' of the community and their perspectives of education. This form of indigenous epistemic injustice ignores, in particular, the discourse of indigenous wisdom within indigenous knowledge systems that sustained the South African socio-ecological system over the ages, protected human dignity and ensured sustainable human development.

It is in this context that the lens of African Indigenous Education (AIE) is introduced to focus the conceptualisation of community engagement within the philosophical foundations of an African philosophy of education. The impetus for this perspective is the argument that, at HEI's, the communal spirit of Ubuntu embedded in AIE that contrasts with the current modernistic and individualistic hegemonic paradigm continues to be eroded. Ubuntu is seen to be replaced with the thinking that *we can sustain ourselves and have the power to succeed in the world through technology and materialism*. The discussion locates community engagement within a longitudinal perspective of South African Education from indigenous to contemporary educational systems and explores the conceptualisation of community engagement within an evolution of AIE that resonates with the transforming trajectory of a globalising South African Education. The salient point of this discussion is that the notion of community engagement has historically been an intrinsic component of AIE and human development paradigms. AIE and its associated education philosophy and pedagogies, therefore, provides an appropriate lens to conceptualise community engagement within a discursive exploration of its role in education; from ancient to present day contexts. Along this journey, community engagement assumes a foundational educational role as an agent for transformation that restores epistemic and social justice and a powerful pedagogy for social cohesion, human development and sustainability. Towards this end, the epistemological, axiological and ontological connections between community engagement and AIE are explored.

The discussion to follow is prefaced with a point of departure that draws attention to the proverbial "elephant in the room" – the socio-cultural influence of the World Wide Web. Colonization has historically been associated with geographical space. However, globalization spawned by the information age has impacted on the notion of culture, values and identity tied

to geographical space. Social boundaries, in reality, have been removed and young minds that are developing identities are faced with contrasting local and global cultures and values. Morley and Robins (1995) remark, "What is being created is a new electronic cultural space, a 'placeless' geography of image and simulation …a world in which space and time horizons have become collapsed…that is profoundly transforming our apprehension of the world: it is provoking a new sense of placed and placeless identity and a challenge of elaborating a new self-interpretation". In essence, we are experiencing the dawn of wide-scale virtual colonization of the minds of young people who through their disconnection with indigenous philosophy, culture and values are vulnerable to a confluence of conflicting cultures and values. Are HEI's, as they embrace the waves of the 4th Industrial revolution, inadvertently on a path to entrenching the materialistic and individualistic ideology that gave birth to colonialism by remaining tied to of Euro-American paradigms of education?

This article foregrounds the vital role in education which community engagement could play in socio-ecological development, with awareness and sensitivity to our inter-dependence and shared human values, amidst these conflicting and contrasting influences. Against this backdrop, the article seeks to pave a new post-apartheid/post- colonial narrative for the conceptualisation of community engagement within an education system in a rapidly globalizing world. This calls for a fresh perspective, amongst academics and policy makers, of indigenous educational thought and practices as we re-contextualize them in contemporary educational systems.

2. Towards a Systemic Transformation

The valuing of indigenous education paradigms in the 21st century

In these chaotic and turbulent times, the global discourse on Education has moved beyond the *right to education*. "It is inspired by a humanistic vision of education and development, based on respect for life and human dignity, equal rights, social justice, cultural diversity, international solidarity, and shared responsibility for a sustainable future. These are the fundamentals of our common humanity" (Unesco.org, 2015: 9). It is not intended for this article to discuss this wider framework of Education for the 21st century for the conceptualisation of community engagement but rather to steer the discourse away from conceptualising community engagement as an "add-on" response to the HE transformation agenda and towards organically locating community engagement within the philosophical foundations of Indigenous Education. This position is different from a perspective that evolves from a transformation of the western paradigm and instead "affirms the use of indigenous concepts and analytical systems and cultural frames of reference" (Dei, 2000: 8). This is one of valuing, affirming and reconceptualising the timeless wisdom of our human heritage that shaped and sustained former indigenous paradigms since ancient times.

