

Building bridges across knowledge systems: Ubuntu and participative research paradigms in Bantu communities

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This paper discusses how Ubuntu as a philosophy and a methodology was used among Bantu in South Africa together with participative Western paradigms in evaluating an educational computer game. The paper argues that research among Bantu has to articulate research experiences within Ubuntu paradigms if valid outcomes are to be realised.

Keywords: Ubuntu in research; African indigenous knowledge systems; participative research

Background

Globalisation has increased the infusion of mainly Western knowledge systems into African developing communities such as those of Bantu, through formal education and commercial interests, leading to a demand for greater focus upon inter-cultural research. Steve Biko (in Forster, 2006) noted the pre-occupation of the West with perfecting their knowledge without concern of the impact upon knowledges of the colonised. This trend submerges most African indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). Thus, African IKS are still framed by theoretical and colonial-administrative concerns reflective of Western understanding (Leach & Fairhead, 2002), which diminish and misrepresent African IKS (Scidev, 2002). In response, Mkabela (2005) proposes Afrocentric research paradigms, which among Bantu should take Ubuntu into account. Similarly, I used Ubuntu as an Afrocentric research paradigm together with some Western paradigms to improve validity and usefulness of outcomes. This paper describes part of an evaluation process of a computer educational program with 26 Bantu teachers in South Africa during 2002 and 2003.

Indigenous knowledge systems

Culture is the life ways of a group, including its distinctive commitment to certain values and subsistence patterns (Eisenhart & Borko, 1993, p. 43). Eisenhart and Borko explain that cultures are coherent, profound and systemic to the extent that 'discrepancy in school achievement' could be the manifestation of discontinuity between culture at home and the expectations at school. Hence, Ditton (2007) recognises different epistemologies in different contexts, and cultures. It is therefore argued in this paper that each epistemology represents an IKS for a given culture. Cosijn, Pirkola, Bothma, and Järvelin (2002, p. 221) refer to IKS as a body of local

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knowledge and skills unique to a culture, often outside 'the formal education system that enables communities to survive'.

Much of African IKS remains tacit, sacred and embedded in practices, relationships and rituals (Bhola, 2002; Cosijn et al., 2002), often transferred orally between generations (Kawooya, 2006; Mbow, 1992). Lack of documentation, clear ownership, and development makes it easy to ignore African IKS in favour of Western knowledge systems. Ditton (2007) notes the mono-cultural predominance of Anglo-American-Australian educational approaches to serve the business and capital interests of these countries. An example is Western curricula in Bantu educational institutions that mainly grow Western knowledge systems, and not so much Bantu IKS. Indeed, a candidate must show how his/her research contributes towards established Western 'knowledge'.

Since validity has the power of truth and identifies acceptable research as well as accurate construction of knowledge (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Lincoln & Denzin, 1994), these and other authors such as Pinkus (1996) and Ogunniyi (1996) recommend research paradigms that are compatible with contexts, and which include participants' perspectives and interpretations, instead of satisfying universal or global 'truths'. It is in that light that Mkabela (2005) notes the absurdity researching in Africa using external methodologies. However, this absurdity resonates with the rejection as worthless of African IKS, such as the traditional acquisition and oral transmission of knowledge (Kawooya, 2006; Mbow, 1992; Raseroka, 2005), with a mindset that anarchy would prevail if research were not controlled (Brenton & Largent, 2000). Yet, such externally imposed paradigms create 'social disharmony, unhappiness, blind obedience, inner deadness, injustices, epidemic substance and process addictions, economic exploitation, cynicism, as well as chronic stress' (Brenton & Largent, 2000), which detrimentally affect people's livelihoods (Scidev, 2002).

