Veronica McKay

Praxis to Policy: Embedding Transformative and Indigenous Paradigms in a National Literacy Campaign

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Abstract: This article contributes to the discussion on how transformative and Indigenous paradigms can be incorporated into policy and practice. It shows how these paradigms can be meaningfully integrated into the design and delivery of education programmes to ensure that interventions are not only technically effective but also relational, participatory, and emancipatory, especially in contexts characterised by historical marginalisation and structural inequality. Using the dual lenses of Mertens' Six Steps for Transformative Research and Chilisa's Eight Rs of Indigenous Inquiry, this article examines the South African Kha Ri Gude (Tshivenda for "Let Us Learn") Literacy Campaign as a national example that embodies these principles. Delivered in all 12 official South African languages, including South African Sign Language, the campaign reached over 4.7 million adults through a decentralised, community-based model delivered by approximately 40,000 volunteers. Drawing on my experience as CEO of the campaign, this article presents a praxis-oriented reflection on the potential of transformative and Indigenous paradigms for implementing large-scale education interventions that achieve both redress and epistemic justice. This article affirms that embedding these paradigms from inception to evaluation can help realise a project's transformative potential.

Keywords: transformative paradigm, Indigenous research, epistemic justice, relational accountability, Ubuntu, literacy campaign

* **Corresponding author: Veronica McKay,** Distinguished Professor, University of South Africa. Email: mckayvi@unisa.ac.za

1 Introduction

Mertens and Chilisa (2024) propose a framework for evaluation grounded in transformative and Indigenous paradigms, offering guidance for assessing impact in ways that are culturally relevant and socially just. They distinguish Indigenous paradigms from mainstream Euro-Western approaches by emphasising multiple constructed realities rooted in material, social, and spiritual contexts. Their model is presented not just as a methodological alternative but as a hopeful intervention aimed at catalysing global transformation. Their focus on reciprocity, relationality, and cultural specificity shows how, when used in evaluation, these principles can guide global development policies towards fairer, more inclusive, and locally grounded solutions – giving voice and agency to those who have traditionally been marginalised.

In this article, I reflect on the importance of these paradigms and argue that their application should not only be used during the evaluation phase but across all the creative phases of a project from conception to evaluation. I illustrate how integrating these paradigms, from design through implementation to evaluation, can help unlock a project's transformative potential. This article uses the example of the large-scale, government-led Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign in South Africa to illustrate how a transformative agenda can steer national efforts towards inclusive and meaningful outcomes. It shows how the campaign addressed the systemic exclusion of adults who were denied education under apartheid through a design explicitly dedicated to challenging power imbalances and promoting participatory mechanisms for social change.

My positionality is rooted in my early experiences as a young (white) South African involved in the anti-apartheid movement – formative years that strengthened my belief in the transformative power of education as a tool for justice. As an academic-activist, I have consistently aimed to bridge theory and practice. My ability to navigate both governmental and academic spheres has enabled my praxis-oriented commitment to translating scholarly insights into policy and practical frameworks. In doing so, I have tried to honour the aspirations of those who have been historically denied opportunities, while creating spaces where all individuals can learn and contribute meaningfully to building a more just and humane world.

This article adopts a dual-paradigm approach, drawing equally from the transformative paradigm, as outlined by Mertens (1998; 2017; 2019), and the Indigenous paradigm, as explained by Chilisa (2009) and Chilisa et al. (2017). Although both paradigms uphold a commitment to justice and inclusion, they offer distinct yet complementary perspectives: the transformative paradigm highlights structural change, participatory processes, and challenging power asymmetries, while the Indigenous paradigm emphasises relational accountability, cultural context, and the co-creation of knowledge rooted in local cosmologies. This article considers both, referring to this combined approach as the transformative-Indigenous paradigm (TIP). Together, the TIP provides a compelling framework for rethinking education, not merely as a technical process but as a culturally meaningful, ethically grounded, and socially transformative endeavour. In this article, I show how the TIP influenced various aspects of the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign – from its design and implementation to its epistemic foundations and community involvement. I demonstrate how, by embedding the values of the TIP, the Literacy Campaign went beyond being just a literacy programme, and succeeded in serving as a vehicle for restoring dignity, enabling redress, and driving systemic transformation.

