Towards an Equitable University Curriculum: Cultivating an Activist Pedagogy

Yusef Waghid
ORCID iD: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2565-824X

Abstract
Higher teaching and learning (pedagogy) at South African universities remain in the spotlight, particularly attempts by such institutions to produce transformative academic offerings. Several reviews by the Council on Higher Education report on the state of higher teaching and learning at South African universities – the most notable being the latest 25-year review of higher education in the country. Despite these reviews on higher pedagogy, teaching and learning have remained flawed.

This article argues that attempts at transforming university curricula would remain superficial if activist pedagogy does not inform it. The basis of activist pedagogy is premised on the idea that practices such as autonomy, deliberative engagement, and responsibility ought to advance higher teaching and learning. In reference to philosophical studies in education in a post-graduate certificate in education programme, I show how an activist pedagogy can manifest to enhance equity within a university curriculum. Then I argue that unless activist practices such as autonomy, deliberation, and responsibility are cultivated commensurate with the notion of *ubuntu* – human dignity and interdependence, such actions will be devoid of transformative action.

Keywords: Council of Higher Education, equitable university curriculum, activist pedagogy, autonomy, deliberation, responsibility

Yusef Waghid

A Cursory Glance at Higher Education in South Africa

Any university curriculum that associates with the notion of equity has the cultivation of justice as its primary concern. Understandably in South African higher education parlance, the concept of just education seems to constitute most of the policy texts that involve realising equitable peda-gogical practices through the curriculum (CHE 2021). The Council on Higher Education, together with its Higher Education Quality Committee, considers the enactment of just action *with/ through* pedagogy to dissociate university curricula from its inequitable past (CHE 2021). Therefore, since its inception, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) has produced four extensive reviews of higher education in South Africa as it guided the transformation of the university sector in South Africa over the past three decades. The four published reviews are: *South African Higher Education in the First Decade of Democracy* (2004); *Review of Higher Education in South Africa – Selected Themes* (2007); *South African Higher Education Reviewed: Two Decades of Democracy* (2016); and *A Review of Higher Education in South Africa Twenty-five Years in a Democracy* (2022). One of the main reasons why the transformation of higher education seemed to have been subjected to so many comprehensive reviews is a recognition that inequities persist in higher education, which makes the pursuit of justice within the sector more than just a quest for reform, reconstruction, improvement and development of higher education discourses in the country. Not that these other forms of trans-formation were not necessary, but because they seem to have treated trans-formation as an end in itself, and not as an ongoing practice, substantive change in higher education seemed to have remained evasive. Consequently, it is not necessarily inexplicable to find that university pedagogy, even in the CHE's review of 2016, was still considered inept for the transformation of higher education based on the view that transmission of knowledge was still considered one of the primary pedagogical actions. I have reason to claim that higher pedagogy in the faculty where I work is still predominantly biased towards a transmission mode of teaching and learning, which seemed to have constrained any form of genuine transformation in the university curriculum (DR 2022). Hence, the CHE's review of the debilitating effects of pedagogical action at universities in the country is not necessarily unfounded. In my view, the transmission of the higher education approach at universities in South Africa

remains one of the most inappropriate forms of higher pedagogy that not only hindered any genuine attempt at trans-formation but also contributed largely to the pervasive pedagogical inequities that seemed to have entrenched in university curricula. In the main, two conceptual-cum-pragmatic complexities emerged from such a deficient view of university pedagogy: first that university educators seem to remain the master explicators of forms of knowledge; and second, that students remain passive actors in the pursuit of knowledge (re)construction at universities (DR 2022). Such an unsatisfactory pedagogical situation invariably enhances the CHE's claim that higher pedagogy ought to become more transformed as we approach the end of thirty years into a democracy (CHE 2022). My argument is, that unless university teaching-learning becomes more revolutionary – activist – South African universities would be constrained in their intellectual efforts to transform higher education in the country.