Formal educational systems and imported paradigms have re-defined and often socialised Africans such as Bantu out of their IKS to suit a more foreign-based albeit sometimes, false 'global view' of who they are. Fanon (1970) observes that education imposes inferiority complexes among Africans because they strive to feel equal to the Europeans, who assume superiority of knowledge and truth, and define lifestyles for Africans. This assumption is an extension to the insult in African school curricula that Europeans discovered Africa. Africans seem oblivious to Fanon's (1970) assertion that the Europeans have a fixed inferior view of Africans and of Bhabha's (1994, p. 70) argument that the colonialists' discourse portrayed the colonised as degenerate races. Prior (2006, p. 163) summarises the assumed racial inferiority in noting that, 'specimens and remains of Indigenous colonised people are objects of scientific interest in European museums and laboratories, with little regard for their cultural significance'. 'The colonial mentality persists among elite Africans' (Kawooya, 2006, p. 2) causing an addiction to Western paradigms that present to Africans ready-made approaches, theoretical assumptions, ontologies, and epistemologies – these are assumed to be ideologically and politically correct (Robbotom & Hart, 1993). After all, Western paradigms offer employment, and according to Brenton and Largent (2000), a paradigm could be perpetuated through employment. Every professional job requires a certificate, issued by the same paradigm. Therefore, the research discourse that supplies certifiable knowledge required for employment has to be instrumentalist and imposed; the research process and data are validated

and interpreted for the candidate and the researched (Robbotom & Hart, 1993), African academic systems perpetuate Western paradigms, and fail researchers who align themselves with African methodologies. According to Brenton and Largent (2000), such academia ignore or suppress knowledge of anomalies. This positivist stance and demand for objectively proven findings along Western paradigms rarely augurs well with the socially oriented and qualitative nature of African cultures such as Ubuntu. Lather (1991, p. 10) reports on similar covert positivism in some research paradigms when the researcher acts as ‘the great interpreter’ with an assumed ability to understand, interpret and adjudicate what goes on during the research, for the sake of scientific objectivism; indeed the researcher pretends that data are independent of the academic and political spheres of power relationships between the researcher and the researched. This approach distances the researcher from the researched, who often has to adopt the researcher’s interpretations.

Thus, an academic African is assimilated into Western intellectual bondage without concern of growing African IKS that, Raseroka (2005, p. 6) asserts:

African communities generally have a diminished appreciation of IKS. Imperialism successfully implanted the perception that IKS is worthless or shameful because it did not fit into the colonial education system, its scientific notions and/or the missionary worldview. (E.g. perception of all traditional healing practices as witch craft resulting in some cases to criminalization of the practice of this form of healing; the demonisation of belief in the ancestral spirit world.)

Consequently, Bantu have rarely, if at all, initiated qualifications on foundations of Bantu IKS (BIKS), and research among Bantu has often yielded naught contribution to their development. Indeed, the ‘educated’ African is often an accomplice in perpetuating foreign paradigms and in the genocide of African IKS.

A need to transform research among Bantu

Prior (2006) notes that indigenous cultural values have little influence in shaping research agendas or methods of inquiry in Australia and advises changing this through knowledge and understanding of the sociocultural context in which research is conducted. The change requires the adoption of Foucault’s advice (e.g., in Mphahlele, 1996) against a subversive genealogy, which, according to Denzin (in Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p. 579), ‘refuses to accept those “systems of discourse (economic, political, scientific narrative)” that ignore who we are collectively and individually’. Additionally, Fish (in Lincoln & Denzin, 1994) advises for unique standards or versions of proofs of truth or validity in distinctively different interpretive communities, while Brenton and Largent (2000) propose a change in our view of reality and in the way we think and value the world. The challenge among Bantu is that their paradigms are yet to be ‘internationally recognised’, such that the decision of who is ‘educated’, as well as what is to be accepted as valid and useful research and knowledge, is still held outside Bantu IKS.

However, there is evidence of international resistance against non-participation research among Indigenous populations in the form of ‘sanitised’ information or biased data, with undercurrents of a ‘give them what they want’ mentality (Prior, 2006). Similarly, ‘African scholarship is becoming more commonly accepted and sought after in the academy’ (Forster, 2006, p. 1): Africans have started the

transformation in research, considering developments like the *Indilinga*; a journal of IKS hosted by the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa.

Du Plessis and Raza (2004, p. 3) believe that the transformation in research would ‘provide the necessary intellectual tools for expressing and exploring the insights of traditional African thinking in a systematic way’. Furthermore, research among Bantu should include curbing imported ideas and encouraging local initiatives to create academic independence (Ogunniyi, 1996). For example, quoting Asante’s works, Mkabela (2005, p. 179) presents a case for ‘*Afrocentricity*’ as an essential core in research by which culture would be considered.

