



Human Rights Pedagogy: Practices and implications for teachers in a South Africa context

Letloyo Segalo¹

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¹Central University of Technology, Free State, South Africa



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Letloyo Segalo¹

¹Central University of Technology, Free State, South Africa

Email: lsegalo@cut.ac.za

ABSTRACT

In this research Human Rights practices of secondary school teachers across the curricular in their different schools' settings are explored. The importance of Human Rights Pedagogy is advocated for. A qualitative interpretivist research paradigm was used in this study employing Ubuntu as a research framework. An Ubuntu research framework assumes the importance of equality, fairness and justice among the researcher and the participants in the research setting. The participants in the study comprised of 10 secondary schools' teachers which were conveniently sampled. A focused group was used to collect data on issues of human rights in particular the rights of learners using an Ubuntu framework. Data was analysed thematically. The findings of this research showed that teachers have not changed their mind-sets regarding the rights of learners as enshrined in the Constitution (Republic of South Africa) stating that the rights of the learners should be respected and promoted. The study therefore argues for a debate on the training of teachers on Human Rights Pedagogy for professional development.

Keywords: Human Rights Education, Pedagogy, Democracy learners, Constitution, New Revised Curriculum Statement, Ubuntu research framework.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A classroom Human Rights Pedagogy has not translated into practical applications by teachers, despite South African having the most advanced liberal constitution in the world since the 1994 transition to democracy. The democratic event ushered in a new dispensation embracing democratic values such as the respect for life, human dignity and creating humane safe living environments for its citizens (Keet, 2010:28, Ferreira & Schulze, 2014:6). However, these democratic values did not translate into democratic practices amongst many of its citizens. For example, Simatwa, (2012), Manguvo, Whitney, and Chareka, (2011) Mpfu & Mapfumo, (2010) Shumba, (2011), Shumba, Chireshe, Simuforsa, and Ngara, (2014) all posit that the use of corporal punishment in schools is very prevalent despite its abolishment by law. These findings call for schools to play a meaningful role in the teaching of Human Rights Education pedagogy in public schools. Human Rights pedagogy is defined as the deliberate intention to teach or inculcate Human Rights agenda such as peace, fairness, equality and equity across the curriculum.

According to Westbrook, Durrani, Brown, Orr, Pryor, Boddy and Salvi, (2013) pedagogy refers to intentionality, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and understanding about the curriculum and the teaching and learning about the educational process of the learners. As such, Human Rights pedagogy is about the teaching and practice of human rights with the purpose of inculcating in learners the desired human rights values (McLeod, 2014 and Burton & Leoschut, 2013). The Human Rights pedagogy calls for teachers to teach learners in their classrooms and beyond, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, full development of the personality promotion of tolerance and active participation in the decision making that affects the learners.

Human Rights Education is viewed as one of the most important issues since World War II (Hung, 2014). Hung, (2014), Al-Daraeesh, (2013) and Christie, (2008) point out that though many countries have signed many international declarations against abuse of human rights, compliance with the intents of the treaties are lacking. The decade of the United Nations Human Rights Education (1995-2004 and 2005-2009) witnessed many countries entwining human rights and democratic principles in their school's curriculum (Pitsou & Balias, 2010:3). In South African context, Keet and Carrim, (2006:88) argue that Human Rights Education was influenced by compelling global developments such as the ratification of the Declaration on Human Rights. As such, Keet and Carrim (2006) view adoption of Human Rights Education (HRE) in the New Curriculum Statement in South Africa as being more symbolic, mechanical, compliant mechanism rather than deliberate. Later, Keet, (2014) refers to this phenomenon metaphorically as a refraction, that is the discourse and the intention, which the researcher understood as being the distance between what Human Rights Pedagogy is about and the time it takes for its implementation. Keet (2014)'s refractory metaphor resonates with the observations

of Maphosa and Shumba (2010) and Masitsa (2008) there is absence of human rights values driven curriculum in schools. These observations are demonstrated by lack of safety, security and lawlessness in the classrooms and within the school premises.

The aim of this paper was therefore to find out the current practices of secondary schools' teachers, how they infuse Human Rights Pedagogies in the subjects or Subjects Areas they teach in different secondary schools. This aim led to the research question as to how secondary schools' teachers experience the implementation of Human Rights Pedagogy in the subjects they teach in South African schools.

