

## ISSUES, DILEMMAS AND PROSPECTS ON THE STATE PROVISION OF EDUCATION TO TRADITIONAL HUNTER- GATHERER SOCIETIES OF BOTSWANA

Lucky TSHIRELETSO  
*Molepolole College of Education,  
Botswana*

**ABSTRACT** Botswana has embraced the idea of universal provision of basic education to all of its young citizens on the basis of right. This has put a tremendous pressure on the education sector to improve access to schooling. As a result, over one hundred and fifty additional schools built during the period between 1985 and 1995 as part of this effort. However, studies conducted in the latter part of the 1980's and the National Commission on Education point out the fact that about 17% of school going children remain outside school. These children reported as missing from school are the children of the country's Remote Area Dweller (RAD) communities most of whom are the Basarwa, the indigenous minority ethnic hunter-gatherer social groups in Botswana. Basarwa comprise a distinct and heterogeneous socio-cultural group whose economic lifestyle and culture differ from that of the dominant Tswana groups. This socio-cultural dislocation also comes into surface in the classroom and is one of the main causes of Basarwa children's continued stay away from the classroom. The classroom in this case becomes an arena of intercultural conflicts. These conflicts *inter alia* take the form of exclusion of language, traditions and cultural world-view of the children of minorities in the pedagogic process. Teachers also transport into the classroom a baggage of cultural and personal attitudes which is not supportive to the learning of these children. The study suggests a community based teacher induction process and a teaching approach which will attempt to accommodate both the learners language and cultural world-view in the classroom. This approach follows the empowerment perspectives to teaching and learning where parents have some power and control on what their children learn and the culture, language and experiences of children are central to the classroom teaching and learning process. What takes place in the classroom then becomes a culturally mediated process.

Key Words: Basarwa; Schooling; Language; Culture; Community based approach

### INTRODUCTION

The San, who in the local Setswana language are referred to as Basarwa and in official government terminology as the Remote Area Dwellers (RADs) are Botswana's traditional hunter gatherer or foraging societies. In fact, not withstanding the possible problems associated with naming the name of the Basarwa, Barnard (1992) alludes to the name San as being a Khoekhoe word for Bushmen or foragers. However, it is well known that the Basarwa as a population group are heterogeneous and for the purpose of self-identity it is preferable to call themselves by the

name of their language group. This paper is focussed on the Kua/Hua speaking group of Basarwa found in the Diphuduhudu, Khekhenye, Tshwaane and Motokwe Remote Area Dweller settlements (however, Motokwe is not a settlement but a Bakgalagadi village with some Basarwa in it). Some of the Basarwa interviewed referred to themselves as Tshasi, Kute or Kuera of the Kua /Hua sub-language groups. This reveals the complexity of the nature of the Basarwa, as heterogeneous population group. This paper uses the local name Basarwa, being the plural for Mosarwa, which is in singular, interchangeably with the official reference name of RAD, which in fact identifies the group by its socio-economic conditions. The RAD settlements have been introduced by government in Botswana to bring the bands of the hunter-gatherers together into one geographical location where they can have access to facilities such as a clinic, school, tribal administration offices and fresh reticulated water to alleviate their poverty conditions. The RAD settlements are a transitional phase of the Basarwa from the nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle to sedentary living. Although, through the Remote Area Dweller Development Programme government has provided the Basarwa families with cattle, goats and sheep as well as seeds for cultivation, these has not helped much as individuals interviewed claimed that the animals were either killed by wild animals or were slaughtered for food. At the same time the poor infertile soil condition coupled with arid conditions of the Kgalagadi desert most of the time results with poor crop yields. These situation expose many families to starvation and has increased their dependence on government handouts even more. Although most of the Basarwa would prefer to revert back to their previous foraging lifestyle of rural opulence, they can only forage for wild berries, water melons and edible roots as animal hunting is strictly regulated by the state. In spite of their special hunting licenses, most of them say they are afraid to go hunting as they are sometimes accused of exceeding their permitted quota, which always results with unpleasant experiences for them.

It is in the background of these bleak economic conditions that we look at education provision for Basarwa children in Botswana. It is not surprising that although parents have quite a high regard for schooling, 85% of those interviewed in Diphuduhudu, view the school as at least a place where the young can have a meal and are yet reported to be less concerned about their children's attendance at school. The headmistress at the Diphuduhudu Primary School stated that:

“When a child stays at home and does not come to school, parents do not try to send the child to school, to them there is nothing wrong.”