2 Transformative and Indigenous Paradigms: Conceptual Foundations

Transformative and Indigenous paradigms have emerged as essential frameworks that question the dominance of mainstream Euro-Western approaches and methodologies in studying marginalised communities. These paradigms offer more than just methodological alternatives – they advocate for a fundamental shift in research values, relationships, and goals. They emphasise collaboration, co-creation of knowledge, and ethical engagement rooted in relationality and social justice. The paradigms call for a shift from conducting research *on* Indigenous communities to working *with* and *for* them – addressing long-standing concerns of over-research and extractive engagement. As Ouédraogo et al. (2025, p. 29) argue, the integration of African-rooted philosophies and frameworks into evaluation and research practices advocates for methodologies that align with Indigenous ontological and epistemological perspectives, highlighting the inherent conflict between prevailing Euro-Western paradigms. This African-rooted approach promotes culturally responsive and community-driven approaches that align with culturally grounded ethical protocols, the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems, and the centrality of community perspectives (Koster et al., 2012; Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014; Romm, 2015).

2.1 Centring Marginalise Voices

Central to the TIP is the amplification of the voices of those who have been historically excluded from knowledge production. Mertens' Six Steps for Transformative Research are based on challenging structural oppression through participatory and action-oriented research methodologies. These steps are designed to enable the articulation of voices in confronting power asymmetries and limited access to social justice.

As Mertens (2019, p. 4) states, the "transformative paradigm is applicable to the study of power structures that perpetuate social inequities," and the voices of the marginalised are crucial in the research process. Voice is not regarded as anecdotal but as epistemic authority rooted in lived experiences. Louis (2007), in the influential paper "Can You Hear Us Now?", emphasises that research must be accountable to Indigenous worldviews. Snow et al. (2016) suggest an ethics of research grounded in community-defined goals, and Chilisa, Major, and Khudu-Petersen (2017) support an African-based paradigm that affirms communities' right to articulate their realities. *Voice* is both a method and a moral imperative, ensuring that the research speaks *with*, and not *for*, those historically silenced.

2.2 Relational Accountability

Relationality, as emphasised in the TIP, draws on the African philosophy of Ubuntu. This philosophy offers a relational and spiritual ontology that values community participation,

affirms dignity, and engenders shared ownership of research processes (Ouédraogo et al., 2025; Mertens & Chilisa, 2024; Maimela et al., 2024; Thobane & Jansen van Rensburg, 2022; Chilisa et al., 2017; McKay & Romm, 2019; Chilisa & Preece, 2005). Rooted in kinship, Ubuntu holds that "a person is a person through others", situating knowledge as emerging within and through relationships. Chilisa et al. (2017) describe this as an ontological interdependence, calling for multi-epistemological partnerships based on trust and mutual responsibility. Simonds and Christopher (2013) frame "relational accountability" as reciprocity in practice, while Adyanga and Romm (2022) introduce the concept of "relational sampling," which embeds researchers within community life.

2.3 Collaboration and Participation as Ethical Imperatives

The transformative paradigm offers a framework for conducting culturally respectful research that advances social justice praxis by employing mixed methods, action research, and community-based participatory research, positioning communities as co-researchers rather than subjects (Mertens, 2017; Koster et al., 2012). Within this orientation, Mertens and Chilisa (2024) characterise the TIP as a "multi-epistemological" collaboration, where Indigenous ways of knowing are affirmed and collaboration itself becomes an expression of community sovereignty and relevance (Chilisa et al., 2017).

Such an approach entails the collective identification of problems, the co-design of research methods, and the joint interpretation of findings. Crucially, collaboration must be both culturally sensitive and historically informed, particularly in contexts with legacies of exploitative research (Dube, Ndwandwe, & Ngulube, 2013). Afrocentric frameworks, as Thobane and Jansen van Rensburg (2022) argue, safeguard this process by ensuring the respectful observance of cultural protocols and the custodianship of knowledge.

2.4 Transformative Praxis, Decoloniality and Epistemic Justice

TIP-oriented research seeks to both challenge injustice and to facilitate change. Mertens (1998) situates the transformative paradigm within social justice, while Chilisa and Tsheko (2014) emphasise the value of culturally embedded methods such as storytelling. Romm (2015) builds on this, proposing that when research is aligned with equity outcomes, it becomes a vehicle for structural transformation. These perspectives extend beyond critiquing colonial legacies – rather, they are a call to reimagine research as both liberatory and accountable. As Chilisa et al. (2017) argue, there is a call for an "epistemic shift" that privileges local, spiritual, and collective ways of knowing and for restoring communal ethics in research.

