BOOK REPORT

African Philosophy of Education Reconsidered: On being human


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African Philosophy of Education Reconsidered: On being human is worthy reading for scholars, teachers, and other people in the education community, as well as for general readers. The word reconsidered meaning thought about again is precisely what Waghid has done in this book. The author relooks what other African philosophers think African education should entail. Waghid juxtaposes his ideas with other writers’ views as he concurs, and also disagrees, with other academics’ assertions about African educational philosophy. He suggests that scholars of African education should be guided by African traditions.

The book centres on ubuntu, a concept on which the author has written extensively, and which “translates as humaneness, personhood and morality” (Letseka, 2012, p. 48). Hence, he includes On being human in the book title. This further illustrates what Waghid considers one of the main attributes of African philosophy of education: he argues that African education should be based on communality. Local contexts and historical and cultural knowledge such as beliefs and practices should be taken heed of during any teaching or learning process. He asserts that African philosophy of education must link European philosophy with African consciousness. There is further argument that African knowledge, much of which is transmitted through oral history, should be documented for it to be debated or validated and thus become a cornerstone of African education.

The seven-chapter book is user friendly with every chapter having its own heading and subheading. This makes for clear understanding of the content of each chapter. As a researcher of oral communication (focusing on teaching English oral communication to isiZulu-speakers), I became interested by the author’s highlighting of Africa’s institutes of democracy such as inkundla, ibhunga or ibandla (courts, councils or forums). These institutes are colloquies where ubuntu, the idea that people live in a community where they share things and care for each other (Mkhize, 2004), and ukama (interdependent relationships) are nurtured. According to Waghid these are foundations of democratic citizenship that should be woven into Africans’ ways of life through African philosophy of education.
Throughout the book, readers can note that the suggestion is that African beliefs and practices need to underpin African education. Waghid sees ubuntu philosophy as means of propagating the teaching, learning, and working together of communities (see also Caracciolo & Mungai, 2009). The author avers that human rights abuses can be counteracted through the concept of ubuntu. That is to say, an African philosophy of education that stresses oneness and communitarian existence can aid in averting the civil wars that ravage the African continent, and aid in preventing the horrific violence that has been prevalent in countries such as Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

Reading this book has prompted my own self-introspection as a teacher and a researcher. Am I providing my learners with “transformative education” (Ball, 2004, p. 468)? How am I going to contribute to scholarly work that can help to cleanse my country of the inequities of apartheid in South African education?

Waghid’s book is appropriate for teachers who aspire to interweaving traditional African philosophy with modern and global philosophies of education. It is a very informative book, particularly for researchers using ubuntu as theoretical lens for any study. The book is also an invaluable resource for scholars whose interest lies specifically in African philosophy of education.

References