Ubuntu an alternative framework

International and regional declarations and legislative frameworks remain the solid guiding points towards creating a humane and sustainable human rights environment. Furthermore, these declarations and legislative frameworks remain reference points on the discourse on Human Rights Education. Evidence shows that member states fail to implement the international resolutions they have signed to or fail to enforce the resolutions. For example, in Africa three examples can be referred to, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa the right to life of innocent people continue to be violated. Internationally, the United States of America has yet to sign the Declaration of Human Rights and together with Britain have not being prosecuted for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This research employs Ubuntu as a frame to understand that human rights are not only in print but innate and normative. For example, Ubuntu as a framework shifts from the 'must' (positivist framework) what the declarations and legislations say and postures on what 'ought' (normative framework) people to one another and their environment. Keet (2007) assumes the framing of human rights within the normative and innate discourse as a powerful communicative tool that could be used to enhance the livelihood of people.

Consistent with the normative view of human rights, Ubuntu view the world of people from what is common among people. Letseka, (2014), Metz and Gaie, (2010), Mkhize (2008), Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2009) and Ramose, (1999) refer to the practice of sharing, treatment of equality, fairness, justice, righteousness, unity and peace as common among people irrespective of race, greed, culture, gender and religion. These characteristics of Ubuntu could also be regarded as the essential fibre of the human existence. For example, where there is no unity, justice and peace there is discontentment and war which leads to the end of life. Waghid and Meyers, (2011), Prinsloo, 2001, Swanson, 2007 take the view of Ubuntu further by transcending it to the connectedness of being, that is directly or indirectly people are connected to one another and their universes.

Interconnectedness of humanity is further illustrated in the idea of people being connected to their immediate environment, ancestors and God and this is sustained through life by respect, humility, unity and the treatment of one another fairly and equally. Le Grange (2012) refers to this interconnectedness as 'Ukama' meaning relatedness of things in a particular space or environment. Mawere, (2012) on the other hand points the importance of the sacred forest jiri in Norumedzo area in Masvingo in Zimbabwe that is conserved by the villages as they believe it gives nourishment to the ecosystem. On one hand, Shumba (2012) refers this interconnectedness as a common links which represents both the naturals' systems and the cultural patterns that are shared by the communities without cost. For example, the notion of respect to nature is demonstrated in Ubuntu by metaphorically seeing it as Mother Nature which could imply the essentials of nature. Le Grange (2012) supports this view of Mother Nature as a biophysical world and pointing out human beings have a moral obligation to protect it.

In the classroom environment or school setting the principle of Ubuntu could be potent as teachers could realize that sharing their knowledge with their learners, they create a classroom environment that promotes equality of ideas, tolerance and interdependence (Letseka, 2012, Msila, (2011), Msila, (2009), Le Roux, 2000 and Reyneke, 2011). Letseka (2013) alludes that as much as Ubuntu could be taught within the indigenous education framework, its ideas are relevant to the present conventional classroom practices. Venter, (2000) adds that Ubuntu could be used in the classroom for the teaching of a common identity amongst the learners and regaining of societal values. Reyneke, (2011:133) advises that the school and the classrooms settings should be mirrored by a sense of respect and dignity for both the learners and teachers in order to create a harmonious learning safe spaces which are the embodiments of Ubuntu. Teachers practicing in an environment that embodies Ubuntu acknowledge the cognitive understanding of their learners in order to allow the voices to be heard (Msila, 2012, Hammett& Staeheli, 2011). From the Ubuntu perspective teachers are expected demonstrate that they care, include all learners, and encouraged participation in the classrooms.

Research questions

The study sought to address the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of secondary school teachers with regard to human rights education pedagogy in their practice?
- To what an extent are secondary school teachers deliberate to teach human rights education in their classrooms?
- How willing are teachers committed to respect the rights of learners in their practice?

- How can teachers be assisted to change their mind-sets regarding human rights education pedagogy?