It is however apparent that the authoritarian structure of the school, expressed through the teacher and the curriculum, which is alien to Basarwa culture has an influence on the children's erratic attendance and parents' lack of attention to monitoring their children's school attendance. The latter can partly be explained as part of Basarwa's cultural view to parenthood and child socialization. At the same time lack of education amongst Basarwa parents also has some contribution to lack of follow-up on the schooling of their children. As one parent is reported to have said about her son who left school (Kann, 1991):

“He doesn't have any books, I can't read, so how do I know if he can read?”

At the same time language remains a barrier to performance and progress for Basarwa children in school. At primary school level, the medium of communication in Botswana is Setswana up to standard four, after which teaching and learning occur in English. Basarwa who live in the settlement grow up exposed only to their mother language until they get to school. As a result, Basarwa children, unlike other children, are slow to learn as they have to take some time to learn the Setswana language at the same time as their school subjects. It is however interesting to note that in spite of the barriers experienced in their schooling, Basarwa children show a high enthusiasm for schooling and all (100%) interviewed at the Diphuduhudu Primary School, indicate that they like to be at school because they learn how to read and write, and that schooling increases their employment chances. The same optimism is shared by parents who indicate that schooling is necessary as it prepares their children for a good future. They express a general feeling that “we are nothing,” but our children can get an education to live a different lifestyle from us. This not only indicates parents’ understanding of their social and economic state of marginality, but it also shows their perception of how schooling can play a role in changing their predicament.

This paper intends to focus on the topical issues, problems and prospects surrounding education provision for Basarwa children in Botswana, and to determine a possible community based school model which is cognisant of the culture and language of Basarwa children in education, and with a possibility of enhancing their participation in schooling.

## CURRENT PROBLEMS IN THE EDUCATION OF BASARWA CHILDREN

### I. Problems Related to Access to Schooling

Previous efforts on the participation of the Basarwa children in education under the aegis of the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) have always been problematic mainly on the basis of their access and retention in the school system. Although several efforts have been made to improve access to education for Basarwa children through such strategies as provision of hostel accommodation, establishment of schools in RAD settlements, giving children free uniforms, food rations and toiletries, their school attendance continues to be erratic. As one school teacher at Motokwe commented:

“Basarwa children in winter they desert school, after winter they return.”

How to retain these children in the education system remains a major challenge for the Botswana education system (Ministry of Education, 1993). Some studies (Allison, 1981; Kann et al., 1989; Tshireletso, 1997) indicate that problems such as distance to school, poverty, children having to work at home, (for example, looking after goats), children not interested in schooling, disability, corporal punishment, limited facilities, age limits, culture (for example verbal insults), separation from parents for a long time, and the language of instruction are also barriers to school attendance for Basarwa children. However, the teacher-learner

relations in the classroom become crucial in understanding the learning environment for these children in a school context. The role of teachers and teaching has essentially been instrumental in transmission of the language and culture of the dominant Tswana group. This approach to teaching has had a tremendous influence on classroom teaching and learning whereby teaching remains authoritative, teacher centered, with a less regard for the learner's background, especially his language and culture. The curriculum and its transmission in the classroom then becomes an area of contestation, subversion and shifting of cultural codes (Connel, 1992) whereby children of marginalized ethnic groups command little control in the teaching-learning process and have a high chance of losing out as compared to their counterparts from majority ethnic groups. In their learning, pupils in this context learn by memorization, have little cognitive understanding of curriculum content and also have a good chance of losing their own language and culture, with an expectation to be submissive to those with authority, power and control over them. It is clear that education in this context offers less value to a minority ethnic child and raises doubt as to why they need to go through it.

## II. Teachers' Attitudes toward Basarwa Children

The school teachers at both the Diphuduhudu and Motokwe Primary Schools are from the main dominant Tswana ethnic groups. They bring into the classroom their own cultural views of teaching and learning, as well as deeply seated biased attitudes towards the Basarwa as an ethnic group. On the other hand the learners also come into the classroom with their home culture and its views of knowing, values of knowledge, as well as mother tongue. In this situation teachers tend to experience teaching problems, mainly of communication with the pupils (Reimer, et al., 1997) and at the same time learners also experience learning problems, mainly of situating knowledge transmitted in their own socio-cultural context (Brock-Utne, 1993) which in most cases also contribute to the high rate of attrition for indigenous children in the school system. Indicating some of their experiences in teaching Basarwa children, some of the teachers interviewed say:

"We communicate with the parents, but sometimes when we find fault with a RAD pupil, parents don't understand because they themselves don't train their children. Most understand Setswana but not the idea that we are trying to communicate (*Teacher, Motokwe Primary School*)."

