Back on the chain gang: some difficulties in developing a (South) African philosophy of education

Ben Parker

> We reject the power-based society of the Westerner that seems to be ever concerned with perfecting their technological know-how while losing out on their spiritual dimension. We believe that in the long run...the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face (Biko,1988, p. 61).

Abstract

Higgs (2003) calls for the development of an African philosophy of education as a key element in the transformation of South African education. Although Higgs does not provide a convincing account, his failures are useful insofar as they raise interesting questions about philosophical and educational discourses and the ways they are embedded in communities. These questions relate to tensions between unity and diversity, individual and community, scientific knowledge and everyday knowledge that will have to be addressed in developing a (South) African philosophy of education. I outline one possible beginning to a response to these questions through a brief exploration of *Africana* philosophy.

Introduction

Higgs (2003) provides us a with a useful overview of African philosophy and an interesting claim that it should become a 'voice' within South African philosophy of education. The overview (especially the references) is useful to those unfamiliar with the diverse range of 'philosophies' that are labeled broadly as 'African philosophy'. There are two main arguments running through Higgs' paper. The first uses evidence from the overview to show African philosophy has a set of common values running through its diverse discourses: communalism, 'ubuntu' and humanism. The second argument proposes these values as a foundation for "...the introduction of an African discourse (based on African philosophy) into the conversation surrounding the re-vision of philosophy of education in South Africa" (Higgs, 2003, p.2).

The first part of this paper examines these arguments and finds them wanting primarily on the grounds that the account provided by Higgs is ahistorical and decontextualised. I provide some glimpses of history and context to support this critique and then move onto a more detailed discussion of African philosophy. Using Higgs' description as a launching pad, I explore a particular strand of African philosophy that is becoming increasingly influential internationally: Africana philosophy. In the final section, I link this discussion of African philosophy back to South African teacher education.

Philosophy of Education in South Africa

Higgs adopts a methodological approach that uses typologies to describe discourses. This can be a useful analytic tool, but Higgs uses it only at a conceptual 'level' and does not explore the power relations operating within and between the different discourses. Higgs distinguishes between five discourses within South African philosophy of education: marxist and neo-marxist; democratic liberalism; analytical philosophy of education (with its origins in the Institute of Education at the University of London); a 'Doeyweerdian' paradigm; and, fundamental pedagogics (FP). This typology is too brief to be helpful, at least in part because it is not 'mapped onto' a social reality: there is a lack of reference to people, institutions and texts, to their histories and to their relations to political and economic contexts.

Higgs does not explore the ways in which these discourses were intimately interwoven with Apartheid education. The boundaries between these discourses were often blurred, and people and their associations and the relations between them changed as broader political events unfolded. Democratic liberalism and analytic philosophy were often inseparable, especially from the early1980s onwards, and they maintained a vigorous debate with Marxists as evidenced in the proceedings of the conferences of the Kenton Educational Association and the journal *Perspectives in Education.* One key distinguishing characteristic shared by all three of these discourses was their opposition to fundamental pedagogics (FP) – the equivalent of philosophy of education in Afrikaans speaking institutions and those ethnic institutions controlled by the Apartheid state. For purposes of simplicity, I will label the first set of discourses "analytic" and the second set "FP".

The analytic discourses mentioned by Higgs were confined in the main to the ‘white’ English-speaking universities, with some influence in ‘white’ English-speaking training colleges and schools. The FP discourses were located in the Afrikaans-speaking universities, training colleges and schools and, for our purposes, more importantly, in those universities, training colleges and schools defined by their racial and ethnic identities: the institutions of “Bantu” education. Simple arithmetic shows that the first set of discourses had only a few adherents and little influence on teacher training and the schooling system for most of the second half of the twentieth century.

Given the struggles against Apartheid of the 1970s and 1980s and the 1994 election of a democratic government led by the African National Congress, one may well have expected the analytic discourses to increase their influence while the FP discourses would rapidly dissipate without support from the Apartheid regime. This reversal of influence did indeed happen but was confined, in the main, to policy developments and, as recently as 2002, most teacher education institutions in South Africa remained within discourses descended from FP – albeit stripped of the racist and Afrikaner nationalist language and imagery that characterised FP.