In addition to the higher education transformation project's perceived failure to genuinely counteract an endemic transmission approach to university pedagogy, came the accompanying student protests around access, equity, institutional cultures, decolonisation and social justice. Often, regulative measures were introduced reactively in response to crises of governance, lack of adherence by individual institutions, student protests, or to restrict the proliferation of private higher education providers and distance education programmes. Despite a clearly articulated regulatory framework, policy implementation without clearly stipulated targets remains problematic, thus making the long-term transformation of higher education inequitable. The efficacy and success of such efforts at transformation also require that they be synchronised with each other and with the broader macroeconomic environment, that they utilise effective political and institutional leadership, build consensus and foster accountability (CHE 2022).

It seems the public university's unwillingness to sufficiently and boldly tackle matters such as ongoing student protests against rising tuition costs, institutional corruption and mismanagement of resources, gender inequality and exclusion, sexual harassment, and malpractices that involve bribes for marks, academic plagiarism and indiscipline, and excessive student drinking and delinquency, exacerbate what cannot be called other than a crisis in university education (CHE 2021). Yet, by far, the most disconcerting aspect of university life seems to be related to the pedagogical activity of higher teaching-learning itself. Teaching and learning seem to

have remained overwhelmingly concerned with knowledge transfer and acquisition and limited opportunities for critical pedagogical practices (CHE 2014). At the time of writing, the coronavirus pandemic remains prevalent, and universities in the country have introduced emergency online remote teaching to attend to the learning responsibilities of students. Yet, emergency remote teaching seemed to have enhanced learning by transmission and the possibility for critical learning has invariably been subverted. In this way, the public responsibility of the university seems to be under threat and the institution, without being too alarmist, teeters on the brink of collapse (Waghid 2022). Thus, it seems as if higher education has again been sacrificed for online remote and blended learning as if these approaches to higher pedagogy in themselves can build confidence in university education (Waghid 2022). What has emerged seems to have further undermined the possibility for higher education to manifest, and the university appears to be limping in a quagmire of pedagogical uncertainty and ambivalence. If learning by transmission is considered the only legitimate form of learning, then the likelihood that criticality would be pronounced would be remote in itself (Waghid 2022).

Cultivating a (Post)critical University Curriculum: Learning to Speak without Explanation

My understanding of higher teaching-learning that is still prejudiced towards transmission is not an innocuous situation as some university educators might want to assert. Rather, it is at the centre of an inequitable university curriculum because a predominant focus on transmission erodes the autonomy of both educators and students (Waghid & Davids 2020). If educators were to be considered as the primary pedagogical agents who merely transfer knowledge claims to students, then such a damaging act of pedagogy instantly undermines the autonomy of students to think for themselves. Students are no longer treated as speaking beings who can autonomously speak their minds. Through transmission, the expectation is always there that they listen uncritically to the dominant voices of university educators who pedagogically exclude them from genuine learning. Transmission of knowledge claims manifest in multiple ways: a student acquiring a thought communicated to her by an educator without having made sense of the authenticity of the thought itself; an educator prescribing a particular text and

expects students to regurgitate ideas in the text in exactly the same way; and, students emulating everything educators do in fear of possibly receiving inadequate grades (Davids & Waghid 2021). Trans-mission of knowledge claims is unquestioningly a form of doctrinaire thinking where students have become unresponsive actors of knowledge and educators the providers of such knowledge claims (Freire 1970). As aptly stated by Paulo Freire (1970: 52):

> Education is suffering from narration sickness. The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of students. His task is to 'fill' the students with the content of his narration – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concrete-ness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity.

My concern with doctrinaire thinking is its capacity to alienate the other (students) from their realities. On the basis of narration, students become rambling beings without having anything significant to say. This reminds me of some doctoral passages I read of students who write in pretentious ways to impress me (their supervisor) without really articulating themselves with perspicuous clarity. Doctrinaire thinking detaches students from the reality of seeing things for themselves. As Freire (1970: 53) notes, doctrinaire thinking 'leads students to memorise mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them … into receptacles to be filled by the teacher'. When students merely narrate mechanically they seem to be disconnected from the realities they are confronted with, completely oblivious of what they face. This is exactly the problem with an education that is resistant to criticality. Being critical is a capacity to learn without a master explicator – that is, a capacity to learn for and by oneself – a matter of being summoned to use one's intelligence (Rancière 1991: 12). Rancière's (1991) argument for critical learning is one whereby students engage in learning without expla-nation or narration. Explanation leads to stultification as the student no longer has the urgency to think for herself because she is led to a position that is already known by the master educator. For Rancière (1991: 27), her learning is 'given' by educators and she remains dependent on their

