



A Reflective Piece on Teaching and Learning in Botswana

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ABSTRACT

What is needed in Botswana and the rest of Southern Africa is a kind of teaching and learning that educates to empower, liberate, transform, shape identities and reinforce peace and humanity (Ketsitlile, 2009). Southern Africa today is characterized by many socio-economic, political and educational problems and in my view, teaching and learning is still in an embryotic stage. Although literacy has improved significantly in the last decade (United Nations Report), there is still a lot of work to be done in the areas of teaching and learning in schools. And colonial educational influences are still very much in place in Botswana and other places in Southern Africa. Teaching and learning in Botswana and the rest of Southern Africa needs to focus on meeting the needs of all its people, among others. In Botswana, for example, in order for teaching and learning to have lifelong meaning and make an impact among Botswana at large, it should be focused on meeting diversified needs and this means that it should be better packaged than it presently is. Shujaa (1993) says that for teaching and learning to be beneficial to African-Americans and African peoples in general, distinction between schooling and education, as the two cannot be separated or looked as two opposing dichotomies. I concur with Asante (1995) who says that education to an African is not just a matter of schooling, but it is a lifetime affair. Teaching and learning should focus on meeting the needs of the learners all the time; inside and outside the classroom.

Historical Background of Teaching and Learning Activities in Botswana-Pre-independent Botswana

The content from this section is taken from our paper; Commeyras, M. & Ketsitlile, L.E. (2010). Bechuanaland became a British Protectorate in 1885 and remained so until independence in 1966. Chief Khama III of the Bamangwato, Chief Gaseitsiwe I of the Bangwaketse and Chief Sechele of the Bakwena accepted the 1890 Order of Council that

recognized nine chiefs who would rule their people under the ultimate power of a British High Commissioner. This was deemed necessary because of the expansionist designs of the Boers in South Africa (as seen in Sechele's letter to Livingstone in our paper).

During this period children received a traditional education that was informal, formal and vocational. In 1905 Mr. E. B. Sargent, then education adviser to the British High Commissioner, reported that 1,000 children were in school (Schapera, 1940). The Batswana wanted an education that went beyond what the missionaries offered but what they got was an education that met the needs of colonial administrators (Mgadla, 2003). The Bechuanaland colonial administration thought education should serve three primary purposes: (1) to promote European-style education, (2) help maintain law and order; and (3) support commerce and trade.

The London Missionary Schools were hence in competition with industrial schools that prepared men to be masons, carpenters and builders. The education adviser, E. B. Sargent, criticized the missionary schools for leaving out education in weaving, pottery, carving and stringing beads. At the time Khama III and other chiefs favored a comprehensive educational program (Watters, 1973). The Tswana elite preferred to send their children to schools such as Lovedale in the Cape and Morija in Basutoland where they would learn to speak, read and write English. The LMS responded by introducing a two tier education wherein one stream of students paid a higher fee to get English lessons. Miss Alice Young, the school mistress at Palapye, used this system beginning in 1894. At the turn of the century there were two inspection reports from colonial administrators (Ellenberger & Sargent) that supported the idea of beginning instruction in the vernacular (Setswana) with English instruction following from three to five years later (Mgadla, 2003).

The earliest report of pupils reading achievement in L. M.S. schools was delivered in 1899 by Reverend James Richardson. In his visits to schools he administered a reading test in Setswana (Chirenje, 1977). Results were reported for 822 pupils at seven school locations (Sekao, Boririma, Khurutsho, Talaote, Palapye, Molepolole and Kanye). Less than ten percent of pupils passed the test. Pass rates varied among the schools from a high of 78% at Palapye followed by 30% at Boririma and the remainder being less than ten percent. Ella Sharp, who was the

principal of the Phalatswe Central School from 1899 to 1902, wrote that the pupils have "an intensive desire to learn how to read" (Mgadla, 1997, p. 76). Phalatswe Central was the school in Palapye where Richardson found the most students able to pass the reading test.