Community Engagement: A pedagogy integrating cosmology, identity and axiology

Literature in Anthropological studies indicate that all indigenous cultures, evolved a cosmology which defines, for its members, an identity within the cosmos of where they come from, who they are, and what their personal role and meaning could be in life's greater picture. In Southern Africa, the concept of Ubuntu underpinned African indigenous cosmology and axiology. According to Ramose (2002a: 230), Ubuntu is the wellspring flowing with African

ontology, epistemology and also the African tree of knowledge stems from Ubuntu, from which it cannot be separated. The Socio-Anthropological influence of Ubuntu on African axiology defined what was valued and desired *in* and *by* a human being. Ubuntu may be expressed by the maxim "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" which may be translated "to be a human being is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and on that basis, establish humane relations with them" (Ramose, 2002b: 230). Higgs (2017: 233) argues that South African indigenous education philosophy was founded on two core principles, Ubuntu and communalism. Letseka and Venter (2012) allude that "In traditional African life, the individual owes their existence to other people, including those of past generations and their contemporaries… Hence the saying: '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.'" (Mbiti, 1969:108−109 as cited in Letseka and Venter, 2012).

The question arises on *how* was indigenous philosophy transmitted? Yunkaporta (2009) defined indigenous pedagogy as generalized indigenous preference for experiential learning, direct learning by seeing and doing, connectedness to local values and learning how to apply knowledge to changing circumstances. In AIE, "Education took place through the socialisation process which had to do with the acquisition of cultural norms, values and beliefs, and rules for interacting with others" (Seroto, 2011: 77- 88). Prior to colonisation, Marah (2006) states, "The process of traditional education in Africa was intimately integrated with the social, cultural, artistic, religious, and recreational life of the ethnic group. That is, 'schooling' and 'education', or the learning of skills, social and cultural values and norms were not separated from other spheres of life." The link between African axiology and Ubuntu is emphasized in the literature "…*ubuntu* has normative implications in that it encapsulates moral norms and values such as altruism, kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, and respect and concern for others." (Letseka, 2000 as cited in Letseka and Venter, 2012: 1-8). An holistic or integral approach to education, which combines discipline knowledge with an appreciation of culture and values through the integration of various modalities of learning, is characteristic of African Education and is therefore critical to the formation of an identity in Ubuntu. The African proverb, *"What you help a child to love can be more important than what you help him to learn"* expresses this aspect.

The triad between the formation of identity in the child, axiology and social responsibility is, therefore, inherent in AIE underpinned by Ubuntu. Of relevance to the conceptualisation of community engagement is the connection between philosophy and practice as articulated through indigenous educational pedagogy. It is in recognizing that the *type* of pedagogy used is a critical element in the transmission of indigenous knowledge systems that the importance of conceptualising community engagement as an *African educational pedagogy* is realised. This gives recognition to indigenous African epistemology applied to the emergence of Ubuntu within a person as an authentic human experience that unfolds in the context of community and rich social interactions. The "ivory tower" image inherited within the South African Higher Education system highlights a disjoint between the current traditional Euro-American Education archetype and that of African Indigenous Education. Community engagement, as envisioned within the transformation agenda for Higher Education is, however, reminiscent of indigenous pedagogical methods and hence community engagement could be explored as a means to re-connect the fragmented epistemological and axiological foundations of AIE. Engagement between students and the wider community provides a praxis for Ubuntu and space for local cultural values and norms to guide what desired attributes should be inculcated in children and young adults.

Community Engagement as a Humanizing Pedagogy

Humanization is the process of becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons who participate in and with the world (Freire, 1993). It has been widely seen that the devastating legacy of invading Positivistic Western hegemony on indigenous cultures is disempowerment and dehumanization. "Concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility, but also as a historical reality" (Freire, 1993: 43). Literature on the transformation of school curriculum in democratic South Africa, has been shown to indicate a continued "legacy of dehumanization which has been absorbed into relationships with educational systems which mirror and depict hierarchies of power, cultures of compliance, fear, as well as the suppression as loss of voice" (Zinn and Rogers, 2012: 76). This is seen to be the consequence of top-down approaches in the transformation of education which reflect the continued dehumanization process within the education transformation agenda itself.