A need to transform research among Bantu is motivated by a need to improve validity of the process and findings from research. Among the various kinds of validity, Ubuntu can be used to improve:

- Technical validity – fit between research questions, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques, and the effective application of specific data collection and analysis techniques (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; Heron, 1996; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995) by using the vernacular.
- Psychosocial validity – the practice, both in the way it is done and in its outcomes (Heron, 1996) by removing Western distortions, restrictions and rigid norms and values through the adoption of social norms such as Ubuntu.
- Value validity – the evaluation process contributes to valuable personal and social transformation according to the inquirers’ and participants’ views (Heron, 1996; Le Compte, Preissle, with Tesch, 1993) by incorporating into the evaluation Bantu participants’ values and discourses (Ubuntu).
- Fairness – obtaining balanced representations of the multiple realities in a situation (Le Compte et al., 1993) by incorporating Bantu values.

These validities improve interpretive validity; the understanding participants have of research processes and findings (Gay et al., 2006).

Ubuntu

Ubuntu is a Bantu characteristic of relationships and Bantu means people (Ki-Zerbo, 1989, p. 114). Bantu cover almost a third of sub-Saharan Africa and speak over 400 Bantu languages (Lwango-Lunyiigo & Vansina, 1992, p. 75), in South Cameroon, south-eastern region of Nigeria, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya, southern Somalia, Tanzania, Angola, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa (Ki-Zerbo, 1889, p. 114). Lwango-Lunyiigo and Vansina (1992, p. 75) explain that all Bantu languages have the root ‘ntu’, with the prefix ‘ba’, which denotes plurality (like in Bantu), while the prefix ‘mu’ refers to an individual person (like in Muntu in Luganda or Umuntu in isiZulu). ‘Ubuntu is found in diverse forms in many societies throughout Africa’ (Murithi, 2006, p. 28). However, the term Ubuntu as used in this paper is a Xhosa and Zulu reference to the social conduct of a Muntu. Other Bantu languages such as Luganda (by Baganda in Uganda) would translate Ubuntu as *Obuntu bulamu*. That is, different Bantu languages would have different terms of Ubuntu.

‘...“ubu” refers to the abstract, whereas “-ntu” is a reference to the ancestor who spawned human society and gave human beings their way of life’ (Forster, 2006, p. 4)

Ubuntu is a communal way of life which deems that society must be run for the sake of all, requiring co-operation as well as sharing and charity (Broodryk, 2006). Therefore, Ubuntu is the quality of being human (Murithi, 2006, p. 8). Additionally, Ubuntu involves caring, sharing, respect, compassion and ensures a happy and qualitative human community life in the spirit of family (Broodryk, 2006, p. 13). Mtuze (1999, p. 84) gives the fundamentals of Ubuntu thus:

In this kind of existence, one person’s personhood and identity is fulfilled and complemented by the other person’s personhood. Each person is because the other person is. Each person exists because the other person exists.

In that existence, Louw (2004) suggests Ubuntu defines the individual in terms of rules of conduct or social ethics in relation with others. For example, Bantu are welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, and are willing to share (attributes that one could argue contributed to the colonisation of Bantu). Bantu are available to others, willing to affirm others, and are able to do well to others because of the assurance that they belong to a community.

Hence, Ubuntu is about amicable personal relationships, accentuates the importance of agreement, and has, according to Mkabela (2005), a capacity for the pursuit of consensus and reconciliation. Bantu democracy relies on extensive discussions that provide a platform to every person until some solidarity is reached. It is during such discussions that each Muntu exposes him/herself to others, and during which differences are ironed out to a homogeneous agreement that is cognisant of norms and values of that community. Discussions confront plurality and interrogate truths or credibility (Louw, 2004). Louw explains further that ‘Ubuntu respects the particularity of the other’, and therefore links up closely to its respect for individuality, that is not Cartesian. According to Louw, the shortcomings of Cartesian models, especially the *modernistic*, individuals is that they exist prior to, or separately and independently from the rest of the community or society such that the ‘rest of society is an added extra to a pre-existent and self-sufficient being’. Cartesian individualism is solitary, sometimes against communal interests. Collective Cartesian individuals often translate into competitiveness; this is Western democracy and capitalism.