In 1919 the British inspector of schools named Dutton proposed a syllabus for schools with three general principles. Two of the principles are particularly telling with regard to what Dutton had observed in schools. First Dutton proposed that "No pupil should begin an English Reading Book until he can correctly read and write sentences in Setswana;" Secondly he proposed that "that the use of English primers be discontinued. As pupils in Grade 3 already know the sounds of letters, and how to spell them, it is useless to weary them with such sentences as: The fat cat sat on the mat." (Watters, 1973 p. 96). Dutton was calling into the question the usefulness of a linguistic approach to teaching reading for students who had learned the correspondences between letters and sounds.

Frances Phiri, a primary school teacher (1929-1958) observed that "Children want to go to school, but as soon as they learned to read and write that was enough schooling for them. The girls could then go home and write to the young men in the mines who, in turn, could read and answer their letters" (Watters, 1973; pp. 105-106). Examples of epistolary reading and writing by the Bakgatla can be found in excerpts Schapera (1940) used from the letters he collected during his ethnographic study of married life among the Bakgatla. Breckenridge (2006) who studies the significance of epistolary literacy in southern Africa writes that I. Schapera, who did his fieldwork in Bechuanaland (1929-1934), is the only one who collected letters from his informants. Excerpts from these letters show that epistolary literacy was not limited to the educated elite but included others who had received some literacy instruction in village schools. Schapera and Breckenridge analyze the content of these letters to better understand the personal and political of the times. In colonial Southern Africa the writing and reading of letters was a major literate activity that emerged because of the massive and systematic labor migration (Barber, 2006).

In 1935 cattle-post schools were introduced as a way of providing education to those boys who were not able to attend formal schools because of their herding responsibilities. A teacher traveled from cattle post to cattle post with a blackboard and books. The idea was that these teachers would focus on what the boys wanted to learn given their day

to day herding responsibilities. This effort in extending education beyond the school walls did not last long (Watters, 1973).

For those who attended formal schools the day began with an assembly which included prayers. After assembly children were inspected for cleanliness and health resulting in some being sent home to wash or have their tattered clothes mended. The instruction time focused on learning religious content, arithmetic, English and Setswana. First the teacher read and explained the lessons then students reread the lesson and asked questions to prepare for tests on their mastery of the material. In formal schools there was also a trend toward using more materials that fit the Bechuanaland context. From 1960 onward the school syllabi increasingly called for using English in the classroom and using materials relevant to life in Bechuanaland (Watters, 1973).

An expression of racism affecting literacy learning was expressed in this colonial period by a South African ophthalmologist named Joki. When advising the Bechuanaland government on preventing trachoma infections that led to blindness he recommended against prescribing reading glasses because in his estimation the “[Native] mind is not experienced like the minds of white persons to distinguish rapidly, and assess the differences of small details (in white persons this faculty has been developed since centuries before the art of reading). From this point of view, the efforts of traveling opticians who examine Natives, and supply them with spectacles, should not be encouraged. The more educated Native has nearly a morbid desire to wear spectacles, firstly because he imagines they give him an air of importance, and secondly because he very often suffers from eye strain. This eye strain, however, is not due to an uncorrected refractive error, but to the lack of familiarity with the art of reading and writing Livingston” (2005 p. 159). If that doctor were alive today he would see that the art of reading and writing is alive and well in Botswana.

Post-independence Botswana

When independent Botswana was established there were citizens who could “make the books talk” (read) but schooling was predominantly foreign, selective and expensive (Molefe, 2004). In 1966 Botswana was among the 25 poorest and least developed countries in the world whereas today it is ranked among the middle income countries (Hanemann, 2005). Education has been a key development priority

since independence. A National Literacy Programme for adults and school leavers was established in 1980 (Youngman, 2002). Botswana has achieved universal access to primary education (Republic of Botswana/United Nations, 2004). In the past forty-three years of nationhood the ability to read in Setswana and/or English has made notable gains. UNICEF statistics project that more than 90% of youth can read (HYPERLINK "http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/botswana_statistics.html#46" [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/botswanastatistics.html #46](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/botswanastatistics.html#46)). Among adults, 81% were found to be literate on the 2003 national survey (Chilisa, 2008).