The recognition of dehumanization, however, presents the problem of how to restore and heal the disempowered? In advancing a narrative of South African Education with indigenous roots and humanizing pedagogies, the focus here is on the aspects of AIE which enculturated children towards the development of a social conscience and a spirit of philanthropy. It has been argued that before the introduction of Western civilization into Africa, the philosophical foundations of African traditional indigenous education were aimed at the five principles of "preparationism, functionalism, communalism, perennialism and holisticism" (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2002: 223). These socializing principles are key to Ubuntu and human development within indigenous African social ecological systems and contrasts with South Africa's inherited western secular education.

AIE is seen to be synergistic with the theoretical foundations of the Progressive education movements. In Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, a key conceptual reference in the theory is the 'zone of proximal development (ZPD)' (Chaiklin, 2003). This educational perspective is mentioned in literature on African educational theory. The ZPD refers to the difference between what a child can achieve unaided in problem solving and what s/he can achieve with the help of adults/ teachers or peer mentors (Nsamenang and Tchombe, 2011). Significantly, the social settings which community engagement entails mitigates against the individualistic thinking that the current education for the job market seems to foster. A further justification may be drawn from Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) where community engagement as "field education" may be conceived of as a relational experience. "Relational Cultural Theory focuses on the development of relational competencies that are necessary to create and sustain growth-fostering relationships, such as the capacity to recognize and attend to the needs of others." (Edwards, Jarvis and Harris 2013: 1)

The identification of community engagement as a contemporary counterpart to African indigenous socialisation methodologies, however, promotes an ontological restoration of an *Indigenous People's Education* in that it is recognised that the engagement process should be infused with the spirit of Ubuntu. This draws impetus as well from the *decolonization* of education conversation through which this paper advances a narrative of the *Africanization* or, in a global context, the *Humanization"* of education through this conceptualisation. In this model, community engagement is not only a HE imperative but also an intrinsic component of humanising pedagogies across all educational levels, from early childhood into young adulthood where community relations founded in Ubuntu extend from the "cradle to the grave".

A critical aspect that this conceptualisation brings to transformation of education is the requirement of community engagement to become a credit - bearing component of educational programmes and assessment practices, thus ensuring that the implementation meets academic standards and may be subject to formal monitoring processes. In this regard, Beets and Le Grange (2005) further argue that the influence of African philosophy and Ubuntu on assessment practices has the potential to shift traditional western paradigms of assessment that is heavily focussed on knowledge transference and assessment '*of* ' learning to behavioural transformation and self – reflection through assessment that is designed '*for* ' learning. These corollaries pave the way for community engagement to become a true pillar of an education system designed to transmit and uphold the aspirations of the society that it serves.

Community Engagement as a Transformation Strategy within Education for a Sustainable Future

Resilience theory has demonstrated that the natural development and transformation of a social ecosystem is characterized by resilience and sustainability. Resilience

may be conceptualised as a measure of how far the system could be perturbed without shifting to a different regime (Holling, 1996). It is assumed in this discussion that the sudden and wide-scale colonization of Africa and, in particular, in South Africa, followed by hegemony and segregation of cultures through apartheid, has resulted in the crossing of the threshold of resilience and sustainability of the indigenous South African educational and social ecological system. Indigenous cultures hence find themselves outside of the natural temporal and spatial evolutionary regime. The shift back to equilibrium of vulnerable communities (economically-deprived, AIDS affected orphans, marginalised rural communities, women and children), that have neither the Indigenous knowledge of their ancestors nor access to resources which could aid adaptation and transformation, is particularly formidable. These challenges have been exacerbated by global chronological factors such as climate change and depleting natural resources. Conversely, although reconstruction and technological advances offer greater opportunity for South Africans to thrive, they also pose a greater risk for further marginalisation of the disadvantaged communities who are ill-prepared to access these opportunities.

