

SAN JUNIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF LITERACY IN
SCHOOL AND AT HOME: A CASE STUDY

by

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(Under the Direction of Michelle Commeyras)

ABSTRACT

The study investigated how San students of Botswana in a Junior Community Secondary School understood as literacy in school and at home. A narrative qualitative case study approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of what students' value and understand by literacy from co-participants and informants perspectives.

Findings across participants' stories revealed that they saw literacy as those things that had value to them and these influenced how they read the word and the world. Storytelling, games and singing were labeled literacy to the six participants in the study and the two San informants. Knowledge of different plants, basket weaving and sculpting was literacy to some of the participants.

The conclusion is that the participants' ways of reading and knowing the word and the world need to be included in the school curriculum for the benefit of not only San students but non San Batswana. In addition, appropriate pedagogic strategies need to be adopted in San classrooms for San formal schooling success.

INDEX WORDS: San of Botswana Literacy, Home Literacy, and San Content Literacy

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DEDICATION

To all the San and other marginalized peoples in Botswana.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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 Botswana, 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 (see appendix A) 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 remember vividly a neighbors' daughter in the village who got pregnant by a San man. This brought great shame to her parents, especially the father. I could never understand why because it was an open secret that he had a San woman as a concubine at his cattle post. Of course; there was no question of marriage between the girl and the San man. The pregnancy was shame enough as far as the parents were concerned.

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 two 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.

A story of my own about the San people is particularly important in conveying my understanding of the San. One day my father came from the cattle post with a San boy he was very fond of named Xau. At that time Xau was about eight or nine years old and I will always remember how he could not sleep or eat when he came to the city. Everything mesmerized him: the houses, cars, food and every little thing. For the whole two weeks he was in the city, he went around in a daze of wonderment. Honestly, I could not see what made him so amazed. Our house was just like any government house. It was small. There were not enough beds for 8 children, 2 cousins and parents. However, in retrospect, I realize that I too would have been dazed and amazed. This was a completely different environment from his life in the Kalahari Desert. I remember his mother and father's little mud hut. One day when the family was out, I went on an adventure and peeped inside the little hut. I was shocked to find that there was no bed. Instead I saw a number of goat skins on the floor and some old and torn blankets. There was also no

furniture, except for an old wooden chair next to some dirty looking plastic containers.

After earning my first college degree I was posted as a teacher in the remote part of northern Botswana. There I came into direct contact with some San children and other minorities, such as the Wayeyi or the river people. I remember two San boys I taught in a senior secondary school. They were the only San students. 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 poverty stricken 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 scholarship to come to the US was a dream come true because it seemed a way to gain the knowledge, experiences and credibility to contribute to San empowerment not only in Botswana but across Southern Africa. My focus is 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).

My personal experiences and what I have studied about language, culture and literacy prompted me study the educational experiences of San children's literacy in one Botswana junior secondary school to better understand their challenges within formal education along with their view of what it means to be literate. I adopted 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 Batswana society.

The San of the Kalahari

Botswana has the highest number of San people in Southern Africa and the approximately 50, 000 San (Wagner, 2006) have found themselves residing in the very dry areas of the Kalahari Desert without education or amenities. Nyati-Ramahobo (2004) says that due to their nomadic nature, they are present in 7 out of the 8 Administrative Districts in Botswana. According to Coulson and Campbell (2001) traditional San lore is a combination of the natural and the supernatural "with both realms existing within each other at the same time, but with the supernatural realm being seen by only those who know how to step into it..." (p. 31). The San do not separate the spiritual from their daily activities but, the two are integrated. God plays a very central role in the lives of the San and he is the creator of all life: animals, plants and humans. The San believe that in the beginning, "people were animals and animals were people" (p. 31). The earth is believed to have mystical powers and neither animals nor humans' own the land, but, they are both owned by the land.

The San believe that their God separated humans from animals but, the relationship between the two still remained very strong as humans can communicate with animals when they moved into the spirit realm. For example, the eland is held in very high regard by the San as it is believed to have mystical powers and metaphysical properties, hence, the name 'people of the eland.' The San believe that they have a lot to learn through animals as their god, *kaggen* (pronounced xagn) or the praying-mantis lives in the bones of the eland. In addition to reading the world through animals and spirits, rock art across Southern Africa helps to illuminate the San's way of making meaning.

According to Vinnicombe (1976), the existence of rock art was first noted by European travelers in the Cape in the eighteenth century. In the Kalahari desert alone, there are 4, 000 red finger paintings of which about 50 percent are animals, 37 percent geometrics and 13 percent human figures (Vinnicombe, 1976). This tells of the very close relationship that the San shared with wild animals and how human behavior was seen through the lens of animals and the cosmological world. For example, in studying rock art in Southern Africa, Vinnicombe observed that the wildebeest is hardly painted except for one picture. The explanation behind this is that it is believed to be a taboo animal as it is thought to interfere with the hunter's bow-string and arrow-heads. Also, it is believed to live among other animals under false pretenses and this unwelcome behavior is extended to humans, specifically to parents-in-law who are to be avoided. "The nature of the wildebeest leads it to interfere with hunting practices: the nature of a mother-in-law leads her to interfere in domestic affairs..." (Vinnicombe, 1976, p. 213). The San avoid conflict at all costs, hence, the need to avoid the qualities expressed by the wildebeest and other animals such as the zebra and the ostrich. This is one of the forms of literacy to the San people.

The Status of San in Botswana

Botswana is a country known by many for its shining democratic principles (<http://www.democracyweb.org/accountability/Botswana.php>). While Botswana has achieved socio-economic success in the past two decades, the San have been literally left behind in all spheres of life, education included (Mazonde, 2002). The San have been denied constitutional rights to which every other citizen of Botswana has claim (Saugestad, 1998). Unlike other Botswana citizens they have no territory and no recognized paramount chief. At least half of the San are living below the poverty line for Botswana and low nutritional status has been reported

among the very young and the old (Kgosidintsi, 1992). Without doubt, the San people (also referred to as Bushmen or *Basarwa*) are the poorest economically not only in Botswana but, throughout Southern Africa (Hays, 2002; Mazonde, 2002).

The San are treated in a condescending manner and are on the lowest rung of the ladder in all spheres of life in Botswana (Mazonde, 2002). The result has been that many San people have resorted to excessive drinking and drug abuse, including school going children who are not exempt from such abuse (Pridmore, 1995). It appears as though they see themselves as simply '*Basarwa*' a term used in a derogatory manner in Botswana. The reference to 'Mosarwa' "is a culturally loaded idiom in contemporary Botswana, referring to peoples classified as uncultured, uncouth 'Bushman' who have no rights to land and may be enslaved..." (Motzafi-Haller, 1994, p. 32). Motzafi-Haller reports that in carrying out research among the Batswapong people in 1981, the *Basarwa* were reported to be at the bottom of the hierarchy of ethnic groups in Botswana. Across time the lowly status of the San has been observed as seen in this communication by a British colonial in 1888:

The Bachwapong and Bakalahari speak a dialect of Sechwana and are of lower and inferior rank: many of their chiefs own flocks and herds and they are to be distinguished from the still lower Masarwa by these possessions and the cultivating of gardens" (Shapera, 1961, p. 420).

In 1993 when Motzafi-Haller (2002) returned to Botswana to continue research, she found some change. For example, the women of Tamasane were more celebratory of their *Basarwa* identity in the 1990s. Today in Botswana it is the government and those from outside who prefer terms such as 'remote area dwellers' and 'first peoples of the Kalahari' while those dwellers and peoples accept themselves as *Basarwa*. Due to the ongoing marginalization of the

San, Non-Governmental Organizations, such as Survival International (based in England) are fighting for San rights in Botswana and the rest of Southern Africa.

The San and Formal Education

The San are forced to learn in an education system that is foreign to them. Many of their socio-economic and political problems are due to the fact that formal education is failing them. Wagner (2006) wrote that San children go to school without shoes and adequate clothing. There is little the San of today can do about their status quo because they lack the education and proficiency in the national language (Setswana) to be able to fight for their rights at Setswana customary courts (Mogwe, 1994). This is denying the San and other minorities their Botswana rights (Solway, 2002). Providing formal education, in my view to San children appears a good thing as it does raise their social status, “even though it might not fully erase a stigma such as a lowly rated ethnicity” (Mazonde, 2002, p. 65). With formal education, they can work as professionals instead of cattle-herders. In order to survive in the global world, being literate is a must as readers and writers.

Given the current situation with San literacy and formal education frustrations, I conducted an interview and observation case study of San understandings of literacy and what it means to them in Botswana. My aim was to focus on a small group of students from the humanities and science subjects at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School (the school name is a pseudonym). I studied the students’ formal schooling literacy experiences in the humanities and science subjects. I inquired about their primary and secondary school experiences. In the context of Botswana there is a shift from the conventional understanding in which literacy was defined simplistically as “the ability to read and write with understanding, in Setswana, English or both: and the ability to carry out simple computations in everyday life

(Gaborone, et al, 1987:p. 2). The country adopted a wider understanding of literacy and numeracy which acknowledges the diversity and complexity in the possibilities of these concepts. Thus, for the purpose of the 2003 National Survey, literacy was defined as:

Literacy is a responsive and context specific multidimensional lifelong learning process designed to equip beneficiaries with specialized knowledge, skills, attitudes and techniques to independently engage in practices and genres involving listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy, technical functioning and critical thinking required in real life (Hanemann, 2005, p.8).

It is important to note that there is not one word in Setswana that means literacy. The term “literacy” is not one word in Setswana. I consulted Dr. Otlogetswe (personal communication, May 12th, 2009) who has written the most recent Setswana/English dictionary and he confirmed that there is no direct translation for literacy. This presents a challenge for researchers who use Setswana when interviewing research participants about literacy. When asking about literacy I said, “O tlhaloganya go nna le kitso kana go itse ele eng? Translated into English this asks, “what do you mean by knowing or to know?” Literacy must be indirectly investigated as meaningful ways of knowing.

Currently, the literature is silent on San indigenous literacy as it might inform their education to better meet their needs. San’s indigenous literacy practices and unique ways of reading the world are ignored in formal education in Botswana. In addition to reading the world through animals and spirits, rock art across Southern Africa, helps to illuminate the San’s traditional way of making meaning (Coulson and Campbell 2001). Hence, it was my aim to kick start research that is culturally appropriate and relevant to the San child and San communities.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following terms are defined:

Basarwa: A plural term used derogatively for the disadvantaged San people in Botswana (Motzafi-Haller, 1994). According to Boko (2002) it is used widely by non San to mean servant.

Batswana: People of Botswana

Case Study: A case study is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 16).

Co-Participant: I regarded my six participants as partners as opposed to mere give and take participants.

Dumela Mma/Rra: Hello, Sir/Madam

Germany: Unofficial football field where Mr. President and his friends played football.

Gwagisa: Term used by some San students to mean bullying.

Informant and Participants: Non San and San students who assisted me in the study by closely interviewing, observing and listening to what San students had to say about their past and present schooling experiences.

Kgotla: Traditional meeting place for the community (Chilisa & Preece, 2005).

Literacy: Ways of knowing and reading the word and the world.

Mma: Prefix used before a woman’s last name of before the name of her first born child.

Mosarwa: Singular for Basarwa.

Narratives: Described as “a phenomena under study and method of study” by Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 4). They go on to write that “...we think narratively as we enter into research relationships with teachers, create *field texts*, and write storied accounts of educational lives.” (p. 5).

Non-San: Batswana peoples who do not belong to the San ethnic group.

Participant Observer: The researcher is part of the setting as he/she “participates in the daily routines of this setting, develops ongoing relations with the people in it, and observes all the while what is going on” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p.2).

Remote Area Dwellers (RAD): RADs are made up of peoples or ethnic groups comprising of unique cultural identities or practices. According to Boko (2002) a lot of RADs have lost control of their traditional hunting and gathering lands. The districts or areas in which they were resettled “already had their own tribal and administrative patterns and institutions” (Boko, p. 102).

San: In scholarly circles, the term “Bushman” was replaced by the more neutral indigenous term “San” introduced by Wilson and Thompson (1968).

Social Construction of Knowledge: Knowledge constructed by participants in a particular culture or society. Learning must be tied to a concrete social situation and be integrative (Dewey, 1897).

Snowball Sampling: In the study I employed what researchers call snowball, chain or network sampling to find my participants (Merriam, 1998).

Stories: An account of a series of events. Stories can be true or fictitious.

Techere: Teacher

Tswana (Setswana): The national and majority language of Botswana. The people are Batswana (plural) and Motswana (singular). Tswana speakers are also found in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

Ubuntu/Botho: *Ubuntu / Botho* is a Southern African philosophy that stands for “respect for human life, mutual help, generosity, cooperation, respect for older people, harmony and

preservation of the sacred, respect and humane behavior.” (Chilisa & Preece, 2005, p. 9). In South Africa, it is known as *Ubuntu* and in Botswana, *Botho*. Throughout this study, I will use *Botho*.

Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Dissertation

In this chapter, I provided a brief introduction to the San of Botswana. In addition, I gave a definition of relevant terminology used in the study. Chapter Two is an explanation of the methods and methodology I employed in designing the study, selecting the participants and collecting and analyzing data. Chapter Three are the thirteen stories starting with my narrative about meeting the school deputy principal and ending with the narrative on the parents. Chapter Four concludes by looking for common themes across the narratives. In addition, I discuss the findings and situate them within the current literature in and outside Botswana. I also discuss the limitations to the study and offer recommendations that would result in a change in status quo regarding San formal education in Botswana.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In research parlance I conducted a narrative research study which as Merriam (1998) explains is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit” (p. 16). Within this case I collected interview and observation data both in and out of school with San and Non San students. Data about parents, teachers, school administrators and the school environment were also collected. Everything was very much interrelated and connected.

Why Narrative Research?

In researching the San students at Letsatsi and how they understood literacy and made meaning, my intention was to focus on the participants lived experiences. Stories portray life and they always have a message (Bruner, 2002). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) posit that human beings are by nature story tellers and the lives we lead are storied lives individually and socially. Furthermore, “learners, teachers, and researchers are story tellers and characters in their own and other’s stories” (p. 2). Hence, narrative inquiry is about stories lived and told. In addition, Connelly and Clandinin explain that narrative inquiry is a partnership “between the researcher and participant, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (p. 20). Narrative inquiry is the study of experience and experience should not be seen in isolation but it should be contextualized (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938). A narrative inquiry approach recognizes that although people are individuals they must be

understood in relation to other peoples or within their social context. This echoes the *Botho* philosophy in Botswana (“*motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe*”). A person can only be a person through others. Botho also known as Ubuntu in Zulu “is not merely positive human qualities, but the very human essence itself, which lures and enables human beings to become abantu or humanized beings, living in daily self-expressive works of love and efforts to create harmonious relationships in the community and the world beyond” (Mnyandu, 1997, p. 81). *Ubuntu/Botho* as methodology was necessary if I was to have any chance of San students speaking with me without fear as it preaches equality and respect of the researched.

According to Marjorie Shostak (1981; 2000) who lived among the !Kung San in Dobe region from 1969-1971 “telling stories is a main source of aesthetic pleasure for the !Kung” (p. 20). Through stories, children are entertained. They learn about love, respect, peace and how to conduct themselves from the stories told by adults. Stories have messages that teach the young about life. This is why I found the narrative inquiry approach culturally appropriate for my study of San student’s literacy experiences at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School in Botswana. By collecting their stories I was able to understand and represent how they view literacy in their lives. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) write that it is correct to say “inquiry into narrative” as it is “narrative inquiry” (p.2). This is because the narrative is both a “phenomenon and method” (p. 2). In my study “story” refers to the term I used to refer to the data collected and “narrative” to writing about the data.

Narrative inquiry is becoming very popular in social sciences research because of its focus on human experience (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Hence, because it focuses on human experience, the narrative “is situated in a matrix of qualitative research” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2) along with psychology, curriculum studies, anthropology and others.