explanations who claim that they (educators) can think for them (students). In such a situation, emancipation has not happened and the student demonstrates an incapacity to think for herself. Only when students are emancipated do they think for themselves and see things in critical ways. However, when their intelligence is subordinated to the authority of educators they remain stultified. On the contrary, emancipation requires students to think for themselves and to use their intelligence to see things differently – a matter of looking at things as if they could be otherwise. In this way, a critical university curriculum summons students to make their independent intellecttual judgments without always having to be told by educators what to do. The very notion of being a student as a subject of education implies that they can learn without explanation. Failing to do so would render their position as students as indefensible because they cannot speak.

A university curriculum that summons students to speak independently is equitable because students do not have to rely on educators to come to their own speech. As eloquently posited by Rancière (1991: 65) '[i]n the act of speaking [a] [hu]man doesn't transmit his knowledge, he makes poetry; he translates and invites others to do the same'. University educators who provoke students to speak for themselves invariably interrupt an assumption that students cannot be speakers and have to be explained what to do all the time. The starting point for any form of (post)critical university curriculum is to consider students as emancipatory beings who can come to their own speech. It is such an understanding of (post)critical university pedagogy that allows students to be activistic or revolutionary.

Next, I examine what such an activist pedagogy entails.

Philosophy of Education as an Activist Pedagogy: Doing things Together

In the 1980s Wally Morrow (1989: 58) waged an analytically astute criticism against 'philosophies of education' on the grounds that such philosophies lack the grammar of thought [or some sphere of thought] or criteria for what counts as education for a particular people. In his words,

> [A philosophy of education] specifies what counts as being educated for those people, which thus comes to be conceived of as conformity to something prespecified. Any pupil [student] or teacher [educator]

who departs from these ideals must be merely disobedient or igno-
rant [because] … there is no logical space for autonomy … no room
for critical thought (Morrow 1989: 59).

My interest is in Morrow's assertion that any philosophy of education, such
as Christian National Education and positivism he vehemently criticised,
cannot be about an exclusive political autonomy that puts people's nation-
ality, race, language, country, and morality above everyone and everything
else. I concur with Morrow that philosophy of education, although not
denying people's ethnicity, language, and morality, cannot be about what he
referred to as a domestication of philosophy where its grammar as doctrine
is out of bounds for philosophical scrutiny (Morrow 1989: 48). Like Morrow,
philosophical scrutiny is conceived of a theory of human thought whereby
arguments are proffered in the face of critique and in defence of views of
education. The point about domesticating philosophy of education is to have
made presumptions in advance about education – that is, having presupposed
philosophical conclusions about education without articulation and
justification. If an articulation, and justification of philosophical arguments
are absent, philosophy of education would have been domesticated in rela-
tion to a given grammar or jargon promoted by such claims to education. In
this way, there does not seem to be a distinction between education and
indoctrination as both conform to something prespecified (Morrow 1989:
59).

The above argument is a compelling defence for any philosophy of
education because it connects argumentation, articulation, and justification
to the grammar of education. However, unlike Morrow (1989: 62), I disagree
that this grammar of thought releases '… a person from myopic embed-
dedness in the limitations and restraints of the belief-systems and practices
of his [her] cultural group' (Morrow 1989: 62). The latter pernicious claim
is what some advocates of Morrow's philosophy of education use to deny the
existence of an African philosophy of education. Articulation, justification,
and argumentation are human expressions that do not happen independently
of who they are and what they stand for. To proffer erroneously that human
argumentation is devoid of cultural attenuation is a denial that humans are
grounded in modes of societal living. If humans can articulate and justify
their claims independent of their cultural attachment, then such a grammar
would be presented as neutral and untouched by what people think and do.