The alleviation of epistemic and economic marginalisation presents a complex undertaking in post-colonial/post-apartheid South Africa. There has been ubiquitous erosion of the integrity of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and with this loss; the spirit of Ubuntu has been seen to be replaced by a competitive and individualistic mind-set. Research reported by the South African Institute of Race Relations (Irr.org, 2015) has revealed wide - spread high unemployment, violent crime, exploitation and abuse and poverty which is exacerbated by the AIDS pandemic. Against this background, children continue to be the most vulnerable and severely affected where it is reported that more than 60% of children in South Africa live with single parents, single grandparents or worse; child headed homes. (Irr.org, 2015)

A country's education system is arguably the *only* social system to which all its citizens have access. This has bearing on the potential of community engagement to be a highly responsive transformative methodology which could act as a catalyst for development. With regards to the achievement of wide-scale sustainable development, international policy documents on sustainable development reiterate the need for combined effort of the role-players in education. The African Union, in 2013, adopted a 50- year plan for development which embodied "The African Aspirations for 2063". These are:

- A Prosperous Africa, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.

- An integrated continent, politically united, based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance.

- An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.

- A Peaceful and Secure Africa.

- Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics.

- An Africa whose development is people driven, relying on the potential offered by people, especially its women and youth and caring for children.

- An Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner (DeGhetto, Gray and Kiggundu, 2016).

Community engagement clearly embodies these imperatives. From the perspective of AIE, community engagement is not an "add on" to Higher Education but rather it is envisioned as a core pedagogy that translates African philosophy and human development paradigms into actionable methodologies across the entire education system. This approach synergises the educational approach of all role players, these being: family and community, schools and Higher Education as well as business and industry. The maxim "It takes a village to raise a child", explicates this aspect of African education.

Community engagement fostering acquisition of entrepreneurial, technical and vocational skills in mainstream education.

Another key insight from African education concerns the vocational development of children and youth. Community engagement as an indigenous learning strategy is advocated with the aim to transform it into a major activity for African youth employment and development. Socialisation of children in vocational activities within the family and community is, therefore, seen as having enormous advantages since they develop problem- solving skills through real life challenges (Nsamenang and Tchombo, 2011). In a continent blessed with abundant resources as Africa, training teachers to stir up enterprise skills in the young is indispensable in human capital development strategy for the education sector and beyond. (Nsamenang and Tchombo, 2011)

The integration into education of community engagement inducts learners into real life problem solving which integrates theory and practice. This supports the call from the African Union (AU) for Technical and Vocational Educational Training (TVET) to begin within the mainstream school system. Community engagement resolves one of the key strategic issues on the implementation of TVET programmes stated in the AU guiding document on TVET, that of the *Linkage between vocational and general education*. The creation of separate and parallel vocational tracks tends to reinforce the perception of inferiority of the vocational track. "It is therefore important to create articulation pathways between vocational education and general education" (Union, 2007*)*.

Community Engagement as a learner centred pedagogy: Nurturing the emergence of Ubuntu.

In the foregoing discussion, the conceptualisation of community engagement as a contemporary counterpart to indigenous pedagogies has been argued, wherein Ubuntu has been emphasized for social and human development. However, Ubuntu is not an abstraction