When Botswana attained independence in 1966, it was without doubt one of the poorest countries in the world with an estimated GDP per capita of P118 million. Most Botswana relied on agriculture as a source of livelihoods (Ntseane, 2012). Regrettably, independence came at the end of the most severe drought which left the rural population impoverished. It is estimated that heavy expenditure amounting to P2 million was spent on famine relief and other rehabilitation services (Republic of Botswana, 1977). To that end, the primary aim of government policy would be at one level to develop the education system that would “create in the shortest possible time, within such financial means as possible, a stock of trained local manpower capable of servicing the country's economy” (Botswana Government, 1966: page 33, cited in Ntseane, 2012). The assumption by policy makers and economist at the time was that by investing in human resource development, balanced development would become inevitable, thus resulting in high degree of self-sufficiency (Ntseane, 2012).

According to Ntseane, with the discovery of minerals in the 1970s, the country recorded remarkable social and economic change. Records show that the mining sector contributed 52% to Gross National Product (GDP) in 1983/84. By 2000/2001 minerals still contributed the largest share although other sectors of the economy such as government, finance, business services and trade also made an impact on the total value added (Republic of Botswana, 2003).

At independence, Botswana had no higher education to talk about. Prominent and rich Botswana children went to schools such as Tiger Kloof in South Africa and others. In 1966, BOLESWANA came into existence. This was the formation of the Botswana, Lesotho and

Swaziland University. It was only in 1980 that through the initiative of the former President Sir Seretse Khama, the University of Botswana came into being. Botswana had to contribute in cash and in kind towards their university and it truly was birthed from very humble beginnings. The curriculum at this time was heavily skewed towards that of Botswana's former colonial master, Britain.

Democracy and education in Botswana

Sir Seretse Khama, the first president of Botswana came up with what is known as Education for Kagisano philosophy (education for social harmony) (RNPE, 1977), which stipulated that a united and democratic Botswana, whose main objective would be to promote social harmony, would be birthed through the four pillars of Unity, Democracy, Self-Reliance, Development as well as Botho (humaness) (cf. Education for Kagisano, 1977). The pillars were defined as follows (Monaka, 2006):

- Unity (Kagisano): education would promote social harmony and unity among the citizen of the country by affording them equality in education and social development;
- Democracy (Puso ya batho ka batho): a republican governance system where citizens equally stand the chance to accede into positions of government and have fairness in social development;
- Self Reliance (Boipelego): a social order where citizens strive to make an effort to contribute to their development by making necessary personal sacrifices to meet the efforts of the government half-way;
- Development (Tlhabologo); a process that entails improved social and cultural lives of citizens, and that make them enjoy the benefits of their social progress;
- Botho (Humanness): a social state of being kind and generous; respectful and tolerant to others.

I agree with Monaka that on paper, these are admirable ideals. However, the government has been slow to promote and develop these ideals in schools in matters concerning the incorporation of languages (Monaka). She goes on to say that Education for Kagisano could only be effective if the education system was committed to the realization of the pillars upon which both it and democracy were hinged. Jotia goes on to say that (2006:2) 'in order for Botswana to be deemed a truly democratic country, its education system should be seen to be advancing deep democratic ideals.' He further notes that the product of a genuine practice of democracy in the education system of the country could be 'transformative' intellectuals capable of perpetuating the ideals of democracy (Jotia, 2006), as indeed democracy is a

transformative ideal (Green, 1999, as cited in Monaka, 2006).

Teaching and learning in higher education in Botswana

The Botswana Government has always allocated a large share of the budget to education, with higher education getting the lion's share. As it has already been stated in this paper, the primary purpose of this was to develop manpower mainly for government. Hence, in the 70's, 80's and even late 90's, the Botswana Government spent a lot of money sending Botswana to study in foreign universities. It is only in the last couple of years that the Botswana Government severely cut down on sending Botswana to foreign universities. Undoubtedly, this posed a problem as until very recently, the University of Botswana was the only university in the country. This resulted in mushrooming of private universities and colleges which offered a wide range of programs and courses. Most of the programs are much more specialized and tailored to the increasingly economic and financial driven Botswana labour market. In the beginning, there was very little quality control measures in place and as a result, government came up with the Tertiary Education Council (TEC), Botswana Examinations Council (BEC), Botswana Quality Authority (BQA) and the Human Resources Development Council (HRDC) as its watchdogs. The University of Botswana stills remains the traditional and 'mother' university offering a wide range of courses.