In contrast to the absolutist Cartesian individual, while there are individual decisions and capital ownership, competition would not be severe in Ubuntu because Ubuntu defines the individual in terms of relationships with others. The Bantu discourages a Muntu to take precedence over the community. The ‘individual’ Muntu flourishes but assists, and interacts with, others. Hence, a Muntu signifies a plurality of personalities in a community.

Ubuntu as a research paradigm

Tutu (2004) identifies Ubuntu-based research with participative research paradigms in stating that ‘*we are bound with others ... in Ubuntu*’ (my emphasis). Broodryk (2006, p. 6) supports Tutu’s view: ‘the emphasis is on togetherness ... as a cooperative and community we are heading for the same end result ... we can

share what we have, our thoughts included'. Thus, Ubuntu *inter alia* implies empowering participants in research (i.e., as social responsibility), and emphasises unity or consensus in decision-making, and the processes that lead to decisions. Essentially, Ubuntu as a research philosophy gives the research process a human face, as opposed to some top-down imposed research processes, and advocates collaboration with the participants and community humanely, with respect to their spirituality, values, needs, norms, and mores. Therefore, Ubuntu ameliorates tensions in research discourse and brings the researcher to the level of the participants. Greet Bantu, sit with them, understand their needs, and if possible eat with them. In short become a Muntu for full co-operation of Bantu in research.

How I used Ubuntu and some aspects of Western participative paradigms

On the one hand, Ubuntu formed the ground for entry into local schools: Ubuntu considered the teachers' social fabric, local context, priorities, and culture (Evans & Powell, 2007; Wells & Wells, 2007). On the other hand, Western-based research paradigms were necessary, since the computer programs have been designed along Western-based epistemology, bearing in mind that no universal truths in ICT applications in education exist (Pedro, Enrique, Ernesto & Lucio, 2004): technology is not value neutral, but has inbuilt assumptions and ideologies, which influence use (Jefferies, Carsten-Stahl, & McRobb, 2007).

According to Prior (2006, p. 165), 'decolonising research decentres the focus from the aims of the researcher to the agenda of the people, and advocates a research relationship that engages the subjects'. Prior adds that the cultural values of the Indigenous people have to be embedded in the research design. Heeding Lincoln and Denzin's (1994), Pinkus' (1996), and Mammo's (1999) call for inclusion of community values, together with participants, I combined the Indigenous local discourse which is Ubuntu, with the internationally renowned evaluation paradigms into unique and suitable processes for the participants and the ICT application; these emergent processes simultaneously authenticated and validated the evaluation. The involvement of teachers in planning and executing the evaluation injected Ubuntu into the process.

This participatory approach engendered a working relationship (Mkabela, 2005) such that the teachers clearly and co-operatively stated their priorities in the evaluation process. For example, a computer program would be a priority if it contributed towards poverty alleviation. I had to show how the pedagogical use of the computer program would contribute towards learning, and eventually to job creation or employment. Evaluation skills of computer educational programs would prevent misuse or purchasing useless programs. Figure 1 summarises the evaluation processes. The considerations indicated in Figure 1 are described below.

Qualitative evaluation

The evaluation was qualitative for two reasons: first, the teachers' actions could not be quantified (Myers, 2000; Savenye & Robinson, 2001), and second, because Ubuntu involved social transactions that were mostly qualitative: these include discourses such as the nature of greeting and quality of socialisation. The other philosophical genre included the developmental, post-modern, interpretative, and