Narrative inquiry as a mode of qualitative research was appropriate for my study because it values observed phenomena and it derives knowledge from actual experience rather than from apriori theory or belief, according to Webster & Mertova (2007).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write that it does not make sense to study storied lives and the world any other way than with narrative because as humans we understand the world narratively. This concurs with Johnson-Bailey (2004) who posits that “stories are the familiar and easily understood as the discourse used to frame our everyday lives...” (p. 174). She goes on to explain that researchers like the narrative approach because it is a natural way to collect data. I concur with Tappan and Brown (1991) that there is no better method to tell it as it was told like the narrative. Also, Johnson-Bailey writes that narratives “are told with moral authority and are representative of the cognitive and conative dimensions of the experiences” (p. 124). Cahnmann (2003) writes that through the narrative, many people can be reached who are not necessarily scholars and in the academia. Like Polkinghorne (1998) I want research to be “more successful and useful” (p. xi).

Narratives are also becoming popular as they give power to the disadvantaged and people of color in research. The San are a disadvantaged group within Botswana. The aim of narrative research is that their stories should portray the lives of those researched as authentically as possible. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990) the stories have the possibility of resulting in empowerment as voice is given to the researched. Britzman (2003) who writes that through stories, an individual finds words to express him/her and thus communicate with the researcher. In asking the San students to tell me their stories I sought a manner of communication that was natural to them. Indeed through stories the San students freely told me stories that related to literacy. Perhaps my willingness to listen provided a way for healing their

wounds as the ‘Others’ (Hooks, 1994; Smith, 1999) of Botswana. According to Pamphilon (1999), a story should not be taken only at its literal meaning. The researcher should look at the broader picture and situate a story within the broader political and social issues in society. In looking at the broader social and political landscapes in the stories, the inferior position of the San people in Botswana was once again documented. Also, the lack of *Botho* by the rest of Botswana towards the San was evident.

However, critics of the narrative approach lament the fact that issues of truth and subjectivity are not clear in narrative research. Hence, they argue that it is not ‘scientific’ enough. Alvermann (2000) counters those critiques by arguing that the writing of narratives as research findings often diminishes the researcher as teller. According to Alvermann, how the researcher tells the story and why she tells a story will have an impact upon the story. From whose point of view should the story be told? Alvermann posits this question is very important in narrative research as it portrays the power dynamics between the researcher and the researched. In telling the stories of the students, I was very much aware of what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to as “multiplicity of voices” (p. 147). In the study, my aim was to bring out the voices of the San students and their lived experiences. However, I do acknowledge that in writing about their stories my ‘silent voice’ was heard. For example, my efforts at buying them toiletry and asking for donations for them. This was bound to happen as stories in the study reflect my engagement with the participants and how the research process has shaped me as a researcher (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

How and Why did Letsatsi School Become My Site?

Conducting educational research in Botswana involves getting permission from the Ministry of Education and the school administration that then connected me to the relevant

teachers. Generally, getting permission to conduct research at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School was easy. I explained to the Ministry of Education official the purpose of my research and after a month I was granted the permission to conduct research. However, he did warn me to stay away from politics “as the San people are highly politicized.” In addition, he warned me that I was being watched. It was then left to my discretion to select a school I wanted to conduct research at in the Kgatleng District. A lecturer at the University of Botswana told me about Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School and she provided the information I needed to make my first contact there.

I contacted the school deputy principal of Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School about my desire to carry research in his school and he agreed. The deputy principal in turn let the school staff know about me. Once everyone was informed, I felt that I would be welcomed at the school. Letsatsi School is what is known as a Remote Area Dwellers School (RAD) (schools primarily for children from settlements far from villages in Botswana). I was certain of finding San students in the school. Its proximity to the capital city was convenient because there was nowhere for me to stay at the school so I could commute approximately 200 kilometers from my parents home in Gaborone.

How I Found my Student Informants and Participants

I employed what researchers call snowball, chain or network sampling to find my participants (Merriam, 1998). The snowball began with two Non-San students whom I met on my second day at the school in Mr. Selepe’s classroom. First I met Love, a confident girl who introduced me to a boy named Peace. I thought they would be good informants since they knew who were San students and could help me find those that would be likely to speak freely with me. The Deputy Principal had warned me in our first meeting that I might find it difficult to

identify San students because they take Tswana names to blend in with the Non-San Batswana. In addition to helping me find San participants Love and Peace agreed to tell me about their own observations of San students inside and outside the classroom. We met in an empty classroom four times so they could tell me about what they saw and heard. With the addition of each informant or participant I explained my expectations and promised to pay them (10.00USD or about 60.00BWP) for being in my study at the end of the school term. I told the participants that I was going to work with them closely by interviewing, observing and listening to what they had to say about their past and present schooling experiences. This would help me to understand their views of literacy in and out of school. In addition, I was going to share with them my schooling and life experiences in general and they were free to ask me any questions. To provide anonymity I have given them different names and in many cases ones that are English translations of their Setswana names.

My Non San informants Love and Peace told me stories about the San students they knew. I asked them to find San students who might collaborate with me as informants or as co-participants. They introduced me to Done and News who agreed to work as San informants. Then Done and News introduced me to Mr. President who agreed to be a participant. He in turn introduced me to his best friend, Knowledge who agreed to participate. Later Done and News introduced Happy to me and she agreed to participate. Love and Peace told me some stories about Trust. That led to asking Trust to participate and he agreed. Also, Love and Peace introduced me to Drought who agreed to be a participant. After I interviewed Drought, she led me to Receiver because she thought she was a better singer than her. In sum, I collected data from 2 non-San informants (Love and Peace), 2 San informants (Done and News) and 6 participants (Mr. President, Knowledge, Happy, Trust, Drought, Receiver).

Table 1. Participants and Informants Profile

Name	Age	Gender	Form/Grade
Mr. President (participant)	15	Male	Form One = Grade 8
Knowledge (participant)	14	Male	Form One= Grade 8
Happy (participant)	14	Female	Form One= Grade 8
Drought (participant)	15	Female	Form One= Grade 8
Receiver (participant)	16	Female	Form 2 = Grade 9
Trust (participant)	14	Male	Form One= Grade 8
Done (informant)	14	Female	Form One= Grade 8
News (informant)	15	Male	Form One= Grade 8
Love (informant)	14	Female	Form One= Grade 8
Peace (informant)	14	Male	Form One= Grade 8

How Did I Conduct Myself as a Researcher to Collect Data?

As Patton (2002) suggested, triangulation strengthens qualitative studies. In this research, data was collected from multiple sources including interviews, photography, observations, school assignments and a meeting with parents. I was both participant and observer at Letsatsi School. In participant observation, the researcher is very much a part of the setting. Participant observation has the advantages of producing quality data and quality of interpretation of data which in turn encourages the formulation of new questions grounded on the observations (De Walt & De Walt, 2002). As a participant observer I shared myself. Sometimes San students asked questions about my schooling and upbringing. I answered as honestly as I thought appropriate. My aim was not just to take information from them but to give information as well. Hence, I wanted a collaborative relationship and did not adopt the superior stance of a researcher or one who is more educated.

In order to establish rapport, I had to monitor my language during interviews and interactions with everyone. Almost immediately, I realized that the San students became very uneasy by the mention of the words ‘San,’ ‘Mosarwa’ or ‘Basarwa.’ Hence, when communicating with them, I avoided that language in favor of: “these students,” “your friends,” “those like you,” “those from remote area settlements” and “students from Kgomodiatshaba, Bodungwane or Moshaweng.” When communicating with non San students I used the words, “our friends,” “your friends” and “these students.” There was never any confusion about whom I meant when using these terms. Yet, teachers and other members of staff did refer to San students as “Basarwa” but, as my time at Letsatsi progressed, they began to alternate between the latter and “your children.” For example, Mr. Selepe, a Science teacher used to say to me “Tell your children to stop sleeping in class.” Indeed as time passed I did feel more of a parent than a researcher as I continuously brought San students toiletries and listened to their tales of frustration. I negotiated with the First National Bank of Botswana to buy San students’ toiletries as they were in dire need. I felt compelled to do this because to separate my research from students’ welfare would have showed a serious lack of *Botho* on my part. In turn, this would have seriously affected my relations with the San students. Gifts are important in San culture.

Interviews: Interviewing has been an important form of data collection in various types of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Before the interviews began, I gained students trust by getting to know them. I made it a point of seeking them out in school and chatting to them. I showed respect for the students by always honoring our appointments and if I promised to bring them some toiletries, I did that. In conducting interviews with them I was showing that I viewed them as capable and trusted their intelligence. Also, during the occasions when Done (one of my San informants) gave out toiletries, I was present. This I believe helped me in establishing *Botho*

with the students who in turn were more willing to share stories of their lived experience. This is important as formal interviewing is not culturally familiar in African settings whereas sharing stories is. Following the advice of Batswana researchers Chilisa and Preece (2005) I sought individual interviews to be a conversation between myself and the student (see interview protocol in appendix B).

Interviews were conducted in Setswana, a lingua franca for the informants, participants and me. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed soon thereafter. In addition, I had informal talks with students. Co-participants and informants would come to me and volunteer to share a story. These were times that allowed for flexibility and made it possible for me to follow the interests and concerns of the informants and participants. When I got home each evening, I transcribed the digitally recorded interviews from that day. In total I conducted 27 interviews with informants and participants. When the interviews were transcribed I had 392 pages of data.

Photography: According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) photographs help us to construct our lives and “are rich sources of field texts for the construction of social narratives” (p. 115). I gave the six San participants disposable cameras to take pictures in their environment and school. Love, one of my non San informants demonstrated how to use the cameras. After that, each student took some pictures as a test. Then, I asked them to take pictures of the things that represented literacy or had meaning to them. In Setswana I said, “O tlhaloganya go nna le kitso kana go itse ele eng? E ka tswa ele mo sekolong kana ko motseng?” which translated into English mean “what do you mean by knowing or to know? Either at home or in school?” After that the pictures were developed I met with each student to ask them to explain why they took a particular picture. This further shed light on students' experiences, perceptions and ways in which they make meaning. Students described what was in the photograph and why they took it.

Pink (2006) posits that as researchers, we can make a lot of sense from visuals and photographs. I asked probing questions like, “what is going on in this picture?” and “why did you take this picture?” The value of photography is that it allows for the visual image to be ‘read’ according to a given culture and within a given historical context, thus, providing a rich source of research information (Grbich, 2007). For example, Mr. President took a picture of a tree which looked very ordinary to me. From his explanation I learned that the root of the tree was very important in successful hunting of small animals. My meetings with the students about the pictures they took were digitally recorded and later transcribed. The students took 44 photographs and I have 30 pages of transcribed talk about the photographs.

Observations: Observation is an important source of data in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Observations are different from interviews in that they take place in a natural setting and they represent a firsthand account of what transpired in the setting (Merriam, 1998). I sat at the back of the classrooms and took descriptive notes of teacher and student talk and actions. Students in secondary schools in Botswana are used to having visitors in their classrooms as a result of the teaching practice supervised by teacher trainees from Colleges of Education. Hence, I did not expect the students to feel anxious by my presence. I observed humanities and science classes in a Form One (= grade 8) and Form Two (= grade 9). All lessons were 40 minutes as is typical in Botswana. I observed five English lessons and six science lessons. In addition, I observed twice when classes were taken to the school library. After each observation, I typed my notes and reviewed them to plan for subsequent observations. In total I spent eleven hours observing in classrooms which became 32 pages of typed data. I wrote field notes on things that happened outside of class seemed at the time related to my research questions.

Tests and Assignments: I asked the participants and some of their San friends to give me test papers from their English and Science classes. In total I had 28 test and homework papers (English and Science) from the 6 participants and San informants. In addition, I had 36 test papers and homework from other San students in the school.

Outside classes, my role was that of participant observer again as I ‘hung around’ the school observing on the goings on. At times I would go to the dining hall to listen and talk with the cooks as they prepared a meal for the students. Often I went to the hostels and sports grounds where I observed students playing, singing and telling stories. These experiences contributed to the rapport that developed between me and students at Letsatsi Junior Secondary School.

In the staffroom, teachers and other members of staff freely discussed students (San and non San) in my presence. This became another observation opportunity. Ms. Tau, the Guidance and Counseling teacher went out of her way to offer information that she deemed of importance to my research. She would seek me out in the staffroom and tell me stories about San students.

Parents’ meeting: I had to talk to the parents about their children’s’ schooling as failure to do so would have been construed as lack of *Botho* on my part. The parents were located through the snowballing sampling method (Merriam, 1998). By parents, I am not referring to the biological parents as such but, to any adult who is viewed as a guardian or caregiver of a San student. Some of the biological parents did not necessarily live in the same village as their children and it is often the norm by parents to assign the duty of ‘parent’ to an aunt, uncle, neighbor or older sibling. For some of the San students, social workers assumed the role of parents. A group meeting was most appropriate for because in Botswana, discussion is normally a family affair and rarely an individual’s sole endeavor (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). Botswana value *pitso or morero* (a talk or discussion). These talks or discussions are sometimes held at the

Kgotla, the traditional meeting place. Also, I thought a group meeting would diminish the power imbalance that normally exists in the case of individual interviews (Johnson-Bailey, 2004).

Hence, a meeting occurred with three parents. Among them was a thirty-five year old mother of eight children and two old grandmothers. The three women told me that they were not working. I had a talk with them to get an idea of what literacy meant to them and what they envisioned as literacy for their children. The meeting lasted 30 minutes and resulted in 10 transcribed pages.

Table 2. Data Inventory

Name	Interviews	Photographs	Tests /Assignments	English Class observations	Science Class Observations
Mr. President (participant)	2 (60 mins)	8	2	2	1
Knowledge (participant)	2 (60 mins)	8	2	2	2
Happy (participant)	2 (60 mins)	8	2	2	2
Drought (participant)	2 (60 mins)	10	2	2	2
Receiver (participant)	2 (60 mins)	6	2	1	1
Trust (participant)	2 (60 mins)	4	0	2	2
Done (Informant)	4 (30 mins)	0	1	2	2
News (Informant)	4 (30 mins)	0	0	2	2
Love (Informant)	4 (30 mins)	0	0	2	2
Peace (Informant)	4 (30 mins)	0	0	2	2
Group Interview	30 mins	1	1	1	1

How was the Data Analyzed and Interpreted to Write Narratives?

I kept in mind a metaphor used by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) of narrative being like “a soup” (p.155) while analyzing the data to write narratives. All the ingredients that make a delicious soup have to be included and in the right amounts. According to Clandinin and Connelly, the ingredients in our narrative pots can differ. In my narrative pot, the main ingredient was people accompanied by details about time, place, weather, humor, songs, tales and of course conversation. I did not employ the conventional method of coding for themes across transcripts when constructing the narratives in Chapter Three writing because “those themes separated people’s words from their spoken and heard context” (McCormack, 2000, p. 283). My intention was to paint with words the lived experiences of the participants as vividly and truthfully as possible.

My approach to writing narratives was first and foremost to use the data to find answers to my address three research questions:

1. What are San students’ understandings of their learning experiences in school and how do these impacts on students’ identities. (Based on memories of primary and on current attendance in junior secondary?)
2. What are the San students’ experiences in the humanities and science based subject classes?
3. What do San children value and find meaningful in their home and school environments? How does this relate to the possibilities for literacy learning?

McCormack (2004) offers a process of “storying stories” (p. 1) for those who have collected stories and want to construct interpretative narratives to answer their research questions. McCormack (2000; 2004) recommends the use of multiple lenses. They are (1) active listening, (2) narrative processes, (3) language, (4) context and (5) moments.

1. Active listening refers to a process for immersing oneself in the data: My immersion

began each evening after being at Letsatsi School. I listened to the digital recordings of interviews, classroom observations and explanations of photographs as I transcribed these data. This all occurred while in Botswana. After returning to the U.S. I listened again while reading along in the transcripts. I wrote memos to myself in the margins about content that pertained to the research questions.