Research paradigm and method

An interpretivist qualitative research lens was employed to ground this research study. This paradigm was appropriate in this context as it embraces the view that the participants have consciousness, thoughts, can reflect, have feelings and have the potential of seeing the Human Rights Pedagogy from multiple perspectives (Flick, 2010, Payne & Payne 2004 and Coberta (2003). This view is consistent with Terre Blance, Durrheim, and Painter, (2006)'s view that realities studied in the context of Human Rights discourse acknowledge the subjective experiences of the participants in the research study on how they view Human Rights discourses prior and post 1994 and beyond. In the context of this paradigm participants are free to provide insights on their own practices as they are able to reflect and probed to clarify their stances where it is necessary. The interpretivist approach resonated with the discourse on Human Rights and Ubuntu as it allows participants to naturally converse subjectively without prejudice (2012). Lastly, the research understood that to gain trust and cooperation of the participants there is a need to treat them with respect and equity.

Sample

A convenience sample procedure was chosen for this particular research as the participants were readily available and willing to participate in the research study (Frey, 2000). The sample conveniently chosen fitted the characteristics of this study which are the teachers in a Bachelor of Honours Education (Law of Education) at one University of Technology in South African setting. Therefore, the idea of the findings of this research was not intended to generalize the findings of this research rather to provide an insightful rich interpretations and descriptions of the participants in their own settings on how they continue to employ Human Rights pedagogy. The process of selection and participation was therefore seen as voluntary and not obligatory. Initially 11 participants volunteered, but only 10 participated. The participants' representation cut across race, gender, culture and school settings and experience of teaching. For example, 7 (5- 20 years of teaching experience) were Black (3 Coloured- 1 male and 2 females, 4 Blacks - 3 females and 1 male)) and 3 (White (8- 14 years of teaching experiences), 2 female - 1 male). Their schools' settings ranged from Independent Schools, former model C schools to Township schools. Rural and farm schools were not represented which interestingly would have added a different dimension to the view and practices of Human Rights pedagogy in South African setting. The participants' experience in teaching ranged from 0-5 years, 6-10 and 11-16 years. The aim of this categorization was to elicit differences from participants with regard to their views and experiences of their roles in teaching Human Rights principles in their classrooms.

Data collection tool

A focused group interview was organized to collect data from the participants. Billson (2006) defines a focus group as a structured, guided discussion that have as their sole purpose the gathering of scientific data. A qualitative interview guide was used to pose questions to the participants. Questions were phrased in a way they allowed clarification and probing. The Ubuntu setting is similar to the Lekgotla (Parliament) and patience is exercised to elicit the positional ideas of the members in a matter that is before the Lekgotla. Members of the Lekgotla exercises a lot of patience in listening, probing and rephrasing where clarity was not provided. The views of the members are not intended to make conclusions rather to make sense and understanding (Masadeh, 2012). The note taking method was used and a scribe was selected from the participants to take notes of what transpired as the researcher felt that the audio tape recording was not conducive.

Ethical consideration

In this instance, the voluntary participation of the participating teachers was acknowledged at all times. This view is aligned to Kvale, (2010), Gray, (2010) and Horrocks, (2010) stances that a qualitative interview is a construction site for knowledge which should be regarded as a moral inquiry. This view of ethical consideration could be seen as embedded within the Ubuntu setting as it embraces the notion of respect and humility (Mahlomaholo, 2011). Permission was sought from the Department of Education (Free State) and the University Research and Planning Committee and was granted. All the participants were informed of the aim, objectives, the research methods, and the nature of their participation, confidentiality, anonymity of their participation and possible publication of the results of their participation in the study (Allmark, Boote, Chambers, Clarke, McDonnell, Thompson and Todd 2009).

Trustworthiness

The following strategies were utilized to account for the trustworthiness of the qualitative study. A peer check was done where the researcher and a senior researcher transcribed the transcripts of the interviews separately and member check was utilized where the researcher went back to the participants to confirm aspects of the

results which were not clear (Shenton, 2004, Mouton 2002, Harrison, MacGibbon and Morton (2001) and Seale (1999).