Analytic discourses, albeit from a small institutional base, became influential in policy-making through the major policy initiatives of the early 1990s. The National Education Policy Investigation, the National Skills Development Strategy, the Policy Framework for Education and Training, and the National Commission on Higher Education spelt out the initial visions of a post-Apartheid education system. The global weakening of Marxism and the increasing dominance of an aggressive capitalism saw liberalism emerge as the most influential of the analytic discourses. This can be seen in the emphasis on human rights in The National Education Policy Act of 1996 and in the commitment to devolving state power and encouraging community participation in decision-making in school governing bodies in the South African Schools Act of 1996.

This growing political influence of a ‘liberal’ discourse was not matched by an increasing institutional presence. It is worth noting the small size of South Africa’s philosophy of education community. Through the 1990s, teacher education in South Africa underwent a massive re-structuring. In 1994 there were approximately 150 institutions providing teacher education to 200,000 students. Of these, 120 were colleges, under provincial or ‘homeland’ control.

Out of the 150 institutions, there were probably no more than a dozen that were influenced by analytic discourses.

By 2001, after a massive downsizing in the provincial colleges, the remaining colleges were incorporated into universities and technikons and teacher education became a national competence provided by 27 public universities and technikons. In the period from 2003 to 2006, there will be a reduction in the number of universities and technikons as the higher education system is further re-structured. This will leave 17 public higher education institutions providing teacher education.

This is a small institutional base that remains divided by its history. Of the 17 institutions, perhaps 5 could be regarded as having traditions of philosophy of education characterised by analytic discourses and the remainder, in the erstwhile Afrikaans and 'homeland' universities, by FP. Given a predominantly liberal democratic form of analytic discourse (albeit with some tendencies towards communitarian and participatory approaches) and an FP that has disintegrated into a variety of neo-FPs, there would appear to be no existing discourse that provides a suitable breeding-ground for a new philosophy of education. More importantly, perhaps, the institutional base of philosophy of education has undergone such radical restructuring that the philosophers of education are more concerned about survival than becoming activists for a new discourse.

Within this vulnerable institutional base, Higgs wants to bring about a radical change in philosophy of education by dispensing with analytic and FP discourses and adopting an African educational discourse. Higgs argues analytic and FP philosophy of education in South Africa are Eurocentric: "European values (are) seen as the index of progress" (p. 3). For as long as it remains Eurocentric, philosophy of education will alienate and oppress Africans preventing the emergence of an African identity in educational discourse. What is needed is "....a new philosophical discourse in education" (p. 2). To find a source for this new discourse Higgs turns to African philosophy.

African philosophy

For Higgs " African philosophy respects diversity, acknowledges lived experience and challenges the hegemony of Western forms of universal knowledge" (p. 13). The emergence of African philosophy as a distinct field of study over the last fifty years has been chaotic, often fragmented and marginalised from mainstream fields of study. It would be difficult to pinpoint a moment when one could say African philosophy had arrived in the sense that one talks about "Indian philosophy" or "Chinese philosophy". One indicator of recognition is the publication of the African Philosophy anthology published in the Blackwell Philosophy Anthologies series in 1998 (Eze, 1998). This anthology gives a clear indication of the diverse bodies of thought that sit underneath the broad tree of 'African philosophy'. Given this diversity, any attempt to provide a typology has a certain arbitrariness. For present purposes, I want to distinguish between three different discourses within African philosophy that provide a brief summation of the comprehensive description given by Higgs. This typology is not intended as an accurate description of African philosophy, it is merely a tool to further my review of Higgs' article in a way that helps to develop my later argument.

The first discourse privileges the "African" in African philosophy and is linked to a geographical definition that suggests that whatever comes out of Africa (people and products) is African; a re-discovering and promotion of traditional African world-views that may have strong religious overtones; a strong oral tradition invoking the importance of sagacity – of wisdom carefully collected and developed through the ages. The primary focus is on grounding 'reflection' in the daily life experiences of ordinary Africans

The second discourse privileges the philosophy in African philosophy and emphasises the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of African culture. Philosophy is a rational critical activity, a methodology with which to address conceptual and/or practical problems. For example, an African philosopher may be concerned with epistemological questions about the nature of knowledge or ethical questions about wealth and poverty or ethical professional conduct. What marks the philosopher as African is not methodological differences with his European or Anglo-American counterparts but the object of concern: African culture and lived experience.

