



Athepreneurship as a Change Agent tool for Mainstreaming Youth Development in South Africa

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Abstract

This article presents a case study of the Catholic Church from multiple case studies on narratives of youth development in South Africa. The purpose of this article is to illustrate mainstreaming youth development through an exemplary case of South Africa beyond thirty years of democracy. The article is also informed by the imperatives of critical theory to understand mainstreaming youth development in South Africa. I examine mainstreaming youth development about sustainable development via athepreneurship (to be described later in the discussion). As mentioned above, South Africa was purposively selected in this context. The argumentation forwarded depicts athepreneurship as one of the ways of mainstreaming youth development in the Church. Data were collected using the qualitative method of documentary analysis. The results of the article indicate the need to pursue the skills development capacities of young people so that they can contribute to the development of their livelihood. The study concludes by highlighting that the participation of youth in South Africa in sustainable development activities could serve as an anchor for mainstreaming youth development in Southern Africa beyond 30 years of democracy.

Keywords: youth, transformative social justice, athepreneurship, mainstreaming youth development, skills development.

Introduction

The youth in South Africa today, as in most nations, are confronted with challenging life decisions that put their morals and values into question and they need to make responsible life choices as they progress. There are of course opportunities to educate them through religion. We must note the important teachings on independence, responsibility, and morality in the process. For example in 1 Timothy 5:8, we read: "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." James 4:17 also teaches, "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is a sin for them." The church also teaches that work is a human right and a duty. It is beneficial for all individuals and also society, it serves the common good. Such scriptures will keep their actions revolving around morals and religious-based ethics. In addition, by regular prayer the youth can become grounded and more attentive in making responsible life choices. Many Catholics turn to St. Joseph for intercession as they seek a position. They believe that he can be a powerful intercessor for all who are searching for good development. Above all, the youth should exhibit phronesis (practical wisdom).

The youth need to be reminded as in Proverbs 19:17 that, "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done." Promoting this ethos of a humility grounded in reality, will help lead them to making more responsible life choices. Being



surrounded by a supportive local church can also help in forging social skills, but may equally also provide them with important Catholic mentors such as priests who may be positioned to provide a guidepost. Colossians 3:23-24 states: "Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ."

There are many Biblical verse supporting youth development. Just three are cited below. Proverbs 16:3 explains: "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established." When one creates a business plan and shares it with the Lord, He can make sure that it is accomplished. Proverbs 29:18 informs; "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The youth need to have a vision to make an initiative they create work. They must forward thinking and accept coaching and consulting to help them realize and act on their dream. James 2:26 states: "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead." The youth need to give God something to bless which can only come through action. It's not enough to believe anyone can create an entrepreneurial venture, they have to take needed actions to breed success.

Clarion calls have reverberated through various discourses on youth participation in sustainable development. To this end, the term *athepreneurship* is proposed, devised as a new concept that indicates a change in the co-constructed perceptions about youth development. Premised on the fact that youth are generally neglected in the world of work or employment in the post-apartheid 1994-2024, subsistence entrepreneurship under the auspices of *athepreneurship*, Higginbotham and Hughes (2006) contend attempts to mainstream them into the global market as equal a footing as every other entrepreneur. Joshi (2004) argues that the phrase youth indicates that young people have their own abilities and capabilities and that they are able to work with different talents.

The definition of a founder forwarded here is characterised by *transformative social justice and youth transformation*. According to Sefotho (2013), the term social justice is generally conceived as giving everyone their due. Thus, Francis and Le Roux (2011) elaborate that the main aim of education, when it comes to youth development, is the continuous struggle for social justice education that mainstreams youth. As Oliver (2018:1) "the past few years of democracy in South Africa have been traumatic for youth who are linked to the higher education sector. In line with the developments of youth, Modisaotsile (2012) identifies that the widening gap between basic education and higher education, together with the pressure to produce more graduates who are qualified for an unknown future where job markets are unstable and evolving, is forcing higher education and private sectors to take on responsibilities beyond focussing only on teaching subject-specific course content. As a lifelong process education emerges, Isaacs, Visser, Friedrich, and Brijlal (2007) see it as a cornerstone in the mainstreaming of young people via other forms of education, such as entrepreneurship education, perceived as a precursor to *athepreneurship*. Social justice is taken here as the mainstreaming of young people in all areas of human life.