but rather a lived experience and hence is uniquely manifest in an individual. Community engagement may be explored in a learner - centred model as a tool to promote the emergence of a social identity founded in Ubuntu as a developmental milestone. The Latin roots of the word Education are two-fold: Educare' which means to "mould" and Educere' which means to "bring forth". In giving prominence to both these connotations, the relevance for a student centred community engagement model is seen wherein the student is perceived as an agent *for* and *of* change. In promoting a shift away from the modernistic child development paradigms which view the child as being "deficit", community engagement may draw on the "counter paradigm referred to as the sociology of childhood" which "…focuses on children as social actors with competence, agency and resilience" (Naidoo and Muthukrishna, 2016: 3). Community engagement could provide settings for creative and innovative thinking to emerge as learners tackle real issues and come up with their own solutions. Importantly, educators nurture self -reflection and self- directed learning through pedagogical methods which are intrinsically related to how indigenous philosophy and knowledge has been preserved, transmitted and developed without textbook learning. Paradoxically, this approach is synergistic with perspectives of integral or holistic education in the 21st century.

Recommendations and Conclusion

As the mechanisms of the 4th Industrial Revolution advance upon a disturbed and fragmented South African family, the lens of African indigenous education with its long established roots in Ubuntu, shaping our common human identity and shared one-ness emerges as a vital edifice against the tide of turbulence and growing loss of identity, values and humanity. The conceptualisation of community engagement as a contemporary counterpart to indigenous educational pedagogy provides administrators and academia at HE in South Africa an opportune leverage for systemic transformation at a fundamental level that restores epistemic justice to African indigenous knowledge systems. The lens of AIE challenges HEI's to reflect and re-assess the paradigmatic trajectory embarked upon as they decolonialise institutional culture into learning communities that embrace the eroded histories, culture and aspirations of the communities that they serve. Across the education system from early childhood education to higher education, community engagement is conceptualised as an essential and powerful educational pedagogy that provides a natural praxis for the theoretical foundations of an African philosophy of education. This conceptualisation of community engagement within AIE places it at a foundational position alongside teaching and learning as well as research. Importantly, it encourages a shift back towards a holistic and humanistic perspective for the purpose education.

For this conceptualisation of community engagement to be empowered by a policy for its enactment, a proposal of recommendations is distilled from the key insights that have emerged:

• Initiate dialogue around fundamental HE transformation to include African philosophy of education in the conceptualisation of Community Engagement

• Integrate community engagement as a true "pillar" of education with a well -structured and coherent vision across the entire education system from Basic Education to Higher Education.

• Develop training pathways for educators to be skilled in community engagement as conceptualised within an African philosophy of education.

- The conceptualisation, implementation and assessment of community engagement activities should reflect the shifting pedagogical paradigm induced by an African philosophy of education with Ubuntu and communalism as its core foundations, restoring humanness to the methodologies that support a holistic education.

- Incorporate community engagement at different levels of complexity from simple acts of kindness and service to more complex engagement that manifests and promotes multiple intelligences reflecting creativity and innovation in a spirit of Ubuntu and communalism.

- It is suggested that Higher Education and Basic Education sectors collaborate in identifying the needs within communities and to undertake social entrepreneurship projects where students may become imbued with a sense of communal responsibility as they become skilled to accomplish their roles as agents of change.

- Initiate partnerships with business and industry where community engagement could become a pathway towards skills development, enterprise and entrepreneurship for students across the education system.

- Community engagement as community based research incorporate principles and ethics that respects research from different epistemologies, pedagogies and knowledges, giving a voice to indigenous wisdom.

"It is one of the characteristic traits of colonialism that it denied diversity, epistemic diversity, and created instead inferiority. The production of the hegemonic epistemology necessitated the Other, which was characterized as uncivilized, irrational, superstitious" (Breidlid, 2013: 7). This devaluing of indigenous knowledge systems through colonization and the rise of modernism, science and technology is perhaps the greatest loss to our common shared civilization and humanity on the planet. Conceptualising community engagement, within a South African Indigenous Education model, is part of a discourse on appreciating, affirming and applying the wisdom of our Ancient human heritage. It is about the sacredness of our humanness, placing Community above Self and Spirit above Body. Steve Bantu Biko provided an insightful perspective on the disjuncture between modern- colonial and African epistemology and ontology when he wrote "… We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationship. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face" (Biko, 1978: 46).

3. Acknowledgement

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