2.5 Six Steps and 8 Rs – Tenets of Transformative and Indigenous Paradigms

Inspired by Mertens' Six Steps for Transformative Evaluation and Chilisa's 8 Rs for Indigenous Research (Mertens & Chilisa, 2024), this article aims to demonstrate how the literacy campaign aligns with these principles, presented here as interconnected steps or stages. I begin with a synopsis, not as a substitute for full engagement with the frameworks, but to provide a basis for comparison:

- Mertens' first step concentrates on contextualising the engagement; examining the interconnectedness of people, place, time, and spiritual and environmental factors; and requiring researchers to align their work with local cultural protocols, histories, and time cycles. This step aligns with Chilisa's Rs of Relevance, Rights and Reflection, ensuring that research resonates with the local context.
- The second step emphasises the historical context. It highlights stakeholder engagement, advocating for a critical examination of power dynamics, historical legacies, and the spiritual-cultural landscape in which the engagements occur. This involves assessing how communities are positioned within a project and the interests they may serve. This step aligns with Chilisa's Rs of Relationality and Respect.
- The third step concentrates on culturally responsive methods and partnerships. It emphasises the co-creation of approaches that reflect community values and build mutual learning. This step aligns with Chilisa's Rs of Respect, Relevance, and Reciprocity, and grounds the research in Relationships and Responsibility.
- The fourth step emphasises jointly defining success indicators (in the context of a project evaluation). These are relevant for community collaboration in determining goals and metrics with culturally and socially shaped criteria to enhance shared ownership, thereby aligning with Chilisa's focus on Relevance and Respect.

- Decolonising and employing mixed methods is the fifth step, which involves using tools such as storytelling, proverbs, and talking circles to centre community voices and acknowledge alternative knowledge systems. This step incorporates Chilisa's Rs of Responsibility and Relationality.
- Lastly, Mertens and Chilisa (2024) mention the inclusive dissemination of reports and findings that are accessible to the community and others. This sixth and final step closely aligns with Chilisa's Rs of Resurgence and Reciprocity, with the findings supporting and contributing to community renewal and continuity.

In the following section, I examine the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign through these lenses to show how it embodied the TIP principles alongside their epistemic and ethical commitments. I describe how the campaign functioned not only as a literacy intervention but also as a case of praxis rooted in Ubuntu and decolonial thought. I begin with an outline of the campaign's history as the foundation for this analysis.

3 Planning for Transformation

The Ministerial Committee on Literacy, established in 2007, was responsible for developing a campaign strategy for the South African Literacy Campaign, which was part of the wider post-apartheid efforts towards social justice and economic inclusion.

3.1 Learning from the Global South

In developing its strategy, the Ministerial Committee explicitly drew on models and ethos rooted in the Global South, reflecting a lineage of inspiration from successful literacy movements in similar contexts. The Ministerial Committee visited Cuba, Venezuela, and New Zealand to benchmark South Africa's literacy initiatives against international literacy models. Additionally, we had the opportunity to meet with leaders from the Indian and Brazilian campaigns to gain insights from various campaign models. The following valuable insights were gained:

- Cuba and Venezuela's "Yo, sí puedo" campaign (developed by Cuba and adapted for implementation in Venezuela) provided valuable insights into mass mobilisation and community-based instruction, illustrating how education can serve as a tool for social justice. The South African model was particularly influenced by the Cuban model's emphasis on solidarity, accessibility, and commitment to grassroots empowerment.
- Brazil's AlfaSol Literacy Programme and India's National Literacy Mission both demonstrated the impact of large-scale mass mobilisation in contexts of poverty and inequality – conditions similar to South Africa's societal challenges.
- New Zealand's Māori literacy efforts, though not from the Global South geographically, nonetheless resonated with South Africa's decolonial and multilingual objectives. The Māori community's focus on Indigenous languages and cultural identity offered further inspiration for cultural preservation and pride.

By engaging with these models, South Africa positioned itself within the epistemic space of the Global South, favouring contextualised, community-driven, mass-based, and politically conscious solutions over Western-Eurocentric models, while reaffirming education as a pathway to reclaim voice and agency. This same model inspired the Australian Aboriginal model, which was adapted for local contexts (Maniam et al., 2023).