Methodology

I used a qualitative desktop methodology in this study. I also collected data through a desk review of secondary sources with content analysis of relevant documents on mainstreaming youth development in post-apartheid South Africa: 1994-2024. In addition, the article focused on the analysis of primary sources, including socio-economic treaties. The background study (desktop) showed that South African youth are experiencing changes and challenges in response to the changes and demands of the 21st-century society. In the South African context, the government and other stakeholders must adapt to the African context and integrate youth development through *athepreneurialism*.



Mainstreaming Youth through Athepreneurship

The key issues emerging from the trainings and workshops offered in this chapter indicate the importance of young people's career development through the advocacy for employment by the Catholic Church. As a result, the Catholic Church found that obstacles to employment in post-apartheid South Africa led young people to alternatives through self-employment. There is a strong inclination towards youth entrepreneurship (Sefotho, 2013), here conceptualised as atepreneurship within contemporary careers in the 21st century. As observed in my Thesis, one important aspect is that Career Advocacy for Athepreneurship (CAA) may be validated *ex post facto* from the results of this study and through future research. Contextualising the meaning of atepreneurship, I followed "the road less travelled" (Peck, 1978)¹ in youth and career discourse by developing it a priori from the ancient literature of philosophy (Sefotho, 2013). The concept of atepreneurship does not intend or pretend to isolate, segregate, or discriminate against other people in the periphery of life. This affirms that through this new term, I stand to support, encourage young people, and conscientiously allow society to look at the unemployment situation 'through eyes that transform negative perceptions into positive ones' Sefotho, 2013:102).

Career Advocacy for 'Atepreneurship' – CAA

Encouraged by the current structure of mainstreaming youth development discourse and the attitudinal changes in the world of work gleaned from data collection, I coined the concept 'atepreneurship', whose expressive meaning signifies my historical life journey to the formulation of this framework and beyond (Baker, 1992). The term is a compound of the root *Athena* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2009), the Greek goddess (among gods and goddess) who had a gift of reason, wisdom, intelligence, skill, peace, and handicrafts, and the suffix *preneurship* (Ebenstein, 2006). According to Matlay (2006), the word 'preneur' depicts a taker or an undertaker, one who undertakes a certain activity to establish a business or a way of earning a living, some type of 'nascent entrepreneurship' explained as those entrepreneurs who are about to start a career as a self-employed. I believe that this coinage may add a cross-disciplinary value to the mainstreaming development of youth entrepreneurship (Nieuwenhuizen & Nieman, 2009). It also allows me to share in a language designed for the purposes and profit of mainstreaming youth development (Noddings, 2012). Therefore, I envisage atepreneurship as sometimes developing from subsistence entrepreneurship of mainstreaming youth development, 'founded on the ethos of career advocacy toward transformative social justice and social change for positive and meaningful existence' (Sefotho, 2013:89). Walking in the footsteps of Buckingham (2011), I propose through CAA a new look and conversion of the welfare paradigms towards a transformational paradigm whereby youth and society would transform their world views on career advocacy, arts, and employment (Mertens, 2010). The framework was built using the characteristics of some of the theories that were discussed.

Portraying Athena's image, Dolmage (2006) asserts that several distinctive and sometimes conflicting characteristics are embodied in the Athenian myths. Athena promoted the internal prosperity of the state by encouraging agriculture and industry, and by maintaining law and order in all public transactions; so she also protected the state from outward enemies (Deacy, 2008). Deacy (2008) also presented Athena as somewhat mysterious, with extraordinary talents and, therefore, I contend it is just as complex as the youth empowerment phenomenon. According to Deacy (2008:130), Athena is never fully a heroine, never fully a villain". She is only a depiction of an ordinary human person. In addition to this, Athena also seems to transcend the negativity of youth empowerment and becomes an embodiment of *métis*" (Sefotho, 2013:119).



Thus, a relationship can be established between philosophy as practical wisdom called *phronesis* and *métis*, described by Deacy as the cunning intelligence needed to act in a world of chance. As Thomas (2011:214) shows, 'Phronesis is practical knowledge. It is a model based on personal experience. It is personal and helps us to make sense of particular situations.' *Métis* can be described by qualities such as invention, craftiness, hard work, positive association, creativity, and the ability to think laterally (Sefotho, 2013). In this manner, the Church may possibly choose new inventions and positive association as a central quality that relates to the principles of positive philosophy to mainstreaming youth development.

