

HuUbuntu:
I Am Because We Are

Reconceptualizing Family
Engagement





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Land Acknowledgement



I acknowledge with respect the traditional territories of the Lekwungen speaking peoples, the Scianew, the Songhees and the First Nations on whose land I live and work and whose relationship to the land continues today.

SESSION LEARNING GOALS

01

Understand HuUbuntu as an African relational philosophy rooted in Ubuntu: the principle that personhood is constituted through relationships (Metz & Gaie, 2010).

02

Reframe family involvement as interconnected co-creation, moving from compliance-based participation to shared belonging and agency (Epstein, 2019).

03

Identify practical, relational, and decolonial strategies that honour community knowledge, cultural humility, and reciprocal partnership (Dei, 2012).

A Philosophy of Unity

Hunhu

→

←

Ubuntu

"Human Excellence, Manners, Kindness"
(Shona/Ndebele)

"I Am Because We Are"
(Nguni/Zulu/Xhosa)

Two traditions. One truth.

When two philosophies become one

HuUbuntu

Hu

Ubuntu

from Hunhu from Ubuntu

Pronounced: whoo-boon-too

HuUbuntu: I Am Because We Are

PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF UBUNTU		
Oral Tradition Bantu-speaking Southern & East Africa	Post-colonial Scholarship 1980s–2000s	Educational Application 2000s–Present
Ubuntu originates in the oral philosophies of Bantu-speaking peoples spanning sub-Saharan Africa. Its wisdom is encoded in proverbs, songs, and communal governance — predating Western academic philosophy by millennia (Tutu, 1999; Mbiti, 1969).	Scholars including Samkange & Samkange (1980), Mbiti (1969), and later Metz (2007) articulated Ubuntu as a formal ethical framework, emphasizing communal personhood over Western individualism.	Ubuntu is increasingly applied in education to challenge Eurocentric schooling models, support culturally responsive pedagogy, and frame family-school partnerships as living relational systems (Dei, 2012; Udah et al., 2025).

What is HuUbuntu?

“Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu”

A person is a person through other persons.

— Zulu/Ndebele proverb

HuUbuntu as Philosophy

Relational Identity

Who we are is constituted through relationship, not in isolation. Identity is inherently social and interdependent (Metz & Gaie, 2010).

Collective Accountability

Moral responsibility is shared. Communities are responsible for children's growth — not only individuals (Samkange & Samkange, 1980).

Communal Knowledge

Knowing emerges through dialogue, oral tradition, and lived experience — not solely text-based academic structures (Dei, 2012).

Reciprocal Care

Care flows both ways. Schools, families, and communities enter into ongoing relationships of mutual giving and receiving (Noddings, 2013).

HuUbuntu

Philosophy

Poll Questions

Who shares moral responsibility for children's growth under Collective Accountability?

A

Parents only

B

Teachers and schools

C

The whole community

D

Government institutions

HuUbuntu

Philosophy

Poll Questions

How does Communal Knowledge emerge?

A

Through textbooks and exams

B

Through dialogue, oral tradition, and lived experience

C

Through individual research and formal academic credentials

HuUbuntu

Philosophy

Poll Question

Reciprocal Care means...

A Schools give and families receive

B Care flows in one direction — from professionals to children only

C Schools, families, and communities mutually give and receive



nhaka
foundation
'leaving a lasting legacy'





What of us is in here?



FROM INVOLVEMENT TO BELONGING

Traditional Model

1. School-centred decision-making
2. Event-based engagement (parent/teacher associations, school councils, fundraisers)
3. One-way communication flows
4. Families adapt to school structures
5. Cultural difference seen as a 'gap'
6. Professional expertise privileged over lived experience

VS

HuUbuntu Model

1. Relationship-centred co-governance
2. Ongoing community partnership and dialogue
3. Reciprocal, multi-directional communication
4. Schools adapt to family and community realities
5. Cultural difference seen as asset and strength
6. Community knowledge co-equal to professional knowledge

Reflective Poll

"I Am Becoming We Are"

REFLECTIVE POLL

1 What replaces event-based engagement in the HuUbuntu Model?

A School council meetings

B Ongoing community partnership and dialogue

C Parent-teacher conferences

Reflective Poll

"I Am Because We Are"

REFLECTIVE POLL

2

In the HuUbuntu Model, community knowledge is...

A

Valued less than professional expertise

B

Supplementary to academic knowledge

C

Co-equal to professional knowledge

Reflective Poll

"I Am Because We Are"

REFLECTIVE POLL

3

Which best describes the shift "From Involvement to Belonging"?

A

Adding more school events for parents

B

Moving from families adapting to schools, to schools adapting to communities

C

Increasing professional expertise in schools and hiring more diverse staff

Family Engagement

"I Am Because We Are"

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

1

We recognize families as the primary experts of their children.

2

We adapt our communication and engagement to meet families where they are.

3

We learn from families rather than teach them because we honor diverse expressions of care and engagement.

4

We share power and decision-making.

What the Research Confirms

52%

Higher academic achievement when families are actively engaged as partners (Henderson & Mapp, 2002)

3×

Greater teacher retention in schools with strong community relationships (Harvard GSE, 2023)

↑ 68%

Family confidence and agency when co-creation replaces one-way communication (Epstein, 2019)

↓ 40%

Exclusionary discipline events in schools using relational engagement models (Weiss et al., 2018)

Whose Knowledge Counts?