2. Narrative processes refer to how the research participants told their stories. Part of my active listening involved noticing why, how when and where a particular story was told. For example, the participants enjoyed telling me stories that were narrated to them by their parents or grandparents. They would then tell me the story as it was told to them, taking the role of the different characters. For example, the story Knowledge shared with me about Tomatoma and his evil grandfather.
3. Language refers to the researcher noticing how the participants choose to speak about themselves and others. Part of my active listening involved noticing what was said and how it was said. In addition, I took notice of what was not said (i.e. the absence of references to themselves as San or Basarwa). I also noted specialized vocabulary such as *gwagisa* meaning ‘to be bullied’ and frequently used words. An example from the San students stories, “I find English difficult,” “I don’t read English books” and “they laugh at us in class.” Attention to language assisted greatly in identifying important elements in participants’ lives (at home and in school).
4. Context refers to noticing the circumstances within which participants talked and told their stories. Interviews were not necessarily private but people came in and out during the interviews. For example, during one of my interviews with Drought, the Boarding Master and a friend came to chat with us and asked Drought questions about her

mysterious sores. Sometimes during interviews, groups of students waited on the sidelines for their friends.)

5. Moments refers to noticing when something unexpected happened. My active listening involved identifying moments that were interesting, important, tense, shameful or joyful. For each narrative I chose titles which evolved from a significant moment.

McCormack (2000) explains that “these lenses are the dimensions people use to construct and reconstruct their identity and to give meaning to their lives” (p. 282). This approach worked very well as San students told a lot of stories about their lives at primary school, at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School and at home. Through these stories the San students revealed their views on what is of value to them. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “life is experienced on a continuum...what we may be able to say now about a person or school or some other is given meaning in terms of the larger context...” (p. 19). The larger context of the status of the San in Botswana needed to be taken into consideration in writing the narratives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) advise that in writing narratives from data one should try “to compose a text that at once looks backward and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experiences within place” (p. 140). For example, in coming up with my narratives, I had to keep going back to the field notes and strove to capture the shared stories well. According to Clandinnin and Connelly, the researcher in writing the narrative inquiry should think of the audience and also how best to represent the lived experiences of the participants.

I was mindful throughout my writing interpretative narratives that I had to communicate with multiple audiences (readers in Botswana, the United States of America and the rest of the world). Hence, I was faced with tension as I thought about voice and how best to present the stories collected at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. For example, as a researcher, I

was aware that although my intention was that my participants' voices come out all the time, there were instances when my voice came out. For example, when I wrote about the participants and how they were mistreated by other students.

Once the narratives were written then I did use a coding approach to identify themes across the narratives. Specifically I looked for themes related to each research question. I used this analytic process to write more explicitly in the final chapter findings for each research question. For example, one theme that I found across the narratives was the San participants' eagerness to become literate in English. Another theme I noted across narratives was talk about reading and other social activities being boring. I wrote in the margins of the narratives code words for the recurring themes.

What were my Subjectivities as a Researcher?

“Ubuntu / Botho inspire us to expose ourselves to others, to encounter the difference of their humanness so as to inform and enrich our own.”

Sindane (1994, p. 8-9).

I will always remember the 14th of October, 2008 as it has a special place in my heart. It was on that date that I first arrived at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. As I walked into the school gate, I could not help wondering if this was it! The school where I was going to be conducting research for the next 50 days. I remember a moment of panic because the students did not fit the profile of the San. Those I saw were not short nor light complexion with small eyes. The deputy head later explained that although there were some San students in the school, there were also students from other ethnic groups. It did not take long for me to become aware of the San students as I moved around the school with the deputy head. As we walked, he kept saying to me “*O a ba bona akere?*” (do you see them?). He was referring to the San students

who were either outside class or going into class. He informed me that Ms. Thuso's class had a reasonable number of "Basarwa" students and he would talk to her about my doing classroom observations in her class. While he expressed some pessimism about my finding San students to cooperate in the research he was also willing to help me find them. That conversation left me feeling nervous. Should I be looking for another research site? I was worried by the time factor because the Ministry of Education had taken so long in granting me permission to carry out the research. I think permission might have been delayed because I wanted to carry out the research with San students. I thought of Professor Good, a former University of Botswana lecturer when I received permission to conduct the research with the proviso that I was being watched. Professor Good became a prohibited immigrant in Botswana after writing about the displacement of the San people by the Government of Botswana from their ancestral Central Kalahari Game Reserve (<http://www.survival-international.org/news/915>). After a long talk with the deputy principal, I decided Letsatsi Junior Secondary School was the place. The deputy head assured me that he would assist me with any problems I might come across. All that I had to do was knock on his office door. I marveled at this man's *Botho* and considered myself very fortunate indeed.

During my first talk with Love and Peace who became research informants I could not help noticing that they had a condescending attitude towards the San students. It was obvious talking to them that they saw themselves as superior to the San students. They also thought these students were stupid and wondered why they were in school at all. I remember Peace telling me that San students do not play in the school games because "they are not perfect." Love thought it had to do with where they came from (remote settlements). I could not help feeling empathy for San students but did not voice this to Love and Peace. I instinctively felt that if they thought I had some sympathy towards San students it might jeopardize our relations and they would see

me as critical of them. When talking with Love and Peace about San students I would refer to them as “our friends” and never as San or Basarwa because I wanted to protect my relationship with San students.

On the other hand, I realized that when talking to News and Done, my San informants, I was more relaxed and less guarded. I remember how we joked around, especially with News who loved to tell me how strong he was. My researcher position kept shifting depending on who I was talking to (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane & Muhamed, 2001).

As I talked to my San informants and participants more, they quickly warmed up to me and told me stories of what had been happening to them in my absence without my asking. I remember vividly how after about a month after I had first arrived at Letsatsi Community Junior secondary school how I had to miss school for a day as I had some business to attend to in Lobatse town. Drought informed me the next day how she and Happy looked for me but, were too scared to ask the teachers of my whereabouts. I still remember the tone in her voice when she told me that they had thought I was never coming back. They had then decided to wait for me under our meeting tree but, went back to the hostels when they realized I was not coming. Talking to my informants and participants helped me position and think about my role as a researcher all the time. I had to think inwardly about my stance with San and non-San students and strive towards an objective lens in how I observed, wrote the field notes and conducted the interviews.

Having talked, laughed and shared stories with these students, I quickly came to realize that they like everybody else had feelings and dreams. I remember how I used to feel when Drought told me that she wanted to be a researcher like me. I saw light at the end of the tunnel for the San people as Trust shared with me about his dream of being a soldier one day and

protecting Batswana. I realized that whereas these students had real fears of opening up to their teachers, they treated me as a friend, confidante and a mother figure. This confirmed what I already knew; that most people in Botswana saw the San people was just a misconception and stereotype. I was very much aware that as a participant observer, there was a real danger of me as the researcher getting too involved with the students and 'going native' (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). I concur with Alridge (2003) that Black scholars writing about Black people should strive for strong objectivity.

I often sat in the staffroom and many a time and had to listen as teacher after teacher talked about how useless the San students were. It was obvious that they had very little confidence in these students and extended little *Botho* to them. Also, they did not understand them. I found this contrary to Gay's (2000) concept of care. Gay writes that teachers need to recognize that learners need to feel loved and appreciated in and outside the classroom. Listening to the teachers and other people in the school speak ill of the San students made me feel very much an outsider. I had to listen to all these stories but, said nothing to defend my informants and participants. However, this did not mean that I agreed with everything that was said about the San students. All these reminded me of Morris-Roberts (2001) who challenged the politics and practice of research among children and youth in her article 'Intervening in friendship exclusion? the politics of doing feminist research with teenage girls.' She lamented the fact that as researchers, we are silent in the face of injustices.

I felt the lack of respect towards San students by non San students, teachers and others in the school prevented them from learning who these students really were. "Without respect, one learns nothing. You must always show us your respect" (Stoller, 1989, p. 156). These are the words an informant told Stoller, a researcher. I found this to agree with the *Botho* Philosophy

that preaches respect. According to Peshkin (2001) “we display respect to our research others by taking seriously what they say, what they think they are doing, what they make of things” (p. 244).

It was especially during Saturdays that my heart went out to them. I had come to notice the appreciation in their eyes when I gave them the little toiletries I used to bring them and how I used to cast an apologetic look at their friends who watched everything from a distance. They had no money, had little clothes and toiletries. I watched them as they played ‘*diketo, mmilo, morabara and koi*’. I saw how the students reached out to one another by moving in their groups, singing and playing their worries away. For example, Knowledge and the other boys loved playing football in ‘Germany.’

One day when I was sitting under our meeting tree in a hot afternoon, I thought of the sad fact that I was probably the only person in the school who saw the San students for who they truly were. After talking to them and getting to know them better, I came to realize that these students had a story that needed to be told. There was more beneath their expressionless faces. When everybody else ‘rubbished’ them off, I saw a lot of potential that lay untapped, dreams for the future and boys and girls with real fears like any other. I witnessed firsthand how they talked about missing home and the things they did there. I shared their pain of failing in school and especially their problems with the English language. I saw the disappointment in their eyes as they told me of how they had failed social studies, moral education, mathematics and science, yet again. They opened their innermost hearts and confided in me how they feared the teachers and found school very boring as it did not relate to their way of doing things. I saw how in class they were completely ignored by the teachers except when they woke them up or threatened to send them to the sports ground for a jog to wake them up. I wondered on the school curriculum which

ignored San literacy. Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti (2001) talk of funds of knowledge as literacy that children bring to schools. They encourage teachers to recognize and tap from such knowledge. Clearly, this was not being done at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) “we and our participants are together in the midst” (p. 144-145).

Every community junior secondary school in Botswana has a Vision/Mission Statement displayed for all to see. Theoretically the Vision/Mission Statement is to inspire teachers and administrators to provide for all students. So why did I see two schools existing within Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School.

VISION STATEMENT

We, the staff of Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School aim to develop skilled, productive, well informed and dynamic students who will contribute to the community and the nation positively.

MISSION STATEMENT

We exist to provide a conducive learning environment through variety use of teaching methods, be acceptive and proactive daily to produce a wholesome child who would be dynamic to meet world changes.

In undertaking this present study, I have come to realize that the positions of insider and outsider as a researcher are not that clearly cut. Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane & Muhamad (2001, p. 405) write that “in the real world of data collection, there is a good bit of slippage and fluidity between these two statutes.” I had to exercise extreme caution as I undertook my study as I dealt with differing views, peoples, cultures and beliefs. Although there is a general assumption that the same culture between the researcher and the researched can

result in more trust and openness in the research, I believe I was able to gain trust and create rapport with the San students because I extended *Botho* to them. As a result, they opened up to me and we had a good working relationship. I also experienced that being outside their culture and ways of knowing allowed me to ask pertinent and taboo questions without being judged.

It is interesting how I always felt like I was researching in two schools within one. One school was where San students were not taken seriously. To the rest of the school they were lazy and stupid with no hope for the future. In the other school were non-San students, especially transfer in students from the city of Gaborone and surrounding places. Teachers talked about how clever the latter were and the fact that the school needed them for excellent test results.

CHAPTER 3

MEETING WITH THE DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

As I got into the 6.00 o'clock morning bus on the way to Letsatsi village, I was excited about the prospect of carrying out research at Letsatsi Junior Community Secondary School (C.J.S.S). I had spoken to the Deputy Headmaster about three times on the phone explaining the purpose of my research and he had said anytime I wanted to visit the school, I was welcome.

The bus sped fast from the city of Gaborone towards Francistown, a town 500 kilometers away from the capital city. It was a hot mid October day and I was tempted to nap a little before we arrived at Letsatsi village but, I did not take that pleasure because I might miss getting off the bus at Letsatsi and end up all the way in Francistown. Also, it was just too noisy on the bus. The bus conductor had on a song by 'V' a popular young Motswana artist and '*Lethale le a tsamaya*' (the clever one is leaving) was playing very loudly:

Lethale le a tsamaya

Le a tsamaya

Lethale le a tsamaya

Le a tsamaya...

I was tempted to ask the young bus conductor to reduce the volume but, I refrained. Just a few minutes ago, he had spoken rudely to one woman who had asked for her change. Some of these young men have little *Botho*, I thought. I kept my eyes focused on the letter I received the other day from the Ministry of Education authorizing me to carry out research at Letsatsi C.J.S.S.

The words of the officer kept ringing in my ears “stay away from politics, you are being watched”

On the way we passed a number of smaller villages such as Rasesa, Malolwana and others. Although people tried to stop the bus, it sped past and I suspected that the driver was in a rush for passengers in the next bigger village of Mahalape. I shouted to the driver to stop at Letsatsi village and he nodded. About 100 kilometers from the city of Gaborone, the bus stopped and the bus conductor signaled for me to get off. I was the only passenger getting off the bus and I could not help feeling a bit anxious. From the stop, I could see the brown building of the school. At the bus stop I greeted a woman and we walked together to the school gate where we parted ways.

At the school gate there was a sign with big bold letters **WELCOME TO LETSATSI C.J.S.S.**

“*Dumela Rra,*” I greeted the man who I assumed to be the gatekeeper from his brown uniform.

“*Dumela Mma. A nkago thusa?*” he enquired politely.

“Yes Please. I am looking for the Deputy Principal,” I answered.

The man showed me to the administration building and as I walked there, I could not help thinking how the community junior secondary schools in Botswana are all the same. It does not matter whether one is in the south, east or north of Botswana: the layout is all the same. The administration buildings and classrooms, for example, are identical. Also, they are all built with the same brown/reddish bricks. If one has been to one community junior secondary school in Botswana, it is as if one has been to all of them because they are identical in terms of organization. At Letsatsi there are thirty teachers and about twenty other members of the staff

which includes kitchen hands, night watchmen, ground men, drivers, cooks, matron, bursar and others. They are all very important in the running of the school. I passed by a group of students who looked at me curiously and I could not help thinking that soon they will know me.

“My name is *Mma* Olebile,” I introduced myself to the school messenger. “I am looking for the Deputy Principal. He knows that I am coming,” I explained.

“He is in a meeting right now with a parent,” said the kindly looking woman. “You can have a seat and wait for him,” she invited.

As I waited for the Deputy Principal, I could not help noticing that the teachers in this school, like most teachers in most community junior secondary schools were young, mostly in their mid twenties. I recognized two teachers that I had taught: one in senior secondary school and the other at Tonota College of Education.

“Hello, Madam,” they greeted respectively.

“What are you doing here?” one asked politely.

I told them that I was a visitor of the Deputy Principal. I guessed that it must be the end of class as teachers were coming into the staffroom. Some held sticks they used to discipline students with and others were accompanied by one or two students who helped them carry books.

The messenger showed me to the Deputy Principal’s office which was opposite that of the Principal. Next to the Deputy Principal’s office were two other offices: those of the Guidance and Counseling teacher and Senior Teacher 1.

The man who stood to greet me was in his early forties. He introduced himself as the Deputy Principal of Letsatsi C.J.S.S. and he looked the part. He was dressed in dark green trousers, a light green shirt and a light green tie with yellow stripes. He smiled from ear to ear, revealing two missing front teeth.

“*Dumela Mma*. I assume this is *Mma Olebile*?” he asked. “I am the Deputy Head and they call me Radipitse,” he offered.

“*Dumela Rra*. I am *Mma Olebile*,” I said.

“I am very pleased that you came. I am sorry I was in a meeting. A parent had come asking for a Form Three place for her daughter who had dropped out of a school in Thamaga as a result of pregnancy,” he volunteered.

He got up to switch on the small fan in his little office and I was thankful for the cool air as it was very hot.

“I come from nearby Mochudi village,” he said. “At the moment I am doing the work of the deputy and the school head who has some emergency,” explained Mr. Radipitse. “By the way, your face looks so familiar. Have I met you somewhere,” he asked casually.

I told him where I had taught and all the schools I attended.

“That’s right!” he said with a click of his fingers. “I saw you at Gaborone Secondary School (G.S.S) years ago. Where you not in 3B in the same class as the naughty Mpho and that scoundrel, Lefhoko?” he asked.

“I was in the same class with both of them but, I do not remember you,” I said politely. This did not surprise me much as men tend to change a lot as they age, I mused.

However much he tried to jog my memory, I could not remember seeing him at G.S.S.

He then laughed as he remembered the good old days, especially ‘Michael Jackson’ our school head then. He got the name Michael Jackson as he was always dressed impeccably from head to toe in white and black.

“I remember the time he went to our class angry as a lion. John, a very delinquent boy had drawn a picture of Mrs Leburu, our Religious Education teacher on the blackboard. When

she came to class and saw her very pregnant self on the board, she rushed to get ‘Michael Jackson.’ We all got seriously beaten that day as no one would tell on John,” he remembered with a shake of the head.