I propose CAA to contribute to the youth development debate as an aspect of the initiative. difference discourse (Grey, 2009). In addition, through the framework, I wish to contribute to the literature by challenging interdisciplinary debates on new terminology and reviewing traditional conceptions of youth development. I stand for more recognition of the needs of individual youth regarding career advocacy within youth entrepreneurship. I submit myself to such calls for models that can address ways that encourage individual youth to actively use their elegant arts for a meaningful existence (Grey, 2009). While espousing multicultural narratives as reinforcement for the foundation of this framework (Sefotho, 2013), I wish to activate additional debates on youth development literature by addressing the Athepreneurial career advocacy.

Athepreneurial Career Advocacy

Othman and Ishak (2009) contend that entrepreneurship is a viable solution to the ever-growing problem of unemployment. Therefore, I therefore also contend that entrepreneurship is a viable solution even for young South Africans (Larsson, 2006). For example, Smallbone (2010:xxi) argues that 'it is increasingly recognised that entrepreneurship is a global phenomenon, which is not confined to mature market environments'. As a way to address the mature market, understanding a plethora of problems surrounding entrepreneurship, Ipsen and Arnold (2005) regard self-employment as particularly valuable for young people and those living on the periphery. The research engagement by Temkin (2009) shows that youth entrepreneurship as a form of self-employment may be important to individual youth, assisting them to resist negative perceptions and disbelief of their own potential.

Blickle and Witzki (2008:154) identified that the pulse of career advocacy 'is the development, implementation and enhancement of a vocational self-concept, that is, a vocational identity.' Furthermore, Woolfolk (2010:560) believes that self-concept is the "individual's knowledge and beliefs about themselves, their ideas, feelings, attitudes, and expectations". Through CCA, I maintain that individual youth could contemplate their self-concept and strive to build a positive one that could enhance their lives. Smith *et al.* (2009:15) justify that 'Self-concept is in turn influenced by the other factors that make up an individual's sense of career (e.g., abilities, interests)". I infer that young athepreneurs need to develop and establish a career self-concept pertinent to athepreneurship. However, your success in practising that depends on your general self-concept, given the 'label', 'youth'.

I envisage career self-concept as forming a central constituent part of a career. athepreneurial personality required of youth athepreneurs (Oishi, Lun, & Sherman, 2007). I suggest that career self-concept be used as a foundation for advocating for athepreneurial career. Self-concept is sometimes equated with identity, therefore, career self-concept could be construed as tantamount to career identity (Sefotho, 2013). Coetzee and Roythorne-Jacobs (2007) envisage that career identity consists of the meanings by which individuals consciously link to their own motivation, values, drives, interests, and competencies with acceptable career roles. I consider conscious linking and acceptable career roles to be relevant to advocacy of the athepreneurial career in that they 'imply choice of a career and



consequent construction thereof' (Sefotho, 2013:96). Similarly, Trög (2010:25) strongly believes that 'in the postmodern age, it should also be understood that a person's career knowledge is a process'.

It is my hope that the CCA will encourage more research and establish synergy between the democratic government and youth toward athepreneurialism. Therefore, it is my desire to encourage policy developers to ultimately cater for the needs for self-employment of young people in democratic South Africa. A research by Watts (2009:341) reflects that 'in belated recognition of the importance of policy matters, the last few years have seen a rapid growth of interest in the application of public policy to career guidance'. In support of this, I add to this recognition the importance of public policy to career advocacy as a path to athepreneurialship.

Steps towards Athepreneurship

I am guided by the following unique four steps and I believe that they may carve a path toward athepreneurship and propose CCA as 'suggestion empowerment' (Hechanova, Alampay & Franco, 2006:72) for mainstreaming youth development.

Career advocacy as an important step in carving a niche within the world of work

Individual youth could start off with the mindset of an entrepreneur while engaging in self-knowledge and seeking information about the world of work (World Economic Forum, 2009). Baker and Nelson (2005) articulate that self-knowledge reflects an individual knowing their talents, skills, interests, values, and other personal attributes that might be of value in the working environment. Advocacy in career choice indicates an area where an individual could start a career journey as a demonstration of self-efficacy (Reddan, 2015). This in turn helps individuals to make realistic career advocacy based on their knowledge about themselves.