The Ministerial Committee's visits to these countries were inspirational, informing the strategy for a literacy campaign for South Africa. In the words of Dr Casius Lubisi, leader of the Ministerial Committee on Literacy:

> Our belief in what could be achieved in our country was strengthened by what we witnessed in Cuba and Venezuela and [New Zealand] … as we climbed up the mountains of Guarenas to the barrios of Venezuela, as we interacted with Cuban advisors in Caracas, as we sang and shared ideas with the Maori in New Zealand, we were left with nothing but a sense of hope for our people … We came back revitalised and ready to make a contribution to pushing back the frontiers of poverty, despair and indignity – for illiteracy is indeed an affront to human dignity (Department of Education [DoE] 2008, Foreword).

The South African Plan recognised literacy as a vital link to civic participation and community development. It designed an intersectoral model involving government ministries, grassroots organisations, and volunteer networks, presenting a model that relied on mass mobilisation to promote widespread community involvement in literacy across the country (McKay, 2019, 2020). The strategy was based on a national contextual analysis that used data from the national census, including demographic

details such as languages, education levels, and geographic distribution. This was supported by insights from the field, gathered from various provinces during the consultative process, which involved broad-based stakeholder consultations with a range of community organisations, including faith-based organisations, NGOs and the disability sector.

The South African Cabinet approved the campaign strategy, budget, and operational plans, and the South African Kha Ri Gude National Literacy Campaign was launched in April 2008 (DoE, 2008).

3.2 Community Learning and the Social Nexus

The literacy campaign was based on a community-driven delivery model. The campaign used a cascading delivery system (see Figure 1) designed to reach 4.7 million adult learners across over 40,000 learning sites. The large number of learners prompted the use of innovative approaches to identify learning venues. The campaign slogan, "literacy wherever you are", resonated with learners who chose their learning spaces, typically within walking distance of their homes, in familiar environments such as people's homes, churches, community centres, informal structures, and even in markets, prisons, or hospitals. This approach made learning accessible and embedded it within familiar community settings, integrating knowledge into daily life and communal spaces.

3.2.1 The Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign Model

The four-tiered cascading structure, illustrated in Figure 1, is designed to facilitate both pedagogical coherence and local autonomy as follows:

- Groups of 18 adults attended literacy classes for 10 hours per week over 6 months.
- Educators were recruited locally and grouped into communities of practice (COPs), consisting of 10 educators.
- Supervisors supported 10 educators each, offering pedagogical guidance.
- Coordinators oversaw 20 supervisors and reported to the campaign head office (McKay, 2018).

This cascading structure ensured both vertical communication and horizontal learning alongside peer support. In this case, the COPs operated as self-organising, context-responsive units that addressed grassroots needs: electing venues, scheduling classes, mobilising communities, conducting local advocacy, and tailoring recruitment to local realities. These naturally took into account the local histories of the various places and spaces, as communities and learners defined the locations of classes in collaboration with the local community, traditional leaders, and elders steeped in their tradition and culture.

