
Citizenship education as compassion

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Abstract

In this article I explore how instances of liberal and communitarian conceptions of citizenship theory underscore citizenship education in South Africa. My contention is that citizenship education as it evolved through “Values, Education and Democracy” policy discourses seems to resemble instances of liberal and communitarian conceptions of citizenship theory. Yet, aspects of such a citizenship education also seem to be at odds with liberal and communitarian conceptions. My contention is that a communitarian conception of citizenship education, which invokes compassion, has the potential to enact educational transformation in institutions. Consequently, I argue that citizenship education initiatives in South Africa need to take seriously the notion of compassion so that students may become serious about the suffering of others – a precondition, as I argue, for educational transformation to occur.

Background

Since the establishment of the country’s new democratic system of government in April 1994, every education policy initiative has been linked to democratic principles enunciated in the Constitution and Bill of Rights of 1996. It is not surprising that the national Department of Education (DoE) initiated the *Tirisano* project (*Tirisano* meaning “Working together”) in 1999 with its strategic goals being to ensure that the country’s new outcomes-based education system (OBE) could be successfully implemented commensurate with a spirit of democracy, respect for human rights, justice, equality, freedom, nation building and reconciliation – key features listed in the Preamble of the Constitution (1996).

After the second democratic elections in 1999, Minister Kader Asmal was appointed Minister of Education to confirm and accelerate the transformative work done by his predecessor, Professor Sibusiso Bengu. The year 1999 also welcomed in the new President, Thabo Mbeki, whose “watchword” was “accelerated delivery” (DoE, 1999, p.7). In his State of the Nation address to

Parliament on 25 June 1999 the President identified education and training as a critical priority for meeting the broader challenge of creating a democratic and prosperous society (DoE, 1999, p.11). On 27 July 1999, after vigorous discussions with the major stakeholders in the educational arena, the Minister of Education launched what he termed a national mobilisation for education and training under the slogan *Tirisano*, “Working together”, where he calls upon all South Africans, in the spirit of *Tirisano*, to join hands with the Ministry to tackle the most urgent problems in education. More specifically, the *Tirisano* project announced as its goals: establishing co-operative governance in educational institutions; making schools “centres of community and cultural life”; attending to and preventing the physical degradation of schools; developing the professionalism of teachers; cultivating active learning through OBE; creating an education and training system which could meet the socio-economic demands of the country; reconfiguring higher education in line with the imperatives of a global market economy; and dealing purposefully with HIV/AIDS (DoE, 1999).

In essence the *Tirisano* project’s goals stressed the Ministry of Education’s commitment to produce “good” citizens who, on the one hand, can contribute towards achieving the political stability and peace necessary to ensure the growth of a competitive labour market economy and, on the other hand, can combat the crime, corruption and moral decadence endemic to South African society.

Two *Tirisano* moments of citizenship education

In the modern era, interest in citizenship has been sparked by a number of political events and trends throughout the world – increasing apathy and long-term welfare dependency in the United States, the resurgence of nationalist movements in Eastern Europe, the stresses created by increasingly multicultural and multiracial populations in Western Europe, the failure of environmental policies that rely on citizens’ voluntary co-operation, disaffection with globalisation and the perceived loss of national sovereignty (Kymlicka, 2002, p.284). These events indicated that the stability of modern democracies depends not only on the justice of their institutions – for instance, in the case of South Africa on its Constitution, Bill of Rights, Constitutional Court and multi-party democratic system – but also on the quality and attitude of its citizens: e.g. their sense of identity and how they view potentially competing forms of national, regional, ethnic or religious identities; their

ability to tolerate and work with others who are different from themselves; their desire to participate in the political process in order to promote the public good and hold authorities accountable; their willingness to show self-restraint and exercise personal responsibility in their economic demands, and in personal choices which affect their health and the environment. Without citizens who possess these qualities democracies become difficult to govern, even unstable (Kymlicka, 2002, p.285).