The third discourse has roots in the previous two discourses and has emerged from a melding of a European tradition of hermeneutics, phenomenology and existentialism with an African tradition of philosophizing that expresses the authentic everyday life experiences of Africans. Lives that have been, and continue to be, characterised by poverty, suffering and the lack of dignity that goes with having only negative identities imposed by oppressive others.

Higgs aligns his position with Appiah (1994) and Oladipo (1992) and moves beyond concerns about defining African philosophy to an activism where African philosophers "...put their intellect in the service of the struggle and destiny of Africans" (p. 6). This 'moving beyond' produces a synthetic discourse that contains elements of all three discourses described above. For Higgs, there must be a strong focus on the 'African predicament' - calling into question relations of power and addressing issues of poverty and violence. African philosophy of education must be relevant and useful. Where "(The) West is concerned with perfecting philosophical discourse for its own sake" (p.7), Africans must develop a philosophical discourse that has positive practical consequences.

Higgs bases this activism on three overlapping values that he claims are common across all discourses of African philosophy: communality, "ubuntu" and humanism (p. 9). Higgs gives some substance to these values. Being human is only possible through relationships with others, through being embedded in 'communities' such as family, neighbourhood, peer group, clan, religion or nation. African values are linked to a vision of human beings within communities where human needs, interests and dignity are of primary concern .

Educating ought to be a process of "fostering humane people endowed with moral norms and virtues such as kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy and respect and concern for others" (pp. 10-11). An education based on African values will encourage the development of co-operative skills and interpersonal skills. There will be a strong emphasis on indigenous knowledge as one source of an African identity. Within philosophy of education, there will be a strong emphasis on the key role of oral traditions and customs and the history, values and beliefs that they contain. Traditional 'sagacity' will be related to present-day beliefs, actions and codes of behaviour. Above all, education will not be separated from life itself; it is a natural process whereby through oral traditions a child acquires skills, knowledge and attitudes appropriate to life in his or her community.

Higgs wants his philosophy of education embedded and contextualised in an African perspective and linked to an activism that supports resistance to an oppressive Eurocentrism:

> African philosophy, engendered by its appreciation of diversity and directed by a pragmatic concern for a better quality of life for all, can ensure that education

> ceases to function as an ideological handmaiden serving group interests in maintaining relations of power and domination. (p.13)

These are laudable activist aims, but in ‘moving beyond’ concerns over defining African philosophy, Higgs has avoided key questions necessary for any understanding of what makes the activism ‘African’. In moving to a ‘transcending’ synthetic discourse, Higgs has blurred the boundaries between the three discourses and in doing so produced conceptions of African values and philosophy that are too generic to be helpful. Many non-Africans would support the kind of pedagogies described by Higgs and the belief that education ought not to be the handmaiden of powerful political and/or economic interests, but they would be puzzled by his claim that these were particularly African values.

Higgs’ difficulties demonstrate the complexity of defining African values in ways that are distinct from European values. Other values he mentions include: dignity, freedom, fairness, justice and human rights. At times, Higgs links these values explicitly to humanism. The difficulty that arises immediately is that many people and societies that would regard themselves as non-African would embrace these values. Many non-African constitutions are based on these values. So, what makes values distinctively African? Higgs (p.10) responds by asserting that:

> For Africans, what they know is inseparable from how they know it in the lived experience of their African culture. This sense of Africanness is, in other words, born out of a deep socioethical sense of cultural unity that provides the African identity with its distinctiveness.

Higgs provides no evidence for this ‘deep socioethical sense of cultural unity’, nor is it clear what would constitute such evidence. Were those Hutus engaged in the genocide of their Tutsi neighbours expressing ‘a cultural unity’? How does this cultural unity embrace the diversity of the African Diaspora?