Contexts guiding choices of research philosophies	Considerations	Philosophy	Methodology	Methods	Data	Data analysis
<p>Bantu IKS (Ubuntu)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Local realities: e.g., poverty ○ ○ 	<p>Accessing and incorporating teacher participants' values – Ubuntu</p> <p>Empowering participants with evaluation skills/training</p> <p>Teacher interpretations, interests and needs</p> <p>Need for development and emancipation</p>	<p>Qualitative Unquantifiable social interactions</p> <p>Developmental Teacher participants develop evaluation skills; new skills and knowledge</p> <p>Post-modern No formalities Sensitivity to Ubuntu, teacher (participant) interests and capacity</p> <p>Constructivist Teacher participants contribute towards the evaluation process; IKS</p>	<p>Case study Local contexts – Bantu culture</p> <p>Action Teachers as co-evaluators; training in school and classroom contexts; IKS growth</p> <p>Contextual observation Observe teacher participants' practices, interactions; talk aloud protocol</p> <p>Ethical considerations Ubuntu – permission from educational authorities; teachers and school participants' convenience; coded records</p> <p>Interpretive Teacher and vernacular; discourse</p>	<p>Questionnaires; Interviews; (focus groups & dialogue); Contextual observations, vernacular</p>	<p>Interview scripts; Video or audio records; Questionnaire responses</p>	<p>Constant comparative; Discourse analysis</p>

Figure 1. The conceptual framework used in the evaluation process in a Bantu community.

constructivist approaches (Greene, 1994; Reeves & Hedberg, 2003), and these were again best described qualitatively than quantitatively. The subjectivity and bias among participants (Hickey & Zucker, 2002) were reduced by Ubuntu communal consensus.

Post-modern evaluation

In line with the definitions of post-modernism of Nichols and Allen-Brown (2001), Kincheloe and McLaren (1994), and Yeaman, Hlynka, Anderson, Damarin, and Muffoletto (2001), this evaluation rejected the use of absolute Western paradigms by shifting the responsibility of the evaluation to participants and incorporating Ubuntu. Furthermore, teachers benefited from the evaluation process (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003), and included Ubuntu.

Developmental evaluation

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) (cited in Raseroka, 2005) desired a people-centred and inclusive development. The development of teachers (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003) included: interpreting findings; implementing the findings; and gaining skills in the evaluation of the computer program. In turn I developed a greater understanding of the teaching community and its social dynamics in relation to the evaluation.

Constructivist evaluation

It is possibly true of every knowledge system, including Ubuntu, that people naturally confirm or form new constructs from interpreting experiences (Cobern, 1996; Wilson, 1995). Participants were partners in constructing their development and in designing the evaluation scheme (Willis, 2000; Winn, 1997) in a way outlined by Cennamo, Abell, and Chung (as cited in Willis, 2000), who advise for 'client-centred negotiations that nurture reflexivity and questions rather than asking them to complete tasks'. For example, some started by practising computer skills, whilst computer-literate teachers focused on the pedagogical value of the computer program. Each teacher designed the implementation of the computer program in the classroom practice according to local realities in the school. Hence, the evaluation procedures suited Mkabela's (2005, p. 179) '*Afrocentric*' suggestion of participants being subjects and human agents (Bantu) as opposed to objects or simply 'data' or informants 'in the Eurocentric frame of reference'.

The second way and specifically Ubuntu-related, was Social Constructivism, which, according to Gergen (1985, p. 266),

views discourse about the world as an artefact of communal interchange, and is concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves).

Ubuntu as a philosophy meant that teachers collaborated in the evaluations between themselves even though they each had developed unique ways of using the computer program.

Methodology (evaluation processes)

I used three tenets of Ubuntu, which were in accord with traditional Western evaluation methodology: (1) a respect for others; (2) an agreement on criteria; and (3) dialogue or 'mutual exposure' of beliefs. In Figure 1, methodologies as understood from Crotty (1998) that were compatible with the three tenets of Ubuntu briefly explained below included: ethical considerations, action evaluation, interpretative approaches, case study, and discourse analysis.

Through Ubuntu, I communicated, and agreed on methodology through dialogue with the teachers. This dialogue was easier because I, the facilitator, was a Muntu. That is, a non-Muntu facilitator would have to transform into a Muntu (Mkabela, 2005, p. 179), from 'solitary to solidarity, and from independence to interdependence' (Louw, 2004), with the Bantu community. Becoming a Muntu is a methodology involving submitting one self to Ubuntu. The Ubuntu-becoming process would require 'cultural and social immersion as opposed to scientific distance ... to understand African phenomena' (Mkabela, 2005, p. 179). For example, it was Ubuntu to share my family history, clan, and totem, which made participants more at ease with me because then they 'knew' me. The depth of knowing me determined the quality and quantity of local knowledge I gained access to. Fortunately, a Muntu perception of the other is not fixed or rigidly closed, but is adjustable or open-ended and allows the other to be (Louw, 2004). Thus, a non-Muntu would also be able to become a Muntu.