However, another teacher at Motokwe Primary School says:

"There are some linguistic problems. They (Basarwa children) say yes, rather than yes madam or yes sir. They don't greet. They don't greet at home. The parents say the children are very young, that they don't know how to greet (*Teacher, Motokwe Primary School*)."

Regarding the discipline of the children at school, another teacher observed:

“There is also a problem of discipline at times in the school. Children drink (alcohol) and they take tobacco. Even those children in standard One, so sometimes when they are in need of a dose, usually of ground tobacco deposited inside the lower lip, they become drowsy and cannot concentrate in class.”

The issue of alcohol and drug abuse is recorded as common among most indigent minority communities and it also has negative effects on children of school going age who either directly partake as abusers or are indirectly affected by parents and older siblings whose misuse of alcohol and drugs leads them to abuse of the younger family members through lack of care, lack of love, etc.

Furtherstill, Basarwa children remain disadvantaged in the school not only because of the language barrier, but also because of their geographical environment, which provides very little educational experience that relates to what they learn in school. As one teacher observed:

“Compared with other children, Basarwa children are slow to learn, maybe it is because of their environment (*Teacher, Diphudukudu Primary School*).”

This statement does not only articulate problems of pedagogical practice experienced by teachers when confronted with children of a minority, other culture which is different from theirs, it also reveals the competing discourses within a classroom set up where children's identities often run at angles to the dominant culture (Mallan, 1998). At the same time the conversations reveal the power of the teacher over pupils, parents and of the curriculum in determining knowledge in the classroom. Power relations as a major characteristic of organizations, including school classrooms also depicts asymmetric and unequal relations. In a classroom context what action or non-action teachers take is an expression of power. Actions of teachers in the classroom on deciding how to organize their teaching, which student is chosen to talk, what language is to be used and so on, can be a perpetuation or a challenge to existing power relations (Ginsburg & Lindsay, 1992). In actual fact, as is the case with Botswana, the dominant forms of pedagogy used by the teachers tend to use language codes and forms of cultural capital favouring achievement and participation of children from majority ethnic and in most cases rich families, at the expense of the poor, ethnically marginalized students. Thus power distribution and use in the classroom has a direct contribution towards performance, whether positive or negative in the learner. As a result, how power is distributed and resourced, primarily by the teacher in the classroom, becomes a very crucial element in education provision. In the case of minority ethnic Basarwa children of Botswana, the use of Setswana (a language of the majority ethnic groups) and symbolic representations of Tswana (Setswana speaking people) culture in the classroom as sanctioned by the curriculum and the teacher, becomes a limiting factor in their performance and progress.

This situation also provides a challenge for teachers in that they have to communicate with parents and children whose first language is not Setswana, and teachers cannot speak Kua, the local San language. Teachers seem to have a prejudice against parents, feeling that they encourage children to attend school only on an irregular basis and also send them to school dirty. The teachers have a lack of familiarity with the social, economic and even cultural life of the Basarwa, which

is quite different from their own Tswana culture. It is probably because of this lack of understanding of the Basarwa life that teachers maintain their prejudice, of which they are probably unaware towards the parents and the pupils. The result is poor contact between the school (teachers) and the community, which also in turn has a negative impact on the schooling of Basarwa children as they feel the school is dislocated from their socio-cultural reality.

### III. Effect of School Hostels on the Schooling of Basarwa Children

In order to make education accessible to Basarwa children who are from settlements without schools, the RADP provides hostel accommodation near a village primary school. The distance between the hostels and home settlement would range from more than 10 to 35 km. Children are normally collected from their homes by RADP arranged transport at the beginning of each school term and are returned home by the same arrangement at the end of each term. The RADP also pays wages of hostel caretakers and cooks, provides school uniforms for children and meals during their residence in the hostels and pays school fees. Despite the relative proximity to school that a hostel accommodation provides, the continued low rate of school attendance and high drop out rate of RAD children from settlement and village schools are clear indicators that problems on provision of education to the RADS cannot only be associated with distance from school. At least as part of the responsibility for low attendance and high drop out rate lies with the manner in which the RADP itself is being implemented. RADP hostels are in despair, staff are untrained, overall management is poor and many RAD children lack both the school uniforms and shoes, (Chr. Michelsen Institute, 1995; Kann, et al., 1989). Girls in particular are the most affected by hostel life as well as the cultural differences between the home and the school. Poor supervision of the children and lack of security in the hostels has increased the chance that young girls will become pregnant while residing in an RADP hostel. Both the traditional ceremonies carried out at first menses and early marriage also prevent many girls from completing their schooling as they are to be confined in the home.