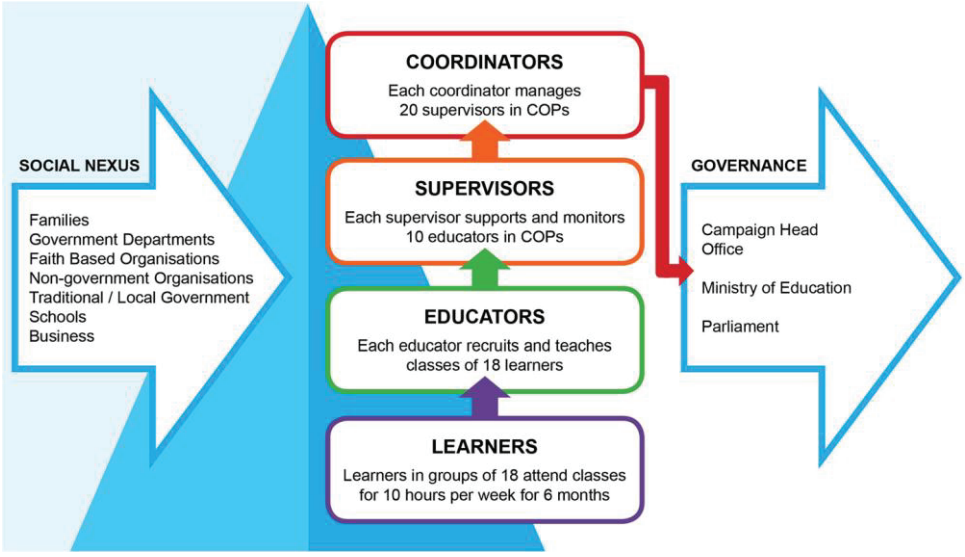

Figure 1: The Four-Tiered Cascading Model
Note: COPs = communities of practice

3.2.2 Community Ownership and Participatory Governance

As Figure 1 illustrates, the Literacy Campaign engaged multiple government agencies, NGOs, and grassroots networks. This social connection was important for accessing respected elders or community leaders who interacted with local educators, thereby ensuring trustworthy relationships among families, NGOs, faith-based organisations, traditional leaders, and schools. The cascade enabled sustained, localised engagement. Governance was overseen by local coordinators, whose reports were submitted to the Campaign Head Office within the Ministry of Education and ultimately presented in Parliament. The model exemplifies a hybrid of structure and autonomy. While governed at a national level, the implementation remained local and followed Chilisa's 8 Rs and Mertens' transformative paradigm.

3.2.3 Participatory Research and Indigenous Pedagogy

Each of the 4,000 organisational units conducted community research, including needs assessments and participatory asset mapping. The research was ongoing, collaborative, and formative, focused on continuous improvement as the campaign progressed. This involved responsive teaching and learning rooting literacy in Ubuntu, with learners sharing spaces, resources, emotional support and respect. A coordinator reflected: "There was no way of negating the Ubuntu culture. The learning units shared their homes and resources, and offered emotional support and respect that endured long after the classes had ended."

Indigenous integration within the literacy campaign was both theoretical and practical, with the literacy initiatives owned and led by the communities. As Figure 1 illustrates, communities assumed the role of co-creators rather than simply beneficiaries, with literacy classes organised at the community level and developed collaboratively with the community. This facilitated alignment with local languages, cultures and learning traditions.

In my role as CEO, I had the privilege of meeting with chiefs and other community leaders as part of the process of gaining access to communities and garnering support. These engagements built trust and encouraged greater involvement in the literacy programme, as wellknown figures who understood local linguistic and cultural nuances led local implementation.

3.2.4 Building Social Capital and Resilience

Torres (2001, p. 50), who served as the CEO of the Ecuadorian Literacy Campaign (and whom I was fortunate to meet), emphasises the advantages of large-scale social networks in literacy campaigns. Torres describes a literacy campaign as an "educational mass movement" engaged in social and political transformative action that yields both quantitative and qualitative gains, utilising the critical mass as a form of social capital to build momentum. Similarly, Dale and Newman (2006, p. 17) argue that large-scale networks are beneficial in helping marginalised communities confront the challenges of poverty and enabling the community agency needed for change and building resilience. Large-scale movements act as a form of social capital, functioning as a shared community asset that groups can utilise to achieve their goals. This "enabling social capital" enhances community resilience (McKay, 2019).

As I indicate in Figure 1, the campaign created a space for building resilience, with learners and communities working together to address challenges such as creating food gardens, caring for the sick, or advocating for basic services. These actions, described in Setswana as *letsema* – a social solidarity – connect stakeholders, including chiefs, mayors, local businesses, various community-based and non-governmental organisations, as well as government departments, all working in collaboration. The model demonstrates how community-driven programmes can serve as a tool for transformation, nurturing agency, social capital, and Indigenous resilience in confronting systemic inequalities.

3.3 Literacy as a Human Right and Social Justice Initiative

The Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign was conceived as part of South Africa's broader post-apartheid reconstruction efforts, recognising literacy as a fundamental human right and a basis for social justice. In line with the TIP, the campaign strategies were specially designed for empowerment, explicitly targeting the country's most marginalised and vulnerable communities – women, the elderly, people with disabilities, out-of-school youths, the unemployed, the incarcerated, and communities in rural and informal settlements – adults who had been historically excluded from education under apartheid.

Figure 2 depicts the residential and settlement patterns of the literacy learners. It indicates that many literacy learners reside in rural areas, as well as in townships and informal settlements, where poverty is at its highest. These regions typically suffer from poor infrastructure, including shortages of water, sanitation, and electricity, along with issues such as inadequate health and healthcare,

HIV/AIDS, malnutrition and low household income. Illiteracy and poverty intersect with geographic location, race, gender, and disability (Lehohla, 2017).

