

**VOLUME 22 NUMBER 3**

**November 2010**

**ISSN 1013-3445**

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# **Philosophical reflections on the Nziramasanga Commission on education and training of 1999 with special reference to chapter 4 Hunhu/Ubuntu (holistic education)**

**Ngoni Makuvaza, University of Zimbabwe**

## ***Abstract***

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the findings and recommendations of the Nziramasanga Commission on Education and Training of 1999. The special focus of the reflections shall be on Chapter 7 *Hunhu / Ubuntu* (Holistic Education), *hunhu/ubuntu*, which according to the findings and recommendations of the Commission should be **the aim** of education in Zimbabwe. The proposition that *hunhu /ubuntu* should be the aim of education for Zimbabwe is of particular interest to this paper because this recommendation seems to have been a reaction and response to the absence, for a very long time, of an expressed aim of education to inform the provision of education in Zimbabwe. Accordingly this paper is informed by the desire to contribute other dimensions to the articulation of said aim of education desperately required to inform both the theory and practice of education in Zimbabwe.

## **Introduction**

This paper is a result of serious reflections on the findings and recommendations of the Nziramasanga Commission on Education and Training of 1999. Amongst the findings and recommendations of the Commission and which are of interest and special concern to this paper is Chapter 4 entitled '*Hunhu / Ubuntu*' (Holistic Education) which as recommended by the Commission should be **the aim** of education in Zimbabwe (page 66). This paper focuses on this precisely because it has been the concern of like minded philosophers of education that our education system has been for a long time without an articulated **aim** to give it direction (Makuvaza, 2007 & 2010; Zvobgo, 1994). Thus it could be argued that our educational practice in Zimbabwe has been for all this long mere activism. Accordingly this paper together with the Commission is informed by the same desire to contribute towards the discourse on the search for the aim of education to inform both theory and practice of education in Zimbabwe.

## **Knowledge as a product reflective engagement**

Knowledge needs to be constantly re-examined and reflected upon to ensure its continued relevance in the face of the ever-changing demands, needs and expectations of society, otherwise it becomes redundant and

obsolete. Thus, **constantly reflecting** on knowledge keeps it always 'fresh' in the face of new demands and challenges. The reflections must be constant for we cannot afford perceived self-satisfaction lest we are caught off guard by change and find ourselves lagging behind. Indeed, reflection should lead to further reflection if we intend to be reasonably abreast with change and time. The Nziramasanga Commission on Education and Training of 1999, was thus set up to reflect on education and training in the country, to establish how far it was still relevant and serving the desired and intended educational objectives and aims of the country. The results of the reflections on education and training were a number of recommendations.

In the spirit of constantly reflecting on knowledge to ensure it remains as near fresh as possible, this paper proposes to make further philosophical reflections on the findings and recommendations made by the commission on education and training in Zimbabwe. Specifically, this paper proposes to make further reflections on Chapter 4 Hunhu/Ubuntu (Holistic Education).

### Points of Agreement.

We are in agreement with most of the observations, submissions and recommendations made in Chapter 4 of the Commission's Report especially the one concerning *hunhu/ubuntu* as the aim of education in Zimbabwe. This is in realization of the observation that post colonial education in Zimbabwe has been for some time, since the demise of socialism in the mid 80s, without an articulated ideology or philosophy to guide and inform it (Barker, 1986; Zvobgo, 1994) This is in further realization of the centrality of theory or philosophy to any practice, as in the absence of the former, the latter will become mere activism and haphazard without well-defined goals (Makuvaza, 1995; Dei, 1984; Nkrumah, 1970). Unlike in colonial days when capitalism was clearly the ideology or philosophy that aimed at engendering capitalistic consciousness in the learners, the same is not true for post-independent Zimbabwe. Chapter 4 of the Nziramasanga Commission namely Hunhu/Ubuntu (Holistic Education) seems to be an attempt to address this problem as it clearly spells out the aims of education by contending that "the aim of education is the formation of an individual who has *hunhu/ubuntu*, that is to say a human being in the fullest and noblest sense" (page 61). The Commission further reiterates this point by admitting that "in line with the findings, the Commission believes that the nation, the family, the media and churches are challenged to ensure that the education system produces a person with *hunhu/ubuntu*" (page 77). The aim of education according to the Commission, unlike in the past when pupils simply went to school because they had reached the right age and teachers simply taught to make students pass, now is to produce "a person with *hunhu/ubuntu*". *Hunhu/ubuntu* becomes the **grand aim** of education that subsumes all other goals of education. A learner may fail or pass his/her studies but over and above that he/she should have *hunhu/ubuntu*.

(Makuva,2008).