In an interview with a group of nine girls staying in the hostel at Motokwe as they were polishing the steps of the Caretaker's house one afternoon, they explained that while they are ethnically Basarwa, they speak Sekgalagadi at home. "We can hear our parents speak Sesarwa, but we can't speak it." They offered their recommendations for hostel improvement and a sharp critique of their lives in Motokwe away from their settlement home:

"They should paint the houses, plant trees, oranges. We want fruits."

"It should be cleaned so we RAD kids can be happy. The holes should be filled in the fence, so the cows don't come to eat our clothes."

"We want a wheelbarrow so we can clean around here and carry water when there is no water."

"After washing we should wear nice dresses."

Although hostels were established to provide children with accommodation in the walking distance to school, conditions of life in the hostels frustrate and anger mothers and fathers who have no voice in the management of RAD hostels. They complain that the hostels are dirty and that their children are not well cared for. "They are not in good care," asserted a father from Tshwaane settlement." No one encourages them to clean themselves," the father added referring to the children residing at the hostels. Although parents have continually voiced their need to have some control over hostel management, asserting that they themselves rather than strangers from outside the community should be hired as caretakers, nightwatchmen and cooks. No one listens to them. Although the Remote Area Dweller officers (RADO) are to act in loco parentis for the RAD children during their stay in the hostels, they do not dispense well of their expected duties either. According to the hostel caretaker at Dutlwe, "RADOs normally come to the hostel just passing. They haven't come to see the RAD children." RADOs do not carry out orders for uniforms and shoes for RAD children in good time as well. Children sometimes wait for up to three years to receive their uniforms. As a result of this clothing problem, children often go to school in tattered uniforms. They are sent back from school by their teachers because of the poor condition of their clothing. They miss school, and since they have no change of clothes, they return to school the next day wearing the same tattered uniforms. "Even one student was sent back this morning for going to school with his buttocks out." a caretaker confessed. "I tried to patch them but it didn't help. The teacher tells them to go back and get their uniforms but there are non here." Sometimes children end up dropping from school because of the problem of lack of uniforms. They also do not have shoes. "We want shoes, socks," explained a young girl living in Motokwe hostel. "Now it's so hot, we don't have shoes. The sun burns our feet."

The hostel conditions are not only made serious by lack of parents' involvement over hostel management but also by the tension that exists between RAD policy and actual practical implementation as well. There tends to be a feeling amongst some officers involved with RADP implementation that the Basarwa, who are generally looked down upon by their Tswana neighbors are being given too much assistance and attention from government through the policy, which they Batswana do not get.

#### IV. Language and Culture Problems in the Pedagogy for Basarwa Children

Education is viewed by both Basarwa parents and children as a vehicle for social mobility. However, children are faced with a situation of conflict between their preference for schooling and high rate of attrition in school, with barely a few making it to the finishing classes. At the Diphuduhudu Primary School, the school records showed a decline in number of pupils as they moved into higher classes, with a standard seven class of only five pupils ! One of the factors contributing to this situation of conflict is the incompatibility between the culture of the school and the pupils' home culture. Pupils are faced by a school environment, which has very little consideration for their language and culture. In this situation,

according to Garcia (1992), children of ethnic minorities are faced with a dilemma of either selecting alienation from their parents by learning the language and culture of the assimilating national group, or selecting alienation within the nation by staying with the language and culture of their parents. For those Basarwa children who choose to continue with their education, the culturally biased curriculum and examination system continue to make them marginalised through the seventh grade, where teachers assert that children's limited vocabulary forces them to grope for words when taking the formal examination:

“If a Mokgalagadi (or a Mosarwa) child uses a Sekgalagadi word because he doesn't know the Setswana word, it is wrong. The problem is the exam markers are from Gaborone (the capital city). They do not represent different cultures. We need markers from different tribes. They need to be more respectful of different cultures. Different cultural groups should be represented (*Teacher, Motokwe Primary School*).”

Yet no provisions are made to increase their exposure to the world outside their communities. No funds are available for field trips to other parts of the country, and children have neither the opportunity nor the money to travel outside the district. However, at examination time, they are expected to compete at the same level with children from all over the country and because of this lack of capital and exposure to concepts their performance is heavily compromised. As one teacher explained:

“They don't know certain ideas. We need to provide transportation to the students to see things. They don't know what is a museum, an abattoir, even when they read a story. A trip to the abattoir. A trip to parliament. A trip on a train.” They don't know what a train is. When the exam come, they are talking about the train (*Teacher, Motokwe Primary School*).”