Data analysis

Flick (2010) posits that the focus qualitative research data analysis is to describe what is happening, and that the description should be detailed and should contribute to an understanding of the setting studied. The advice of Flick (2010) was employed to provide a thorough description of what teachers related to their practices of Human Rights Pedagogy in such a way what they discussed during the interview was understood. A thematic data analysis was used to identify patterns and categorize the main themes emerging from the focus group interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of a thematic data analysis was used to bring forth a narrative and thick description reporting on the expressions of the participants and was triangulated through the literature review.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The expectation in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa is that teachers are entrusted with the teaching of values that are consistent with the human rights practices. Furthermore, teachers as lifelong learners are supposed to acquire new strategies of dealing with complex issues in the classrooms such as diversity, culture and inclusivity. In this section findings on teachers' practices of human rights pedagogy are presented and discussed. After the qualitative data was collected and analysed, the following themes emerged out of the focus group interviews:

School policy that promotes Human Rights Education

Teachers interviewed were oblivious whether there was a school policy that promotes Human Rights Education in their schools. In fact, it emerged that there was no deliberate effort by the schools to teach and make learners and teachers aware of the importance of human rights pertinent to education. This is despite the fact, that many of the public schools are riddled with violations of learner human rights such as lack of proper sanitation, school violence in the form of bullying, rape, sexual harassment and corporal punishment (Motseke, 2010, Shumba, 2011, Ngqela & Lewis, 2012, de Wet, 2014, and Segalo, 2015). As a result, there were no forums at the schools that were geared towards promoting of Human Rights Education. This finding is consistent with the views of Keet (2007) that there is a distant between the intents of Human Rights Education instruments and the actual practice. It would have been expected that the schools in teachers practice promote the ethos and values consistent with human rights. It was observed that it is difficult for teachers to teach human rights values if the schools do not promote such them. Donaldson, 56-year-old Head of Department teacher with 29 years of teaching Social Sciences remarked that at their school human rights are only celebrated during the cultural day and Freedom Day at the school as the year programme of the school.

“At my school there is no policy that stipulates that human rights values must be advocated. Human rights values are seen only in the context of being event. After the event life goes back to normal. But I think it is important to internalize human rights in our practices and make our schools sensitive to the importance of the rights and responsibilities of others”

The views Donaldson above were echoed by 28-year-old Mavis with 5 years of experience by adding:

“I think it is important to live human rights values rather than to treat its symptoms. I think we are a way too far from reaching this goal. We teachers are to blame for this, because we expect learners to behave in a certain way when they arrive at our school thinking that they have been taught these human rights values by their parents”

The views of the two teachers expressed above indicates the importance of the two families, that is the home and the school in the importance of inculcating human rights values such as respect for one another, respect for the environment and to love their own schools. This finding is like that of Marais and Meier, (2010) who observed that there is a link between violent families and violent schools. These findings suggest that parents play an important role in the character formation of their own learners. Many schools in South African are vandalized, broken into, school property stolen, and the school defaced by learners who have no respect for their own surrounding which is direct violation of the rights of other learners to learn in a safe environment (De Wet, 2004 and Esau, 2007).

Cross curricular teaching

In terms of the New Revised Curriculum Statement teachers are expected to infuse Human Rights pedagogy across disciplines daily while teaching learners. In return, learners are also expected to participate in the construction of information shared with them by teachers. What became evident during the interviews was that teachers felt that they did not have sufficient time to create democratic spaces that enhance or purport the advancement of Human Rights Education in the classrooms. Teachers expressed that they were pressed by time to finish the curriculum as the Department of Basic Education was after good results. As such, many teachers felt that the best way to teach in the class was the authoritative teacher-focused learning. This form of learning is

viewed by many critics as a way of silencing the voices of the learners in the class. This few of learning is regarded as being counterproductive as it is reproductive. Teacher Rose, with 9 years of teaching experience who teach Natural Science expressed her views in this way:

“There is not enough time to teach Human Rights values in my subject, I have to teach content and that is what the Department of Education wants. Everyone wants to see good results at the end of the year” I teach what is important for my subject. In my knowledge human rights values are supposed to be taught in Life Orientation and Social Sciences.