This is different from saying that humans see things as 'true' and 'fundamental' only in relation to their cultural moralities. The point is that doing African philosophy of education does not make one uncritical towards one's cultural roots or unwilling to criticise the grammar of an African philosophy of education.

What follows from this argument is that educators, for instance, do not just privilege their knowledge and understanding of things in the world according to their cultural persuasions, for that is tantamount to doctrinaire thinking. Rather, an educator maximises learning opportunities for her students. She opens the door for students who risk being excluded if the door is closed for them. This is what Rancière (1991) suggests when he evokes the potentiality of students to be equal with him in the presence of something and to respond to that presence. As someone doing African philosophy of education, it is not my task to indoctrinate students with my cultural bias but rather to consider them as equals who can think for themselves in the presence of what is being taught and how they critically respond to their learning. In other words, when advancing an African philosophy of education, articulations, justifications, and arguments in the realm of both educational and cultural encounters can collectively enhance the legitimacy of the claims proffered as both educators and students are considered equally capable of thought in an inclusive manner. And, when educators create learning opportunities for students to act with equality in the presence of their learning and to respond to that presence, they would have acquired the capacity to be activists. This is what Freire (1970: 74) refers to as revolutionary learning:

> Authentic [revolutionary/activist] education is not carried on by 'A' *for* 'B' or by 'A' *about* 'B', but rather by 'A' *with* 'B', mediated by the world – a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it.

The problem with a philosophy of education that does not open up students to 'revolutionary action' (activism) is based on a false assumption that educators ought to transmit knowledge to students and bring them to their privileged level of expertise. Instead, pedagogical encounters in an activist way are constituted by what educators and students do together *with* one another without having to succumb to authoritarian relations that mostly

advantage the knowledgeable educator.

In the next section, I analyse what it means for university educators and students to do things together in a spirit of *ubuntu* (human dignity and interdependence).

Ubuntu Ethics and Activism

Freire (1970: 51) links the notion of revolutionary education to a commitment on the part of educators and students to do things together. In this article, I want to connect activist pedagogy (teaching-learning) to the African ethic of *ubuntu* (literally, human dignity and interdependence). In my view, *ubuntu* is both a philosophical and politico-ethical concept that can contribute to thinking about the university differently in troubled times and also to enacting practices that can realign institutional and transformational purposes with an idea of community in which educators and students can cultivate relations of individual freedom, collaborative engagement and co-belonging. What a university curriculum framed according to *ubuntu* can engender are higher education practices that reconsider the transformative potential of the practices themselves. The distinctiveness of *ubuntu* lies in its internal connection to human action and the external enactment of relations with other humans, contexts, and entities of a non-human kind, such as computers and other technological devices.

Underscored by the dictum 'I am because we are [and can become]', *ubuntu* implies having intra- and inter-relations with the self and others, including other things so that the actions implied by *ubuntu* are a matter of doing things *with* others and not always to and for others. My contention is that an *ubuntu*-inspired university curriculum can offer educators and students an opportunity to remain autonomous yet publicly responsible for their actions. In the main, such a university curriculum would not only consolidate the institution's transformation agenda but would, firstly, extend it to matters of public concern. And, here I refer to issues that involve its transformation concerning claims of knowledge and reason and lines of inquiry not thought about previously. Secondly, such a university curriculum would consider its engagement with the broader community not as a service provision or an activity with impact but rather as an act of genuine collaboration in the interest of both the institution and the broader public. Thirdly, the university curriculum would lay claims to cultivating a moral

attentiveness to address local and worldly concerns in and about matters that would enhance human dignity, social and restorative justice and peaceful human coexistence.