The point I am making is that South Africa's democratic education system would not necessarily function effectively in the absence of an especially responsible and accountable citizenry. Individuals cannot just pursue their own self-interest without regard for the common good, neither would procedural-institutional mechanisms such as a Constitution, Bill of Rights and multi-party democratic system of government be enough. Citizens also require what Galston (1991, p.217) and Macedo (1990, p.138) refer to as some level of civic virtue and "public-spiritedness". In other words, effective education policy implementation relies on responsible citizenship. For instance, the state would be unable to provide a basic education if citizens do not act responsibly with respect to their own education in terms of attending school (both teachers and students), eradicating the vandalising of school buildings, and fostering communal involvement in school activities. Attempts to implement policy would flounder without the co-operation and self-restraint of citizens, that is, the exercise of civic virtue – citizens' willingness to participate, ability to trust, giving expression to their sense of justice (Kymlicka, 2002, p.286).

In South Africa two strategic moments spearheaded by the DoE sum up the country's commitment to implementing citizenship education: (1) The Report of the Working Group on Values in Education (DoE, 2000), which culminated in the Saamtrek Conference on Values, Education and Democracy (DoE, 2001a); this in turn generated (2) the Manifesto on Values in Education (DoE, 2001b). This brings me to a discussion of the main aspects associated with these moments.

Firstly, following the 1994 elections the transformation of the education system became the top priority of the new government. According to Minister Asmal, the democratic values as enshrined in the Constitution had to be developed and internalised by South Africans, and schools were the most convenient point of embarking upon this project. As stated earlier, President Thabo Mbeki identified education and training as a critical priority for meeting the broader challenge of creating a democratic and prosperous society. His position was that the transformation of the education system required a

fundamental reassessment and rethinking in order to prepare people for “citizenship” and “nationhood”. Therefore, small wonder that Minister Asmal, in his *Tirisano* Implementation Plan, focused on “developing people for citizenship”. Minister Bengu announced on his appointment in 1994 that all schools and education institutions were open and without racial barriers of any kind, as promulgated in the 1993 Interim Constitution. The South African Schools Act of 1996 created the nation’s first national and non-racial school system (DoE, 1999, p.63). On the one hand, however, a South African Human Rights Commission study on racial integration in schools found that racism was still extremely prevalent, in some schools. On the other hand, another question being debated was whether the DoE should focus on “race” alone as a form of discrimination: “Race may be the most obvious and historically potent of the issues on which discrimination occurs, but racial intolerance is commonly associated with other forms of prejudice and bigotry, towards women, gays, foreigners, the disabled, and other religious traditions” (DoE, 1999, p.66).

It was during an informal discussion on religious education for the *Tirisano* Plan that the idea of a “Values, Education and Democracy” project, following the international trend of “education for democratic values and social participation”, was born. Out of this broader concern for social solidarity and cohesion, the practice of peace, and civic participation in democratic institutions, Minister Kader Asmal requested that a working group on “Values, Education and Democracy” be established in February 2000 (DoE, 1999, pp.66-67).³

Under the auspices of the Working Group a school-based research project was conducted in October 2000 by a consortium of research organisations led by the Witwatersrand University Education Policy Unit to explore the ways that teachers, students and parents think and talk about “Values, Education and

³ The members of the Working Group on “Values, Education and Democracy” were appointed by the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal in their individual capacities. Headed by Professor Wilmot James (ex-Dean of Humanities, University of Cape Town), the other members were: Dr Frans Auerbach (retired educator; South African Jewish Board of Deputies); Ms Zubeida Desai (Chairperson, Pan South African Language Board; senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education, University of the Western Cape); Dr Herman Giliomee (former Professor of Political Studies at the University of Cape Town); Dr Z Pallo Jordan (Minister of Parliament); Ms Antjie Krog (author, poet and journalist); Mr Tembile Kulati (Special Advisor to the Minister: Higher Education); Mr Khetsi Lehoko (Deputy Director-General in the DoE); Ms Brenda Leibowitz (Director: National Research Centre for Curriculum Research in the DoE); and Ms Pansy Tlakula (Member of South African Human Rights Commission) (DoE, 2000, p.53).

