



Revisiting the Tide~ Ubuntu Projects



Elephant Times Association

Reflecting on ideas and aspirational values explored in the Tide~ Ubuntu Projects

Twenty years on - How do they look?

Clive Harber and Jeff Serf, who led the Tide~ Ubuntu Projects, revisit the publications developed and some to the core ideas.

Looking back some 20 years on, it is clear the dimensions explored remain of key importance in debates about education and democracy.

We feel that given heightened ideological tensions about democracy and about education today:

- *that these aspirational values have an even greater salience;*
- *that there is a need to revitalise the core debates.*

We have explored this in five sections:

1. An overview of the Ubuntu projects
2. How the projects evolved
3. Ubuntu - Ten Fundamental Values
4. How do you see the situation?
5. The need to revitalise the debates

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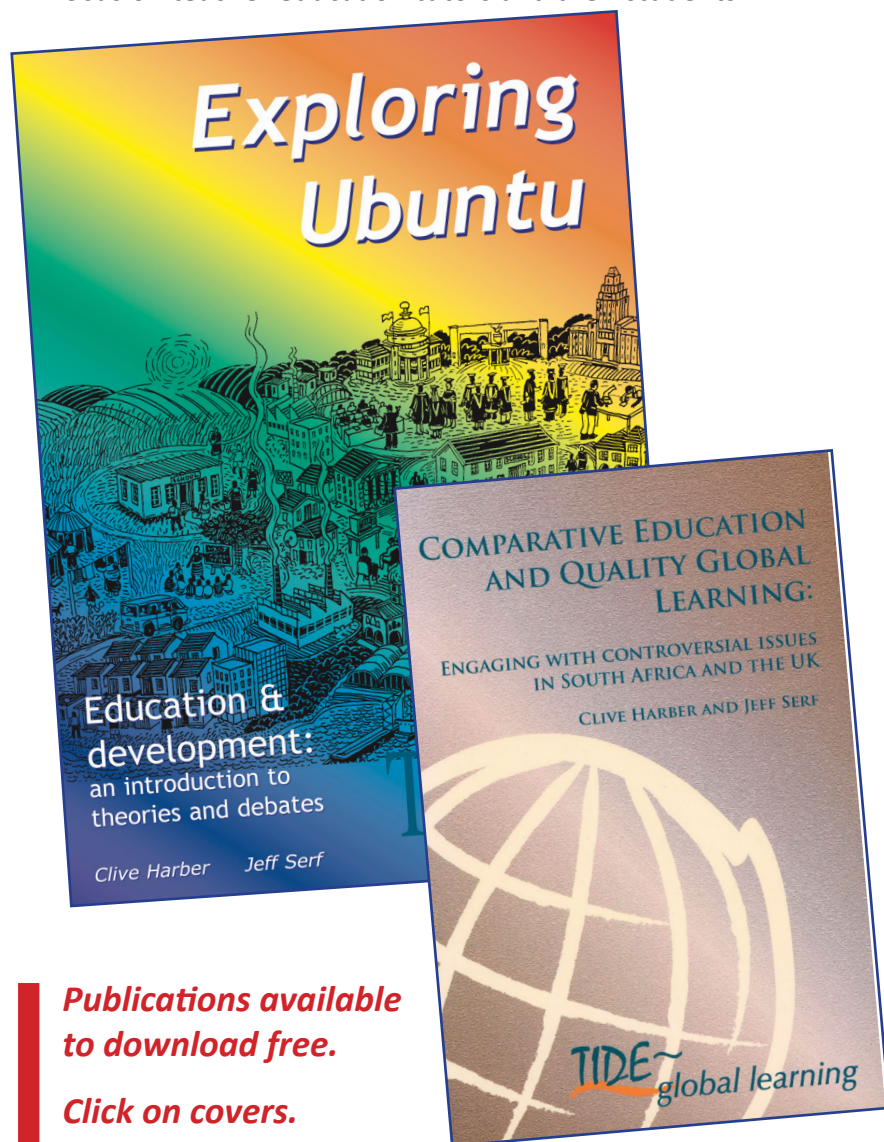
www.tidegloballearning.net [2026]

“There is a word in South Africa - Ubuntu - that describes Mandela’s greatest gift; his recognition that we are all bound together in ways that can be invisible to the eye; that there is oneness to humanity; that we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others, and caring for those around us.”

Barack Obama, at Nelson Mandela’s memorial service,
December 2013.

1. An overview - Tide~ Ubuntu Projects (2001 - 2007)

A contribution to Tide~'s West Midlands Coalition initiative.
A focus on teacher education tutors and their students.



Publications available to download free.

Click on covers.

Towards Ubuntu – critical teacher education for democratic citizenship in South Africa and England.

Exploring Ubuntu – Education & development: an introduction to theories and debates.