Descriptive career decision self-efficacy scale

The scale of self-efficacy in career decisions was originally defined by Taylor and Betz (1983) as an individual's beliefs that he or she has the ability to successfully complete tasks related to decision making in relation to his or her career. They describe the career decision self-efficacy scale as a measure of the way people perceive their ability to make educational and vocational decisions (Taylor & Ekman, 2008). This definition is a great measure to encourage youth to identify their career personality. That is, individuals must find their special gifts, talents and competences, generally, their abilities (Sefotho, 2013). Segers *et al.* (2008) note that, based on a contemporary career approach, the repertoire of required skills of individuals could include being value-driven and self-directed, as well as having physical and psychological mobility. The emphasis should be more on the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities of youth. The following list of youth employability skills could perhaps be fundamental to the repertoire.

- **The Entrepreneurial Ecosystem** Entrepreneurship thrives in ecosystems in which multiple stakeholders play a role in facilitating entrepreneurship. Policy makers at the international, national, regional, and local levels all have important roles to play in setting the appropriate legal and fiscal frameworks to encourage entrepreneurship and to fill market gaps as necessary (Stam E, 2015:1767)
- **Developing Effective Educators:** Growing the base of experienced educators not only means providing the necessary training and education, but also requires expanding the definition of educators beyond professors to include entrepreneurs, alumni, business professionals, and even students. Entrepreneurs and others with



entrepreneurial experience should be allowed, encouraged, and trained to teach. Not only do they provide great value in the classroom, they also enhance the entrepreneurial spirit within the institution overall and create stronger links with the local community and ecosystem (World Economic Forum, 2009:22)

- **Curriculum Development:** Research and curriculum development are of particular importance in helping to ensure the rightful place of entrepreneurship among academic disciplines. This requires curricula that focus on learning 'for' rather than 'about' entrepreneurship. Students should also learn to manage and grow enterprises, not just how to start them (World Economic Forum, 2009:23; Saputra, Novilia & Hendrayati, 2023:1419).
- **Outreach (Engagement of Business):** Educators should be encouraged to reach out to the business community and integrate them into the learning process. Outside speakers and case studies provide role models for students considering an entrepreneurial career path. This is an important part of creating entrepreneurial drive: If students see that people 'like themselves' were able to successfully create companies, it helps demystify the process and make that option more feasible (World Economic Forum, 2009:23; Ncube & Matlala, 2024:204)
- **Advancing Innovation:** More needs to be done to encourage links between academia and the private sector, as well as the sharing of best technology transfer links with business school students and faculty as well as with the business community should also be encouraged practices. The nurturing of centres of excellence in R&D excellence is also important (World Economic Forum, 2009:23)
- **Sustainable funding:** Efforts to communicate with policy makers about the need, benefits, and possible actions to take to encourage and support entrepreneurship education should be increased. At the same time, too much start and stop financing should be avoided, and plans for making the programmes sustainable should be considered and integrated from the start. This requires a shared vision by all stakeholders of the desired outcomes at the policy level (World Economic Forum, 2009:22; Ncube & Matlala, 2024:210).

Against the background that has been provided in the above list, I summarise these skills as developmental mechanisms to career maturity, career knowledge, and self-knowledge. According to (Pickworth, 1997, p.17), career maturity refers to 'the individual's readiness to cope with developmental tasks with which he or she is confronted due to his or her biological and social developments and due to society expectations of people who have reached that stage of development.' Stead and Watson (2006) understood career knowledge as relating to the knowledge base that individuals have about career alternatives that are available to them. This concept is also understood by Baker and Nelson (2005) in the context of the study as knowledge that relates to possible career options. Self-knowledge, according to Mbetse (2003:83) is defined as 'insight into one's personality that enables him to know what he is capable of.' The goal is for unemployed youth to make their own choices about their livelihoods. Although these mechanisms are important to investigate, it is beyond the scope of this study to engage them at length. Hence, they are briefly touched on to create context in this study.

Social skills in the career

Baron and Tang (2009) indicate that social perception (the ability to perceive others accurately), expressiveness (the ability to express feelings and reactions clearly and openly),



impression management (skill in making favourable first impressions on others), and social adaptability (proficiency in adapting one's actions to current social contexts). In other words, certain factors have been identified as contributing to career social skills among young people. Mayer, Roberts, and Barsade (2008:513) identify that "as skills grow in one area (e.g., perceiving emotions), so will skills in other areas, such as understanding emotions and being able to regulate them" which is fundamental for young people in South Africa. This illustrates the importance of exploring career social skills and self-knowledge for young people. However, it is important to note, though, that personality characteristics are not static, but they change as the person develops. The development of theories, therefore, should always be done in such a way that priority to local contexts is given the outmost favour. Although some of the western perceptions have been adapted for the South African context, there is still a great need for the development of concepts that are key to South Africa (Mubiana, 2010). As much as we recognise that Western perceptions have provided a very important foundation and framework of career theories, more needs to be done for the advancement of career and vocational research in South Africa (Mubiana, 2010). This research therefore attempts to contribute to debates calling for mainstreaming youth development in post-apartheid South Africa, which will be contextually relevant studies that capture local realities that affect young people in the country.