In spite of the difficulties their children experience in getting education, parents continue to express high optimism and expectations on their childrens' schooling. Some of the parents asserted:

“I like their education, they can provide income for us (*Mother, Khekhenye*).”

“Education can be a wealth no one can take from you (*Mother, Tshwaane*).”

“We want our children to be educated, so they can have a future for themselves (*Father, Motokwe Farms*).”

## A COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH TO SCHOOLING FOR BASARWA CHILDREN

### I. The Importance of a Community Based Approach

The current provision of education for Basarwa children highlights exclusion of their language and culture and non-involvement of parents in schooling as some of the major problems affecting their retention and performance in education.



However, as Hollins (1996) noted teaching and learning are more meaningful and productive when curriculum content and instructional process include culturally mediated cognition, culturally appropriate social institutions for learning and culturally valued knowledge. This means that pedagogy for Basarwa children can be more effective if it takes into account their community culture and the community and learner's perception of teaching and valuable knowledge. Several authors have noted the crucial link between culture and pedagogy (Cole, 1974; Hollins, 1996; Reynolds, et al., 1982; Ho, 1998) particularly when it comes to the education of cultural minorities. Parental participation in the schooling of the young is also noted as an important dimension of this teaching and learning process. The community based teaching and learning is used with the Inuk, Mohawk, Algonquin and Cree indigenous communities of Canada using community perceptions of what are appropriate teaching and teacher characteristics. This approach, according to Wolforth (1997), helps both outside researchers and community members themselves with baseline data on how aboriginal teachers teach. Using a similar paradigm or model for structuring classroom interactions in the context of education provision for Basarwa children can turn upside down the current practice of pedagogy, and empower the Basarwa pupil and parent in the school. It is however difficult to say how effective it can be as research data on this approach's practical use in classroom interaction is rather scanty particularly in the African context.

The following reference is here made to a participatory research experience involving Basarwa community members (mixed up with other non-Basarwa RADs) in determining how to improve education for RAD children within their locality. The participatory research involved using community members as experts and as researchers in their own community based problem of education provision.

## II. A Participatory Research Experience

A participatory research exercise was carried out in Motokwe involving Basarwa participants from Tshwaane and Khekhenye RAD settlements in Kweneng district in October 1996. The key areas of concern were to identify those factors that could be contributing to poor attendance of the RAD children in school and how conditions of their education can be improved. Previous studies, (Kann, et al., 1989; Tshireletso, 1997; Ministry of Education, 1993) have already confirmed that most of the missing children from school are children of the RADs.

The participatory research exercise focussed on the problem issues surrounding the schooling of RAD children, and involved parents and other community members, non-governmental organizations, village extension teams, central and local government personnel, the school and school personnel for data collection. Here information flow was reversed. Knowledge and information was owned by community members. They identified and assessed what prevails within the community regarding their childrens' schooling (assessment). They went further to examine why the identified situation or problems exist (analysis). Finally, they decided on what action can be taken to address the situation (action).

Dividing themselves into four methods-based groups (i.e. house to house survey, village profile, observation, and interviews), the participants identified areas within the local context on which to focus and they designed questions to guide their data collection. However, locally generated data collection methods were not used here, mainly as part of ensuring the validation of the research process and to make the findings generalizable.

Participants gained new experience in collecting data, shifted and expanded their outlook concerning their own practice and beliefs and gained confidence in their own skills and abilities. When new facts were unearthed, learning, here defined as a personal paradigm shift, took place. They were empowered through the exercise. In the process, revelation was made of the long standing political divisions between Basarwa and their Bakgalagadi neighbors, resulting from a history of inequitable power and resource distribution between the two groups. Basarwa participants complained about the past injustices suffered at the hands of the Bakgalagadi, ill treatment of Basarwa workers on Bakgalagadi farms, the disproportionate amount of development funding allocated to Motokwe, to the detriment of the nearby Basarwa RAD settlements. These complaints reveal the Basarwa's deep felt or imagined, as well as practical realities of being a marginalized groups. Crystallized into school and classroom contexts of interaction between Basarwa children and teachers from dominant Tswana groups, these deep seated historical relations of hegemony and subordination continue to characterize the nature of the relationship between the two social groups.