Democracy”. Ninety-seven schools across five provinces were chosen by provincial officials to represent the range of schools in their province. Questionnaires were administered to all the teachers and principals. Three-hour participatory workshops were conducted separately with teachers, students and parents in thirteen schools (DoE, 2000, p.4). After a process of research and debate, this working group presented a report on its findings and recommendations entitled, “Values, Education and Democracy: Report of the Working Group on Values in Education”, in April 2000. According to the Report of the Working Group (RWG), the democratic Constitution and Bill of Rights accepted in 1996 provide the frame of reference for a democratic educational philosophy. The RWG outlines the importance of achieving the following in education:

- developing the intellectual abilities and critical faculties of students;
- establishing a climate of inclusiveness in institutions whereby students do not feel alienated and excluded;
- equipping students with problem-solving abilities (DoE, 2000).

The Working Group proposed the promotion of six “values” in institutions which they contended would contribute towards producing an inclusive critical student population capable of problem solving. These “values” include: equity, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability and social honour (DoE, 2000). A brief analytical summary of these “values” and their purposes as understood by the Working Group now follows:

- **Equity** is considered as a means to eradicate the inequalities in education, experienced mostly by Black students and teachers;
- **Tolerance** is considered as a priority in cultivating in students the capacities for mutual understanding, reciprocal altruism and the recognition of difference, particularly in managing and supporting the linguistic, religious, cultural and national diversity of the South African community of students and teachers (DoE, 2000, p.22);
- **Multilingualism** seeks to equalise the status of 11 official languages as announced in the Constitution of 1996. These languages include: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Afrikaans and English. Two values are promoted in the area of language: firstly, the importance of studying in the language one knows best, or as this is popularly referred to, mother tongue education; and secondly, the fostering of multilingualism, that is, since South Africa is a multilingual country students are encouraged to be at least bilingual, but preferably trilingual (DoE, 2000, pp.30-33);

- **Openness** is considered as a direct challenge to rote learning and the slavish repetition of information which characterised the apartheid system of education, where asking questions was discouraged and where an authoritarian attitude to learning and social conduct was expected of teachers. Cultivating openness principally has to do with engendering in students the capacities to be open and receptive to new ideas such as the ability to ask good and penetrating questions, and being willing to debate to arrive at quality decisions (DoE, 2000, pp.36-39);
- **Accountability** aims to foster in teachers and students a capacity for diligence, commitment to teaching and learning, and responsibility so desperately lacking in many dysfunctional Black schools (DoE, 2000, pp.42-45); and
- **Honour** is aimed at instilling in students and teachers a sense of “common loyalty” to the state or to national symbols, which was lacking before 1994 (DoE, 2000, pp.48-50).

The understanding of citizenship education as espoused in the aforementioned six “values” seems to resemble a liberal conception of citizenship as propounded by Rawls (1971), which places an emphasis on people possessing a set of rights and obligations they enjoy equally as citizens, for instance, having a right to personal security and freedom of speech. Certainly the attainment of equity⁴ implies that everyone has a right to education, whereas the promotion of multilingualism recognises the right of people to communicate in the language of their choice. Moreover, “values” such as tolerance, respect, openness, accountability and social honour can be related to the liberal view that people need to uphold the rule of law and generally not to interfere with others’ enjoyment of their rights. In other words, a liberal conception of citizenship aims to inculcate in people a sense of moral virtue or “public spiritedness” to respect the rule of law, to cultivate socio-economic

⁴ According to figures supplied by the Department of Education, 4,3% of young adults and 17% of youths are illiterate (45% of adults are functionally illiterate); 4 407 schools are in “poor” or “very poor” condition; close to half of South Africa’s schools have a shortage of classrooms (almost 65 000 classrooms are needed); 2,3 million students attend schools without water within walking distance; 6,6 million students attend schools without toilets; and only some 10% of primary schools and around a third of secondary schools have recreational facilities (Christiansen, Cawthra, Helman-Smith and Moloji, 2001, p.88). Moreover, the South African Statistics Income and Expenditure Survey of 1995 showed that: the poverty rate for Africans was slightly above 60% compared to 1% for Whites; 60% of female-headed households fell under the poverty line compared to around 30% of male-headed households; and the poverty rate in rural areas was some 70% compared to almost 30% in urban areas (Christiansen, Cawthra, Helman-Smith and Moloji, 2001, p.80).

justice and to promote commonality amongst themselves (Miller, 2000, p.83). Hence, the RWG seems to be aligned to a liberal conception of citizenship education.