Career Advocacy – Training and workplace-based experiential learning

Training and experiential learning in the workplace are crucial to advocacy for the career of the physician (Samuel, 2010). In addition, Baron and Tang (2009) postulate that young people entrepreneurs could benefit from training to prepare for starting new business ventures and (Hisrich, Langan-Fox & Grant, 2007) develop entrepreneurial attitudes. Training and continuous learning through experiential learning in the workplace may be beneficial for young people. Essentially, 'career denotes a moving perspective that imposes personal meaning on past memories, present experiences, and future aspirations by patterning them into a life theme' (Savickas *et al.*, 2009:246). I have faith in the notion that through lifelong training and workplace-based experiential learning (Mubiana, 2010), individual young people may be likely to advocate a career in entrepreneurship. As a result, individuals may be able to avoid irrational expectations about the career decision-making process (Gibbs, 2013). As shown by Sefotho, (2013:58), 'choice liberates, provides control, and bestows dignity upon an individual'. Therefore, I therefore intend to discuss human dignity as an extension of choice and existence in the next section.

Human dignity is central to human life

It is well known that the concept of human dignity is not new. However, from an existential point of view, dignity is crucial for all of humankind. Nevertheless, Friedman (2008) posits that human dignity presents significant challenges in the realm of public discourse. However, Shultziner (2006) argues that the concept of human dignity has become and warns that its meanings have become ambiguous and blurred. Sefotho (2013) highlights that even if not defined, there is general agreement that dignity is good; it gives human beings honour, prestige, and recognition. Thus, as depicted by Jordaan (2009), human dignity denotes the objective value inherent to all humans. Fischer (2009:5) recognises human dignity in this manner:

'Human dignity does not require a proof or justification, but it needs to be understood, and when it is understood, it cannot be denied because humanity cannot deny the existence of the social world. If these considerations are true, it cannot be controversial whether human beings as members of the human community have human dignity.'

It is my contention that youth in post-apartheid South Africa: '1994-2024 as human beings have dignity. Aguas (2009) concurs that a human being has dignity because he or she is a



person. Furthermore, Aguas (2009:55) notes that 'human dignity is rooted in man's personhood and the dignity of man is based on his spiritual essence'. As Alluded to by Sefotho (2013), it should be noted that the 'man' as used by some authors is a generic term that stands for a human being. In this article, a more gender sensitive term, human being, is adopted. Therefore, I concurrently link human dignity to the concept of *Ubuntu* (Mji *et al.*, 2011) which over and above the usual sense of 'a human being is a human being because of other human beings' extends beyond the Ubuntu-orientated notion towards embracing the dignity of the human person on the basis of occupying an existential space in the world (Letseka, 2011: 48). Thus, Oliver, (2019:3) points to the notion of a change master or transformational leader(ship) as the point of discussion in the literature of the 1980s and 1990s. Oliver (2019:13) further argues that "during these decades, it was expected from the prospective change agent to focus on technological innovation, to cope with all the uncertainties linked to unfamiliar technology, and to also be a risk taker". Thus, the athepreneurship model or concept appears to relate to the category of privileging youth in this study and can become a change agency in especially the global South.

Conclusions

For the past 28 years, the mainstreaming of youth development and youth development per se, has been described through various definitions and models to make sense of this complex phenomenon. I introduced entrepreneurialism in this article as an aspect that emerges as a novel suggestion toward addressing mainstreaming youth development beyond 28 years of democracy in South Africa. This article argues that through the characteristics of Athena, athepreneurship can provide alternative opportunities for career adaptability for mainstreaming youth development. Therefore, youth could successfully benefit from a range of skills to support athepreneurship. I therefore further argue that athepreneurialism can provide an alternative to career choice limitations and the lacuna of youth development. In addition to my argument, I make the contention that through athepreneurship, networks could be established between policies for youth development, education, and employment to develop a cross-cutting youth response for educational change. Educational change does not happen overnight. Patience and persistence should be characteristics of a determined and enthusiastic change agent and can also function as educators for the change agent in the process of lifelong learning (Oliver, 2019:7).

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