Background to my university-Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST)

The information below is from a report that was submitted to The Ministry of Education and Skills and Development by the Office of the Vice-Chancellor in consultation with The Vice-Chancellor's Cabinet-BIUST

The Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST) was established through an Act of Parliament of the Government of Botswana in 2005 to accelerate the transformation of Botswana into a knowledge-based economy through production of highly skilled personnel who can compete internationally, enhance research and development in key science and technology fields, and provide entrepreneurship support in critical areas of the local, national, continental and global economy. Even prior to the BIUST Act, a National Task Force that was assembled by the Minister of Education, recommended in October 2003 that BIUST should focus its academic

and allied programme activities on basic and applied sciences, engineering, technology ICT, agricultural and food sciences, business/management and related elements of the arts.

The University is planned to excel in research and postgraduate education with an enrolment range (with revisions) of 6000 – 10000 students. BIUST is mandated to establish and operate collaborative programmes with industry and public agencies on innovation as regards products and services. It must also rise into the corps of excellent tertiary institutions internationally. Targeting of excellence places specific requirements as regards the operational mode, budget and development of physical facilities to support operations in the areas of BIUST research, teaching, entrepreneurship, professional activities and community service, to mention a few.

The Ministry of Education and Skills Development is a key contributor to the implementation of the Botswana Economic Advisory Council (BEAC) plans as regards supply of highly skilled labour; reduction of unemployment through promotion of entrepreneurship education and support activities; provision of incentives for intellectual property development in Botswana universities and colleges; and promotion of academic/research events that can engender international collaboration on projects that can attract subsequent investment. BIUST has been configured to play a leading role with respect to satisfaction of this mandate. Under new Management leadership, several carefully planned initiatives have begun while others are planned for commencement in the 2014/2015 academic year to catalyze and accelerate the implementation of the BEAC plans.

Who am I and why I do what I do?

I was born and bred in Botswana, a country known by many for its love of peace and people. Growing up, I was always surprised that the same peace and humane behavior was not extended to some Batswana, specifically the San people. Formerly referred to as Bushmen, the San is the preferred term for the peoples of the Kalahari Desert who speak Khoesan languages (<http://www.kalaharipeoples.org/>) The San were not strangers to me growing up as they and Bakhalahari were cattle herders of Tswana peoples (those who speak Setswana) including the Bangwaketse of whom I am a member. Cattle to the Tswana peoples are a mark of great pride and wealth. A man who does not own any cattle was and is still considered less than a man. The San, unfortunately, do

not own a lot of cattle but, are excellent cattle herders. Growing up as children, we only associated with San children very minimally as we were made to believe that they were uncultured, unschooled and barbaric. In any case, we hardly saw them much except when we went to our father's cattle post in the Kalahari, which I hated because it was too hot during the day and too cold at night. Also, there was very little entertainment for us children. I developed a passion to assist this disadvantaged group of people in Botswana to reach greater heights especially in education. The journey started with teaching and learning.

When I started teaching English, I came into direct contact with students who struggled not only with the language but, also with issues of identity as language is very much linked to one's identity. I remember teaching in my third school the western part of Botswana when I had my 'aha!' moment in teaching. In my class were two San students and I immediately sensed that they did not fit with the rest of the students. They were the only San students in class. I was constantly told that they would dropout. I started to panic when I realized that they were more absent than present for school. When I asked them to explain their frequent absenteeism they always said that they had to go and see the social worker or they had to go home or something else. I admit that I was not surprised when they eventually dropped out of school and went back to lead a nomadic life with their parents. I never heard of them again. I always wondered if there was anything I could have done to keep them in school. As for me obtaining a Fulbright scholarship to go to the US in 2006 was a dream come true because it seemed a way to gain the knowledge, experiences and credibility to contribute to San empowerment through education not only in Botswana but, Southern Africa as a whole.