In other words *hunhu/ubuntu* should be understood as the new mark of 'educatedness' in Zimbabwe (Makuva, 1995). We cannot agree with the Commission any further on this because for the first time our education will be said to have some clearly defined goal, one that is not imported or imposed on us but one that evolves from and is informed by our Africanness. Together with the Commission, we are equally committed to this aim of education and wish it could be met with the same commitment from the implementers of educational policies. In addition, the Commission and we partly agree with it, has proceeded to articulate a philosophy that is informing *hunhu/ubuntu* as the aim of education in Zimbabwe when it maintains that "the school should promote holistic education and expound *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy"(p. 79). Thus *hunhu/ubuntu philosophy* according to the Commission is to be the philosophy informing theory and practice of education in Zimbabwe, a positive development indeed.

We are also in agreement with most of the challenges observed and the recommendations made. Of particular interest is the recommendation regarding the involvement of the "family, school, college, churches and NGOs, media and society in promoting the *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy and take an active part in the moral and ethical education of youth"(p. 78). In other words, the community as in the past should be involved in the nurturing and upbringing of the neophyte into active and acceptable participation in the same society. This is in line with Afro centric reconstructionalism and Afro centrism / *chivanhu* or African traditional thought that maintains that *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu /munhu munhu nevanhu* (Shutte, 1993; Mbiti, 1969; Menkiti ; 1979). Literally translated it means' a human being becomes a person through others' meaning that one's personhood and individuality is to a great extent if not exclusively determined by the community or society. Dussell (1980: 19) corroborates this when he contends that "a person is born into and grows up in a family, or other social group, and in a society in a historical epoch within which one's world of sense will unfold". Thus, the community is central in the creation and shaping of one's broad identity. Menkiti (1979: 158) augments this view further when he submits that "in the African view it is the community which defines the person as person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory". Mbiti (1969:141) corroborates the centrality of the community in the lives of individuals when he says" I am because you are, and you are because I am.". Indeed, the community is and should be central in the upbringing of the child in society because the child is a product of the community and owes its being to the same in more ways than one. For instance the creation of the child was and is the result of a community of people, of firstly the two parents but also and very importantly the two clans represented by the two parents. The involvement of the community has far reaching positive effects on especially matters of discipline and monitoring of the child when he / she is away from home. Precisely because everyone

was a father, mother, sister, uncle, *mbuya*, *sekuru* to the child, at no time was he/she ever given to misbehavior without anyone 'noticing' it. Accordingly, we are arguing for the same, notwithstanding the fact that some intentions of some of our adults of today, especially the male members of our communities towards particularly the girl- children need to be treated with great circumspect. If it is the case that *munhu munhu ne vanhu/umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, then we are in agreement with the Commission that the community (physically and metaphysically) must be involved in the upbringing of the child so that he/she will have *hunhu/ubuntu* (Makuvaza, 1996; Gyekye, 1997).

### **Points of difference and further reflection Challenges**

Notwithstanding the above merits, the following should be construed in the spirit of further reflecting in order to have 'refined' knowledge about theory and practice of education in Zimbabwe which is as 'fresh' as can be possible in the efforts to best address the needs and aspirations of the people. Precisely because no one can and should claim to monopolize knowledge there is bound to be differences in opinions regarding how we interpret reality and these should be welcome as this is a sign of a 'healthy democracy.' The following are issues for further reflection in our attempt to establish a more holistic (*hunhu/ubuntu*) education in Zimbabwe.

Two points of contention arise from two of the Commission's recommendations both of which emanate from the apparent deficiency of the particular recommendations in question. The recommendations in question that are of particular interest to us are 6.2 that reads "teachers should promote ethical education, character formation and model *hunhu/ubuntu* and 6.12 which reads "the school should promote holistic education and expound the *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy" respectively. Indeed, these recommendations in our view can be taken as a summary of this particular sub-section except that as they are, teachers can find some difficulties in implementing them. One of the problems being that the recommendations appear to be premised on rather flawed assumptions the assumption that teachers *know* what the idea of *hunhu/ubuntu* and *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy entails apart from probably a layman's view. In this regard therefore what the Commission should have recommended as a prerequisite should have been country-wide workshops for staffing officers, school heads and teachers to staff- develop them on this new philosophy so that everyone starting from the teacher upwards will be speaking the same language and this would facilitate speedy implementation. In the absence of such workshops, the implementation of these recommendations is likely to be derailed.