Higgs asserts two claims: Firstly, there are three common values underpinning African philosophies and, secondly, that these values must be linked to activism in support of the poor and oppressed through establishing an African philosophy of education. These assertions are not given sufficient support by Higgs’ arguments. It is not clear how one distinguishes African humanism from European humanism, or African communalism from Chinese communalism. Although designated by an African word ‘ubuntu’, the notion that we are human through our relations with other humans, that our individual identity is embedded in social relations within the fabrics of multiple communities, has a long history in European, Chinese and Indian philosophy. Higgs can only claim that these are ‘common’ values that are uniquely African if he assumes their meaning is broadly agreed upon by diverse African philosophies in a way that is different from non-African philosophies. This assumption cannot withstand the evidence of similarities with non-African philosophies and of the fierce contestations over interpretations of these values within African philosophy.

The failure of Higgs’ first argument directly undermines his claim that these African values lead to, and justify, an activist African philosophy of education. His second argument falls with the first. Without a clear understanding of what makes values into *African* values, we cannot give a clear meaning to an ‘activist African philosophy of education’. It would seem, then, that Higgs has not provided a convincing account. As I showed in the previous section, he has not indicated how this new discourse will develop an institutional base under hostile conditions, nor, as I have shown in this section, has he demonstrated that the three values provide a definition of what it means to be ‘African’. I want now to go where Higgs did not go in his exploration of African philosophy.

African philosophy revisited

The dominance and pervasiveness of FP and its phenomenological philosophical roots had at least one unexpected consequence - preparing the ground for an intellectual tradition of resistance nurtured by those most brutalised by FP and Apartheid. For the last fifty years, the majority of philosophers and philosophers of education in South Africa were strongly influenced by FP and phenomenology. Following the emergence of Black Consciousness as a social and political movement in South Africa in the late 1960s, there were a few places (the universities of the North and Fort Hare and the University of Natal medical school most prominently) where the phenomenological tradition was appropriated by the students. A cadre of intellectuals emerged reading major theorists of the Western canon (Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, Husserl, Sartre) alongside African authors such as Malcolm X, Cabral, Fanon, Nyerere, Nkrumah (See Eze, 1998, for examples of their writing). In the early 1970s, the most prominent expression of this discourse was through the work of Biko (1987, 1988). This discourse was not widespread in South Africa, but it has persisted through the last two decades with a succession of intellectual voices speaking broadly within this discourse (see, for example, Pityana, et al, 1991, and Coetzee & Roux, 1998).

In the last decade, once freed of Apartheid's travel and communication restrictions, this 'indigenised' South African discourse has become part of a broader international movement known broadly as 'Africana philosophy' (Outlaw, 1998). Outlaw offers the following definition of Africana philosophy:

> ...a gathering notion under which to situate the articulations...and traditions of Africans and peoples of African descent collectively, as well as the subdiscipline or field-forming, tradition-defining or tradition-organizing reconstructive efforts, which are to be regarded as philosophy (Outlaw, 1998, p.23).

Africana philosophy has become a movement that embraces the African continent and the African Diaspora and draws on a long tradition of African philosophy that foregrounds the everyday life experience of Africans as slaves, colonised subjects, poor and oppressed. As a discipline, Africana philosophy draws on oral traditions, early writings (for example, Frederick Douglas) and cultural artifacts such as music as well the rigorous techniques of reason and analytic philosophy to construct African philosophy as a distinct discourse.

There is, then, a discourse that gives substance to the label 'African philosophy' that has addressed the question of what makes a value African. This discourse has roots in all three of the discourses described earlier, but it is not a 'synthetic' discourse. Its strongest roots lie in the first and third discourses; a combination of sagacity grounded in common life experiences of Africans with the Hegelian tradition and existentialism. From this base, it appropriates rather than synthesizes what it takes from the other discourses. One way of understanding this is to turn our question into a dilemma. On the one hand, African values must be a negation of western colonialism, of a western dominated globalisation and of Eurocentric philosophy (a position that Higgs appears to take). On the other hand, African values include many values common to western and other forms of humanism and so cannot be a simple negation.

This dilemma has confronted philosophy for a long time and has taken many forms over the ages. For example, in ancient Greece, philosophers debated how one can reconcile the 'one and the many'. One form of this tension is expressed as conflicting desires: For a universalism recognising that all human beings should be treated equally, fairly and with dignity; and, for a particularism recognising the importance of diverse indigenous identities, languages, religions, cultures, locations, classes, races and genders.