Comparative education & quality global learning – Engaging with controversial issues in South Africa and the UK.

In 2001, seven years after the end of apartheid, a study visit to South Africa resulted in ***Towards Ubuntu***, a book that examines **critical teacher education for democratic citizenship**, comparing education issues in South Africa and England.

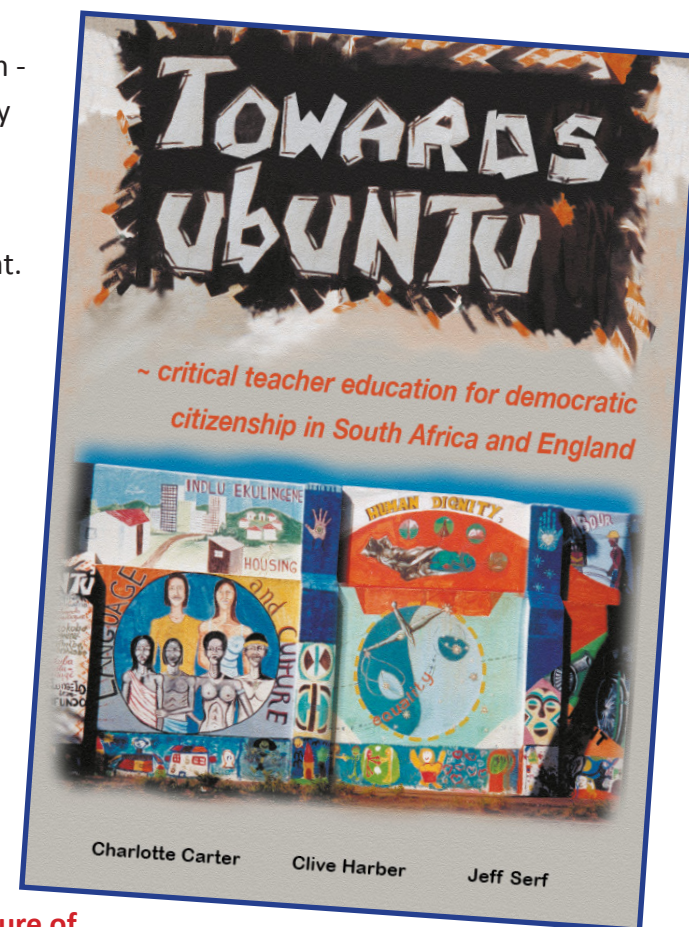
A visit in 2004 led to the publication - ***Exploring Ubuntu***. This explicitly took the **'development'** aspect of Tide~'s title to explore the role of education in South Africa's social, economic and political development.

A third study visit in 2005 involved a group of nine teacher educators from a variety of higher education and local authority roles, plus two facilitators.

The resulting edited book, with chapters on a diverse range of themes, reflected on various **controversial aspects of comparative education** in South Africa and the UK in the context of global learning.

All three visits and resulting publications were framed by an awareness of both **the political nature of education and of the key goals of post-apartheid education** in South Africa from 1994 onwards.

The goals, expressed as fundamental values, are outlined in section 3.



2. How the projects evolved ...

The first Ubuntu Project was a study visit to South Africa in 2001, just seven years after the end of apartheid.

The visit, which resulted in the publication [*Towards Ubuntu*](#), involved three teacher educators one of whom had recently worked in teacher education in South Africa. The visit had no predetermined goals other than an exploration of post-Apartheid South Africa in relation to education for citizenship. The visit was based in three areas – Cape Town, Pretoria, and Durban – and involved discussions with NGOs, academics, and school staff and their pupils.

It became apparent from these discussions, observations and reading that the overarching concept framing post-Apartheid educational reconstruction was the traditional African concept of Ubuntu. Therefore, we used that concept to discuss, analyse, and organise the material we had gathered in South Africa. However, we approached this in a way that would enable us to reflect on and compare with teacher education in England.

From our debates and experiences in South Africa it rapidly became clear that any discussion of the purposes of education in South Africa - or elsewhere - requires an overtly political analysis. Therefore, the following key dimensions appeared to be of significance in the political nature of education in South Africa and England:

The curriculum; democratic schools; race, racism and education; sexual responsibility and citizenship; homosexuality and human rights; gender violence and democracy; disability and inclusion; literacy and empowerment; environmental education; conflict resolution and peace.

It was recognised that given these dimensions we would have to include material about teaching controversial issues in the classroom.

Two of the original participants had interest and experience in the field of international development, the key *raison d'être* of Tide~. It was decided to return to South Africa to work on further understanding of the concept of Ubuntu by examining the role of education through a development lens.

The resulting publication [*Exploring Ubuntu*](#) introduced key theories about the role of education in development and used case studies primarily from South Africa to explore the implications and issues arising from these theories and in particular the implications for education.

