

## Where Is the Wisdom We Have Lost in Knowledge?

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**ABSTRACT** In this research paper the researchers highlight the need for an incorporation of the African cultural heritage in general and proverbs in particular for second language learning and teaching. This is in the light of the widespread trivialisation of African culture and knowledge systems which has resulted in an appalling degeneration of the cultural, social and spiritual fabric of the African people as a whole. This degeneration needs to be challenged through a revolutionised academic engagement that harnesses the African cultural living heritage because the tenets of the African cultural systems and practices form the fundamentals of living with others and with nature in harmony. Folklore in general and proverbs, in particular, contain practical wisdom for instilling moral values and social skills as globalization, transculturalism and real-life experiences demand problem-solving that is based on the human condition. Thus academics need to consciously and consistently incorporate and illuminate the African heritage in their teaching in order to enable students to learn and think critically about the knowledge and the wisdom of the cultural practices of their communities.

### INTRODUCTION

For most people, there is very little difference between wisdom and knowledge because even opinion is carted around as wisdom. In all humankind, knowledge is based on learning, information, data, facts and news as such it has a specific focus and solves definite problems. But knowledge alone does not result in clear vision, a proper perspective, relevant meaning and the right behaviour. Wisdom on the other hand, is the end product when knowledge has been applied in a way that takes into account all the pertinent relationships and that, which is consistent with universal laws. TS Elliot once posed the question: "where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?" It is obvious that humankind, especially Africans, need a better mode of conducting themselves and their affairs. What we urgently need is wisdom. But what exactly does the word mean, what do we understand from the term and how and where do we get it from? McKinney (2011) elucidates the parameters for wisdom as: entailing the proper use of knowledge; and grounded in reality. To connect with reality and develop wisdom, we need to learn to be aware, aware of ourselves and aware of those around us. The principle that underlies wisdom is to have a long term perspective and to look beyond the immediate situation. Prah (1995: 50) states that wisdom is sagacity as it provides discretion and prudence which encompasses the general approach to life and a proverb is a concrete saying that is known and expresses a truth

based on an important fact of practical experience of humanity. Hence academics need to realise that there is wisdom in nature, whereas knowledge is vested in scholarship. Some Southern African languages make a distinction between knowledge and wisdom. For example, in Silozi (Zambia), wisdom is *butali* and knowledge is *zibo* which is derived from the verb to know (*ku ziba*). The pivot for wisdom in our dealings is humankind *Kamunu* or *Mutu* (person) – the most important of all living creatures and hence *butu* (to be human) means one behaves and exhibits the virtues that embody the values that are revered in one's society. It is the embodiment of wisdom in a people's ways of living and interacting that is linked to the sayings or proverbs which embed wisdom.

In different African countries, tradition, culture and indigenous knowledge systems are embedded in the philosophy and the cultural practices that have evolved over many generations (Keane 2008). It is from the African philosophy and cultural systems that we get proverbs and sayings that form the fundamentals of living with others and with nature in harmony. Although each African country has its own unique proverbs that have been in existence from time immemorial, the fundamental value of these proverbs lie in their obvious directness that teach humanity worthwhile lessons. This knowledge has been passed on through oral traditions, and has evolved to provide wisdom for the understandings of the interactions of humans among themselves and with their environments. It is

these interactions that carry necessities for living as they are embedded in human relationships, as well as in the economic and governance system of a culture for policies on politics, and the philosophies of life (Keane 2008). Hence the wisdom we lost is located in the relational values that connect us to each other and to our environments culturally. Thus to illustrate the link of proverbs to wisdom, we will cite some sayings that encapsulate the very fundamental wisdom-based African living that has been lost in knowledge gained. The sayings are meant to illustrate what is being garnered for in this article which is connected to wisdom-inquiry in academia and not knowledge-inquiry per se:

For instance, the saying in Isizulu (South Africa) '*Umntu ngu muntu nga bantu; or in Silozi (Zambia) 'Mutu ki mutu ka batu*' (you are a human being because of others – you are because I am). One cannot live in a vacuum as human beings are social and were created to live together in harmony. The saying encourages and promotes co-operation, love and respect and togetherness. If we internalized and observed the above in daily practices, we would be looking out for one another's needs instead of upholding the selfishness that is so rampant in our midst today. The saying is linked to the Silozi proverb: '*Munwana ulimugw'i haukoni ku tuba nda*' (one finger cannot crash lice). This means one needs others to survive. The saying is an albatross for humankind's existence and survival and it is enhanced by '*kopano ki maata*' (togetherness is strength/power). There is power in numbers for if there is a problem, it can easily be resolved with other people's input. Even an enemy can be defeated through the concerted effort of togetherness. Another proverb from Silozi and Tshivenda (South Africa) is '*Pukucwe munyela siliba or U tshi pfuluwa u songo nyela fshisimani*' (when you travel do not shit in the water fountain on the way). This means you should not defile the water well on the way out because you will be forced to drink your own shit when you have to return. In a nutshell we should always strive to leave a place amicably so that we can come back (if need be) without having to lose face. We can only be sure of where we are coming from but we can never predict our fate with certainty where we are going. Another proverb from Siluyana (old Silozi) is based on obedience and respect for parents:

*'Kanuke ka sambelwa, kanungamena tu mone'* (A child who does not value her/his parents' counsel will get what's coming to him/her). That is, a young person who never accepts advice from elders will be taught by the world and the world can be cruel. This is so apt in today's world because young people need to accept their parents' counsel as they care and have a lot of wisdom regarding the affairs of this world. Young people in general seem to think they know it all until something terrible happens to them which prompts them to run back to the same people they didn't listen to in the first place. This is a fundamental saying to be observed at all times. Another proverb from Silozi is '*Mutu ki pilu situpu hasi tusi*' (what constitutes a human being is one's heart, the stature of his/her body does not do anything for anybody). This means the body is just a shell – the outward make up of a person is just a cover as what really matters is the quality of a person's heart and not because one is good looking, pretty, tall, fat, thin and so on. The heart determines our actions and how we deal with others. Hence we need to get back to our humanity and start instilling this in our young through academia.

### THE IMPETUS FOR CHANGE IN ACADEMIA

In his keynote address to the SRHE conference in London, Maxwell (2010) argues that academia is presently caught up in the hot pursuit of knowledge and technological know-how. As a result, all the benefits that are enjoyed are paradoxically, counterbalanced by the crises that are confronting humanity. We know that human beings are responsible for all the crises ranging from global warming to ozone depletion, the destruction of natural habitats and rapid extinction of species, to mention just a few of the disasters that are threatening the survival of humanity. All the problems that we face have arisen because some people have acquired powers to act without acquiring the capacity to act wisely. Thus the push for change becomes an imperative so that the fundamental intellectual aim does not remain the hot pursuit of knowledge, but to spur academics to acquire positive leverage in solving problems of living in more cooperative and rational ways, after all, Africa is more negatively impacted by all the crises than other continents. It is noteworthy that Maxwell's (2010)

instigation for a change of orientation in how the academic agenda is pursued has arisen because of pressures that have come out of existing dysfunctional ties and the unsuccessful modes of problem-solving globally. This call is in synergy with Gibbons et al. (1994) problem-solving mode which is located in the humanities and social sciences disciplines. As the humanities and social sciences disciplines get involved with the human condition at the individual level of consciousness or at the level of social experience, wisdom-inquiry mode makes sense as it carries meaning for the entire human experience as this is based on a concern for the inner workings of society and the generation of culture. In this regard, the intellectual motivation is vested in the ceaseless interrogation of the past through the present.

Therefore, in this article, the researchers support the move from knowledge-inquiry to wisdom inquiry which incorporates the premise that the African heritage and systems can make unique contributions to the more rational ways of solving problems. By drawing from the indigenous knowledge of the African heritage, academia is enabled to identify successful principles and practices from the African cultural capital for inclusion in the curriculum to provide a vital ingredient for pedagogy. The incorporation of indigenous ways of living and interaction helps in the contextualization of both language and content concepts for the reduction of mental overload for second language education as the kaleidoscopic stance becomes a catalyst for both intellectual wisdom and academic vibrancy. In this sense, universities and schools can draw from the resources of the African traditions for what is true, good and beautiful. Maxwell (2010) points out that, when humanity considers what is of value in life, we come to the realization that the problems that need solving are, fundamentally, problems of living, of action, and not problems of knowledge. This is what wisdom-inquiry means as it hinges on intellectual standards that are different from those of knowledge-inquiry. After all it is society's actions or lack of it, and not what society knows, that helps in realizing what is of value (except when that which we seek of value is knowledge and understanding in themselves). Wisdom, which is behind the knowledge that enables us to accomplish things, is more important than the knowledge or technological know-how. This is

the reason for Maxwell (2010) stating that social inquiry is found to be intellectually more fundamental than natural science even though it would not itself be science, or concerned, in the first instance, to acquire knowledge. What is required for wisdom to take its lead role is the interplay of skeptical rationality and emotion, which is the interplay of mind and heart (Maxwell 2010).