This expression implied that teachers are unable to link the subjects that they teach with examples that are within their contents with human rights values. This implies that teachers lack the awareness to see their subjects as being interconnected to other spheres of life like it expressed by Msimanga, (2010), Mawere (2012 and Le Grange (2012). The tendency to dichotomize learning disciplines or field of study is common in many education settings. Gay (2013) refers to this instance as lack of cultural responsiveness to teaching, implying that teachers should teach learners in such a way that the learning discipline they teach holistically understood as related to other spheres of their lives.

Human Rights Education as disruptive

Teachers were asked to comment on the usefulness of the teaching of Human Rights Education to their learners. Their responses were that teaching learners of their human rights and human rights related to education was the starting of the creation of a disruptive classroom environment that did not strived to enhance teaching and learning environment. For these teachers it was important not to teach or promote the ideas of a free society in the class. Teachers seemed not ready and prepared to answer questions from the learners that could destabilize the harmonious school environment. It was, if learners knew about their human rights that was their own good. For the teachers, knowledge of human rights for the learners was viewed as a private thing that did not warrant to be shared in an open space with others.

The degree to which learners take responsibility for their actions

Like in many other studies conducted in South Africa, learners might have a hint of ‘right’ and that ‘right’ that they from time-to-time demand, however, they seemed not take responsibility for their actions. Teachers felt that the culture of human rights in schools has rendered teachers in effective when trying to discipline learners as the issue of “rights” became more pronounced. Teachers felt that it was important to remain silent for them and just wish something bad to happen to the learners so that they can learn a lesson from nature. Mavis, a 43-year-old female teacher with 28 years’ experience teaching Economic and Management Sciences remarked:

“It is important to avoid confrontation with the learners and stay away as far as possible; this helps to stay stress less even though you know you have the responsibility to discipline your learners as expected from you as the teachers”

Mavis’ views were supported by 41-year-old Lukas who taught Mathematics for the last 15 years by interjecting:

“Teachers are unable to instil disciple in their learners, it is hard to tell the learners that his or her actions are wrong, Teachers are afraid of being attacked by learners or be seen as having clashes with their learners. Parents, sometimes they come to school and confront teachers without evidence that teachers are abusive in the class and their children do not feel free anymore.

These views agree with the findings of Mkhize (2008) by stating that the classroom in South Africa has become a contested terrain between teachers and the learners where human rights values play a critical role. This view reinforces the evidence that human rights values are looked at from a narrow perspective of “my rights” rather than our “our rights”. These classroom contestations impact on the human rights pedagogy in the classroom.

Ubuntu as a way of teaching one another about humanness

The classroom is viewed as a learning space that could be utilized by both teachers and learners to learn to live together and create a harmonious environment for teaching and learning. Whilst Ubuntu purports the importance of justice, respect and solidarity it was important to allow the teachers to discuss on how the principles of Ubuntu could be infuse in their practice on a daily basis in order to allow the learners to discover their humanness. Teachers interviewed indicated that it was important to teach learners about respect, justice and solidarity. However, the feeling was that the society in which learners live in has changed so much that they (learners) do not see these principles in the general society.

CONCLUSION

Attention to Human Rights Pedagogy was argued despite contrary findings that teachers find it problematic to infuse in their teaching across the curricular. This is despite teachers being aware of the constitutional demands and curriculum compliance to human rights to create a democratic society. The interrelatedness of human rights ethos to biodiversity as an example was pointed out as the importance of schools’ vandalism and defacement by

learners cannot be justified. The connection of human rights and Ubuntu demonstrated that safe learning environments could be sustained through the respect for teachers and learners and the environment, principles of justice, equality, harmony and democracy. It is in this atmosphere where teachers understand the meaning of nurturing and humane disciplinary approaches are explored and applied to create an assurance of safety and security for their learners. In the human rights sensitive learning environments, the essential of living and meaning searching for a purpose is created by teachers allowing learners a space to think create and share their knowledge with one another in a safe democratic space. In so doing, teachers and learners scaffold the notion of paper human rights to the innate normative Ubuntu ethos.

Lastly, it was established that Ubuntu could be employed both as a research approach in a qualitative research because it is not only a practice but a practice as well. Ubuntu as a research framework encourages a holistic approach to knowledge and raises a number of sensitive ethical issues such as equality, fairness, respect and dignity, especially when researching attitudes of teachers and learners in a school setting.

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