By far, the most poignant aspect of higher education transformation that the public university curriculum ought to consider more plausibly is the notion of decolonisation. Decolonisation, as elusive as the term might be (Zembylas 2018), seems to be linked to offering resistance to the exercise of politico-economic sovereignty of one dominant nation over another less dominant one (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Thus, I talk about the decolonisation of a university curriculum, I refer to practices of resistance that are offered to disrupt skewed understandings of power-sharing and imposition that constitute higher education practices. Together with decolonisation, the notion of decoloniality can be considered as restoring the cultural values, economic aspirations, and knowledge interests of (previously) colonised communities (Mbembe 2016). By implication, the decolonisation of the university curriculum is an attempt to oppose and undermine the imperialist legacy and devaluation of the cultures and knowledge interests of marginalised communities. Decolonisation of the university curriculum thus involves recognising the cultural values and knowledge concerns of marginalised communities that have been suppressed and undermined. In this way, the decolonisation of the university curriculum can be couched as a re-articulation of the underlying value systems of excluded communities.

And, this is where the decolonisation project connects with *ubuntu* in the sense that the latter equally insists that the values of the other in their otherness should be attended to. Hence, the decolonisation of the university curriculum is synonymous with reshaping the higher education landscape according to the moral values of *ubuntu*. The question can legitimately be asked: Is an *ubuntu* university curriculum different from an entrepreneurial university, thinking university, and ecological university curriculum (Barnett 2018)? While these different understandings of a university curriculum accentuate both the epistemological and moral imperatives concerning itself and the societies in which they manifest (Waghid & Davids 2020), I argue that it is through the *ubuntu* university curriculum that emotivism in the forms of dignity and humaneness will enhance a university's capacity for autonomy, responsibility, and criticality.

The very idea of reimagining an African university curriculum is based on the view that universities on the continent, as elsewhere, have and

continue to undergo unprecedented changes as enunciated by Zeleza and Olukoshi (2004). My argument for an *ubuntu* university curriculum is a way of redefining and defending the significance of higher education institutions on the continent. I also recognise that other philosophies impacted the transformation of university curricula on the continent such as *ujamaa* (people in community), and *ukama* (people in relation to one another) (Zeleza & Olukushi 2004). However, in limiting claims to *ubuntu* and its constitutive notions, one would not minimise the importance of rethinking the idea of the university curricula on the African continent. And, introducing a snapshot of a South African university curriculum (in philosophy of education) and how it can be impacted by *ubuntu* seems to be a tenable way to enhance claims for cultivating an *ubuntu* university curriculum on the continent.

What constitutes a philosophy of education university curriculum that connects with *ubuntu*? Drawing on the seminal work of Jacques Derrida (2004), he analyses the notion of 'democracy to come' and connects it to justice, equity, and the (im)possible experience. For democracy to manifest in university curricula, it must be considered, *firstly*, as a promise for the future so that it cannot be assumed to be an experience of certainty. Such a view of democracy seems relevant to the cultivation of a university curriculum that remains reflexively open to what is still to come. Here, I am specifically thinking of how a philosophy of education can be used to cultivate deliberative encounters among university educators and students to disrupt unequal and unjust human relations that seem to work against the pursuit of equity in university spaces. Educators and students engaged in a democracy to come will always remain open to what is not yet and what possibilities might still arise. Bearing in mind that Derrida's (2004) idea of democratic education invariably involves the cultivation of mutually respectful encounters, it is envisaged that an equitable university curriculum (in philosophy of education) produces students who consider their duty 'to treat humanity with respect [which] requires us to treat aliens on our soil with honor and hospitality' (Nussbaum 2000: 59). The emphasis of such a university curriculum is premised on the assumption that we recognise humanity as a (democratic) community of reason and morality and, as aptly put by Nussbaum (2000: 58), by not allowing 'differences of nationality or class or ethnic membership or even gender to erect barriers between us and our fellow human beings'.

Based on the aforementioned view of democratic education students

need to be exposed to discussions and debates in and about ethnic, racial, sexual, cultural, and religious differences to promote understanding of and respect for another. In a way, a university curriculum requires students and educators to become what Nussbaum (2000) refers to as 'philosophical exiles from our own ways of life, seeing them from the vantage point of the outsider and asking the questions an outsider is likely to ask about their meaning and function' (Nussbaum 2000: 58). In a different way, such a university curriculum in philosophy of education ought to encourage students and educators to become detached from an uncritical loyalty to their own ways of being and doing. Only when an individual self learns to become distanced from an unbridled loyalty to his or her own identity, tradition and custom would the possibility arise that he or she respects others and their differences. It might just be that their *ubuntu* (human dignity and interdependence) will become aroused.