However, having a closer look at Rawls' ideas, the value of "equity" as espoused by the RWG does seem to be at odds with a liberal conception of citizenship. In presenting Rawls' ideas, I shall first expound on his "general conception" of justice: "All social primary goods – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favored" (Rawls, 1971, p.303). Rawls ties the idea of justice to an equal sharing of social goods, but he adds that by treating people as equals does not mean that one has to remove all inequalities (as suggested by the RWG), especially when the presence of such inequalities favour the least advantaged. For instance, if giving poor citizens a better pension allowance than wealthy citizens actually promotes the welfare of the poor without disadvantaging the living conditions of the wealthy, then inequality is allowed.

Rawls breaks down this "general conception" of justice into two principles:

First Principle – Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

Second Principle – Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:

- a. to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, and
- b. attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (Rawls, 1971, pp.56).

According to these principles, equal liberties take precedence over equal opportunities, which take precedence over equal resources. But central to both principles is the idea that an inequality is allowed if it benefits "the least advantaged". In contrast to such a Rawlsian idea, the RWG suggests that inequalities in education be eradicated. If the distribution of resources in South African schools favours the least advantaged, then the unequal resources of advantaged schools could be allowed in a Rawlsian sense.

In his more recent work entitled, *Political Liberalism*, Rawls still endorses his two principles of justice: the liberty principle which guarantees every citizen equal basic liberties; and the difference principle which requires an equal distribution of resources except where inequalities benefit the least advantaged people. Yet, it is his argument for the liberty principle which has changed.

Rawls' conception of liberty is no longer merely limited to providing equal basic liberties to individuals, but that liberty (freedom) must be interpreted in terms of an individual's capacity to form and revise his (her) conception of what it means to do good. "As free persons, citizens claim the right to view their persons as independent from and as not identified with any particular conception of the good, or scheme of private ends" (Rawls, 1993, p.30). For instance, according to this Rawlsian idea of "political liberalism" every individual affiliated to a particular religious group has the right to exercise his (her) rights and in so doing attempts to restrict or eliminate group-imposed hindrances that would nullify such private individual rights. In other words, groups cannot limit the basic liberties of their individual members, including their right to be non-religious or to question and revise inherited conceptions of the good (Kymlicka, 2002, p.238). What Rawls' "political liberalism" involves, is not only giving to individuals certain formal legal rights to revise their understandings of what it means to do good, but also knowledge of these rights, as well as the educational and legal conditions required which would enable individuals to exercise such rights in an autonomous way (Kymlicka, 2002, p.239). What seems to be at variance with such a Rawlsian idea of political liberalism is the RWG's emphasis on cultivating "honour" in students. Instilling "a common loyalty" in students would certainly restrict or nullify students' private individual rights, including their right to be non-loyal or to question and revise the RWG's and DoE's conception of "honour".

Secondly, the resolutions of the VED conference⁵ related to implementing a discourse of citizenship education that had three dimensions:

⁵ The publication of the Report of the Working Group on "Values, Education and Democracy" was made possible by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in 2000 and presented for public deliberation. The issues raised by public debate in newspapers, academic journals, letters and submissions to the Ministry culminated in a national conference at the National Botanical Institute, Kirstenbosch, Cape Town on 22-24 February 2001, called "Saamtrek: Values, Education and Democracy in the 21st Century". More than 400 of South Africa's leading education specialists, researchers, politicians, intellectuals and members of non-governmental organisations, gathered to deliberate the issues in an attempt to formulate a "Values, Education and Democracy" policy and its implementation in schools. The following were the conference themes and discussions: rooting the new patriotism in the Constitution; the role of teachers; the question of equity; governance and institutional culture; the question of language; infusing schools with the values of human rights; the oral tradition as a carrier of values; the value of history; the value of arts and culture; religion education vs. religious education; the role of sport; values and technology; the role of the media; sexual responsibility and HIV/AIDS; and gender and schooling (DoE 2001a).