I could not help myself but laugh at this man’s stories. I liked his carefree manner and friendly attitude. Thank you Jesus, I said inwardly.

“So, you want to work with Basarwa students?” he asked. “They are a difficult group,” he warned me.

He told me a story that took place just recently in the school. Two Basarwa boys left school for good. He had tried to reason with them. No amount of threats, pleading and begging would make them go back to school. Talk of a future when they could buy new cars and build lovely houses failed to entice them to continue with school. Mr. Radipitse laughed when he remembered what the two boys had said to the Remote Area Dweller Officer: that there is a lot of soil in the bush to build traditional houses and they do not need to stay in school to do that.

Some parents did make the effort to come to school to report that their children had dropped out, informed the Deputy Head. The school then informed the RAD Officer who tries to reason with the students to go back to school. Most students refused to go back to school and preferred to stay home with their parents.

“Don’t be surprised if you find that students do not come forward to work with you as most of these Basarwa identify with the eight major Tswana tribes. What he meant was that the San try to blend with those who are non San Batswana. Also, many of them have adopted Tswana names,” he laughed.

However, all that was no problem to the Deputy Head as he was able to identify the students just by looking at their physical features: the very light skin color, small eyes and very kinky hair.

“The Basarwa are now a part of us. We are even marrying them. The Bakgatla herd boys being the worst! In the cattle posts they are marrying Basarwa girls. After some years, there will be no Basarwa as a result of intermarriage,” he reflected.

Letsatsi is one of the Remote Area Dwellers School (RAD) in the country, said Mr. Radipitse. The school is situated in Letsatsi village with the intention to serve first and foremost, children from catchments’ areas comprising the settlements of Kgomodiatshaba, Dikgonnye, Leshibitse, Ramotlabaki, Khurutshe, Artesia, Oliphant’s Drift, Malwelwe and Moshaweng.

The Deputy Head invited me to his house for tea and as we walked there, he promised to talk to one English teacher by the name of Ms. Thuso. Also, he was going to talk to Mr. Selepe, a science teacher to allow me to observe their classes. I was very much interested in making sense of what San students’ think of literacy and schooling in general. In addition, I looked forward to any stories they were willing to share with me.

“I will contact those teachers who have a good number of Basarwa students in their classes,” he had promised. After tea, I went back to the city and looked forward to coming back to the school the next day.

“Dumela Madam,” greeted the Deputy Head cheerfully. “Ms. Thuso, an English teacher and Mr. Selepe, a science teacher have agreed that you can visit their classrooms from time to time,” he informed me. “Here are their timetables and you are free to discuss anything you want with them,” he said.

He then went to call them from the staffroom so that we could meet. Ms. Thuso offered to help with identifying some Basarwa students as most have “blended in.”

That day, I had my first science classroom observation, although Mr. Selepe was nowhere to be found. I met him after class and he informed me that he was not in class because the students had to clean the dirty hall where his science class was held.

After those first encounters with the Deputy Head, we met from time to time in the staffroom, in his office or around school. Whenever we met, he inquired of me about the behavior of the San students and told me stories about Gaborone Secondary School and our former school mates who are now very successful in their respective careers.

CHAPTER 4

INFORMANTS' NARRATIVES

Love and Peace – My Non San Informants

It was during my first week at Letsatsi School when I left the staffroom and walked outside. I passed by some classrooms until I arrived where Mr. Selepe was going to teach his science class. As I walked, I could feel many pairs of eyes looking at me. The students appeared to be lost in the large hall as about three quarters of the space in the hall was empty. In the classroom I saw students' busy writing notes from their science textbooks. Mr. Selepe was nowhere to be seen. I took a chair by the window where I sat so as to observe the students from a distance. From where I sat, I could see outside where the cooks were busy preparing for lunch.

A girl walked over to me.

"Hello Madam. Are you our new science teacher?" she asked.

I told her that I was there as a visitor and would come from time to time. I marveled at her proficiency in speaking English as well as her confidence in approaching me as an adult. She told me that she was on transfer from the Rainbow English Medium Primary School in the capital city of Gaborone.

"What is your name?" I asked her.

"Love," she replied confidently.

In an instant it occurred to me that it would be a good idea to involve her in my research as a non-San informant. I would seek her insights into life in school and specifically what she knew of the San students' life.

I explained my research to her and she was very interested to work with me. I then suggested to her that she should work with another non San student in getting the stories from San students about life in school, both in class and at the hostels. She called Peace, a boy in her class, a transfer student from Verda. I informed them that I was interested in hearing about their observations of the San students in school, after school and in the hostels. They thought it would be a good idea to jot down some points discreetly as they made their observations. I promised to buy them small notebooks.

“Students like us who have transferred from Gaborone and other places are called transfer-ins,” they informed me.

“Other students treat us in an advantageous manner because of this,” said Peace.

“Especially students from settlements such as Kgomodiatshaba,” he added.

There was tension between them and transfer ins and they do not see eye to eye, said Love. At the school, students move about in groups according to their geographic home locations. The same applies to school work which is discussed in these groups.

“Even in class when the teacher gives out some work, “these students” (meaning San students) do it in their groups and do not like to work with us,” explained Love.

We agreed to meet the following week in an empty classroom next to the staffroom. As we got out of the class, the Guidance and Counseling teacher saw me and shouted to me that she wanted to see me later as she had something to tell me. We met later in the afternoon and she told me about a San boy who had just dropped out of school.

After observing Mr. Selepe’s class, I met with Love and Peace a week later in the empty classroom. Love was ready to tell me about a heart to heart talk she had with Trust, a Mosarwa boy from her class.

“Yesterday before afternoon study, we were just sitting by the corner and I asked him if there are any problems in the hostel that he is facing right now,” said Love.

Trust told Love that he was miserable in school as his toiletries and clothes are always stolen. At the moment, he has no shoes and he also has no money. He hated being called silly names. His school work was also suffering. He does not read his assignments because when he reads he gets bored. Sometimes he does not understand when the teacher is teaching and cannot ask for fear of being laughed at by other students in class. They always laugh at his “wrong” pronunciations of English and this makes him so sad.

“He is very quiet. Sometimes he spends the whole day in class without talking,” explained Love. “He seemed really frustrated,” Love continued with a shake of the head. He misses home so much that he thinks of jumping over the fence and running home.

Trust is really worried by his poor English skills. Love told him that she wants to help him so that school is not so unbearable.

“What are they going to say about my English?” he asked Love. He was too nervous to speak in class.

He told Love that one day in class he tried to pronounce an English word but it just led the other students to roar with laughter. From that day, he has decided never again to say anything in class to avoid being laughed and mocked.

Then Love told me about Lucky, a San girl she knew. Lucky too has no clothes and she has to borrow clothes from other students.

“The only clothes she has is her school uniform which is old from too much washing,” said Love.

She wishes her parents could visit her more as life is unbearable without them. Form 2 and 3 girls always force her to wash their dirty laundry and she is very tired of this.

The following week in November, we met again with Love and Peace in the same classroom. Peace told me that it is his impression that “these students” (San) hardly read.

“Sometimes, I just look at them, they will be reading and I see that nothing is getting in. They DON’T understand,” he stressed. “Also, when they copy the teachers’ notes from the chalkboard, they make mistakes,” Peace had observed.

Both students have observed that “these students” have problems with Setswana and English. According to Love, their English problems are more serious.

“Mostly they speak Shikhalahari,” said Peace.

“Even their appearance, even in class, they will be like...just looking outside, *techere antse a ruta* (while the teacher is teaching) observed Love.

“These students fight, *yaa*, at the hostels. They fight with their own people. Even if they have problems they go to their own people,” said Peace.

According to Peace, if the parents of “these students” visited them more, then things will be better.

“They work for us, you see?” explained Peace.

“Work for you?” I asked in surprise.

“They wash our clothes and we give them the food our parents bought us,” chipped in Love.

Today I was meeting Love and Peace again for the fourth time. The Deputy Head walked me out of the staffroom and we chatted about our days at Gaborone Secondary School.

“You remember Paul?” he asked. “Do you know that he has made it? He is now a Chief Education Officer,” said the Deputy Head with pride. Paul’s brother was a top executive in a Botswana Stock Exchange. Almost everyone in Botswana knows him, I thought. A respectable distance from the staffroom, Maipelo, a Form 2 San girl I had befriended was waiting for us as we approached.

“*Dumelang*,” she greeted us shyly. “Madam, I need to talk to you,” she said.

The Deputy Head left us and went back to his office.

“Can I please wash your clothes this weekend,” she started. “I need money to pay for some school books I lost,” she pleaded with her eyes.

“How much do you need?” I asked her.

It turned out that she needed P150.00 (about 20.00USD). I promised to talk to her later as I had to meet with Love and Peace in our usual classroom.

“Hello Love and Peace. What stories do you have for me today?” I asked the two as I took in their neat appearance as they sat on top of the desks.

“How is school?” I asked. My role was not only of a researcher but, also a parent to these children and as a result, their welfare was important to me.

Love told me that they had just written an English composition. She had written about her sister’s wedding which was a grand affair.

“I was a bridesmaid,” she told us proudly.

Peace had written about the best day of his life. He made up a story about an imaginary bicycle his mother bought him. Both had performed very well in the test and Love got the highest mark in class with a 96% pass.

The Form Three students have just finished writing their end of year examinations and they have left for home. Fortunately for Love and Peace there is ample space in the hostels and the rooms are less populated. Before that, there were 12 to 14 students in one room. In Love's room, she was the only "transfer-in" student among 9 students. Everybody else was from Moshaweng settlement. She did not like sharing a room with

"These students" (San) because she disliked "mixing with them."

Just yesterday when Love was revising for the coming end of year examinations, they were making too much noise and she was forced to go and revise outside.

Peace was staying in the hostels with his non San friends from Gaborone and they relaxed by playing games on their play stations. They played games such as FIFA 2™, FIFA 3™ and Dragon ball Z™.

"What do these students talk about?" I enquired from Love.

"About home and how good it is and the entertainment they have," said Love.

The students were so excited because soon they would be going home. However, Love was concerned that all this excitement about going home would affect their school performance. The Form Three students from remote areas who just left hardly read.

"All they talked about was the 7th," she recalled.

"The 7th?" I asked.

"That they are leaving on the 7th. The whole month they were just talking about the fact that they were leaving on the 7th," explained Love.

"So, they don't like school?" I enquired.

“They don’t like this school. Nobody does” said Love. “We come to study almost every day. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday,” she lamented.

There is no entertainment in the school. The boarding master had told me the story of the only television set that was in the school. One Saturday evening some students were watching television in the school hall when suddenly a new Form One San student loved the game so much such that he wanted to “go into the field.” Before anyone could stop him, he smashed into the screen to get to his favorite players.

Love gets entertainment by reading Jackie Collins novels.

“I get the books from my mother,” she had told me. “When she finishes reading a book, she gives it to me,” explained Love.

She reads about relationships, love, men and women. Peace is into Drum and Kickoff magazines from South Africa. Unfortunately for Love and Peace, when they try to get “these students” to read, they don’t listen.

“Take Mpho for example. Before the start of the religious education class I told him that he was making noise. He told me to leave him alone as I have a reason to be in school,” said Love. “Some say their parents forced them to come to school,” explained Love.

It was two weeks into November and the end of year examinations were starting soon. Teachers were busy in the staffroom setting the examinations and making sure that the school messenger made copies of the test papers. The coordinators of the different departments have put up notices in the staffroom informing teachers about upcoming meetings. It was a busy time as teachers were in a rush to finish the syllabus. Some gave their teaching slots to colleagues who had fallen behind. Unfortunately, Ms. Thuso, the English teacher gave her teaching slots for the

whole week to the agriculture teacher, Mr. Mogotsi. This meant I could not complete my planned observations in her class. It was a big disappointment especially that she did not inform me of the change.

Love came to the staffroom to look for me. We were having our third meeting today in one of the classrooms.

“Hello Love. Where is Peace today,” I asked.

Peace had gone to the city to see a doctor about his eye problems.

Love talked to a girl called Happy yesterday. They were having a friendly chat when Happy confided to her that she has problems in understanding English. However, she is afraid to ask her English teacher for assistance.

“She can’t read English. She does not know English,” explained Love.

As Happy’s roommate, she has seen Happy holding her notebooks but, she is doubtful if she is doing any serious reading. She has not known Happy to be an avid reader. As the library monitor, she has never seen Happy borrow a book from the library. I thanked her for her time and sent a speedy recovery to Peace.

At the end of the meeting Peace asked to be excused from the research as his eyes were giving him problems and he needed more time revising his examinations. I continued to talk to Love whenever we met and she assisted greatly in showing the San students how to use the disposable cameras that I gave to them in order to take pictures of those things that had meaning to them. Love was also present at the end of year party although she only stayed for a short time.

Done and News – My San Informants

Three weeks after I had been in the school, Love, one of my non San informants introduced Done and News to me.

“Dumela Madam,” greeted Love. “This is Done and News from 1A. They are interested to work as your informants, too.”

“Hello Done. Hello News,” I greeted the two students.

I had met both of them before in and outside class. Done assisted with giving out the toiletry that I sometimes bought for the students. She had a calm countenance and shy smile that deceived. Of all the San students I worked with, I found Done and Mr. President to be the most confident.

“Madam, Mr. President, Knowledge, Drought and Receiver said I should tell you that they do not have toiletry,” she went to report to me last week in the staffroom. “Also, Happy does not have underwear,” she added.

Done was good at keeping a list of what the other students lacked. She would confidently go to the staffroom and show me the list. After a couple of days, she would come to the staffroom to check if I had bought the toiletries.

“*Mma Olebile*, one of your children is looking for you,” called out the school messenger from time to time. “You are taking good care of these children,” she used to compliment me.

Last Saturday, I had gone to the school. I had promised my co-participants that I would bring them some toiletries. I went to the hostels looking for Done and Love, one of my non San informants told me that Done and her friends had gone to the nearby Bush to collect some berries. Suddenly, we heard singing from behind the hostels.

“There they come,” announced Love.

Before we saw Done and her friends, we could hear them singing a hymn:

Modimo o re file sebakanyana se, le motsotsonyana o...

Ha ba kena ka kgoro,

Le nna ketla ba le teng...

What beautiful singing, I thought.

I was very happy at the prospect of working with Done and News. I had no doubt that I would learn a lot about them and other San students. After explaining to them what I expected them to do, we scheduled to meet after a week. In the meantime, they had to observe what was going on in school regarding their friends (meaning San students) both in class and outside. When talking to Done and News I realized how I was avoiding the term San in favor of “your friends” or “those from your villages.” Like most San students in the school, the mention of the word ‘San or Basarwa’ made them extremely uncomfortable. Mr. President (who is featured in the next narrative) was the one exception.

It is exactly a month since I first came to Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. As I walked into the school that morning, I met with a group of teachers outside the staffroom. The Form Three Pre-Examination results or what is commonly known as ‘mock examinations’ in Botswana were out for everyone to see.

“*Mma* Olebile, come and see how your children have performed,” called out Ms. Tau, the Guidance and Counseling teacher. “They are the worst!” she cried out.

“Only 8 students out of the 160 who wrote the examinations managed to obtain grade B overall,” explained the Deputy Head. “This year, there was no A,” he noted.

“These students do not study at all,” said Mr. Kitso, a teacher of social studies.

“Those from *tengnyanateng* (remote areas) are the worst,” complained Ms. Tswii, a teacher of Setswana.

I looked at the results and I made a mental note to ask the Deputy Head about them in more detail. Right now, I had to look for Done and News.

As promised, I met with Done and News after a week in an empty classroom near the staffroom. The two looked somewhat sad.

“Hey, you two are looking so happy,” I teased. “What has been going on?” I enquired. They looked at each other as if they were saying “should we tell her?”

“Okay. What stories do you have for me?” I started, “Anything you want to share with me?” I asked.

“Today we came to school without breakfast. The cooking pots in the dining hall have broken again,” explained Done. “Then the Matron told us to go to class,” she complained. All the time she was speaking, she was looking at her shoes and I could tell this incident had really saddened her a lot.

“How do you feel about that?” I asked.

“I don’t feel good,” she said.

“How about you News? What do you have to share with me today?” I asked.