Within African philosophy, there are two responses to this dilemma. The one response is to see particularism as the negation of universalism, the African as the opposite of the European. The role of African philosophy is to invert the definitions and power relations of European hegemony leading to slogans like ‘Black is beautiful’. There is a danger that this form of ‘Africanism’ becomes isolationist and exclusionary of the non-African. If one rejects all Eurocentric values, does one also reject human rights?

An alternative form of Africanism is grounded in resistances that are not negations but contestations. Rather than seek some mythological unity to stand against Eurocentrism, African philosophy can contest the dominance of Eurocentric philosophy by engaging and contesting it – even using its own tools such as rigorous rational analysis - to challenge the power relations that underpin and are expressed through Eurocentric discourses. In this way, an African culture and identity emerges that is similar and different to that of the European. This culture and identity is a consequence of synthesis and negation. Africana philosophy is a ‘disciplined’ articulation of this culture (reflecting the Hegelian tradition’s belief in a close relationship between culture, philosophy and nation-building).

One example of this ‘Africana’ philosophy can be seen in More’s discussion of the tension between universalism and particularism in the South African constitution expressed most clearly in the preamble as ‘united in our diversity’ (More, 1998, p.369). One expression of this tension is between individual and group or collective rights. More notes that the constitution requires, on the one hand, that one look beyond accidental differences such as race and gender and regard every individual human as essentially the same and, on the other hand, that one acknowledges that cultural, religious and linguistic communities or groups have rights. An example of this ambivalence lies in the Constitution’s commitment to non-racism and non-sexism and to redressing race and gender inequalities through programmes predicated on the recognition of race and gender groups (p.372).

From the perspective of a Eurocentric universalised humanism, persons have human rights just because they are rational autonomous individuals. This abstract humanism can be exclusive and oppressive. If one defines Africans as barbarians (non-rational), as did Hegel, one can deny them human rights on the rational grounds that they are not humans. The risk is that human rights discourse becomes a false universalism – a hegemonic particularism pretending to universalism (p.368). By contrast, Africana philosophy, able to draw useful lessons from the work of a 'racist', locates human rights, historically and contextually, in the real life experiences of Africans.

It is for such reasons that Fanon rejects the Eurocentric humanism of Marxism and liberal democracy for failing to handle problems of racial, ethnic, religious and sexual suppression, but he does not reject humanism: rather, Fanon grounds his humanism in African culture and argues:

> The conscious and organised undertaking by a colonized people to re-establish the sovereignty of that nation constitutes the most complete and obvious cultural manifestation that exists. (Fanon, 1963, p. 245)

And

> National consciousness is the most elaborate form of culture.... and ... is the only thing that will give us an international dimension. (p. 247)

Fanon is not an uncritical African nationalist. While he argues that an African identity is intimately interwoven with culture and nationalism, if "... nationalism is not made explicit, if it is not enriched and deepened by a very rapid transformation into a consciousness of social and political needs, in other words into humanism, it leads up a blind alley" (p. 204).

Fanon's favorite example of a nationalism that has uncritically absorbed the 'consciousness' of its European colonizers and headed up a blind alley is America (p. 313). To avoid this fate, Africa must engage in a culturally based nation-building grounded in the human needs of its citizens based on values that are humanist, though not Eurocentric. One needs to take the European out of humanism and place the African as the central axis of orientation for humanism. To be a successful counter-hegemonic discourse, African philosophy and culture has to avoid the pitfalls of false universalism and engage with the full diversity of humanisms found on our planet. For Fanon, this is the only way that African nations can develop a continental and international identity capable of contesting effectively the unequal power relations that oppress Africans.

Fanon's writing, for all its resonance, predates the emergence of Africana philosophy and the onset of post-modernist discourses and their challenge to traditional myths of Eurocentrism and their recognitions of many particularisms, of a diversity of suppressed identities based on gender, class, race, religion, and location. How to include diversity within liberal democracies has been a major theme in Western political philosophy over the last thirty years. As Gilroy notes, much of what is identified as post-modern is prefigured in the experiences and cultural expressions of those subjected to slavery and colonialism (Gilroy, 1993, p.42). Moreover, it was the advent of postmodern discourses that opened the door for the emergence of African philosophy as a distinct field of study.