- 1) promoting anti-racism through the teaching of a new history curriculum which requires that teachers be upgraded appropriately;
- 2) integrating the aesthetic performing arts subjects and African languages into the curricula; and
- 3) incorporating civics education in the curricula with an emphasis on people engaging critically in intersubjective deliberation (DoE, 2001a).

Certainly the anti-racist agenda propounded at the conference resembles a liberal conception of citizenship whereby people's rights irrespective of race, colour, belief and ethnicity cannot be violated. Yet the resolutions of the conference, which culminated in the generation of the MVE (2001), put a great deal of emphasis on citizens engaging actively with others in shaping the future of South African society through deliberation – an idea which seems to be attuned with a communitarian conception of citizenship espoused by Macedo (1990), Galston (1991) and Kymlicka (2002). Put differently, a communitarian conception of citizenship emphasises people's commitment to public participation, respectful dialogue, or critical attention to government, that is, "the need for people to be active citizens who participate in public deliberation" (Kymlicka, 2002, p.293). Such an understanding of communitarian citizenship education is aptly supported by Nussbaum⁶ (2002, pp.293-299), who offers a threefold account of what it means: firstly, communitarian citizenship education engenders the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions; secondly, it urges that people should see themselves as human beings who need to respect diversity; and thirdly, to imagine the "Other", that is, the ability to imagine what it might be like to be in the position of a person different from oneself. Thus one finds that the MVE announces the achievement of the following ten communitarian "values" in educational institutions: democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, *ubuntu* (human dignity), an open society, accountability, the rule of law, respect and reconciliation (DoE 2001b). I shall now explore these ten "values" announced in the MVE, specifically focusing

⁶ My potential critic might refer to Nussbaum as a prominent liberal. I agree. However, considering that communitarianism is in fact a variant of liberalism it would not be inappropriate to refer to Nussbaum as a communitarian as some of her most recent writings suggest. Liberal communitarians among whom Martha Nussbaum is a distinguished representative in recent political philosophy, holds that there are many valuable ways of life which people may choose to pursue in an autonomous way after reflecting on alternative ways of the good life. Although this sounds very much Rawlsian, the communitarian twist occurs when Nussbaum argues that both the availability of a plurality of ways of life and the capacity for autonomous choice depend upon a communal background and by restricting certain individual rights (Nussbaum, 2001).

on their resemblance with liberal and communitarian conceptions of citizenship education.

First, to my mind, being democratic necessarily implies that in deliberation with others one not only becomes critical of one's own position, but also through openness begins to respect that there are others who are different from one. In this regard, Quane (2002, pp.316-319) argues quite correctly that people need to develop competencies such as communicating, being able to live together, critical thinking, being able to change and adapt to change, and creativity in nurturing "citizenship and participation in community life". And, for the reason that both liberal and communitarian conceptions of citizenship aim to achieve a sense of deliberative democracy, the MVE's reference to the "value" of democracy seems to resemble such conceptions of citizenship. Barber's (1984, p.219) argument in defence of strong (deliberative) democracy through citizenship and Young's (1996, p.121) notion of communicative deliberative democracy whereby citizens come together to talk about collective problems, goals, ideals and actions, vindicate liberal and communitarian moments of citizenship.

