

# The Place of Ubuntu in Global Education

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Global competencies can be promoted only if people from different cultures share their knowledge systems and traditional conceptual frameworks with the rest of the world. It is in this context that the authors propose that global education can benefit from ubuntu, Africa's indigenous philosophy of being. This case study highlights, among other things, how ubuntu aligns with the global competencies articulated in the Global Competence Matrix.*

## GLOBAL COMPETENCIES

This chapter is organized around several core concepts in the Global Competency Matrix, including:

### Core Concepts

- World and global issues are complex and interdependent.
- Root causes and history fundamentally affect diverse global forces, events, conditions, and issues.
- One's own culture and history is key to understanding one's relationship with others.
- Perspectives are shaped by varied belief systems which create social affiliation structures, cultural norms, and build a sense of purpose.

Values and Attitudes

- Valuing multiple perspectives.
- Openness to new opportunities, ideas and ways of thinking.

Skills

- Selects and applies appropriate tools and strategies to communicate and collaborate effectively.

Behaviors

- Shares knowledge and encourages discourse.
- Translates ideas, concerns, and findings into appropriate and responsible individual or collaborative actions to improve conditions.

## **CASE BACKGROUND**

Our description of the concept of *ubuntu* which is described in the next section of this chapter is based on our lived experiences as persons born and raised among the Bantu-speaking people of Zimbabwe and Zambia in southern Africa. A large part of the socialization process in the Bantu societies takes place through oral transmission of cultural teachings from elders to young people, coupled with sanctions meant to discourage deviance. A common informal education pedagogy in a traditional Bantu society is evening fireside storytelling and sharing of riddles and proverbs, accompanied by songs that are integral parts of a folk story. Communicative competence in the traditional African community includes the ability to understand and use proverbs. Both of us recall learning a great deal of the tenets of *ubuntu* through listening to stories, riddles, proverbs, and songs. Songs were particularly important not only as a means of entertainment at festivals, or as a medium for expressing one's emotions (such as one's love for a suitor) or a motivational tool during storytelling, but also as a vehicle for carrying news about people or events. Community members displaying deviant dispositions risked ridicule through songs.

Our comparison between *ubuntu* and the Eurocentric worldviews is informed by the fact that both of us have lived in Africa and the Western world. Collectively, we have over 60 years' experience studying and living outside Africa, and we are both educators engaged in international development.

Both of us were born and raised among African ethnic groups classified as "Bantu-speaking people." The Bantu ethnic groups (comprising about 85 million people with more than 400 distinct language clusters) are found in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly from Cameroon in the northwestern part of Africa, through the Democratic Republic of Congo in the central part of Africa, to South Africa on

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