It was an ethical requirement that teachers demanded assurance that I had obtained permission from the education authorities to conduct evaluation (Merriam, 1998), but also an Ubuntu obligation to acknowledge the elderly, spiritual leaders, chiefs, and other forms of leadership around the schools, including those who were not participants. Additionally, in view of oneness in Ubuntu, seeking approval from elders and royalty increased the teachers' participation as their local leadership blessed the evaluation. Asking for willing teacher volunteers (Cates & Goodling, 1997) and how much exposure they wished to give (Mkabela, 2005) reduced tensions and improved power relations between participants and me.

Decolonising research considers the dissemination of research outcomes as a collaboration that acknowledges the contribution of Indigenous peoples and, most importantly, informs them of the methods of dissemination (Prior, 2006). Thus, Ubuntu ethics included clearly identifying participants' contributions to outcomes, sharing, analysing and discussing the findings with the teachers, declaring fully my intentions in conducting the evaluation, clarifying the participants' and my actions, needs, and benefits. Results were therefore idiosyncratic, constructivist and interpretive. In the words of Harding (cited in Mkabela, 2005, p. 180), I avoided invisibility, anonymity, and authority, against the popular 'scientific' reporting of data in the passive, devoid of the human element, as if I had no influence upon the proceedings and results.

It was ethical, albeit an Action Evaluation, in that participants were allowed to develop evaluation skills in their schools (Stevenson, 1995), and a case evaluation in the uniqueness of Bantu as a group and of Ubuntu, as well as translations into vernacular of some of the terminologies, procedures and questions (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Neuman, 1997).

Prior (2006, p. 165) notes that decolonising research is not simply giving a 'voice' to participants, but evokes discourse through a process, which 'develops meaning or "truth" through a relationship of trust, reciprocity and co-operatively evolved methods of research that remain true to the context' in harmony with the cultural values and epistemology of the Indigenous peoples. This case evaluation considered that Bantu communicate through discourses that might be unique, and hence require the discourse analysis of Ubuntu – i.e., attitudes, gestures, glances, thoughts, values, and emotions such as the way they greet a facilitator (Foucault, in Mphahlele, 1996). These discourses were measures of acceptance that seriously relate to the validity of findings. For example, serving me with tea could be an indication of complete acceptance, and therefore revelations of authentic values teachers attached to the ICT program. Discourse analysis included understanding translations of questions and responses between vernacular and English since English was a second language in those Bantu communities. The recognition of community unity under a hierarchy additionally helped in making sure that individual responses were not compromised by community opinions. For example, teachers tended to use 'we' instead of 'I'.

Methods

Although vernacular was not recognised in scholarly communication (Raseroka, 2005), it conveyed more accurately participants' understanding of the evaluation process and its outcomes.

It is in the realm of Ubuntu to concur within a community before committing themselves to responses in a manner similar to Social Constructivism. Thus, focus groups or socialising between participants and myself were more appreciated than individuals interacting with me in line with Broodryk's (2006) notion of Ubuntu inclusivity. In this regard, Ubuntu bears similarity to the Western management practice of teamwork where everyone brings something the team needs and the team defines a common goal.

Data were analysed from an idiosyncratic constructivist and interpretive approach, with clear revelation of my deeds (Gay & Airasian, 2000) and interests, besides those of participants within the framework of discourse analysis. Then we used a constant comparative method to analyse some of the participants' statements to determine recurring themes and patterns in participants' responses as suggested by Maykut and Morehouse (1994), Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), and Denscombe (1998).

Problems in Ubuntu

Anonymity has often been factored out through Ubuntu communalism. Hence, Ubuntu could have easily derailed the evaluation into useless collectivism or communalism, in order to achieve solidarity. Additionally, communalism can be very endless, lengthy and expensive. An individual could be isolated and be labelled as an 'informant' if s/he sticks to an opinion that differs from a community view. This is because to agree is more important than to disagree; conformity is cherished if conflict can be avoided. Additionally, Olinger, Britz, and Olivier (2005, p. 6) note that Ubuntu:

is sustainable at a local village level, but is difficult to exercise beyond the boundaries of everyday relationships. Individuals have a limited capacity to relate to other people in terms of sheer numbers of relationships, and since relationships are a cornerstone to Ubuntu, the practice of Ubuntu occurs primarily within the boundaries of the individual's primary relationships.