The book explores key development theories:

Human Capital; Modernization; Social Reproduction, Control and Violence; Green Development; Religion and Development; and Democratic Political Development.

The two previous study visits highlighted the **key relationship between democracy and Ubuntu in post-Apartheid South Africa**. Democracy is a learnt series of values and behaviours – it is not genetically inherited. Also evident from the previous visits was the role and importance of engaging with controversial issues in schools and teacher education. Therefore, it was decided to organise a Tide~ course for teacher educators focusing on education for democratic citizenship and teaching controversial issues. This included preparation workshops, a study visit to South Africa and each participant writing up their experiences.

In South Africa the course involved talks and discussions on policy issues in South African education, visits to schools, museums and a township tour. More details are available in [*Comparative Education and Quality Global Learning*](#), which also contains chapters by each of the study visit participants reflecting on their experiences in South Africa and their relevance to their professional standards in the UK.

Topics covered in those chapters include:

masculinity violence and identity; HIV/AIDS; inclusive education; curriculum change; the politics of physical education; schools and sustainability; and teaching music in a global citizenship context.

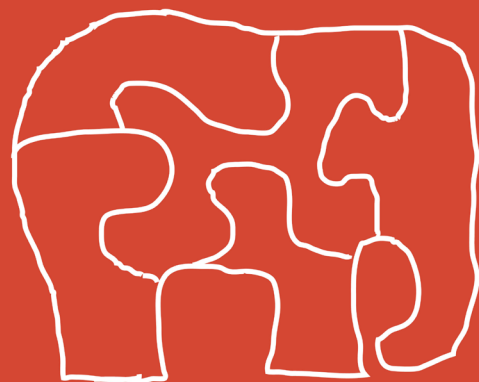
3. Ubuntu - Ten Fundamental Values ...

A key document that informed our thinking in all three study visits was the South African Department of Education's Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (2001). This was the source of this chart setting out the 10 fundamental values of Ubuntu and their educational implications.

See also ['Four approaches to handling controversial issues'](#).

From Towards Ubuntu

Ubuntu – 10 Fundamental Values:



Democracy

Social Justice & Equity

Equality

Non-Sexism & Non-Racism

Human Dignity

Open Society

Accountability

Rule of Law

Respect

Reconciliation

Democracy

Empowerment of population to exercise democratic rights; provision of skills to participate, think critically and act responsibly.

Social Justice and Equity

Access to education is the most important resource in addressing poverty – only then will liberty be achieved. Reconciliation requires social justice to address past injustices – education for all is an essential element of social justice.

Equality

Access for all to an educational provision that does not discriminate on any grounds. Equality in the treatment of all, by all.

Non-sexism & non-racism

Regardless of race or gender, learners afforded the same opportunities and the same degree of security.

Ubuntu (Human Dignity)

Mutual understanding and active appreciation of the value of human differences.

Open Society

Participation rather than observation; empowerment to think and act; a culture of dialogue and debate.

Accountability

Power and responsibility for all involved in education - learners, educators, managers, parents, etc.

Rule of law

Rules within which learners, educators, managers, parents etc operate – including the law of the land.

Respect

Precondition for communication and teamwork – schools require mutual respect between all partners.

Reconciliation

Acceptance of all individuals through learning about each other, valuing differences and diversity.



4. How do you see the situation?

1. How far do your experiences to date as a professional educator reflect any of the ten fundamental values?
2. How far do your experiences to date as a learner in school or higher education reflect any of the ten fundamental values?
3. Do you think the English education system has moved closer or further from these values since the Ubuntu Projects?
4. How far do these values provide a useful framework to evaluate recent trends in democracy and democratic practices across the globe?

Democracy is the keystone to these values.

"It is useful to remind ourselves ... that we value: an elected parliament with checks and balances; free and fair elections; the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary and the press; individual freedoms provided that you do no harm to others; the role of the state in promoting and protecting life, health and well-being of all, including laws to protect minorities and to promote equality."

Tide~ 'Connecting Dialogues' p24

Without a democratic system discussion of these themes would be difficult and limited.

This quotation from Aristotle is some 2,500 years old:

'But of all the safeguards that we hear spoken of as helping to maintain constitutional continuity the most important, but most neglected today, is education, that is educating citizens for the way of living that belongs to the constitution in each case. It is useless to have the most beneficial rules of society fully agreed upon by all who are members of the politeia, if individuals are not going to be trained and have their habits formed for that politeia, that is to live democratically if the laws of the society are democratic, oligarchically if they are oligarchic'

Which of these alternatives posed by Aristotle, most closely correspond to education in Britain today?



5. The need to revitalise the debates ...

International political developments have seen the recent rise of leaders and their parties apparently significantly less committed to the principles and practises of democracy - and the role of education in supporting free democratic debate.