The Commission in 6.2 recommends that teachers should "promote ethical education, character formation and model *hunhu/ubuntu*" The problem is

*how* do they 'promote' *hunhu / ubuntu* and be role models of *hunhu/ubuntu as well*? Do they do it by teaching it as a subject like any other subject on the timetable? If it is going to be taught like a subject then the concern raised above pertaining to workshops becomes very pertinent especially as the teacher is required not only to 'promote' but more so to 'model' or 'live' *hunhu/ubuntu*. We argue that *hunhu/ubuntu* cannot be taught like one is teaching Shona, Mathematics or Economics for *hunhu/ubuntu* demands total commitment from the teacher. Whilst it is possible for one to teach Mathematics without being a Mathematician or to teach Economics without being an Economist one cannot effectively and meaningfully teach *hunhu/ubuntu* without being a '*munhu ane hunhu*'. The levels of commitment required in the two instances are qualitatively different where in the latter one can afford indifference or non commitment and students still pass the subject. The same cannot be true for *hunhu/ubuntu*. In teaching *hunhu/ubuntu* one cannot afford to be indifferent, theoretical or uncaring or unconcerned about *hunhu/ubuntu*. Whilst it is possible for a teacher of Religious Studies to teach Christianity or Islam and become a specialist in teaching them, without being a Christian or Muslim it is equally possible and unsurprising for him/her to be an atheist, skeptic or agnostic, but the same cannot be true for a teacher of *hunhu/ubuntu*. A teacher of *hunhu/ubuntu* cannot and should not only teach it but in addition should **live** it. *Hunhu/ubuntu*, we are urging cannot be professed by professors in lecture theatres and taught in classrooms by teachers and end there, for the lectures and lessons to be effective, the professors and teachers must in addition live *hunhu/ubuntu*. In addition to talking about it in classrooms, they should identify with it by 'living' it. *Hunhu/ubuntu* cannot be theorized without being practiced for theorization should be merged with willing and unpretentious practice. What is being argued for therefore, is that teaching *hunhu/ubuntu* requires a teacher who is committed not only to teaching a subject to be called *hunhu/ubuntu* but committed and devoted to live a life that has '*hunhu/ubuntu*', meaning to do that '*iyе anofanira kuve munhu ane hunhu*'. The problem and challenge facing us is how many teachers in schools and lecturers in colleges and universities do have that kind and level of commitment and devotion to this noble idea and philosophy? That is precisely the reason why earlier on it was suggested that workshops should be held firstly to orientate implementers but more so, to generate commitment in them so that as they try to implement *hunhu/ubuntu* they do so wholeheartedly and compassionately.

Related to the preceding submission regarding commitment another problem and challenge to the full implementation of the philosophy of *hunhu/ubuntu* is the tension between Afrocentrism or *chivanhu ne chiKristu* on the one hand and *chivanhu* and westernization/modernization and educatedness on the other (Gyekye, 1997). One cannot meaningfully interrogate, understand and appreciate *hunhu/ubuntu* outside the broad context of Afrocentrism or '*chivanhu*' and its genesis. Afrocentrism or

chivanhu is the bedrock on which *hunhu/ubuntu* is founded. Afrocentrism is accordingly the philosophy that informs *hunhu/ubuntu*. Thus *hunhu/ubuntu* is a constitutive part and a very crucial one for that matter of Afrocentrism or *chivanhu*. The genesis of Afrocentrism is best understood within the historical context of Western imperialism, conquest, colonisation and the effects of the same, which are exploitation, dehumanization, uprootedness, marginalisation and the being misdefined and misunderstood of the Africans. Afrocentrism becomes then a reaction and challenge to colonization and its effects on the Africans (Dei, 1994). It becomes a desire by the Africans to correct the previous falsehoods and distortions peddled by the West concerning Africa and the need to reassert and regain their rightful position on the world landscape as people like other people. In view of the effects of colonization and Western education the African has been made to despise himself/herself both as a person and a people in favor of everything foreign and Western. Thus the African has been made to despise literally everything associated with Africaness and '*chivanhu*' as being either heathen in the case of religious beliefs and practices, backward and outmoded in the case of cultural practices and general development and finally uneducated in the case of being genuinely committed and devoted to the pursuit of and championing of authentic Africaness (*chivanhu*).

The tension referred to above emanates from the manner the African has been wrongly taught that one cannot be a Christian and at the same time espouse African values (*chivanhu*) for the latter are heathen and the two are unrelated, as the former is a sign of modernization and development. Further, the African has been taught that one cannot champion '*chivanhu*' and be at the same time modern/western and educated, yet critical scholars of Afrocentrism and '*chivanhu*' argue that firstly, modernization and westernization are different, as it is possible for one to pursue modernization without necessarily pursuing westernization and still be an African. In fact this is the thesis of and the whole spirit behind Afrocentrism and '*chivanhu*' namely that it is quite possible and desirable for one to be modern and still be a person who espouses '*chivanhu*' (Dei, 1994; Makuvaza, 1995). In addition, it is quite possible and desirable that one can still advocate for '*chivanhu*' and still be a Christian and lastly one can still be educated and still be a genuine African *ane chivanhu chake, ne hunhu hwake*. The problem and challenge regarding the implementation of '*hunhu/ubuntu*' is who amongst the teachers and lecturers would like to be associated with the so called 'backwardness, heathenism and uneducatedness' by not only championing '*chivanhu*' but also more so **living it**. Indeed, this calls for great commitment, devotion and a liberated consciousness from all those concerned about and involved in the implementation of '*hunhu/ubuntu*' philosophy in the education system. We wonder whether such caliber of cadres can be found within the rank and file of the teaching profession.