Second, if one begins to imagine what it might be like to be in the shoes of someone different from oneself, then the possibilities for becoming socially just, equitable, egalitarian, non-racist, non-sexist, respectful, law-abiding, accountable and reconciliatory could be enhanced, since one invariably exhibits a sense of human dignity (*ubuntu*) towards the "Other" – what Nussbaum (2002, p.301) refers to as having a "cultivated humanity". What follows from this, is that a strong case could be made for a communitarian view of these "values" as they unfold in the MVE since these "values" demand strong communal participation in societal matters. If we truly wish to accommodate communitarian conceptions of the self, then we must be willing to provide some exemption for communitarian groups from the rigorous enforcement of individual liberties (Kymlicka, 2002, p.240). The point is that people cannot just engage in societal practices (family life, religious observance and educational discourse) and political institutions (Parliament and voting), unless there are groups of people in society who engage in such practices and institutions. Moreover, as Miller (2000, p.102) asserts, the individual's capacity to exercise his (her) autonomous choice and to reflect critically upon any particular way of life is not something that people are natively endowed with, but a capacity that is nurtured by "autonomy-supporting practices and institutions whose existence cannot be taken for granted". Put differently, people cannot be socially just, equitable, egalitarian, non-racist, non-sexist, respectful, law-abiding, accountable, reconciliatory and

dignified without engaging with others in society – a matter of being socially situated.

Towards compassion in citizenship education

The question arises: Can educational transformation be enacted in institutions according to the DoE's "Values, Education and Democracy" *Tirisano* agenda? In responding to this question I shall discuss two views. The first is the view that a liberal-communitarian conception of citizenship education can enact educational transformation; and the second is the view that compassion as an extended liberal-communitarian conception of citizenship can bring about meaningful change in educational institutions.

With reference to the MVE, one can have little doubt that cultivating in students the "values" of democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, *ubuntu*, openness, accountability, respect and the need for reconciliation, and recognition of the rule of law, can produce a heightened awareness of what it means to be a "good" citizen. It is difficult to imagine that a student who has internalised the "values" of social justice, equality and *ubuntu* could in any way not be considered as having achieved a worthwhile moral outcome, which would invariably position her favourably to deal with issues of democracy, accountability and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. And, bearing in mind that educational transformation aims to engender in students a deepened awareness of and appreciation for mutual respect, disagreement, justifiable criticism, critical judgement, rational deliberation and nation building, it follows from this that democratic "goods" as announced in the MVE can in fact bring about transformation in education. The point about educational transformation as achieving some form of moral "good" cannot be separated from achieving this without common, shared and agreed-upon democratic "values" as proposed in the MVE.

But then, as I have already indicated, educational transformation also involves cultivating in students the capacity for nation building. To my mind, nation building cannot just occur if students are equipped with skills of practical reasoning such as critical judgement and rational, intersubjective deliberation. Nation building also requires that students be taught to have respect for human suffering and to be serious about the suffering of others, particularly after the majority of South Africans have been subjected to decades of racial discrimination and political exclusion that resulted in abject poverty and

human suffering.⁷ It is here that I propose that the liberal-communitarian citizenship education agenda which resembles the DoE's MVE in South Africa, particularly the notion of *ubuntu* be explored in relation to compassion in order to bring about substantive transformation.

It is my contention that students should become morally just persons. The MVE highlights the importance of teaching students to become democratic, socially just, equitable, egalitarian, non-racist and non-sexist, dignified, open, accountable, respectful, reconciliatory and law-abiding. Yet, it does not specifically mention the necessity for students to become trustworthy, generous and compassionate – “values” which focus greater attention to those who suffer and are oppressed and less attention to students' self-interests. Both Gyekye (1997) and Nussbaum (2001) make an argument for compassion, which they contend can invoke in one a sense of generosity towards others such as solidarity with and respect for human suffering, kindness by seeing that no particular harm is done to others, listening to and alleviating the day-to-day suffering of others, and evoking remorse towards those on whom harm was inflicted – a matter of prompting in students an awareness of the misfortune or suffering of others which might have occurred through no fault of their own. The point I am making is that “values” as announced in the MVE can result in students developing the capacities for rational argumentation, deliberative engagement through which they can build relations of trust and mutual respect. However, these “values” alone with perhaps the exception of *ubuntu* cannot cultivate in students the virtue of being compassionate towards others. And this is what educational transformation requires.