“Decolonization asks us to question school systems built on assumptions that privilege dominant knowledge and marginalize community wisdom.”

Decolonization in Practice

Epistemic Justice:
Legitimize Indigenous and community knowledge alongside formal credentials.

Counter-Narratives:
Actively surface and amplify family and community stories.

Power Redistribution:
Move families from recipients of communication to co-designers of programs.

Cultural Continuity:
Sustain language, tradition, and heritage as core educational values.

CO-CREATING KNOWLEDGE

Listening

Deep, culturally competent listening to family narratives, aspirations, and concerns as the starting point for all engagement (Noddings, 2013).

Reciprocity

Both educators and families bring knowledge. Reciprocal exchange replaces hierarchical information transfer (Epstein, 2019; Metz & Gaie, 2010).

Cultural Humility

Ongoing self-reflection about cultural assumptions. Practitioners recognize the limits of their perspective and remain open to correction (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

Shared Decision-Making

Families are involved as co-designers of programs, policies, and curriculum — not merely consulted after decisions are made (Harvard GSE, 2023).



THE FIVE PILLARS OF RELATIONAL ENGAGEMENT		
I	Relationship First:	Every interaction begins with the relationship, not the task. Invest in knowing families before expecting participation.
II	Community as Curriculum:	Community histories, languages, and knowledge systems are not supplementary — they are the curriculum.
III	Power With:	Shift from 'power over' families to 'power with' — co-designing, co-leading, and co-evaluating together.
IV	Accountability Together:	Shared accountability means all parties — school, family, community — hold responsibility for outcomes and well-being.
V	Presence as Practice:	Consistent, embodied presence in community spaces signals that belonging is not conditional on school performance.

HuUbuntu IN PRACTICE: ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES	
Early Childhood Program	Family Knowledge Circles Monthly gatherings where families share cultural practices, languages, and traditions that educators weave into the curriculum — shifting families from recipients to knowledge holders. <i>Grounded in: Epstein (2019) Type 2 Parenting Partnership + HuUbuntu communal knowledge framework.</i>
Elementary School	Community Elder Curriculum Elders, grandparents, and cultural knowledge-keepers co-facilitate learning units alongside teachers. Their presence signals that community wisdom is as authoritative as textbook knowledge. <i>Grounded in: Dei (2012) indigenous knowledge + HuUbuntu collective responsibility principle.</i>
Secondary School	Co-Designed Student Progress Reporting Families help redesign how student progress is communicated — moving from deficit-focused report cards to strength-based, culturally relevant documentation co-created with families. <i>Grounded in: Harvard GSE (2023) relational structures + HuUbuntu epistemic equity framework.</i>

Pause. Reflect & Share in the chat

Consider your current practice or organization and discuss the following:

- 1. Where do families have genuine voice?**
Identify a specific moment — not a general policy — where family perspectives directly shaped a decision
- 2. Where are families invited only after decisions are made?**
What structures consult rather than co-create? What would it take to change one?
- 3. What would shared power look like here?**
Name one concrete shift — in governance, communication, or program design — that would redistribute power meaningfully

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PRACTICAL RELATIONAL STRATEGIES

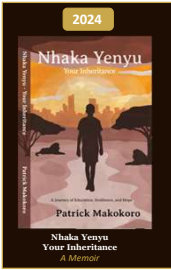
Communication 1. Replace one-way newsletters with two-way listening circles 2. Translate key documents; offer interpretation for multilingual families 3. Send informal, strengths-based check-ins — not only when issues arise	Program and Planning 1. Invite families into curriculum planning, not only family nights 2. Create standing advisory structures with real decision-making authority 3. Map community assets and integrate local knowledge holders into programming
Relationship and Culture 1. Learn the histories, traditions, and values of the communities you serve 2. Attend community events as a learner, not as an institutional representative 3. Acknowledge cultural calendar days and create space for celebration	Access and Inclusion 1. Remove material barriers: transportation, childcare, flexible scheduling 2. Host conversations in community spaces, not only in the school building 3. Ensure all families — regardless of literacy or language — can participate

Books



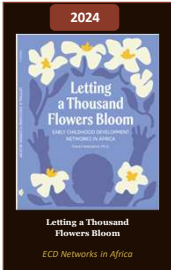
Books

2024



Nhaka Yenyu
Your Inheritance
A Memoir
Patrick Makokoro

2024



Letting
a Thousand
Flowers Bloom
ECD Networks in Africa

2023



Sankofa in Time
of COVID
ECD in Africa

HuUbuntu Resources

Children's Book Series
with Resources



HuUbuntu: I Am Because We Are
whoa-boon-too



Scan Me!

Visit HuUbuntu
Store



HuUbuntu Cultural Connection Cards

HuUbuntu is not just a word; it's a way of life.



Instagram: patrick_makokoro

Facebook: Patrick Makokoro

LinkedIn: Patrick Makokoro Ph.D.

Instagram: huubuntustore

Get in touch with us today!

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COMMITMENT TO ACTION & ACCOUNTABILITY

One relationship I will strengthen:

One practice I will change:

One question I will carry forward:

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"There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children"

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela

Conversations with Dr. PMak!

Be challenged to love differently



Rachel Marchand
Special Guest



Dr. PMak
Host



Karen Foster-Jorgensen
Moderator

JULY 10 10:00 AM WEBINAR



HuUbuntu:
I Am Because We Are

July 10, 2026

Conversations with Dr. PMAK

<https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/conversations-with-dr-pmak-tickets-12908234118543>

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