“We are not happy in the hostels. Our toiletry gets stolen. Right now I have no toiletry,” he said with a shake of his head.

“Who steals your toiletry?” I asked.

“Other students in the hostels,” said Done.

The toiletry issue was a serious matter, I thought. Done told us a story of her friend, Rose. Although Rose is clever, she said, the problem is that her mother is not working. This is creating a lot of problems for Rose because she cannot concentrate in her school work as she has no toiletries and money.

“What did you observe? I asked News.

“On Friday night, a Form Three boy, John, came to our hostel,” he started. “He then went to Tefo’s wardrobe, a boy from Moshaweng settlement and took his bathing soap and toothpaste,” he said sadly.

“Where was Tefo when all this happened?” I asked in surprise. Apparently Tefo was in the room and there was nothing he could do because John promised to cut his long tail if he or anyone else opened their mouths or reported the matter.

According to Done, almost all “her friends” do not have toiletries. The problem it seems is that the parents are not working and the toiletry the social workers gave them at the beginning of the school term has finished.

“The social workers take time to give us toiletry,” explained Done.

“Some students like Lebo are lucky because their brothers are working and so they can buy them toiletry,” she said.

News was unhappy about the bullying by older boys, especially the non San Form 2 and 3 ones.

“They make us do their errands for them,” he complained. “Also, they steal from us,” he complained.

“What do you do after that?” I asked.

“I also steal from them,” informed News somewhat shyly.

He told us a story of the time he found some of his books missing in his locker. This disturbed him so much that he begun to have nightmares at night. He was worried about how he was going to pay for the books. He then decided to steal the books from some unfortunate student.

Done told us how the transfer in students take advantage of them.

“They tell us that we don’t wear any perfume but they wear expensive ones,” she said. Also, they have expensive cell phones and not the ones that cost P200.00 (25USD),” she told us.

Sometimes when they report to the Matron she does nothing. Just last week during lunch she spoke very harshly to Thato, a girl from Kgomodiatshaba. The Matron told her that she was a “big mama.” According to Done, Thato had dropped out of school a year or two ago due to pregnancy.

“Life in the hostels is hard,” explained News. “Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night wondering if witches have come for me. Sometimes I sleep soundly throughout the night,” he said.

“We are finding English difficult,” explained Done. “Setswana is only difficult with pronouncing the words,” she explained.

“What language do you all speak at home?” I asked

“Some can speak smartly,” she said avoiding my question and looking embarrassed all of a sudden.

Done explained that her friends find other school subjects better than English because in those subjects, for example, agriculture, they code switch between English and Setswana because some terms are not translatable.

“Sometimes I understand in class, sometimes I don’t,” explained News. “Personally I have problems in understanding written and spoken English,” he said.

They have observed that most of their friends from home do not ask in class because when they speak, other students laugh at them. Hence, they were underperforming in all subjects.

I met again with Done and News for the third time. It was a Monday after the sports day and soon, all the students were going to write the end of year examinations.

“So, you are all reading hard?” I asked them. “Which books are you reading?” I continued. News told us that he is not reading anything. Done has been reading a book called ‘*George wa Mmonadilo*’ (The unfortunate George). The story, written in Setswana is about a man who had married two women. Then one day, one of the women, Sethunya’s mother died. Sethunya’s stepmother was very cruel to her and sent her on many errands. She would send her to the river to collect water, cook and wash the dishes while her own children did nothing at all. After her stepmother had cooked a meal, she did not give any food to Sethunya.

“I am not going to look after another woman’s child,” she shouted.

One day Sethunya cried and went to report to her father that her stepmother was starving her. Her father chased her away and said she was just telling lies and wanted to cause trouble even after she was badly beaten by her cruel stepmother. She ran away to stay with an aunt who enrolled her in school. When her aunt went to look for a job in Johannesburg, South Africa Sethunya had to go back to her stepmother’s house. After her aunt left, her school uniform got stolen and she dropped out of school.

“This story made me very sad,” reported Done.

“Why?” I asked.

“It made me sad because it reminded me of an incident that took place among my relatives,” she said. “My cousins’ father was mentally sick and as a result, he hanged his wife,” she said sadly. Apparently, the cousin is a student at Letsatsi School.

“How is he coping in school,” I asked.

“He is coping well. Other students do not discriminate against him,” he said.

“How are your friends?” I asked again (meaning the San students).

“They are okay,” said Done. “They are asking for toiletries,” she reported.

I could tell it was not easy for the students to always be asking for toiletry. This was especially made difficult by the fact that they saw how the “transfer-in” students were brought toiletries by their parents. Ms. Tau, the Guidance and Counseling teacher had promised me she would look into the toiletry matter.

“I have to compile a list of the students who desperately need toiletry,” she had informed me. After that, she will send the list to the office of the social worker in the village of Mochudi and it takes time for her to respond.

“They are complaining that when they read they do not understand,” explained Done. “I talked to a girl from Kgomodiatshaba, Neo. She is saddened by the fact that she is not clever,” said Done.

“Who said she is not clever?” I asked in surprise.

“She does not know how to speak English,” explained Done. “She can only speak Setswana,” she added.

Another student from her home village, Lotlhe, also complained of not understanding, especially when the teacher is teaching, explained Done.

“Do they ask when they don’t understand?” I asked.

“No. They are scared of asking the teachers,” explained Done.

Done told me how they sit in groups and share stories or simply play ‘*Morabaraba*’, ‘*Koi*’ or ‘*Diketo*’ during afternoon study.’ Sometimes, they just talk about home and the kind of things they do when they are there. Done and I sang one of the songs they sing when playing ‘*Koi*’

‘Petoro, Malome, Petoro, Malome

Ditonki tsele di kae?

Ditonki tsele di kae?

Ke sampe ke enwa tee

Ware o santse o o nwa tee kere ditonki tsele di kae?

The above song is about Peter and his uncle. His uncle is asking him about the whereabouts of the donkeys and Peter replies that he is still enjoying his tea, much to the surprise of his uncle.

News has good and bad memories of home.

“Sometimes, our parents are a problem. They complain that we make them suffer. For example, we cook food for them and they do not eat it. Then when they come back late at night, they complain that we did not give them food,” he complained. “The other problem is that they take the little ones out late at night. What if something happens to a little one? What will they tell the police?” asked News with a shake of his head.

According to News, all these show that their parents have a lot of problems.

“In my village, people fight and use abusive language a lot,” he complained.

I encouraged them to study hard and to ask teachers if they do not understand in class.

We promised to meet again on Saturday. I had promised the students to show them the photographs that they had taken. Also, each had to explain the meaning behind the photographs.

CHAPTER 5

PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVES

Mr. President – My Grandfather is My Hero

It was a hot afternoon day in Letsatsi village as I waited patiently for Love and Peace, my two non-San informants. I shifted slightly on the makeshift wooden bench to create some balance. The students had finally settled into afternoon study, after much running around from the lockers and their friends' classrooms. As I looked up, Love, Peace and a boy I had seen around school were stopped by the teacher on duty, who was holding a very big stick. From where I was sitting under the *Mosetlhe* tree, I could not tell what he was saying to the students but, Love pointed at me. As they approached, I could tell that the student they were with was the one I spoke to last week and asked for his name. He had told me his name was the same name as Botswana's third president. From that day, I had started to call him Mr. President whenever I met him around school.

Mr. President is very light in complexion. What I vividly remember about him is his smile and rusted teeth that add some kind of charm to his whole countenance. I remember the first time I saw him and how I thought he might agree to work with me as a co-participant. As the three students came closer, I could see that indeed it was Mr. President and this made me smile.

"Hello Love, Peace and Mr. President. I am so happy to see you all," I called out to them as I made space on the bench under the tree.



Figure 1. The Mosetlha tree

“Good afternoon, madam. This is Mr. President,” started Love. He would like to work with you as a co-participant. I thanked Love and Peace and as they left, I explained to Mr. President the reason for wanting to see him. I also told him about myself: where I grew up, went to school and the kind of things I liked doing.

Mr. President informed me that he has ten siblings. “I am the seventh child at home. All my siblings are at home, except for one who has passed on and the girl who dropped out of the University of Botswana after falling pregnant,” he explained. None of his siblings completed primary or junior secondary school. One of his siblings dropped out of school because he could not read or write. The other siblings are doing menial jobs at home and some work as cattle herders for some farmers from Batswana tribes in and around his village, Kgomodiatshaba.

“I am the only one who has made it to secondary school,” explained Mr. President. Primary school for him was full of ups and downs. There was a time he and a cousin of his ran away from boarding school because he could not take the abuse from his standard three teacher anymore. “He will beat me for nothing. Even when I am quiet in class and others make noise, I will still get beaten,” he complained. When they got home, their parents took them back to school.

“Although I ended up repeating standard three, I managed to pass and come to secondary school,” he beamed.

Suddenly, there was shouting from the classroom adjacent to where we were sitting. We saw the boarding master, angry as can be, with two boys. From where we were sitting, we could tell that the commotion was caused by the fact that the boys had gone out of the classroom during study. We both pretended not to have heard the scream of one of the boys as a big “whoosh” sound accompanied the stick that landed on his buttocks. Not surprisingly, he ran as fast as his skinny legs would carry him.

“These children do not want to learn!” thundered the boarding master. “No wonder they are failing. How can they learn when they are always in the toilet? Problem is, they feed them too much in this school,” he boomed at no one in particular as the two students had long disappeared from sight. Mr. President looked at me with fear in his eyes and as I looked past him, I saw the boarding master advancing towards us.

“You are the lady from the university. You are very welcome in our school,” he said as he offered me a handshake. “Today, during the morning assembly, the Deputy Head told us all about you. Where were you?” he enquired.

“Oh, I commute from Gaborone as there is no accommodation in this school,” I explained.

“You should have told me. I would have accommodated you. You know that in African tradition people are never full in a house,” he said. He hoped that I could drum some sense into the brains of students in the school, especially *these* students, pointing to Mr. President. As I looked at Mr. President, I saw that his earlier bright complexion had changed a shade darker. He honestly looked like he would bolt at any time!

“Where did you get that Coca-Cola from?” asked the boarding master, amazed to see the President holding a can of coke.

“I gave it to him,” I said. For the first time, I saw the black and white dog that was following him, obviously oblivious of the tension in the atmosphere. It wagged its tiny tail as it feasted on some leftover chicken bones near the bench. “Is this yours?” I asked pointing at the dog. I desperately wanted to diffuse the tension, which hung thick in the hot air, for Mr. President’s sake. It was obvious the boarding master loved his dog as he told us that it was following him around everywhere. Mr. President was so quiet that I wondered if he was breathing. He seemed extremely uncomfortable. I wanted to tell the boarding master to leave us alone! But he continued.

“This work I am doing is one of the hardest! It is time we too were paid the same salary as teachers. When they are sleeping at night we have to guard these students. You know, some like to jump over the fence at night. They visit the village bars. As for the girls, once they climb the fence and jump, lo and behold, they land straight into the arms of rapists!” I was astonished by his story, especially his lack of sympathy for the poor girls. By this time, I had given up on ever continuing my conversation with my dear President.

“You see, these students love sex. As for *these* ones (pointing at Mr. President), there is nothing one can do about it. He laughed, *he! he! he!* They love that thing! One cannot separate

them once they have started. During the day these students look innocent but, I wish you could go behind that thick bush over there (pointing to some bush) and see things you have never seen!” At that moment, the school driver called out to him and he bid me goodbye as his dog followed close on his heels.

I tried desperately to go back to our conversation but, I could see that Mr. President was shaken, obviously. I offered him some biscuits and encouraged him to take a sip from his Coca-Cola. The boy did tell me that he liked his teachers at primary school better because they were more understanding. Also, they wrote notes for them on the chalk board.

“President! President! President!” called out a group of students from his class as they rushed from the toilets. Mr. President explained that their English teacher was supposed to have come to help them review for a test but, she never showed up. At that moment, the school bell rung and the whole place was filled with navy blue, white and khaki uniforms. Out of curiosity, a group of students were coming toward us as I realized it was time for me to go home.

Mr. President and I met again a few days later under the same tree. He told me that he was failing. The problem was that he failed to understand English which is important for all his studies, except Setswana. What he found hard with reading in English was his lack of understanding the words.

“I really want to know English and Setswana so that I understand other subjects here in school,” he said.

This reminded me of a time thirty or so years ago when I was in primary school. I still remember vividly how my father used to shout at us for not reading novels and books written in English. He saw no reason why we should even bother with reading Setswana books as it would get us nowhere.

“You think I pay school fees for you to be wasting time with Setswana! I need you to read English books so that one day you will become lawyers and doctors!” he used to say angrily. I developed goose pimples as I remembered how one day I was caught red-handed reading a book in Setswana which I had hidden behind a Science textbook. My father shouted for my mother to come and witness “witchcraft during broad daylight!” Mr. President also had a love for Setswana books. He explained that the stories especially reminded him of his times with his grandfather.

“You see, Mr. President explained, in our home story-telling is a family affair. After the day’s work, we all sit around the evening fire and the adults tell us stories of long ago and how they used to live. Riddles and proverbs are also a favorite.”

“Such as?” I asked.

“*Se a tampa tampa se a go tsalela fale*” (It jumps up and down and reproduces at some place). The answer to this riddle was “a seed.” The one who got the answer right will then say a riddle which has to be solved. Mr. President’s face lit up when he talked about his late grandfather and the kind of things he taught him. He taught him how to hunt for rabbits, squirrels and trap birds. In those days, he never used to go without meat. During the hunt, he told him many interesting and important stories. One was the story of Makepe. Mr. President told it to me this way,

Makepe had two siblings. Their father asked each child what he wanted to be when he was older. The first child wanted to be a soldier. The second child wanted to be a priest. Makepe wanted to be a thief. Then his father angrily took him to the chief who asked Makepe if he wanted to steal. Makepe replied that indeed he wanted to steal. At that very moment, a man and his goat passed by.

“Can you steal that goat?” his father asked him.

“That is a child’s job” replied Makepe. Makepe then bought a shoe belonging to the chief and took it to the goat owner who fell in love with the shoe. The owner of the goat then decided to go and look for the other missing shoe as he loved it so much. While he was gone, Makepe stole his goat. As if that was not enough, he bought some alcohol for the boys who were looking after the man’s cattle. After drinking the alcohol, they fell into a stupor and Makepe stole all the cattle in the kraal.

Another day Makepe took some money and stashed it inside the buttocks of some horses he found grazing. Then he drove the horses to some Boer farmers and told them that when the horses defecated, real money came out. The Boers got excited and Makepe asked the horses to defecate and out came money! Then the Boers bought the horses from Makepe for a lot of money. When they got home, they asked the horses to defecate but nothing came out. They got very angry and went in search of Makepe who had hid some feces under a lid with the pretense that there was a dove underneath. The Boers got excited again. Makepe then informed them that he had to go and look for a rock in case the dove tried to fly away once the lid was lifted. He was gone for a long time and one Boer told the other that they needed to kill the dove.

As one lifted the lid, the other quickly grabbed the feces thinking it was the dove! The Boers became extremely angry and they went in search of Makepe again. When they got to his home, Makepe was excitedly counting the money he had got from the Boers. They grabbed him and put him in a sack cloth, then left him by the roadside. Then Makepe started singing: “I don’t want to marry an Afrikaaner girl. I don’t want to marry a Boer girl. I don’t want to marry an Afrikaaner girl.”

At that moment, an old man passed by and stopped as he heard the singing. Makepe begged him to get him out of the sack. Immediately when he got out, he put the old man inside the sack cloth and tied him up. When the Boers came back, they took the sack not knowing Makepe had escaped. Then they burned the old man alive.

“That is the end of the story,” informed Mr. President.

“Wonderful story! Why is the story important to you?” I asked him.

“It is important because it can counsel young people that theft is not a good thing. My grandfather taught us not to steal,” he said.

Apart from telling him about stories, his grandfather also taught him good manners and life skills. “You see, I loved my grandfather. He used to sit me down and tell me about education. He told me how he educated his children and taught them to hunt. He did everything for them. He also taught them about taboos like not to engage in love affairs at a young age,” he said.

“Do you get the same teachings in school?” I enquired.