As a teenager, I felt very sorry for San people. I heard tales about their malaise and ill-treatment by the Tswana. My question has always been: why cannot someone do something to stop this lack of Botho? Botho is about earning respect by giving respect. I listened to stories around the fire in the evening and remembered my grandmother telling us about how the San were punished for bad behavior. One particular story is lodged in my memory. This is a story of a San man who urinated near the chief's compound. He received a serious whipping and was publicly humiliated as he had to dig out the urine and carry it many miles away, beyond the village. I came to realize that a good San person in the eyes of Batswana is one who stays at the cattle post and looks after cattle.

I tested this one day by asking my children if they had seen a San child. The reply was no. I was not surprised because I do not own any cattle; hence, I do not have San people working for me.

My focus in my PhD Dissertation was on the San indigenous literacy practices and unique ways of reading the world. I believe that the San people have a lot to contribute to mainstream Tswana children and the world at large. They are taught to value peace, avoid negative competition and to excel in everything they do (Shostak, 1981, 2000). It is very unfortunate that in Botswana, there are very few of them who enroll at university and even fewer who graduate. I am working closely with a group of colleagues from the University of Botswana and one of our mandates is to encourage San peoples to enroll for higher learning which they so much deserve like any other Motswana.

My personal experiences and what I have studied about language, culture and literacy in the US prompted me to study the educational experiences of San children's literacy in Botswana schools and to better understand their challenges within formal education along with their views of what it means to be literate. I adopt research methods that seemed consistent with my experience living in a society that values a Botho view of human relations. Botho also known as Ubuntu recognizes that who I am is knowable only by recognizing others. This is currently problematic with regard to the San people's position within Botswana society. In addition Botho, is missing in teaching, learning and research (Ketsitlile, Bulawa & Kgathi) in most Botswana schools, especially in the infamous Remote Area Dweller Schools (RADs) where San and other marginalized students study. Of recent, there has been a drastic shift in many countries why people teach; in my opinion, most young people settle for teaching as a last resort and the passion is not there.

Where I am now and what I want to achieve in Teaching and Learning in Botswana and how I plan to do it?

I resigned from my faculty position at the University of Botswana at the end of 2013 and became the founding Associate Professor in Academic and Technical Writing at BIUST. Recently, I have been appointed Director in the newly formed Academic Affairs Centre for Technical Writing. I truly thank the Lord for this big breakthrough in my life and I trust Him to lead and guide me in this exciting journey.

The Centre is responsible among others for setting up professional courses in writing, corporate communication and effective presentation skills. With regard to professional development, the Centre will conduct staff development courses and workshops to sensitize staff on innovative teaching and learning strategies. We will also work closely with undergraduate and graduate students in their academic journey.

As I am writing this paper, I am in a hotel in Dallas, Texas where I have been attending the recently ended ASCD Conference on Teaching Excellence. The conference was a huge success and I hope to share what I learnt with colleagues in Botswana, especially, school teachers. I am very much interested in networking with the schools and scaffolding teacher inquiry and research in Botswana and hopefully, throughout Southern Africa.

CONCLUSION

When I grew up, I always wanted to be a lawyer and ultimately, move to the bench. Although I passed my secondary school examinations with flying colors, I missed law school by a point. I was so frustrated and disappointed back then. I then settled for a Bachelor of Arts Degree majoring in History and English and hoped to go to law school after graduation. Looking back, I am glad I did not go to law school as I will not be where I am today. Indeed, the Good Lord ordered my steps even back then! For me, teaching and learning is a calling and not merely for a pay check at the end of the month. I sincerely love what I do and I am continuously in awe as I watch the lives of young people are being changed! As an educator, one gives a lot of oneself in many ways and has to rise above the opposition, petty jealousies, discouragement and many others. What has been keeping me afloat is my trust in the Lord and my love for the students and belief in what I am doing. I am of the opinion that anything done with Botho and love will never fail; I have always treated my learners with utmost respect and courtesy and they have always reciprocated. As educators, we have the power to make or break our students. Let us make the right choice.

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