### **THE HYBRIDIZED KNOWLEDGE, INDIGENOUS WAYS AND LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY**

Since wisdom-inquiry problem-solving is based on parameters that are to do with the human condition in its totality, there is justification for academics going back to the common good of wisdom that is embodied in people through the ways that they interact in their environment in a socially organized manner. It's a move towards the authentic stance of reasoning which is devoted to the promotion of human welfare through wisdom. In today's complex and fast moving world, what is needed is insightful wisdom in order to bring our past to life to protect our future as transformative learning involves a deep, structural shift in the basic premise of thoughts, feelings and actions. Thus the perspectives of wisdom, social inquiry, proverbs, cultural and indigenous ways of living have to be incorporated in the third space theory of Bhabha (1994) for a hybridized knowledge and languages in education. In the hybridization of knowledge and languages, academics have to explore the "third space" theory which is a means for resolving perceived cultural boundaries through embracing the metaphysics of multiple perspectives and languages (Taylor 2006b). Gibbons et al. (1994), reinforce the multidimensionality of reality by dismantling the schism between expert and lay dichotomy in problem-solving in research as this fosters partnerships between the academy and society. In the application of Bhabha's theory, the indigenous culture provides meaning and identity to the local community in the first space, while imported ideas provide a second space for learning/teaching in school/university. Second language learners together with facilitators function in the third space in arriving at meanings and understandings for the fusion of knowledge, practices, and languages from merging cultures.

The third space theory garners the elimination of cultural hegemony in communication. This is because according to Wallace (2004: 908), multiple discourses are 'woven together without sacrificing or dismissing the importance of their speaker's experiences and ways of knowing in the world.' The third space theory is also akin to Rodby's (1990) kaleidoscopic notion of self for second language learners in which they make use of their cultural and literacy repertoires as a vehicle for their socio-culture in total. English language pedagogy is currently in a state of flux as such, academics have to reflect on where second language education has been and where it is going as part of the wisdom-inquiry mode in research. The ultimate objective of researching and teaching/learning in the third space or in the promotion of the kaleidoscopic stance in the learners is to facilitate the reconstruction of the learner's everyday beliefs and experiences in order to develop an engaging worldview. When disciplinary borders become porous for the hybridization of knowledge in the third space, there is an engendered reflexivity for academia in line with Maxwell's (2010) wisdom-inquiry.

According to Taylor (2006b), the implications and benefits of negotiating within the third space is that, there is the positive recognition and growth of local cultural capital, which incorporates traditional knowledge systems and languages; and the need to develop multicultural identities which embed a strong sense of shared humanity and the validation of the "other." This connects to the fact that wisdom-inquiry is foregrounded by the common good for the shared biological, physical, and cultural space that all life depends upon. In addition, Bowers (2007) argues for an eco-justice pedagogy that involves an engaged dialogue with traditional cultures in order to appropriate indigenous ways of living with nature as a means of eliciting knowledge based on wisdom-inquiry. This interaction is vital for it facilitates the exploration of multiple discourses and languages, hybridized knowledge, and issues that are important to the sustainability and survival of African cultures and humanity as a whole. In wisdom-inquiry based academic pursuits, there has to be room for home languages as a means of providing an authentic context for promoting community identity and learning as 'discourses are not mastered merely through formal instruction only, but through a

supportive environment in which there is vibrant 'interaction with people who have already mastered the discourses'. In this way, an individual (student or novice) becomes literate through social interaction with those who know (teachers, parents and experts) how to engage the wisdom in proverbs to serve particular social purposes for literate behaviour is a collaborative practice.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, therefore, the onus is on academics to pursue the rigors of pedagogy based on wisdom-inquiry and not on the knowledge-inquiry only per se. Hence the answer to the question, where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge lies in folklore, in particular, in proverbs education that cuts across disciplines with a socio-political view of sustainability in which African indigenous ways of living and interacting become conduits of knowledge for academia about living wisely in harmony with nature and ourselves. Proverbs deserve to be included as part of general education because they form a common knowledge pool for basically all those in a learning context. Proverbs can be very effective devices for the communication of wisdom and knowledge about human nature and the world at large. The researchers wish to point out that the educational and communicative powers of the rich heritage of oral literature as expressed in fables, myths, legends, folk tales and proverbs lie in their use as validators of traditional ethics, procedures and beliefs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Thus the researchers' recommendation is that learners need to be confronted with the character building values of the proverbial laws of life during the developmental stages from youth to adulthood because it is the most opportune time when they are getting acquainted with the second language phraseology for effective self-expression and communication. Proverbs are valuable in education because they contain a lot of practical wisdom, which can be used to teach and instill moral values and social skills. They can, in addition, be deployed as didactic tools for linguistic instruction in teaching about human experiences in general and can be used to bring African cultural capital to the English lan-

guage class with significant expressions of folk wisdom to teach moral precepts. This research agenda for universities instigates dialogue and a hybridized knowledge space which translates into learning how to make progress towards a wiser, more balanced world because academic scaffolding and collaboration is located in the context afforded by existing schemas of the natural and the social including knowledge about life in the community and in ongoing social interactions; we cannot imagine any more important work for anyone associated with academia than to research, teach and to help promote this revolution that uses wisdom as leitmotif.

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