“Here in school we are taught in science class to condomize. The look in Mr. President’s eyes told of a past remembered with longing. I could see him in my mind’s eye following his grandfather in the Kalahari as they went hunting. Life then was good, very good, he informed me. Sometimes as they went hunting, they would also gather *morama*, *mmilo* and *moretologa*. They were never hungry as there was a lot of food just waiting to be found. He knew that the San people were the first people to inhabit Southern Africa. After them came the Bantu peoples followed by the Boers. When the Boers came, chaos started in Southern Africa with the San being hunted like wild animals.

“Which language did your grandfather speak to you?” I asked the President. He replied that he spoke some Sesarwa (San) language to him but, Mr. President does not speak the language. He only understands the language when spoken too.

“Just one word” I implored. The President could not remember any San words as his parents hardly spoke any San to him.

“You see, with my grandfather and now my father gone, there is no one to speak the San language to me,” he explained.

Things changed drastically for Mr. President after the death of his father. The breadwinner in the family was gone and poverty quickly set in. The family would go without food for a long time and to make the problem worse, his mother felt really helpless without her husband.

“Our President, tell me about life here in a community secondary school,” I asked him the fourth week of October.

“School is hard. In class it is okay except for some annoying incidences,” he lamented. When Mr. President or any of his friends from Kgomodiatshaba tried to speak in class, other students laughed at them. This he found very annoying and a hindrance to his education endeavor. There was a day when the English teacher asked each student to come to the front to talk about herself/himself. When it was his turn, before Mr. President opened his mouth, some of his class mates were laughing at him. After that painful incident, he has resorted to keeping his views to himself and hardly says anything anymore in class. It does not really matter whether one is speaking in English or Setswana, they still laughed. He wishes they could stop doing this as he cannot ask teachers any questions if he does not understand in class. Studying with his friend does not help much as he quickly forgets what he has studied.

“I cannot read. English words are difficult. I can’t remember what I read about.” He complained. I encouraged him to ask the teachers for help. He looked at me in amazement and explained that non-San students look down upon them and think they know nothing. However, he was proud to be San and nothing would change that. I felt a kinship with Mr. President as his sentiments of pride were ones I also feel.

I remember the first lesson I observed when visiting Mr. President in class. It was a Form One English class. The lesson was about ‘My favorite person.’ As I walked into the class, I was met with about forty pairs of inquisitive eyes, obviously wondering who I was and what I was doing in their classroom. The teacher invited me to sit at the back of the class as she became busy with checking the class attendance. I looked at the almost barren walls, with peelings of yellowed paint hanging from them. On the left side of the room were two medium-sized posters.

Both were on HIV/AIDS. The first one read:

ABSTAIN!

CONDOMIZE!

STICK TO ONE PARTNER!

AIDS Kills. Don’t be a statistic.

On the poster was a picture of a school girl and boy holding hands, looking lovingly into each other’s eyes. The other poster was of a man and woman and it read: **HIV/AIDS MYTH.** In Setswana culture a woman does not ask a man where he has been.

HIV/AIDS REALITY: DON’T FOOL YOURSELF. HIV/AIDS KILLS!

The classroom floor was littered with scraps of paper. It was obvious that someone had not done their job. The class teacher informed those who were supposed to clean that they should report to her in the afternoon in this classroom.

To my immediate right were a group of San students sitting close together. They avoided eye contact with me and I noticed, also with the teacher. Each student was invited by the teacher to the front of the class to share about the person he/she likes the most. First, she called a girl from the San group, a good looking girl by the name of Tlotlo (Respect). She ambled towards the front of the class and stood there for a minute with both hands cupping her mouth. Other students call out to her to speak but, she just looked at her shoes!

“Come on Tlotlo, say something,” encouraged the teacher. “Can’t you see we have an important visitor from the university? Come on,” she implored. Tlotlo fumbled some words through her clasped lips and looking at her, I wondered where she got her school jersey from. It looked too big on her small frame.

“My name is Tlotlo. I am from Kgomodiatshaba,” she whispered.

“Good. Sit down,” said the teacher, although the girl had not finished.

Another San boy named News stands up to tell his story. He is short and has a contagious smile. He is from Bodungwane settlement, about 40 kilometers from the school. He rubbed his hands very hard for a minute or two and said nothing at all, while looking at the teacher from the corner of his eye. He made very little eye contact with the rest of the class. “Okay, sit down,” said the teacher.

Next, a thin looking boy from Kgomodiatshaba was asked to share his story. He started by rubbing his left eye so much that I thought it might pop out! This unfortunately is an invitation for the rest of the class to laugh at him. No matter what the teacher said, she fails to stop them from laughing and making fun of the poor boy. It did not help that he started to scratch his nose and twitch his fingers. One boy called out something I failed to understand. This made Mr. Nervous even more nervous.

“Are you dumb?” some student called out in Setswana.

The teacher asked him to speak his name but, there was no response. The teacher gave up on him and as punishment, left him standing. Thomas was next. He was also from Kgomodiatshaba. Looking at him, I could see that he was not the shy type. He told how he hated Owen (another student in class) because he stole his father’s alcohol and does not help in the fields but, only goes to the field when it was harvest time. This sent the class roaring in laughter, including the teacher. Later, the teacher told me that she deliberately called on San students for my benefit. “Those students always sit in groups. I have tried to separate them but, they always find each other again,” lamented Ms. Thuto.

At the next opportunity I asked Mr. President,

“So, other students laugh at you when you try to speak in class?”

“Everybody here looks down on some of us who come from smaller villages. We are never selected to be Prefects. Only the students from Gaborone and such places are selected. Only one Form Three girl from Kgomodiatshaba is a Prefect,” he offered. Mr. President also thought they were also to blame as they feared leadership and speaking with other people. This, he saw as a shortcoming of their side. “I really wish I could interact more closely with ‘transfer-ins’ better. But, they always don’t have time for us,” he said with remorse. “The problem is, they think very highly of themselves. Even when we ask them for stuff, they refuse. This is surprising because they steal our toiletry and we say nothing. They don’t want to share,” he said sadly.

Toiletry to these students did not come easy. They have to wait for the toiletry from the social workers at the beginning of each term. But, there is no guarantee that the social workers will bring the toiletry on time given other logistics like shortage of transport. Even then, the toiletry only lasted until mid term, even if it was not stolen. The students were expected to bring

some toiletry from home at the beginning of each school term but, most students like Mr. President could not afford to do that.

Towards the end of October, I showed the students how to use the disposable cameras I brought for them. The students were asked to take pictures and then explain why they took the pictures and any meanings they attached to those pictures.

“Let’s look at these pictures you took. In this first photograph, who is this person?” I asked.

“Tiro. My friend,” said Mr. President.

He told me that Tiro was reciting a praise poem.

“Why did you take the picture?” I asked.

“I feel it is important as one can make money as a praise poet,” said the President. In one picture, a group of his friends were playing a game called ‘*Morabaraba*’ (traditional chess). He loves the game because it is entertaining.



Figure 2. Two boys playing ‘*Morabaraba*’ game

He then explained a photograph where he had taken some very green plants. To me, they looked like ordinary plants but, he explained that the plant is very important in hunting. For a successful hunt, one needs to burn the root of the plant and then tie it to some branches to trap small animals like rabbits.



Figure 3. Plant used in successful hunting

“If we were taught such interesting knowledge in science, students from Gaborone and other places would benefit. But, I do not think they will be interested,” reasoned Mr. President. “They look down on such knowledge,” he explained. “But, as for agriculture, I like it because it is not so foreign to our culture and way of doing things,” he reasoned. In the agriculture class, they learn about some plants and herbs which they find in their communities. They also learn about San hunting. He lamented the fact that English was so divorced from his culture and way of doing things. “Setswana is better as some words we can relate to but, others we cannot. If only I knew how to speak English so that my teachers can understand me, then I will do well in school,” the President said nostalgically.

I met again with Mr. President a couple of times in his class and around school. Every time I saw him, I marveled at his contagious smile. I also admired his self-confidence and pride in who he is: a proud San boy.

Knowledge – ‘Germany’ My Love

Mr. President introduced me to his best friend Knowledge soon after our first conversation. Knowledge is a bit darker in complexion than Mr. President and as one teacher enlightened me, this is a result of cohabitation between the Bantu and the San people. Hence, it is not surprising nowadays to come across brown skinned San people. As the President left, I invited Knowledge to walk with me to the rickety plank of wood where we could sit under the tree which was becoming my meeting place apart from the school building.

As we were walking, we passed a group of boys, about ten in number. They were singing traditional Bakgatla songs famously known as ‘*Dikoma*.’ Bakgatla peoples are well known for their traditional singing. The boys took turns in singing the different parts in the song. They seemed not to care that they were attracting attention and Knowledge informed me that it was a norm for these boys to sing around school. They called themselves ‘*Basimane ba Kgosing*’ (the chief’s boys).

“Kgosi Kgari, Kgosi kgolo ya rona.

Kgosi Kgari, Kgosi kgolo ya rona.

Re a mo rata Kgari, Kgosi ya rona

Re a mo rata Kgari, Kgosi ya rona”

“Chief Kgari, our great chief.

Chief Kgari, our great chief.

We love Kgari, our chief.

We love Kgari, our chief”.

“They sing beautifully. Do you also sing like that?” I enquired.

“No. We like traditional San singing and dancing. We have a dance called *Tsutsube*,” he said.

“Do you know how to sing and dance to *Tsutsube*?” I asked.

“Yes. But, there is a Form Three girl called Dineo who excels in it. She is the one who trains us,”

I recalled hearing from one teacher that San students dance very well and when there are important events in the school, they are invited to perform. Recently, there was a prize-giving ceremony in the school and the group performed for the visitor from Gaborone, teachers and some parents. As it was described to me, two students, male and female dance while the other dancers surround them were clapping. Then they take turns with the dancing until everybody has had a chance to dance and sing. The dance costumes are fascinating: animal skins around the girls’ waist and a cloth to cover the boys’ manhood. Both sexes leave the upper body naked. The teacher told me that as the dancers jumped up and down, imitating some animal, the beads tied to their ankles also added to the music.

“Can you sing a San song for me?” I asked of Knowledge. As he started singing, I clapped my hands to encourage him along, as I have seen the San singers do.

“*Ayeiyee! Ayeiyee! Uweeee! Uweeee! Ayeiyeee! Uweeee! Ayeiyee*” sang Knowledge. But, he would not demonstrate the dancing as he felt shy. Knowledge loved San traditional songs and dancing as it is entertaining. I made a mental note to look for Dineo and her dancing group on Saturday.

Knowledge liked school. He told me that getting good grades was important for him. His favorite subjects were Setswana, English and social studies. He found English the easiest as it reminded him of Setswana. Unfortunately, his school performance was not as impressive. He

performed poorly in all subjects, except in social studies. He told me that he scored 92% on his last test. His favorite topic is the environment because it reminded him of his village Kgomodiatshaba.

“In social studies we are taught not to cut down trees. If one has to cut down a tree, then they need to plant another one in its place so that trees can multiply,” he said.

I could tell that this was a topic that interested Knowledge greatly as he told me more about his village Kgomodiatshaba.

“Our village is clean. It is just that they cut down a lot of trees,” he complained.

The trees are cut for firewood and as a result, after some time soil erosion occurs. One of the photographs that Knowledge took of what that literacy means to him was of a boy cutting some branches and collecting firewood. He explained that although they needed the firewood for cooking and keeping warm in winter, he still felt it was not good to cut down trees. Knowledge, the President and some of their friends would go into the bush on errands to collect firewood during school holidays. As they looked for the firewood, they also hunted small animals and looked for caterpillars to eat. After that, they would collect the firewood and headed home. When they arrived the adults were relieved because they thought they were lost.



Figure 4. A boy collecting firewood

In our second talk, Knowledge remembered with fondness his early years growing up at Kgomodiatshaba. He loved to play football with his younger siblings and friends in the dusty fields in his village when schools closed. Playing is important for him. When they got tired of playing football, his father would teach him how to recite poems, especially praise poems for cows. For him, this was a form of literacy.

“Dipampiri tse di makgobo dikgobotse batho diatla, ere ka maburu ba... diatla fela”.
“Modimo o o nko e metsi phologolo e tletseng maphata” (these poems are praise poem that celebrate the beauty of the cow). His grandmother would tell them traditional stories in the evenings, especially after a long days’ work of planting in the fields. His favorite is the story on Tomatoma which he recalled for me.

A long time ago, when animals and people lived together in the village, there was a boy by the name of Tomatoma. He once went out on a journey with his grandfather who got attacked

by a leopard which wanted to kill him. The grandfather then sent the leopard to go and kill Tomatoma. Then the leopard asked grandfather where it will find Tomatoma.

“You will know him by the white beads he will be wearing. I will send him to the stream to fetch water, and then kill him!” instructed the evil grandfather.

As planned, grandfather sent Tomatoma to the stream but, Tomatoma did not go alone. He took his friends along who also wore white beads, just like Tomatoma. On seeing this, the leopard got very angry as it could not tell Tomatoma from his friends. It then went to look for grandfather.

“I will send him to go and look for cattle, and then kill him,” he instructed again. The leopard followed Tomatoma as he was herding but failed to kill him. The grandfather wondered what he was going to say to the leopard this time.

When the leopard came to him, he told it that behind some rocks where he lives there are seven holes. The leopard should get inside the last one and he will send Tomatoma to the seventh hole. Indeed, when Tomatoma got home, his grandfather sent him on an errand to go and sieve traditional beer in the seventh hole. Inside the seventh hole, he found the leopard and he killed it. When his grandfather saw him, he fainted as he could see that the leopard had not killed Tomatoma. When he woke up, Tomatoma told him that he had killed the leopard.

“That is the end of the story,” informed Knowledge.

“Why do you like this story?” I enquired.

The story is important to Knowledge because the grandfather lost in the end. What he had planned to do failed and as a result, good succeeded over evil. Also, such stories teach about life and they should be taught in school. For example, in writing compositions, one can include such knowledge.

On one of the days when I had arranged to meet with Knowledge it was one of those ‘dry’ teaching days in the school as most teachers have gone to the *kgotla* (traditional meeting place). It was a big day as those who have applied for tribal land were going to be allocated plots. During days like these, teaching was relegated to the background. Some teachers had invited me to go with them to the *kgotla* and apply for some land but, I declined since I had promised Knowledge that we were going to meet. While I waited for Knowledge I daydreamed about applying for a plot of land so I could build a two-roomed house and lease it to one of the security guards in the school who always complained of lack of accommodation. I wonder where Knowledge was, I mused. We should be on our way now to the meeting place. As I looked at my watch, I saw that it was past our appointment! The time was 10:30 and we should have met 30 minutes ago. I guess this is what they mean by African time, I chuckled.

I decided to make myself comfortable in the hallway leading to the staffroom. For the first time, I saw a picture of a group of people on the wall, above the door leading to the staffroom. At that moment, Mr. Nthapelang, an Art teacher walked into the staffroom.

“Good morning. You are still coming here, you have not tired of us?” he teased.

“Good morning. Tell me, who are those people in that picture?” I asked ignoring his comment.

“Oh, that is the school Board of Governors and as you can see they are with the school head,” he offered.

“Oh?” I said surprised.

“You have not met the headmaster yet?” he asked, rolling his eyes and throwing his head back. “Why am I not surprised by that?” he said laughing as he asked the school messenger for some money to buy fat cakes.

“Hey, beautiful, have you seen this? I think it might interest you,” said Mr. Loeto, a teacher of social studies who was quite friendly towards me. I took the ‘Botswana Daily Newspaper’ (dated October 20, 2008 No. 196) from him and the front page was a story about President Ian Khama, Seretse Khama’s recent visit to Kaudwane village, one of the San settlements. The President had gone there to encourage San students to stay in school. He applauded Kaudwane residents in the Letlhakeng Sub-District for re-admitting children who dropped out of school.

There was a picture of the President presenting an award to a San girl for best student in English. This failed to impress my teacher friend who harshly commented that:

“These students’ brains do not work properly. Getting a prize is nothing as she is going to drop out of school,”

“Why?” I asked shocked.

“Their brains do not work properly. My grandfather used to say that one can never change a Mosarwa. Once a Mosarwa, always a Mosarwa!”