Many postmodern discourses share with Africana philosophy a desire to challenge a false universal humanism, but without losing those values – liberty, equality, dignity – so extolled by that very humanism. One has to recognise that: "... the modern subject may be located in historically specific and unavoidably complex configurations of individualisation and embodiment – black and white, male and female, lord and bondsman" (p. 46).

And, equally, one has to acknowledge the achievement of civil societies that are just and fair, where people are free to realise their potential, be treated with dignity and equal concern, and enjoy the benefits of peace, security and prosperity. Gilroy and More are arguing for a position that does not simply accept the dichotomy between universal values and particular identities (in which African is the negation of European), nor do they attempt some form of synthetic reconciliation that represents a false universalism, rather, they argue for an on-going contestation based on African lived experience (of poverty and violence) that gives rise to philosophical discourses and other cultural expressions such as rap music that assert the importance of being human and having rights but in a way that is distinctively grounded in the circumstances of everyday 'African life'.

What might all this mean in practice? It is worth looking at one practical example: a political philosophy debate from *Journal of Education 28* on what could be broadly labeled as the values of 'freedom' and 'equality'. The debate is between, on the one hand, Dieltiens and Enslin (2002) arguing against participatory democracy, and on the other hand, Piper (2002) arguing for participatory democracy. This debate is linked to a larger debate between critical theorists (Habermas, 2001; McCarthy, 2001) and liberal democrats (Rawls, 1995). Critical theory discourse argues for a deliberative democracy that is as inclusive as possible allowing diverse voices and identities to participate in political decision-making. Liberal democrats believe these procedural approaches collapse into a utilitarianism where the majority is able to override the rights and interests of minorities. Instead, they favour an accountable representative democracy with strong constitutional guarantees for individual rights.

Dieltiens and Enslin suggest that participatory democracy could undermine the goal of equality in the schooling system through creating restrictions on the autonomy and capacity of the state to address inequalities, privileging elites who are able to dominate participatory decision-making forums, and devaluing the intrinsic worth of education as powerful interest groups force schools to cater to economic, political, religious or other perceived extrinsic needs (Dieltiens and Enslin, 2002, p.16) . Piper acknowledges that these are very real difficulties, but suggests that the struggle to achieve more participatory forms of democracy are worthwhile as this promotes more active citizenship, diversity of opinion, and a strong civil society based on trust and solidarity (Piper, 2002, p.36). For Piper, “participatory democracy affirms the transformative potential of rational argument.... thus building both a sense of the common good and a sense of a common identity” (Piper, 2003, p.28).

Piper’s argument suggests that freedom and equality are interwoven with trust and solidarity. This would fit closely with an Africana philosophy that emphasises the importance of embedding the autonomy and freedom of the individual in social relations and believes the worth of one’s freedom is immediately related to the degree of trust and solidarity expressed in those social relations. This debate maps neatly onto our earlier debates and shows how humanist values such as freedom and equality can be interpreted in ways that are conceptually in tension and reflect distinct social movements and discourses. One interesting characteristic of the articles by Piper and Dieltiens and Enslin is they have a South African context and content combined with rigorous analysis and argument. Moreover, the issue –a choice between more representative or more participatory forms of governance – is of direct relevance to challenges facing the schooling system. In other words, are these articles not examples of the kind of academic activity that Africana philosophy advocates?

Towards a (South) African philosophy of education

Before concluding, it is important to raise the question: Why is an Africana philosophy of education important? I want to suggest that its primary importance lies in the values that it brings to education. In South Africa, the last decade has seen a strong state-driven attempt to integrate education and training through an outcomes based National Qualification Framework (NQF) in order to increase access, mobility and portability within the education system. This has lead to a strong emphasis on criterion-based assessment and a 'regulatory' approach to the state's control over teacher education.

In 2000, the Department of Education (DoE) produced a new set of Norms and Standards for Educators using an outcomes based approach that does not provide a curriculum for teacher education but represents, in a broad and generic manner, the requirements of the DoE as an employer in respect of knowledge, skills and values that an educator must acquire to be competent and capable. These requirements are heavily influenced by labour law requirements such as the construction of an occupational structure with clearly defined career paths and the ability to identify 'incompetent' or 'incapable' teachers or teachers guilty of 'misconduct'. These criteria are 'formal' rather than substantive and provide little description of pacing, sequencing or progression, and appropriate depths of content knowledge and cognitive processes. While this allows for a significant degree of institutional autonomy over the curriculum, it presupposes that teacher educators and teachers can read the criteria in a way that is meaningful and 'aligned with' the meaning intended by the state in promulgating the criteria.