3.3.1 Language and Learner Rights

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) encourages the development and use of all official languages. One of the most notable aspects of the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign was its commitment to cultural and linguistic inclusivity. In line with the aim of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular that of SDG 4, to "leave no one behind", the campaign was carried out in all 12 official South African languages, including South African Sign Language. Additionally, the principles of Universal Design guided the pedagogical process, with materials provided in Braille and large print to support learners with visual impairments. Class sizes and the duration of the literacy programme were adapted for learners with physical or cognitive needs. This demonstrated the campaign's strong alignment with the constitutional right to basic education in the learner's mother tongue, including in South African Sign Language, in line with the principles of rights-based education and inclusivity (Hanemann & McKay, 2019; McKay & Romm, 2015).

The campaign's pedagogy also reflected Indigenous and decolonial principles. The mother-tongue learning approach incorporated Indigenous proverbs, oral storytelling, songs, and collective reflection. This served as motivation for learning, resonating with Mertens and Chilisa's (2024) call for cultural relevance not just in curriculum design, but in how it reached, listened to, and responded to those it served, playing a role in restoring dignity and agency.

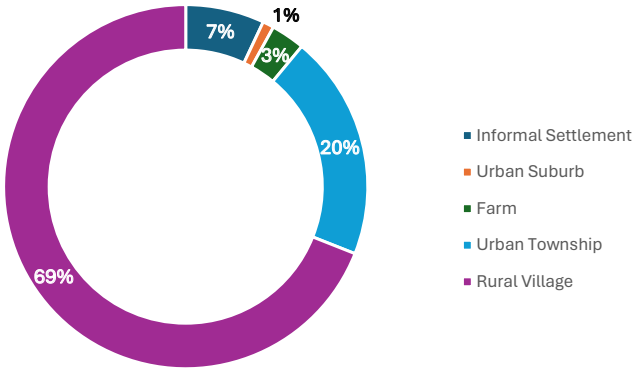

Figure 2: Distribution of Learners by Residential Type

Attending to learner rights required a concerted effort in training trainers on how to accommodate learning differences and how to tackle problems they encountered in their groups. The educators' participation in their regular COP engagements provided them with an opportunity to share critical incidents and exchange lesson ideas, songs, proverbs, and stories.

3.4 Cultural Specificity and Indigenous Ways of Knowing

The TIP highlights the significance of Indigenous knowledge systems and the validation of local ways of knowing. This recognition was important in the literacy campaign and was a consideration from design to evaluation.

With reading, writing, and counting as the core objectives of the literacy programme, the learning outcomes needed to be assessed. Rather than relying solely on external, standardised indicators, the campaign assessed outcomes, allowing learners and educators to define success on their own terms – such as by reading family letters, understanding religious texts, or contributing to local decision-making. In this way, the campaign enabled learners to redefine literacy as a living, practical skill through authentic assessments that involved reading relevant information, such as health and wellness information, information about social services, a child's school report, or religious texts, in ways that helped learners meet their everyday literacy needs. (I discuss in detail the learner-centred, learner-managed portfolio assessment tool used for assessing literacy in McKay, 2015[1]).

Issues of time were also addressed with cultural sensitivity as required by the TIP. Class times were scheduled and adjusted to meet learners' needs, taking into account seasonal factors such as harvesting or floods, as well as safety concerns. The scheduling of night classes in remote rural areas took into account moon cycles, since walking to class in low moonlight compromised learners' safety. These adjustments recognised time as relational rather than linear, aligning with Indigenous worldviews.

[1] The assessments were outcome-based, supported by the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF), ensuring alignment with a broader continuum of adult learning. A key element was the Learner Assessment Portfolio (LAP) – a standardised, contextually adapted tool used throughout the campaign for both formative and diagnostic aims. The portfolio facilitated continuous and collaborative assessment that was non-threatening and particularly well suited to the campaign's decentralised, volunteer-led delivery model. Many assessments required learners to bring their own texts or demonstrate their application of learning in community contexts.