“You see, they cannot change from their lifestyle. Our grandparents knew how to handle them. Nowadays, the mistake we make is that we treat them like human beings,” he said.

“Hey boy, why are you standing there like a log? Don’t you have manners? Why don’t you greet us?” shouted my teacher friend (I am exercising *Botho* by calling him friend).

At the door was Knowledge looking extremely scared. He opened his mouth to say something but, no words came out. I instinctively sensed that I should not say a word. Not now.

“Are you going to say something? Or do you need a stick to loosen up your tongue?” Threatened Mr. Loeto.

“*Ke bata Mma Olebile*,” (I am looking for Ms. Olebile) he quivered.

“My! My! My!” said the teacher, holding his head and spinning on one leg, “I don’t believe my ears! Setswana speaking in the STAFFROOM? How many times do we need to tell you students that Setswana speaking is not allowed in the staffroom?” he screeched. I grabbed my bag quickly and told the teacher that I had some work to do with Knowledge.

“Please see me afterwards beautiful. I need to talk to you some more about something important,” he said with a twinkle in his eye.

“Knowledge, Knowledge, Knowledge. How have you been? How is school?” I enquired of Knowledge during our third talk after the incident with Mr. Loeto. There was excitement in the air because of the sports day on Saturday.

“School has been okay except that I still have problems with reading. But, when I do not understand, I ask my friend Mr. President,” he said.

In the many instances where Mr. President also does not understand, Knowledge resorts to using the dictionary. These days, he uses the English dictionary. This, he tells me, is a big step from his primary schooling days when he relied only on a Setswana dictionary. However, even with the use of a dictionary, he still fails to comprehend when reading and does not ask the teacher for help as he is scared of teachers.

He and Mr. President have been study partners for so long, since their primary school days. Before end of month tests and end of term examinations, they take turns asking each other questions that think might be asked on the test or examinations. As they read from their notebooks, they also write down the questions that they think will be on the test. However, they use this study method only for reviewing for English because they perform so badly on it. English listening comprehension especially, makes Knowledge very worried as it is so difficult unlike Setswana listening comprehension. The teacher reads out a story to the class and after

that, students write answers to the questions posed by the teacher. The problem is that they cannot remember some words in the story and parts of the story. It does not help also that they are slow writers. The last story his teacher read to them was from a Radio Botswana newscast.

I followed Knowledge as promised to the sports field on a Monday afternoon after the sports day. First, he had to change from his school uniform into ordinary clothes. As we were walking towards the hostels, we met Love, one of my non-San informants. She walked along side us, busy on her cell phone.

Knowledge and I could not help but hear her conversation in Setswana. “Mama, I need to transfer from this school. Remember we talked about it and you agreed,” said Love.

“Hooray! Why didn’t you tell me about it?” she screamed excitedly after the call.

Apparently, her mother had just bought a house in Gaborone as she told us excitedly. Also, she proudly informed us that her transfer issue was imminent as it was being handled by her relative, the school matron.

Knowledge headed to the boys’ hostel as I stopped at the entrance to the girls hostel. A fence separated the girls’ and boys’ hostels. Around the mesh fence surrounding the red brick hostels were a few blankets, duvets and comforters of different colors hanging to dry. The rainbow of colors reminded me of an exotic bird in the Okavango Swamps of Botswana where tourists from the West particularly like to visit. Someone told me that when the former President of the United States Bill Clinton and his wife visited the swamps, they fell in love with the bird, the beautiful Lilac-Breasted Roller and could not stop taking pictures of it. Love invited me to her room which she shared with nine other girls. There were five tiny beds on the left of the room and five tiny ones on the right side. On the other side of the wall were some wardrobes. The space in the middle was just wide enough for walking and the room looked very crowded.

The hostels were built in such a way that the doors of the rooms opened to a large courtyard. In the courtyard, students were busy doing a variety of activities. A group of girls were removing braids from their friend's hair. Some girls were just sitting and chatting after a long days work. Done, one of my San informants reminded me not to forget to buy her toiletry. As I watched them, the students reminded me so much of my secondary school days as they went about their chores, not caring about their semi-nakedness.

Behind the hostels was a barren, dusty field the San students called 'Germany'. 'Germany' was much smaller than the school's official sports field and from close observation, I could tell Knowledge and his friends had put a lot of work into it. They had cleared all the grass in the field and erected some pillars that proudly represented football posts. Two or three balls made of cloth, plastic, paper; anything the boys came across could be seen in the middle of the field. As the boys went into the field, Mr. President, Knowledge and a few of their friends waved at me. I was glad that my presence was welcomed.

"Kick the ball this way Henry!" someone shouted.

"Watch out Ronaldo!" screamed Mr. President.

"Beckham! Beckham! Beckham!" screamed an onlooker.

'Germany' was a safe haven for these boys. According to Knowledge, he is not involved in the school's official football team and other sporting activities because he does not yet have a passport. He will need the passport if he has to go and compete in places like South Africa and Namibia. However, they are still allowed to play in school even without the passports. But, he feels more comfortable in 'Germany' with all his friends from Kgomodiatshaba.



Figure 5. Knowledge's friend Tshepho in 'Germany'

I met Knowledge again a few times around school. We would meet from time to time as Done, one of my San informants gave out toiletry to my friends under the tree. The last time I met with Knowledge was during the end of year party.

Happy – I Miss Home So Much!

The big bus sped on its way to Francistown, a town 500 kilometers from Gaborone the capital city of Botswana. From the bus window, I could tell that it was going to rain any moment. I silently prayed that it would as the heat had been intolerable in the last few weeks. The driver swerved to the left and right to avoid other vehicles or livestock. As he did, the standing passengers fell on those sitting.

“Boy, do you want to kill us?” screamed an old lady sitting on the floor of the bus. “Whose child is this? Do you want me to choke on this corn I am eating?” she complained.

The bus was stopped at the request of one passenger who wanted to relieve himself by the side of the road. This led half of the passengers to do the same or just to stretch their legs. Oh, this is just great; I thought sarcastically, this will make me miss my meeting with Happy! We had met a week earlier and agreed on meeting again today. Happy was a fourteen year old girl who despite her name seemed sad even with her pretty smile. I remember the first time I saw her in a science class, I thought how young and sweet she looked. I felt a maternal impulse to protect her from the harsh realities of life. I remember looking into her eyes and seeing pain beyond her fourteen years.

By God's grace, the place left me at the gate leading to the main entrance of the school. I waited for a family in a donkey cart to pass through the gate before closing it behind me to keep the wandering goats and cows from entering. The man driving the cart said, "Thank you for your *Botho*." From the gate, I walked for about six or seven minutes before I reached school. I took off my flip flops, wiped the dust from my feet before putting on my fashionable city shoes. I heard a "Good morning, *Mma*" from somewhere. I looked up to see it was the gate keeper who then updated me on the events of last night. A group of boys had jumped over the school fence last night. This reminded me of what I had heard previously from the headmaster and the deputy head.

"These children love alcohol. One teacher saw them yesterday at the local bar, drinking and dancing," he said with a shake of his grey head.

As I passed by the ENGLISH SPEAKING POLICY board on my way to the staffroom, I heard the loud screams of children coming from two directions: the staffroom and the headmaster's office. Well, I thought, it was one of those days.

The sight that greeted me was far from pleasant. Lying prostrate on the floor were five boys and standing over them was my good friend the Deputy Principal. In his hand was a big stick and I immediately thought of the one a neighbor of ours had used to kill a huge snake that had finished his chickens. He lashed four times at each boy and with each lash came a loud wail. It was the last boy whom my heart particularly went out to. With the approach of each lash, the boy squirmed like a worm to escape the pain. This only led to more lashes. I lost count of how many lashes he got. I looked pathetically at two male teachers who were also witnessing this but they did not look troubled like I was.

“Next time you will think twice about dodging and going to the village!” barked the Deputy Principal.

Teachers came into the staffroom one at a time; some carrying books some sticks. I could tell that it was the end of third period, going on to fourth. Most of the teachers were in their twenties, except for a few who were in their early thirties. They are just children themselves, I thought.

Happy had informed me that her teacher will not be in for fourth period as he has gone with the school’s driver to the capital city of Gaborone. Standing by the staffroom door, I heard Happy’s voice speaking to Ms. Bathusi, one of the cleaning ladies who were chatting in the hallway leading to the staffroom.

“I am looking for the new teacher,” she said.

“Does she have a name,” asked the other women who cleans?

“I have forgotten her name. She has hips,” described Happy.

There was a roar of laughter from the hallway and even from the two men still in the staffroom. I walked to Happy who was nervously wringing her hands. The two of us walked to the usual

meeting place. On the way we passed Ms. Thuso, followed by News and some other boy who were helping carry books for her to the staffroom. Today she looked very tired and I thought to myself that her baby was due any time.

“Hello, Ms. Thuso. How are you two doing?” I greeted cheerfully.

“Hanging in there” she laughed.

“I would like to accompany you to class tomorrow. Is that okay?” I asked.

“We will be doing nothing much. Just going over the test they wrote last month,” she said. I noticed that her friendly demeanor had disappeared.

“That is okay. I just want to hear how the students respond,” I said.

“I don’t think that is a good idea. You will come next time,” she said with a tone of finality.

I felt like an intruder and a real bother when it came to classroom visits, especially with that teacher. Why is she so impossible, I thought? I need to talk to the Deputy Head about making classroom observations.

When Happy and I were finally alone, she told me about herself. She missed her family dearly. She talked with longing about her parents, grandmother and younger siblings. She is the eldest child and has always felt a responsibility towards her younger siblings. She missed making tea for her parents and cooking for her siblings. She reminded me of how I was forced to cook everyday for my five siblings and a couple of cousins at a very young age. This was important, she told me, so that when she was left with her younger siblings she can take good care of them. Her mother had taught her to behave well and always respect other people. That is a sign of *botho*, I reflected. Insulting other people was forbidden. I had to look away from the sad look in her eyes as she fondly talked about her grandmother and the stories she always told her.

Happy's mother had gone up to Standard 7 but, did not continue with her schooling because her academic performance was not good enough. In those days there was no automatic promotion to junior secondary school as is now the norm in Botswana. However, she always encouraged Happy to study hard. Happy remembered her mother teaching her the alphabet when she was young:

"A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M,N,O,P,Q,R,S,T,U,V,W,X,Y,Z," recalled Happy.

Happy is struggling academically. She finds school hard as she was underperforming in all subjects, especially English. She worried that she might not end up being a nurse.

"I can't read English books," she told me.

"I never ask teachers for help," she said.

"Why?" I asked.

"I am scared of them," she said.

I asked her about science and how she performed in it. In the last test she had scored 24%. Although she found science difficult, it reminded her of the importance of cleanliness, which her mother taught her. English was a difficult subject because it was unrelated to her culture. She would also be happier in school if her teachers explained more and stopped missing lessons. Teachers miss lessons to go to the clinic and sometimes a teacher gives his/her teaching slot to another teacher who has to finish the syllabus before end of year examinations. This she found to be in direct contrast to her teachers in primary school.

When Happy needs extra help, she asks Neo, her friend who also comes from Bodungwane.

Happy's told me that one of her problems is that when the teacher is talking she is always thinking of home. She is always thinking of playing with little children and her friends in the

village. She really enjoys the games they play as they are not boring like school. She told me that it is important for children to have fun and sometimes they are allowed to play for the whole day. They play games such as *diketo*. Little holes are dug in the ground and ten little stones are put into each hole. Before the stone in the air falls she must put each stone one by one back in the hole. As they play *diketo*, they also compete in telling riddles. Happy told me about this game when I asked her what literacy meant to her.

In the photographs that Happy took to show what literacy meant to her there was a picture of two girls playing ‘*morabaraba*’ (traditional chess game).



Figure 6. Two girls playing *Morabaraba* game

Happy loves this game so much because it is fun and exciting. She then explains a photograph of some girls dancing to a song called ‘*ba ga Bushi*’ (those of Bushi’s or those who belong to Bushi). I ask her to sing and she starts:

“*Ba ga Bushe te te.*”

“Te te

Ba ga Bushi”.

Another photograph was of Done (one of my San informants) and a friend. They were playing *koi*, traditional skipping. They had got a long vine from the nearby bushes and as two people held it, one on each end, the person in the middle jumped as the vine hit the ground. The trick is not to let the vine touch you. If one touches the vine, they are disqualified and the next person comes to the centre.

There was also a photograph of Neo reciting a poem that Happy could not remember well enough to repeat it. Happy agreed to meet me again to talk more in three days. During the intervening two days, I was going to be with other students.

On a Wednesday before the sports day, I was on my way to observe in Happy's science class which was meeting in the school hall today because their classroom was being used for another lesson. The school has a shortage of classrooms hence, the students have to keep on rotating to other classrooms or to the library. I am wondering about what I will observe since the teacher, Mr. Selepe seemed less than enthusiastic about teaching science the last time I spoke with him.

“I am looking forward to this year coming to an end. I hate teaching science as I am a Design and Technology teacher. Even when I enter class, I feel so discouraged and the students simply put me off!” he lamented.

“Then why are you teaching it? Is it due to shortage of teachers?” I asked.

“No, it is deliberate. Teachers are roaming the streets. The school should do something about this situation,” According to Mr. Selepe, the school needs to employ more Science teachers.

My thoughts are interrupted by a “*dumela Mma*. (Hello lady). You must be the lady from the university,” commented the person whose photograph I had seen in the hallway leading to the staffroom.

“How are you finding everything in the school? Are the students behaving?” he asked.

“These students are well behaved,” I replied politely.

He told me that he was the school head and he was presently doing his Masters’ Degree in Educational Management at the University of Botswana on a part basis.

“You heard about my house, didn’t you?” he asked.

“No. I lied,” Who has not heard of the drama surrounding the headmaster’s house?

He has to commute from Ramotswa, a village 150 kilometers from the school because last winter, strong winds had blown the roof off his house by the school. Now he has a long commute. It was a big joke in the school that he feared someone had bewitched him and his home. We used to laugh when the teachers teased the Deputy Head that he was the one casting spells on the headmaster. What fascinated me about the whole incident was the fact that his house got repaired a long time ago but, he was still scared to live in it.

Before coming to this school, he was the headmaster in a Community Junior Secondary School (C.J.S.S) in the Ghanzi District, west of Botswana. As of now he has been at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School for four years. He told me a story of a San girl in the former Ghanzi School. The girl confessed that she did not care about school because the teachers were under performing. When she was questioned further, she lamented the fact that San students are not taught in their mother tongues and also teachers were ignorant of their home languages. What the head and others found fascinating was that she swore that if she was taught

in her own language, she would excel. The headmaster acknowledged that what the girl was saying was probably the truth.

In Happy's class the science teacher was giving out test papers. He complained of the students' very poor performance, as usual. He called out students one at a time to the front of the class for their papers. Two San boys who were sitting near me at the back got theirs and I saw that the one sitting right next to me had got 6% in the test. They crumbled the test papers into round balls and one put his head on the table, as if ready to sleep. The teachers saw the round balls and said to the students that it clearly showed that the revision process meant nothing to them. He threatened the boy whose head was on the table and another boy that he would send them to the field to jog.

The revision was on the different types of leaves. As the teacher asked the students questions, I noticed that there was hardly any participation by San students in class. The teacher failed to ask them questions or draw them out. I saw that Happy and her friends were very quiet. In Happy's table were two BaKgatla girls (non San) and one always had her hand up. The test revision had no reference to leaves found in San student's home areas and the teacher did not ask them of such knowledge. By now, half of the class was dozing and the heat of the day did not help to make the classroom situation better. For the first time the teacher notices that half of the class (San and non San) do not have their science textbooks with them and the students complain that the books have been stolen. He concludes the lesson by informing students that Friday's lesson is cancelled due to the fact that the school hall had to be cleaned in preparation for Saturdays' regional sports day.

I met Happy at the hostels on Saturday and at the end of the school party. She was more relaxed and told me that she looked forward to the end of the school term as she could not wait to go back home

Drought – I Wish I Had a Friend

I sat under the meeting tree on the rickety bench waiting for Love and Peace, my two non San informants. Today they were going to introduce me to Drought. I had already observed in her Form One class. As usual, it was a very hot October afternoon in Letsatsi village. The sky was blue with no trace of rain clouds. The hot air hung heavy in the air with no breeze at all. If it does not rain soon, we are going to have shortage of water in Botswana, I mused. It was quiet as the students were busy with afternoon study revising for tests or copying down notes. One could never tell.