Secondly, Derrida (2010) considers the experience of a democracy to come synonymous with an experience of the impossible and unconditional hospitality towards the other. A university curriculum that advances engaging with the impossible, considers notions of the 'unforgivable' (Derrida 2010: 32) as important for its education. The point about forgiveness is that human beings should consider new encounters based on new re-beginnings. A society filled with animosity and hatred for one another would not live respectfully, responsibly and peacefully. Hence, forgiveness ought to be permitted and accepted as a way, as is the case with South Africa, through which new human encounters and by implication educative relationships can be harnessed. In his words,

> [f]orgiveness is not, it should not be, normal, normative, normalising. It should remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality (Derrida 2010: 32).

Of course, apartheid, like other crimes against humanity, is 'unforgivable'. Yet, the possibility is there for the crime to be forgiven despite the perpetrator of the crime facing an indictment or possible perusal before the law (Derrida 2010: 33). My interest in forgiving the unforgivable is in the possibility that such acts of forgiveness can lead to new re-beginnings otherwise human beings would remain in perpetual conflict. The interruption of forgiveness is

conditional upon the crime not recurring, otherwise, re-beginnings would, in any case, not be possible. If educative encounters were to be curbed from allowing engagements about human injustices such as heinous crimes against humanity, then the possibility that any new re-beginning might emerge would not be possible. The possibility of a new democratic re-beginning is only there on account of the possibility that humans forgive the unforgivable. The cultivation of a democratic South Africa would not have been possible without forgiveness.

In the same way, educative encounters should not be constrained in the sense that only people advancing the cause of human justice should be engaged with. Derrida (2010: 38) makes the point that forgiving the unforgivable is conditional upon the guilty repenting and mending her ways, such as she is permanently changed by a new obligation. So, if educational encounters were to overcome discord, trauma, and paralysis, then such encounters ought to create conditions whereby the unforgivable ought to be forgiven. Of course, if peaceful human co-existence is the goal, then the language of amnesty, reparation, and reconciliation cannot escape the possibility of forgiveness. In the same way, democratic human encounters that envisage moving societies away from torture, genocide, terrorism and, crimes against humanity should not avoid the educative potential of forgiveness in the cultivation of our common humanity – a matter of acting with *ubuntu*.

Thirdly, for Papastephanou (2012:1), practices like democracy can be elucidated as a capacity that 'decenters the self, cultivates centrifugal virtues, and questions the inflated concern for the globally enriched self'. This ability, Papastephanou (2012) avers, is dependent on an individual's skill or capacity to critically engage with her (or his) own embedded values, beliefs and particular worldview. What transpires, through democratic education that is eccentric, is a transition from focusing only on the self to focusing on both the self and the other. Simply put, one could argue that the focus shifts from an individual perspective to that of a collective or communal perspective. In this instance, a collective or communal perspective refers to the whole of humanity and in particular, social justice as a lived reality for all. Papastephanou (2012) introduces a moral or ethical dimension to her argument with a democracy that is 'ethico-political' and builds on being 'eccentric'. Papastephanou (2012) questions the extent of individuals' ethical responsibility towards the condemnation of unjust practices impact-

ing all of humanity. Only by creating space within oneself, through decentring the self, Papastephanou (2012) argues, individuals can become aware of, have concern for, and act ethically in response to recognised injustices. Only through challenging one's values or motives one can change one's thinking about and treatment of those other than oneself (Papastephanou 2012). Consequently, Papastephanou (2012) reasons that irrespective of where one is located in the world, being concerned about the effect of unethical and unjust practices against humanity, encapsulates the essence of decentring the self. In this way, space has been opened up for the possible transformation of the individual and therefore, for the in-becoming of a socially just democratic citizen.