Enacting *ubuntu* does open up possibilities for students to become compassionate. Why? First, *ubuntu* presupposes a particular way of interacting with people on the basis of mutuality, thus invoking the integrity of all people in the social group, community organisation, family, and so on. Second, *ubuntu* in an African humanist sense implies that people develop the capacity to reach out to others, being committed to one another without having to declare such commitment (Teffo, 1999, p.155). Consequently *ubuntu* demands that individuals in the first place have to commit themselves in solidarity with

⁷ I recall having done field research in the Northern Province area (one of the nine provinces in South Africa) inquiring about the implications of drought in farming communities. One of the workers' sons (a boy of 10 years old) opened the front door of his tiny cottage and collapsed in my presence and that of his mother. Her response was that “It was not his turn to eat tonight, but his sister's”. This gives some indication of the poverty-stricken conditions South Africans experience.

others and through which they can develop sensitivity to the aged, the handicapped and the less privileged (Teffo, 1999, p.154) – a matter of being compassionate. Third, moral goods such as social justice, human rights, equality before the law, quality of life and democratic transformation of education are not practised in isolation but are interdependent and can only be realised in community. Pityana (1999, p.148) posits that the idea of *ubuntu* is logically connected to the preservation of human dignity, the achievement of equality, the enhancement of human rights and freedoms, and the enhancement of the common good – compassionate virtues of *ubuntu* which can be related to “values” announced in the DoE’s MVE.

I want to locate the notion of *ubuntu* within the interdependence between individual persons and the community. Human interdependence places a strong emphasis on achieving solidarity *through* individual persons’ engagement with other people. Mokgoro (in Pityana, 1999, p.144) states that the value human interdependence “has been viewed as the basis for a morality of co-operation, compassion, communalism, concern for the interests of the collective respect, respect for the dignity of personhood, with emphasis on virtues of that dignity in social relationships and practices”. Although the emphasis of human interdependence seems to be tilted towards “co-operation”, “communalism”, “collective respect” and “dignity in social relationships and practices”, my contention is that the afore-mentioned practices cannot be achieved without the significant compassionate will of the individual to live a sense of community from the “inside”.

In the final part of this article, I shall deal with some of the principles I used in teaching a Philosophy of Education course to final-year postgraduate Certificate in Education students at my institution related to educating prospective educators about compassionate citizenship education. In this section I shall attempt to answer the question: Can compassion with its concomitant link to *ubuntu* be taught?

Educating for compassionate citizenship: a case study

Why should students become democratic citizens in the first place? Democratic citizenship requires that people attend to mutual respect, warmth, friendship, trust, self-respect, human dignity, generosity and compassion towards fellow-human beings. Virtues such as mutual respect and trust link with the notion of practical reasoning, whereas generosity, respect for human

dignity and compassion towards one's fellow-persons are virtues not necessarily associated with deliberative argumentation and rational persuasion. One can rationally and persuasively articulate an argument with the aim of building relations of trust among participants, but this does not mean that one is actually compassionate towards others. Compassion is not a virtue which can merely be cultivated through practical reasoning only. A compassionate person pays greater attention to those who suffer and are oppressed and less attention to her self-interest. In this sense, one would not be considered as morally just. Gyekye (1997, p.74) makes the point that moral justice "requires us to look beyond the interests and needs of our own selves, and that, given the beliefs in our common humanity – with all that this concept implies for the fundamental needs, feelings, and interests of all human beings irrespective of their specific communities – our moral sensitivities should extend to people beyond our immediate communities". It is this notion of extending our "moral sensitivities" to others from different communities which constitutes the basis of what compassionate citizenship means.

It would be difficult for students to learn about compassionate citizenship if their teachers are not skilled appropriately. I agree with Walters (1999, p.575), who posits that in South Africa "new educational approaches are needed to promote active citizenship". As a university teacher I incorporated the notion of compassionate citizenship into the Philosophy of Education course for final-year students about to become teachers in schools. I now offer an account of this course and how its underlying principles offer possibilities for teachers to cultivate compassionate citizenship in South African schools.