The commission claims that teachers should be models of people endowed with *hunhu/ubuntu*, for the benefit, it is hoped of the learners under their care, indeed a bright submission. Admittedly, a policy has to be put in place to enforce the implementation of this new change into the curriculum and the teachers have no option but to oblige. However, the problem and challenge comes regarding the issue of practicing *hunhu/ubuntu*, how practically enforceable is it? Indeed, they can enforce the teaching of it but not the practicing or living of it especially in light of the demand by teachers that they need a private life like any other professional and citizen (Makuvaza, 2007). That the commission discussed the issue of 'practice' was a clear recognition and acknowledgement of the fact that '*hunhu/ubuntu*' as theory cannot be separated from *hunhu/ubuntu* as practice i.e. if discourse on '*hunhu/ubuntu*' is to have any meaningful impact as intended on the lives of people especially learners. It must be emphasized that it is not enough to preach '*hunhu/ubuntu*' without honestly living it. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture therefore, has to grapple with the problem and challenge of living '*hunhuistically/ubuntuistically*' by all those concerned and involved in the implementation, if it is to be a success.

Another grey area that might negatively impinge on the implementation of the philosophy of '*hunhu/ubuntu*' in schools and colleges relates to the issue of examinations. In other words, is the subject going to be examined if not what monitoring mechanism is in place to ensure that both teachers and learners will take the subject with the seriousness and earnestness it deserves. Previous experiences with the teaching of 'Education for Living' in schools, precisely because it was not examinable, show that it was taken very lightly by both teachers and students. We suspect that if no clear parameters are laid out for *hunhu/ubuntu*, it might face the same fate. The issue of examinations is an unfortunate but a very pertinent and relevant one in view of international tradition and practice that seems to emphasize education for examinations from perspectives of especially the teacher and learner (Makuvaza, 2007). We say 'unfortunate' because it is felt '*hunhu/ubuntu*', if it is going to be a subject in schools' and colleges' curriculum, is one of those subjects that cannot easily be examined, especially in the manner examinations are presently conceived and practiced in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. *Hunhu/ubuntu* if it is to be a subject and examinable for that matter, therefore, calls for yet another reflection on the theory and practice of examinations in this country.

The pluralistic nature of our society also poses challenges to the meaningful implementation of '*hunhu/ubuntu*' as a subject in all the schools and colleges across the country. If it is to be implemented, how is it going to be enforced in schools with learners whose culture is not agreeable with the concerns and aspirations of Afrocentrism and '*chivanhu*'? Included in this class of people are other Zimbabweans by colour but foreigners within,



who, because of the extent of their cultural uprootedness, might not want their children to have anything to do with '*chivanhu*' in their learning.

It needs to be submitted that the problem with education in Zimbabwe today is the absence of an articulated philosophy or ideology that informs the theory and practice of education. A well articulated philosophy or ideology is necessary as it provides direction and vision to our educational theorizing and practicing. Unlike the education that obtained during colonial days which was informed by capitalism in order to produce capitalist graduates, our education system falls far short in this regard. What kind of graduates, for instance, does our education system hope to produce? When it shall be deemed necessary to have a well defined and well articulated ideology on or philosophy of education in Zimbabwe, it is hoped it shall be realized and acknowledged that Afrocentrism / *chivanhu* should be the ideology and philosophy to inform not only our education but every aspect of our existence, be it political, economical or social. This submission is being made in the hope that the Nziramasanga Commission findings are expressive of a desire to fill this philosophical and ideological gap consciously or otherwise.

### **Conclusion and further recommendations**

The Nziramasanga Commission on Education and Training was a worthwhile exercise that was already overdue even when it was established. That our education system was producing 'educated uneducated' graduates *vanhu vakafunda asi ivo vasina kudzidza* (Makuvaza, 1995) was and is still self evident. To counter this anomaly and to produce *vanhu vakadzidza ivo vaine hunhu* the Nziramasanga Commission on Education and Training should therefore be treated with the seriousness it deserves and not like one of those expensive academic exercises that ends up collecting dust on shelves. What the Nziramasanga Commission needs are cadres who are committed not only to implementing *hunhu / ubuntu* but also committed to Afrocentrism / *chivanhu* not for pedagogical and financial reasons but for existential ones. Unfortunately, it seems it is not getting a lot of such support and caliber of people, for almost nine (9) years after it was adopted very little seems to be happening with respect to the implementation of the recommendations related to education and training, thus confirming the view that often practice lags behind policy in all areas of education and it is anticipated the gap between the two will not be far too wide for reform (Lawton, eds. (2000).

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