Therefore, evaluations done in one community might not be valid in another community and might not be generalised in the whole country. This implies that every community would require its own evaluations, which is an expensive and difficult task.

Suggestions for practice

There are of course likely to be tensions between the demands for 'internationally' recognised paradigms and Ubuntu. However, this evaluation showed possibilities of building bridges between global paradigms and Ubuntu, in concert with Eisenhart and Howe's (1992) and Heron's (1996) advice about the need for clarity about the grounds of validity and on the extent to which those validities have been reached. Fundamentally, Ubuntu should be the benchmark for evaluations among Bantu in line with Bholá's (2002) advice for accessing feelings about knowledge from the indigenous community in consideration of the following.

An innovation, and process such as a research or evaluation should be incorporated into the potential users' value system in contrast to the usual imposition (LeCompte et al., 1993; Prior, 2006). Among Bantu, this implies making sure that the framework of an evaluation framework fits Ubuntu. For example,

Bantu IKS is communal such that it is important and ethical to make sure that the whole community (not a selected individual) understands and views an evaluator's aims in light of how an innovation fits and helps the community.

This implies that Bantu have to be empowered in the process of the project. Since according to LeCompte et al. (1993) and Greene (1994) the questions and values that are addressed and promoted are important in determining the framework and methodology, the evaluation processes and outcomes ought to be beneficial and should contribute towards the social transformation through Bantu participation. It is likely that people would be enthusiastic about a project if they benefit from that project (Muwanga-Zake, 2007). Among Bantu, the evaluation and empowerment are Ubuntu driven. Bantu IKS plays a role since it provides the foundations upon which benefits and further development can be made.

Adopting Ubuntu in the process of evaluation improves validity as the fit between evaluation questions, data collection procedures, analysis techniques, and data required (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995) increases. Hence one has to make sure that Bantu participants understand the project (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003), within the framework of Bantu IKS and Ubuntu. This, for example, implies formulating questions that do not violate their Ubuntu. Embarrassing questions are likely to attract wrong answers, to the extent that researchers wrongly concluded that Bantu do not talk about sex – they do, but only with people Ubuntu assigns for that. Additionally, language problems sometimes require an evaluator to include translation into a local Bantu language and to construct questionnaires as well as analyse responses together with participants – this is Ubuntu, which in Western IKS could be interpreted as social constructivism.

Valid processes, responses and useful outcomes require clear revelations of the voice and interpretations of the participants, besides the researcher's interpretations of the participants' voice (Prior, 2006). Bantu views, however 'uneducated' they might look, are relevant. LeCompte et al. (1993, pp. 315–316) emphasise this view 'kinds and degrees of truth are held . . . differentially for different audiences and constituencies'. That is, the epistemological position that the participants' realities are paramount, and therefore, the ontological position that knowledge is primarily subjective to the holder and secondarily objective only when the subjectivities lead to an agreed meaning, should be considered. This is fortunately a tenet of Ubuntu.

Conclusion

The experience of conducting this evaluation showed that introducing a project into Bantu communities is not a matter of explaining a few things to participants or inviting Bantu to workshops in remote centres. Every project among Bantu requires collaboration and therefore Ubuntu, with unequivocal recognition of the culture and needs of the community. The values Bantu attach to the project or alternatively the extent to which the project solves their problems plays a role, but communities should not be 'pushed' to adopt projects in recognition of Ubuntu. A push would gainsay the interpretative, developmental, and constructivist frameworks, and Ubuntu courtesy and negotiation cannot be hastened. The Ubuntu–Western participative paradigm provides a platform for Bantu to be part of an implementable and sustainable development.

The challenge is building bridges between Ubuntu and Western participative paradigms that are short but which capture all the relevant inputs from stakeholders.

This building includes, *inter alia*, understanding the social, historical and economic situation of Bantu participants, while improving participants' understanding of Western paradigms.

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