In their critique of the Norms and Standards for Educators, Shalem and Slonimsky assert:

> ...the point is that any of the 120 specifications displayed for the three kinds of competence (practical, foundational and reflexive) only make sense from within the moral and political values and the pedagogical preferences embedded in the educational perspective held by the competent educator (Shalem and Slonimsky, 1999, p.14).

The criteria are only useful as descriptions of competence from a particular educational perspective. A trainee teacher will only acquire this perspective with its ethical, epistemological and ontological commitments through initiation and inculcation: "I cannot be told criteria. I am in criteria in much the same way that I belong to a community" (p. 14).

This question of being 'in criteria' or 'in community' raises similar philosophical issues to being 'an African'. Within any discourse, be it regulative, instructional, philosophical or musical, meaning emerges from an 'embedded' perspective – speaking and listening with understanding are communal or collective practices – and these perspectives are always value-ladened. In developing the Norms and Standards for Educators, the DoE could do no more than construct an 'ideal community of agreement' through an extensive process of consultation. One problem with an ideal community is that it does not exist – there is no community of practitioners whose beliefs, attitudes, values and practices are 'pictured' by the criteria. Similar problems face the Ministry of Education's *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (2001). A manifesto is merely a wish list unless it is embedded in a discourse and a community.

For a discourse to exist and develop it must be spoken by a community. For a (South) Africana philosophy of education to develop, it needs a community. This should not be taken to imply that developing philosophy of education is an exercise in community development. It is also an intellectual project - the discourse of an Africana philosophy of education has to develop through addressing philosophical questions that arise in our context. Philosophy provides the methodology, African 'life experiences' provide the content (More, 2003). Unfortunately, the trends in South African education described earlier have resulted in moves away from a discipline-based approach in teacher education to a multi- or inter- disciplinary approach associated with a strong emphasis on applied practice. As a consequence the disciplinary grounding and identity of philosophers of education has been undermined as they become absorbed along with sociologists, psychologists and historians of education, into loose amalgams of social theorists and the curriculum becomes increasingly segmented and applied to everyday life contexts (Bernstein, 1996, p.23). This movement is linked to international trends towards more occupationally relevant forms of training and applied forms of theory and to pressures from the schooling system and education authorities for competent and well-habituated teachers who will re-vitalise and transform the schooling system. This augurs badly for Africana philosophy of education.

For trainee teachers to gain anything from studying Africana philosophy, there must be sufficient time and space within the curriculum and sufficient human and material resources to provide the extensive discipline based education and training required to enter the world of Africana philosophy. Given my earlier descriptions of the present institutional base and discourses of philosophy of education in South Africa, and of the increasing influence of criterion based approaches to teacher education, it is unlikely that an Africana philosophy of education will develop either as a discourse or as a community. There is an opportunity, albeit very slim, to develop a 'positive' Africana philosophy of education promoting a liberating cultural nationalism that appropriates values such as freedom, autonomy and human rights, truth and scientific knowledge, justice and fairness and creates an African nationalism in which state and civil society share a commitment to an equal concern for all people (Dworkin, 2000). Such an Africana philosophy of education would develop at a discursive level with a disciplinary structure – a field with boundaries – that would maintain a healthy tension with the need to be open and inclusive. One requires both critical, argumentative reason and a community that takes the life experiences and circumstances of Africans as the context and content of the discipline. An ideal community of Africana philosophers of education would demonstrate an activism sensitive to the fragility of trust and solidarity, to the vulnerability of civil society, communities and nations and to the inevitable value and ethical conflicts that face any social enterprise. Even if this opportunity were to evaporate, we may take some comfort in the resilience of African philosophy with its long history of being a marginalised counter-hegemonic discourse of which Africana philosophy is a powerful contemporary force.

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Ben Parker
Unilever Ethics Centre
University of Natal
Pietermaritzburg

parker@nu.ac.za