From the beginning this course was informed by three decisions. The first was to put practical reasoning at the heart of the matter, which would awaken critical and independent thinking about values such as deliberative democracy, citizenship, equality and freedom, human rights, and socio-economic and political justice in relation to education in public schools – "values" related to those announced in the MVE. Students engaged in a lot of serious discussion of issues related to these themes. The course's clear focus, its emphasis on lively debate and argumentation among students rather than simply the acquisition of facts, and deliberation on the above-mentioned themes in group discussions whereby students report to the whole class, all make this a reasonable course to elicit active critical engagement.

The second decision was to focus on an area of diversity by selecting a non-Western culture from among three African countries, namely, Ethiopia, Kenya and Mozambique. Students had to raise critical issues about race, gender,

ethnicity, social class and religious sectarianism. While critical discussion of cultural diversity in an African country enhanced students' awareness of difference, it also ensured that they reflected dialectically on the beliefs and practices of their own culture, while exploring a foreign culture.

The third decision was to focus on a theme called "Poverty, Famine and Hunger". Students learned to think about the relationship of poverty, hunger and famine to distress, undeserved misfortune, suffering, injustice, disability and disease on the African continent. They were also encouraged to teach at least for a month at an African school, say in countries such as Mozambique and Nigeria (ravaged by civil wars), Angola, the Congos, Sierra Leone and Burundi (in continuing turmoil), Rwanda (suffered genocide), Ghana and Namibia (subjected to liberation struggles with colonial powers), Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia (experienced drought and famine), after having qualified as teachers (educators). Prospective teachers would in this way become obliged to encounter features of African life and one of their tasks should be to find ways to give voice to the suffering of people on the continent – a matter of listening to the voices of those who suffered the injustice perpetrated by the people who abused power and inflicted harm on the African continent.

When education institutions become intensely concerned about what Nussbaum (2001, p.403) refers to as "tragic predicaments and their prevention", such institutions embody compassion, since they rely on compassionate students and teachers to keep alive the essential concern to attend to the well-being of others – a matter of seriously enacting educational transformation. In South African classrooms (universities and schools) diverse students of advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds (Black and White) are beginning to deliberate about matters of public concern such as crime victimisation, homelessness, job discrimination, unemployment, domestic violence and abuse of women, poverty and lack of food, political alienation, alcoholism and drug abuse, absence of good prospects, and so on; this means that certain practical judgements have to be made by students about these instances of their public and personal lives. Invariably judgements to be made will be based on students' perceptions of other's distress, undeserved misfortune, suffering, injustice, plight, disability, disease and HIV/AIDS. It is in this regard that compassion becomes a necessary condition for adequate deliberation about such matters, since it not only prompts in people an awareness of the misfortune or suffering of others, but also "pushes the boundaries of the self" outward by focusing on others' suffering which might not be any fault of their own.

In conclusion, as university teachers we will need to cultivate compassion as an appropriate response to the well-being of others; this is a quality that deserves recognition in the education of students and the democratisation of our society. Good universities not only teach students practical reasoning, but also a sense of generosity and appropriate concern towards others, which invariably will inform any compassion that they need to enact. My potential critic might argue that teaching students to attend to the concerns of others subjected to suffering and injustice is to treat them as victims of life's ills rather than to respect their dignity in the sense that they are quite capable of improving their own lot. When we see people as victims, we do see them as people upon whom harm was inflicted. But this recognition should give us sufficient reason to bring relief to the afflicted. Nussbaum (2001, p.408) aptly makes the point: "The victim shows us something about our own lives: we see that we too are vulnerable to misfortune, that we are not any different from the people whose fate we are watching, and we therefore have reason to fear a similar reversal". Teaching university students to show compassion means inculcating in them the value of learning to oppose undeserved conditions of living which are an affront to human dignity such as socio-economic deprivation, racism, inequality and poverty – conditions which are rife in South Africa and on the African continent. Our universities owe disadvantaged communities a chance to develop and prosper, especially considering that the gap between White and Black students in South Africa has increased considerably.

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