While the Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign programme was initially aligned with the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals and later the SDGs (Hanneman & McKay, 2015), its engagement with communities led to reinterpreting these frameworks through an Indigenous lens:

- SDG 1 (No Poverty) was considered through land stewardship and communal livelihoods
- SDG 4 (Quality Education) emphasised the revitalisation of Indigenous languages and knowledge systems
- SDG 8 (Decent Work) gave expression to *letsema* (collective work) and sustainable livelihoods
- SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) was considered through inclusive local leadership, which increasingly included women
- SDG 13 (Climate Action) was considered through community-based resilience and ecological knowledge

By valuing community-defined indicators – such as relational accountability, cultural sustainability, and spiritual well-being – the campaign showed that the SDGs can serve as a platform for Indigenous self-determination, rather than merely functioning as tools of global compliance. Moreover, the African philosophy of Ubuntu offered an ecosophical basis for collectivism, connecting humans, animals, and the natural environment (Mabunda & McKay, 2021).

As Mertens and Chilisa (2024) argue, true TIP processes require a shift in power dynamics. The shift in power dynamics in the literacy campaign gave rise to a communal exchange of knowledge, characterised by a more peer-based learning approach and relationships of reciprocity – a relational, participatory, and culturally grounded initiative in which knowledge is co-constructed through dialogic processes within communities.

3.5 Community Collaboration, Social Capital and the Development of Agency and Resilience

In this section, I examine how literacy contributed to the development of agency, social capital, and resilience among the Literacy Campaign participants – factors vital for improving the quality of life in impoverished communities.

Drawing on responses from a large sample of 485,941 literacy learners, the analysis revealed significant shifts in learners' self-perception, family dynamics, and community participation. Participants described newfound confidence, improved relational skills, and increased involvement in civic life. In addition to basic literacy, many acquired practical skills such as financial management, digital literacy (in this case, using an ATM or mobile phone), and supporting children's education. These outcomes reflect the campaign's foundation in transformative and Indigenous paradigms, where learning promotes agency, restores dignity, and strengthens social bonds through collective empowerment, contributing to personal identity and social solidarity (McKay, 2020).

Several scholars emphasise the significance of these effects. Preece (2013) argues that adult basic education boosts self-confidence, well-being, civic participation, and the ability to make informed life decisions. Aldrich and Meyer (2014) underline the development of resilience as the capacity to confront and manage adversity with hope and adaptive strength, highlighting its inherently aspirational nature. Setlhodi (2018, p. 6) describes the African tradition of *letsema* as rooted in reciprocity and collective effort, reflecting deep cultural belonging and community purpose, and framing this practice as a form of grassroots nation-building. These community-driven efforts show how literacy, when embedded in a relational and participatory context, becomes a tool for building resilience through solidarity and mutual support. Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* reminds us that learning must be connected to critical consciousness and collective action. The organisation of learning in the Literacy Campaign – through dialogic, inclusive, and locally led practices – echoes the Freirean principles of how communities can build agency and resilience together (Aitchison & McKay, 2021; Freire, 2000).

3.6 Dissemination of Knowledge

Finally, I conclude with a discussion on the dissemination of achievements in the campaign as highlighted in Mertens' sixth step, which pertains to the dissemination of knowledge. Mertens and Chilisa (2024, p 4) refer to "evaluators combining mainstream and Indigenous reporting".

Within the campaign, dissemination was not limited to academic journals or government reports. The knowledge, progress, and challenges affecting the campaign were shared broadly and made accessible through various means. Besides digital reports and campaign newsletters, community structures and celebratory events were common, where learners expressed their achievements and accomplishments. These events provided learners with opportunities to showcase their cultural choirs and

dancers and to sell their handicrafts. They offered opportunities for local forms of dissemination, which became part of the campaign's mobilisation strategy, strengthening participation and advocacy. Additionally, events were regularly covered by community radio stations, local newspapers, and national television stations. The campaign thus met the ethical duty of both transformative and Indigenous paradigms, ensuring that knowledge generation reached community members.

4 Conclusion

The Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign serves as a paradigmatic case of how transformative and Indigenous paradigms can be integrated at scale to restore human dignity, rebuild cultural identity, and redress historical injustice, not only through what is taught, but also by how, by whom, and in whose language and worldview.

Its grounding in Ubuntu, justice, and equity created the enabling conditions for both personal and societal transformation. The campaign stands as a compelling example of how transformative and Indigenous paradigms can inform large-scale, state-led education and policy development initiatives, embedding relationality, cultural relevance, and social justice throughout their structure and delivery.

By aligning with Mertens' Six Steps and Chilisa's 8 Rs, from inception, the campaign has shown that education can serve as a vehicle for both epistemic and societal transformation, illustrating that transformative education can be achieved on a large scale when policy and practice work together to reimagine justice through learning.

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