### III. The Participatory Research on Hostels, Teaching and Learning

#### 1. *On hostel accommodation*

Although most of the Basarwa participants were at first uneasy to speak out, after much persuasion they began to speak out. They made the following comments concerning their children's education:

“Our children are made to cook for themselves even though there is a Caretaker employed to cook for them.”

“The PTA is not representative of us parents of the children at the hostels. PTA members are from Motokwe (composed of mostly Bakgalagadi parents). It is therefore not fair to say we are not cooperating with PTA.”

Some other observations with Basarwa parents at Khekhenye revealed the following views about hostel accommodation for their children :

1. An interview with Mr. Sisco, a farmer from Khekhenye with a boy and a girl at Motokwe hostel. “One is doing standard 2. I don't know what standard the other one is doing. I have never asked. *Ke lekgarebe* (She is a young lady).” Asked how often he visits his children at the hostel, he replied, “I check them once a month. There is no regulation that prevents me from visiting them more often. I am lazy to visit them frequently.”

Sisco asserted that some of the problems continuing to influence high drop out rate is caused by older children taking smaller children's clothes. Complaining about the Kweneng district council's failure to provide clothes to all children, he explained that when clothes finally come, they are not sufficient for all the children. When asked whether he has problems with his children living at the hostel or attending school at Motokwe, he responded, "I do not have problems with children attending school at Motokwe, as long as they are properly looked after."

But Mr. Sisco felt strongly that a nursery school should be built in Khekhenye. Children should only go to school in Motokwe after standard three. "Younger children should remain with us until they are old enough to wash their clothes."

2. Mme Mmalepone, a Khekhenye parent, talking about the sexuality of Basarwa girls explained, "sexual activity starts at an early age, certainly before puberty. Our children tell us *hone ke basha* (live in modern days). They live a different type of life from their parents."

"I want my children to go to school and be different from me. They should take advantage of government services and resources." Asked why she thinks the school is useful, she said, "To qualitatively improve the lives of Basarwa, to find better employment."

3. Mma Kgosi, the Khekhenye Chiers wife, was asked whether she and her husband ever encourage their children to read at home. "They are very playful," she said. The conversation moved to the hostels, with Mma Kgosi asserting that children should only stay at the hostels after standard three or four, "when they are able to bathe themselves and do their own washing."
4. The Village Development Committee (VDC) Chairman complained that young children are made to cook for themselves at the hostels. "There are possibilities of boiling water spilling over and causing serious burns. Two girls at the hostels were hurt while cooking. We are not against children cooking. We agreed as parents that while living at the hostels children should not be made to lose touch with their culture, which includes girls taking over daily household chores such as cooking, sweeping their surroundings for the younger ones. But we strongly feel that the caretaker needs assistants. She cannot cope alone. Problems always arise at night, such as children falling sick or bullies harassing young ones or girls. It is not safe for her as a woman."

## 2. *On teaching and learning*

Teachers feel inadequately trained to cope with the problem of teaching Basarwa children using Setswana as a second language. However, all but one of the teachers interviewed at Motokwe Primary School have a Primary Teacher's Certificate (PTC), and she holds a semi-PTC. Their teaching experiences at school range from 0 to 22 years they explained.

"Most pupils who come to school have difficulty with Setswana."

"Even Bakgalagadi don't speak Setswana until they come to school. Sometimes if you are not a Mokgalagadi you can't understand anything they say. And your job is to teach many subjects."

Primary school teachers in Botswana teach more than two subjects and do not specialize. The teachers also do not have training to assist the children in the challenges of learning a new language.

“In the Teacher Training College we were taught how to teach slow learners,” a teacher explained. “But we have problems in this place since Setswana is their second language.”

Teachers’ lack of training to teach Setswana as a second language, and requisite lack of strategies to assist children in their learning of Setswana severely restricts the pupils’ access to classroom activities. Their lack of specialized training also impacts upon children with learning or physical disabilities. One deaf girl and one mentally retarded boy attended primary school in Motokwe, and both are mainstreamed in regular classes. While these children have been granted formal access to school, their access to the substance of school is limited by the teachers’ lack of training and experience in special education. No staff member at the school knows any of the modes of communicating with the deaf, and teachers have no training in developing learning tools for mentally retarded children.

The quality of instruction is also affected by the teachers’ lack of insider knowledge of local culture and practice of teaching. Norms concerning gender, learning and teaching, and adult-child interactions differ across cultural groups. While teachers described cultural and socio-linguistic discontinuities between themselves and their pupils, they could not articulate strategies for helping children cope with the difficulties that ensue.