The statements and behaviours of such leaders in, for example, parts of North America, South America, Asia, Africa and Europe have at times directly contradicted the fundamental values of Ubuntu and represent a move backwards in terms of preservation and fostering of democracy in the state and society.

As authors of the Ubuntu series of books, we have re-visited the publications in the light of the threats to democracy and education posed by the rise of such leaders. The Ubuntu publications all contain information, ideas and evidence supportive of education for democracy. **In short, a framework for analysis and potential action.**

Controversial Issues ...

“Education should not attempt to shelter our nation’s children from even the harsher controversies of adult life, but should prepare them to deal with such controversies knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and morally.

Of course, educators must never set out to indoctrinate; but to be completely unbiased is simply not possible, and on some issues, such as those concerning human rights, it is not desirable.

When dealing with controversial issues, teachers should adopt strategies that teach pupils how to recognise bias, how to evaluate evidence put before them and how to look for alternative interpretations, viewpoints and sources of evidence; above all to give good reasons for everything they say and do, and to expect good reasons to be given by others.”

Crick Report - quoted in Elephant Times 1.1, p22.

Take History Seriously

“Black Lives Matter has brought racism back into the open. It doesn’t just hurt Black people, but white people too. We are all victims here. You can’t shame one people’s humanity without shaming all. It is a profound understanding.

We want schools to take history seriously, not just Black history but Black and white history. We can’t talk about one without the other.”

Reverend Eve Pitts, Elephant Times 2.4, p39..

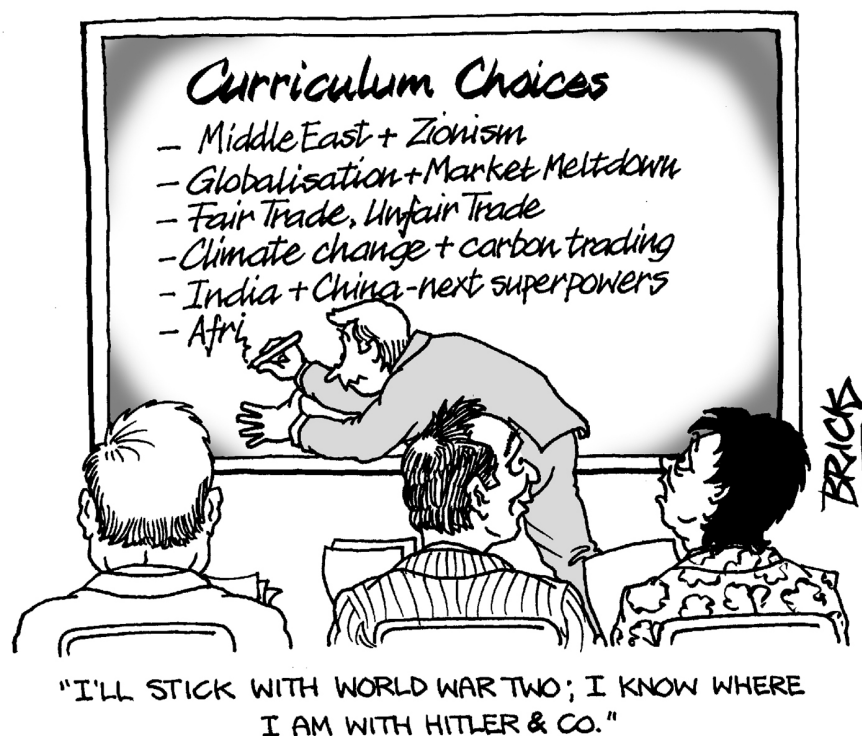
Further, in the Ubuntu books we suggest activities, discussion topics, stimulus material, and advise on school and classroom practise to help individuals and groups explore education and its role in democracy.

See also [‘Some New Activity Boxes’](#) [2020]

The rise of anti-democratic political movements and the implications for education require an alternative discourse and practise supportive of democratic institutions and values. This is true for both education and politics. This is why the debates focused on Ubuntu continue to be of importance and enduring relevance.

However, we question if the current political and educational climate would permit such analysis and discussion to the same degree as was possible at the time of the Ubuntu projects.

What can be done to make sure bigotry does not stifle healthy debate about the educational needs of future generations?



The role of schools?

‘Education has the potential to act as a force for peace – but too often schools are used to reinforce the social divisions, intolerance and prejudices that lead to war.

No country can hope to live in peace and prosperity unless it builds mutual trust between its citizens, starting in the classroom... Schools should be seen first and foremost as places for imparting the most vital of skills: tolerance, mutual respect and the ability to live peacefully with others’

UNESCO (2011) The Hidden Crisis: Armed conflict and Education (Paris: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report)