An understanding of democracy to come that focuses on just human living invariably connects with an ethic of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* has in mind people who can act in collaborative fashion on the basis of expressing their inclinations towards shared and humane actions. When educators act with *ubuntu* the possibility is always there for students to engage with them in dignified ways of articulation, listening, and critique. One would hardly refer to actions as collaborative if opportunities for engagement are minimised or even eradicated. It is not enough that an *ubuntu* pedagogy is conceived as a space for reason but rather that understanding is always subjected to acts of articulation, listening, and critique. Of course, one might argue that the latter is what reasons are supposed to elicit: articulation, listening, and critique. However, when the possibility of unreason manifests and people have been constrained to talk back, for instance, the act of *ubuntu* draws them humanely to a willingness to engage with otherness and difference often expressed through critique.

Secondly, to be engaged in a democracy to come, people internalise the capacity to be aware of one another consciously and what transpires in their contexts. Having an affinity to one's conscience implies some commitment to an awareness of what is going on around one and acting accordingly. That is, to remain conscious of one's surroundings and the claims one proffers in defence of an equitable university curriculum implies an ethical commitment to what is real and what can hopefully enhance institutional and/ or societal change. The point is that an affirmation of conscience involves expressing alertness towards desirable actions of relevance to developments in a university and society. In this sense, to develop a deep affinity to conscience is tantamount to have internalised an ethical commitment to

ensure substantive change within a society that ought to benefit from the goods of a university. In this way, an *ubuntu* university curriculum would be reinforced by the notion of conscience whereby people (university educators and students) express an ethical commitment towards substantive and desirable change in one's society. For example, the professional teacher education acquired by educators ought to make them more ethically responsive to complex and unwarranted situations in school communities. The point about an *ubuntu* university curriculum of conscience is one that encourages its educators and students to act ethically and in response to undesirable situations in societies.

Thirdly, an *ubuntu* university curriculum of humanness is primarily concerned with being attentive to the cultivation of humanity (Waghid 2014). Paulo Freire (1970: 152), reminds us that cultivating humane actions involve empathy, love, and communication. Yet, he accentuates the significance in remaining humble as humans endeavour to enact such a communion (Freire 1970: 152). Our interest is in Freire's idea of practising humility, which seems to constitute what *ubuntu* implies. To act with humility means that people do not simply turn their back on others when they see suffering, poverty, injustice and inequality in society (Freire 1970: 153). Instead, to be humble means to recognise that such societal dystopias exist and that one actually does something to change such unbearable and undesirable situations. For one, an *ubuntu* university curriculum remains open and attentive to social problems in our African communities and the world. If our African universities were to be enveloped by *ubuntu* curriculum, it could not ignore the social realities of human indignity and suffering. An *ubuntu* university curriculum would be and become attentive to hopelessness that seemed to have penetrated social life on the African continent. In this way, a university curriculum would continue to cultivate democratic pedagogical relations in an activist way.

Towards a Conclusion

In this article, I have proffered an argument in defence of an equitable university curriculum. Such a curriculum would create pedagogical opportunities for educators and students to cultivate practices that connect with the enhancement autonomy, deliberation, and responsibility commensurate with *ubuntu*. Only then, a genuine equitable university curriculum would mani-

fest. It is this idea of an equitable university curriculum – a curriculum of conscience, engagement, humaneness, and empathy – that would invariably open up opportunities for pedagogical activism that can assist educators and students to respond to complexities and challenges faced by African societies. I am aware that a potential critic might proffer that emancipatory democratic teaching might be skewed towards the theoretical and that the practical aspects of such an argument might be unstated. Nowhere in the article have I argued for a dichotomy between the theoretical and the practical. Instead, the very theorisation of the thoughts that manifest grows out of practical experiences in and about matters of university teaching and learning. Likewise, the notion of a deliberative teaching experience is by its very nature a practical matter because deliberation does not occur without teachers and students actually doing something practical about their pedagogical encounters. In this way, an argument for activism seems highly relevant because it is inextricably connected to the theoretical-practical aspects of university teaching and learning.

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Professor Yusef Waghid
Philosophy of Education
Stellenbosch University
Stellenbosch
YW@sun.ac.za