#### IV. The Possibilities: A Community Based Constructivist/Pragmatist-Sociohistoric Framework and Teacher Education Reform

The role of a community centered approach to education for Basarwa communities is herein explored particularly with the view to reform the currently used initial teacher preparation approach to enable non-Basarwa teachers to cope with the classroom challenges of cultural and socio-linguistic discontinuities between themselves and their pupils. The constructivist perspective recognizes that learners and teachers bring prior knowledge and experience with them into the classroom, which influence and shape their interaction. Additionally, according to the pragmatist-sociohistoric view, knowledge and experience are located and constructed in an individual’s interaction with others and participation in the community.

The constructivist/pragmatist-sociohistorical perspectives as theoretical basis to a teacher education model focuses more on what teachers think about teaching and how they understand the effect of their practice (Stuart, 1998). In other words, teacher education allows for student teachers to be reflective on their teaching experience, and as Drever & Cope (1989) observe, student teachers are encouraged to critique the dominant norms which govern practice in their placement in schools. They become transformative intellectuals who would use theory acquired at college or university to criticize practice. Teaching and learning becomes a more collaborative and complementary experience.

An underlying concept of this approach towards teaching and learning is the understanding that teachers and learners are creators and products of socially constructed knowledge. The teacher preparation process is characterized by dialogue, reflection and inquiry in order to bring about change in the views of learners as makers of meaning and discipline oriented learning as constructed and situated in context and curriculum as open, flexible, and constructed by students and teachers. The role of the learner is suddenly transformed from that of a passive recipient of knowledge to an active participant with claim to knowledge at a more or less similar level as the teacher.

This does not only change the teacher-learner interaction in a classroom context, but it also, according to Angier & Povey (1999), provides an important foundation for improving curriculum and other school practices. The learner in this model is placed at the center of the pedagogical process with a focus on providing him with a relevant education and cultivating his interest in learning. By orientation, this approach to teacher preparation emphasizes on the use of the school as the location of teacher preparation rather than the college or university. It places less emphasis on giving student teachers technical knowledge about teaching and learning, but instead they are developed on their capacities and cognition to address the needs of diverse pupils in diverse contexts. The teacher in this case has to appreciate the dynamic nature of classroom cultures as forever shifting, with contestations, problematic and differing from day to day as well as learner to learner. It is crucial to note that learners in their individual capacities experience culture differently (Angier & Povey, 1999). An important aspect of this initial teacher preparation is for student teachers to appreciate the socio-cultural contexts of learners as areas of influence to how students learn. In this case the individual's personal experience and the local community form an important resource to a teacher preparation process. The teacher's classroom responsibility of proposing questions and explanations and evaluation of contributions made by pupils is placed in the hands of learners. This dislocates knowledge and the power to define it from being a teacher's possession by virtue of his position in the classroom to being a shared resource.

Thus dialogical interaction particularly at the affective level becomes important not only to knowledge distribution but also to cognitive development, according to the sociohistorical perspective (Greeno et al., 1996). Most importantly, learners are made to recognize their local community as a knowledge resource, specifically in this case of language and culture, which are also important for maintaining an individual's self identity. What becomes important for learning to take place becomes the learner's and the teacher's ability to communicate in a context where both the linguistic meaning and the emotional response are mutually clarified (Gorman, 1974) whenever clarification is necessary, thus leaving little room for misunderstandings and uncertainty. The teacher's role in classroom power relations becomes less supreme to that of the learner as both recognize the need to learn from each other. In this case knowledge from the language and cultural background of the learner and teacher becomes situated in sociohistorical context of both the learner and teacher rather than being the teacher's possession alone.

## CONCLUSION

Education provision for children of ethnic minorities is always problematic in terms of meeting their linguistic and cultural needs. At most, these children find that non use of their language and lack of reference to their culture in classroom teaching-learning negates their interest and pursuit of schooling. In the case of Botswana's Basarwa hunter gatherer ethnic minority children, they have been reported to drop out of school early, many do not complete school and most do not care to attend school at all, and are sometimes dubbed in official circles as the "missing children" from the school system. What is clear is that the dynamics of classroom interaction, amongst other things, highly contribute to failure to absorb these children in the school system. However, it will be interesting to deeply study and understand the dynamics of this teacher-pupil interaction with a particular reference to use of language and culture symbols in classroom instruction.

Although governments the world over, with emergence of a new wave of democratization recognize and uphold rights of ethnic minorities amongst others (with Botswana included), the fact that the education system does not cater well for the needs of ethnic minority children, not by deliberate design but by default of continued manifestation of old traditions of teaching and learning maintained in classrooms calls into question the need to alter these attitudes and classroom power relations. Traditionally, teachers have been viewed as having a position of power in the classroom that is beyond question. However, in order to allow for participation of marginalized children in the classroom, by enabling a recognition of their language and culture as useful resource in classroom discourse, it is necessary to have a change in classroom power relations, thus giving them a power to define knowledge in their interaction with the teacher and with one another in the classroom.

## REFERENCES

- Allison, C. 1981. *The Economics of Household Demand for Children's Schooling: A Study of Kweneng District, Botswana*. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of London, London.
- Angier, C. & H. Povey 1999. One Teacher and a class of students: Their perception of the culture of their mathematics and its construction. *Educational Review Journal*, 51 (1): 147-160.
- Barnard, A. 1992. *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa. A Comparative Ethnography of Khoisan Peoples*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Brock-Utne, B. 1993. *Education in Africa*. University of Oslo, Oslo.
- Chr. Michelsen Institute 1995. *NORAD'S Support of the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) in Botswana*. Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo.
- Cole, M. 1974. *Culture and Thought: A Psychological Introduction*. Wiley, New York.
- Connel, R. W. 1992. *Transformative Labour. Theorizing the Politics of Teachers' Work*. University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh.
- Drever, E. & P. Cope 1989. Students' use of theory in an initial teacher education programme. *Journal of Education for Teaching International Research and Pedagogy*, 25 (2): 97-109.

- Garcia, R. I. 1992. Cultural diversity and minority rights: A consummation to be devoutly demurred. In (J. Lynch, C. Modgil, and S. Modgil, eds.) *Cultural Diversity and the Schools*, pp.45-65. Falmer Press, Bristol.
- Ginsburg M. & B. Lindsay 1992. *Conceptualizing the Political Dimension in Teacher Education*. University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburg.
- Gorman, A. H. 1974. *Teachers and Learners: The Interactive Process of Education*. Ally and Bacon Inc, Boston.
- Greeno, J. G., A. M. Collins & L. B. Resnick 1996. Cognition and learning. In (D. C. Berliner & R. C. Calfee, eds.) *Handbook of Educational Psychology*, pp.15-46. Macmillan Library Reference USA, New York.
- Ho, D. Y. F. 1998. Indigenous psychologies: Asian perspectives. *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*, 29(1): 88-103
- Hollins, E. R. 1996. *Culture in School Learning: Revealing the Deep Meaning*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, New Jersey.
- Kann, U. 1991. *Where the Sand is the Book – Education for Everyone in the Nyae Nyae Area: A Challenge*. Stockholm. A Consultancy Report for Nyae Nyae in Namibia and Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA).
- Kann, U., D. Mapolelo, & P. Nleya 1989. *The Missing Children: Achieving Universal Basic Education in Botswana – The Barriers and Some Suggestions to Overcome Them*. Ministry of Education, Gaborone.
- Mallan, K. 1998. P(1)aying the piper: Making safe spaces for marginal voices. *Journal of Educational Practice and Theory*, 20(2): 35-43.
- Ministry of Education 1993. *Revised National Policy on Education*. Botswana Government Printer, Gaborone.
- Reimer, F., S. Gaborone & L. Tshireletso 1997. *Supporting Our Children's Learning: A Community Based Research and Training Programme in Motokwe, Kbekhenye and Tshwaane*. Gaborone. UNICEF Botswana.
- Reynolds, R. E., M. A. Taylor, M. S. Steffensen, L. L. Shirley & R. C. Derson, 1982. Cultural schemata and reading comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly* 17(3).
- Stuart, S. 1998. *How Teachers Acquire and Use Knowledge Skills and Values: Insight from the "Teacher Thinking Literature."* Unpublished Report from Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Workshop, March 1998. University of Sussex.
- Tshireletso, L. 1997. "They are government's children": School and community relations in a remote (Basarwa) settlement in Kweneng district, Botswana. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 17 (2): 173-188.
- Wolforth, J. 1997. *Discussion Papers on Models of Teacher Education in Remote Areas: Indigenous Teachers in Canada, Rural teachers in Peru*. Resource paper presented at the conference on developing quality schooling in rural areas, Mpumalanga, South Africa.

————— Accepted September 25, 2000

Author's Name and Address: Lucky TSHIRELETSO, Molepolole College of Education, P/Bag 8, Molepolole. Botswana. E-Mail: tshirele@noka.ub.bw