“Madam, this is Drought. The student I told you about,” introduced Love.

“Hello Drought. I am very happy to see you and I hope I will have an opportunity to work with you and know you better,” I said.

Drought comes from a family of ten children. Six of her siblings never went to school. One sibling, Thebe, dropped out of school when he was in standard 4 which is equivalent to grade 4. Drought does not know why he dropped out of school or the reason why two other brothers also dropped out of school. Her mother begged Thebe to go back to school as he was left with only three years to complete primary school and move on to junior secondary school. No amount of cajoling and pleading would convince Thebe to go back to school. Drought, the last born child is the only one who has made it to junior school. Before her, a cousin had gone as far as form 5 when sadly, he died. One day during school holidays he was riding a horse looking for cattle when suddenly the horse threw him off. He fell and broke his neck. The next morning

his mother was found naked at the graveyard and it was obvious that the passing on of his son had greatly affected her.

As for life at school Drought told me she speaks Setswana there and also at home. She likes English a lot but, finds it very difficult.

“What is difficult about it Drought?” I asked

“Sometimes when the teacher asks a question I fail to understand then I keep quiet and wait for other students to respond,” she explained.

After other students answer, then she understands a bit and makes an attempt to answer but, sadly, the teachers never points at her. They always point to the girl who sits next to her from Bodungwana. Drought reasons that this is unfair especially when teachers always complain that students from Kgomodiatshaba never say anything in class. In addition to English, she also likes Mathematics and Setswana. She likes Mathematics because when other students explain concepts to her, she understands quickly. Science is important because it teaches students about teenage pregnancy. However, she is underperforming in all school subjects.

“The problem is that when the teacher is busy on the chalkboard, my friends and I play and make noise,” she explains. Also, when she tries to answer in class, other students laugh at her. She does not like reading and she would rather play *diketo* or sleep. This is because she finds English words difficult. Sometimes, the English teacher asks another student to assist Drought with her reading. Given a choice, she would rather read a Setswana book to an English one.

When she gets a Setswana book, she especially looks for proverbs. Her favorites are:

“*Go nna moriti o tsididi*” (To pretend that one cannot see what is happening around them).

“*Go ja ka loleme*” (To lie to or to cheat).

Such knowledge, according to Drought is useful especially in written composition. She also likes stories and the messages they teach people. In addition, Drought feels such messages are important for the future and for directing young people along the right path. Her favorite is the story of the lion and the monkey. In the story monkey approached lion and asked her to be best friends. They became the best of friends and the lion became chief of all the animals. Hare came along and tried to trick them by saying that a house can build and rebuild itself. What she learnt from this story is that the hare always tries to trick other animals and this is not a good thing to do. Also, animals can act like human beings or be personified, she said.

“Hello, Drought. Please get your share of sweets from Mr. President,” I said to Drought who was coming towards the meeting place.

Mr. President, Knowledge, News and Done were also there. I had brought toiletries and candy for them.

In our second meeting with Drought early in November, she told me how she will never forget the day one of the girls’ hostels burned down. I had been hearing differing stories about why the hostel burned in 2008 before I even arrived at the school. According to Mr. Thutego, one of the Art teachers, the whole unfortunate incident was caused by an electrical fault. Some students like Drought, claim it was caused by some strange men who came to school looking for girls. Most students lost all their belongings but fortunately they got some assistance in replacing their things from the social workers. Since they had nowhere to sleep the school hall was turned into a temporary hostel. What saddens her is that some students failed to show kindness and *Botho* towards those who had lost their belongings. Students from Gaborone and such places or what the students called “transfer-ins” were especially cruel and said that they did not rely on hand outs from social workers but, their parents buy expensive stuff for them.

Drought told me that her mother always talks to her about *Botho*, the importance of respecting adults and her peers. “I was taught to exercise *Botho* in school,” she said. A child who lacks *Botho* often goes astray and ends up alone. Hence, all these are important values that need to be taught at school and home. This is what she told me when I asked her what literacy meant to her. Unfortunately, her home is not always an excellent model of *Botho*. She has a brother who lacks *Botho*. At home, when they are relaxing around the evening fire, their mother would tell them stories of things that happened to her when she was young. Her brother would tell her mother to keep quiet as she was “speaking nonsense”.

One story Drought remembered her mother telling was about the time she got lost a long time ago when she went looking for cattle that had strayed. She was walking past the village Bodungwane when she came upon a lion eating a donkey. She ran for her life until she came upon some people riding donkeys who rescued her. When she arrived at the village late that night her body was badly scratched from running through thorny bushes.

Drought also talked about games as a form of literacy. Her favorite is the sun and moon game. She also likes the traditional hide and seek. I fondly remembered how I used to play this game with my siblings and cousins when we were younger. She likes these games a lot because they are not boring like school. In school, they play games on Saturdays. Sometimes, she and a group of friends play role games in the hostel. For example, they played ‘church’ as they were not allowed to attend the local churches in the village. Church songs play a great part in the service and her favorite is a song we sang together:

Modimo o re file sebakanyana se, le motsotsonyana o...

Ha ba kena ka kgoro,

Le nna ketla ba le teng...

God has given us this time, this limited time.

When they enter the heavenly gates

I will also be there...

Drought likes Christmas because she can be back in the village with her entire family.

There are singing competitions in the village which lasts for days. Each person has new clothes made of animal skins and beads. She sang one of the songs for me in Setswana:

Ke kile ra utswelwa morabaraba

Iyeleielele, kele ra utswelwa morabaraba

Iyeleielele, a ho iyeleielele, yeleielelele

Iyeleielele...

As she sings, I pick on the chorus and sing along “*Iyeleielele, Iyeleielele, Iyeleielele*”

The above song is about the stealing of *morabaraba* by someone. I told Drought a story about a chief’s daughter, Sananapo who got killed by some jealous friends when they had gone out to collect firewood. They then cooked and ate her. They offered her little dog a bone but, it refused. When they got back to the village, the chief wanted to know where his daughter was and Sananapo’s little dog started to sing:

Sananapo, Sananapo, Sananapo, Sananapo,

Ba mmolaile Sananapo

They offered me a bone

Nna ga ke je motho, Sananapo.

Sananapo, Sananapo, Sananapo, Sananapo

They have killed Sananapo

They offered me a bone

I do not eat the flesh of a human.

In one of the photographs that Drought took to help me understand what literacy means to her was of a group of her friends singing the Morabaraba song. She took this photograph because she loves singing and she also values the messages in songs. She sang me a song on passion killings that warned Batswana on the dangers of passion killings. Drought thought the song important because it can help to reduce passion killings and suicide. Unfortunately she is nervous about singing at school because the non San students would laugh.

“Here in school it is boring (*go a bora*). When we sing, they always say that those who are singing are from the cattle posts,” said Drought.

“Do they sing?” I asked.

“They sing only English songs,” replied Drought.



Figure 7. Drought's friends singing 'Morabaraba' song

What I liked a lot about Drought was that she was like an open book. While chatting with her it became obvious that she was a loving girl who reached out to others all the time. However, she got rejected and called an ignorant “Mosarwa” What hurts her most was that even students from Kgomodiatshaba her village, call her “Mosarwa.” Yet when she calls them “Mosarwa” they become angry. She remembers a time when she first started school at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School and how she used to follow students from her village around school all the time. At the time she was a friend to Keteng, a girl from Thamaga near the city who shares her toiletries. I wished for her sake that the friendship lasts.

Whenever I looked at her I wondered whether the strange marks and sores on her face, hands and legs are to blame were the reason why other students rejected her. She told me that when she was in standard 7, a piece of grass got into her eye and ever since that time, she has been having strange marks on her face, hands and legs. Each mark begins as an itchy sore and then develops into a blister. After the blister has healed, ugly marks remain all over her body. After some time, the itchy sores surfaces again with blisters following. The first time I saw her I thought the spots were some soot she put on her body.

When schools close her mother has promised to take her to the traditional doctor. Drought enlightened me on how traditional doctors heal their patients. Patients are given some charms that they blow air into. After that, the doctor takes the charms and throws them onto the chest of the patient and after reading the charms he tells them what is wrong with her. Not all traditional doctors go into trance when they administer healing: some do, some don't. As the doctor provides the healing and goes into trance, there is singing and clapping of hands by other people.

As Drought and I were talking, Dineo, one of the gatekeepers and the boarding master approached and the boarding master asked me for Coca-Cola. I promised to get him a can the following day. He asked me if I have seen the marks and sores on Drought.

“Nobody takes this seriously,” he said in frustration.

“Look at her hands,” said Dineo.

“Her parents lack knowledge on this,” said the boarding master.

They both advised that she should visit a traditional doctor for healing. After they had left, Drought informed me that her father is a traditional doctor who lives in Polokabatho village. Unfortunately for her, he cannot heal her because a traditional doctor does not administer healing on his children. She remembers the times when she and her sister, Dintle used to go with their father to look for traditional plants used for healing. One day Dintle stole some of their father’s medicine and he was angry as some medicine can kill. Her father is so powerful that he has medicine to catch witches and he once caught a witch in the village as she was warming herself at home in winter. This incident surprised everyone and embarrassed the witch greatly. I then laid hands on Drought and invited the Blood of Jesus to heal her as I said a short prayer.

Drought strongly believes in traditional healing. She reasons that ignoring this fact can be fatal. She remembers the time her mother was bitten by a poisonous snake. Her father made cuts on her mother’s skin and the infected blood came out. Her father then put a grasshopper on her hand and as soon as it finished drinking the poisoned blood, the insect fell down dead. Then her father removed one of the snake’s fangs from the wound. This saved her mother’s life. Students in school need to know what to do when bitten by snakes and other poisonous creatures, she said. Her mother has taught her the different plants that are used for healing small children and one of the plants is called ‘*Borumolano*’. She does not know how to mix the herbs and administer

healing but, her mother has taught one of her sisters. Literacy to her is knowledge of healing and how to use things in the environment.

In addition, teachers should connect their teaching to what is happening in students' cultures. For example, in a Setswana lesson, a teacher can ask students:

“What happens when a girl bathes at night?” A girl needs to put some burnt coal in the water when bathing at night to avoid being a spinster. A boy who sleeps until the sun is out will not marry. She regretted the fact that young people are losing their cultural ways of knowing and this is compounded by the fact that they ignore the advice of elders. Traditional knowledge can benefit ‘transfer in’ students as they are losing out on traditional knowledge. For example, ‘transfer in’ students do not know about ‘*Lerufa*’ an underground bulb that contains a lot of water. Knowledge of plants like this is important for survival, especially in the very hot Kalahari Desert, she said.

She told me how her mother taught her and her sister about the different types of grasses used for thatching and how to differentiate them. Also, she taught them how to handle the sickle for cutting the grass. The ‘*Mokubu*’ grass is like a creeper. The ‘*Motshikhiri*’ which is taller, is also good for thatching. The ‘*Motshikhiri*’ grass is better when it rains, water does not leak from the roof. As her mother and a group of her friends’ cut grass, she follows after them singing. She is worried that as school closes, they might not find the grass as it might have burned due to the excessive heat. However, they need the grass to build the hut used for making fire. For Drought, literacy is also for survival.

“Is there anything you want to ask me,” I asked Drought.

“I would like to know about how you were brought up and the teachings you got from your parents growing up,” said Drought.

I told her that my parents taught me to respect young and old alike. Also, I have to extend *Botho* to everyone and treat all people equally. The importance of formal education was also emphasized a lot in our home.

Later that afternoon while waiting for the bus to take me back to Gaborone the Moral Education teacher, Ms. Phiri, volunteered her opinion that the Government of Botswana is wasting tax payers' money by educating Basarwa students. She commented that she saw me with Drought earlier that day. She remarked that Drought is a stupid Mosarwa girl and according to her, I will not get much information from her for my research. She advised that I need to talk to some Mosarwa boy who was not shy about being a Mosarwa. Clearly, this teacher knows very little about Drought, I seethed inside as I got into the bus.

Receiver – Bug Spraying Nightmare

Today my participant named Drought was bringing another San girl to meet me. She told me that the name of the girl is Receiver. She is also from Kgomodiatshaba. While waiting, I made myself comfortable on the sofa where I usually sit in the staffroom as I listened to the conversation that afternoon. There were only two teachers in the staffroom, Mr. Thutego, who was on afternoon duty that week and Mr. Selepe, a Science teacher. Both teachers were marking students' work while they chatted. Mr. Selepe commented that in the school, one cannot teach without the lecturing method. When a teacher tried other methods the lesson stops because few students participate. Other teaching methods, such as group work, can be used in classroom situations where students are average in terms of academic performance. Also, when one tries to engage the students more, one falls behind with regard to covering content form in the syllabus. Hence, the lecture method is the preferred method for these teachers.

Then I heard the polite greeting of “*Dumela Madam*,” from Drought who stood at the door of the staffroom. I rose and walked to meet the two girls at the door. Drought said, “this is Receiver, the girl I told you about.”

Receiver is a tall, slim and dark complexioned San girl with an enchanting smile. She reminded me of what Ms. Thuso, an English teacher called “blended San.” Receiver and I walked out to my usual spot on the rickety bench under the big *Mosetlha* tree. That afternoon, I learnt that Receiver is from a family of seven. Four of her elder siblings have failed junior school and as a result could not progress to senior school. Her two younger siblings are still at primary school. The first born child, a boy, is now looks after someone’s cattle. The other boy was taken to a school in Gaborone by a social worker. At home and in school her primary language is Setswana. In school, she likes to speak English with her friends yet she also told me of the problems she has with spelling and writing English words.

“So why do you like English so much?” I asked.

She was interested in learning English so that she could understand what happens at school. All the school subjects except Setswana are taught in English. Sometimes, when she was with her friends from Kgomodiatshaba, they would practice speaking in English and nobody laughed at them. It was important for her to master English as it would lead to her scoring high marks in school assignments and tests.

When it comes to reading, she enjoys reading Setswana books, especially novels. Her favorite novel is *Ntlo ya Manong* ‘House of Vultures’ which is a story of a girl who lived with her parents and always complained that they were abusing her. She then left her parents to go and work in town for a company. She was late for work every day and finally, she lost her job. After that, she resorted to stealing. When she got caught, she regretted her lifestyle terribly.

Receiver learnt that it is important to listen to parents' advice all the time as failure to do that can lead to trouble.

The stories that her grandmother always tells her and her siblings are very important because of the messages they convey. This is literacy to her because she can learn from such teachings and apply to her own life. One of the stories she told them is that of the hyena and the hare. The two were best friends and lived together. One day they attended a party and started dancing. At the party, the hare ate a lot and as a result he got diarrhea. He decided to go back home without telling hyena. In the evening of the same day, the hare and hyena went out to have more fun. This time it was hyena that left without telling hare.

"In this story I learnt that it is important to treat others well and with kindness so that they return the same treatment," reasoned Receiver.

"So, you read a lot of stories in Setswana. Do you read stories in English too?" I asked.

"No. Because I do not understand English," she said. Even when visiting the school library, she borrows only Setswana books.

"I am only interested in Setswana books," she said.

She finds Science difficult as it does not remind her of her culture. Hence, it has no meaning for her. She gave examples of a lesson on iron and nitrogen. When they are mixed, she does not understand the whole process of coming up with the end product. I could tell that all these were too abstract for Receiver to comprehend.

Unlike science, she finds social studies useful because it has a lot of meaning for her. It relates to her culture. There are references to the San in the Social Studies textbook. However, I noticed the fact that when speaking about the San people' Receiver distances herself by referring to them as "they." Yet she said it was important to teach about the San people in schools and

how they lived long ago. Such knowledge should be made known to non San students, she reasoned. Receiver finds Moral Education easier because it reminds her of the subject Religious Education. However, she still failed Moral Education because she could not understand the questions posed to her in English. She also likes Mathematics but, unfortunately she is failing it. In her last test she scored 30%. However, she is keen to improve.

Another form of literacy Receiver spoke of was the traditional baskets that her mother and grandmother made from grasses they collect by the river far from their village. Her mother and grandmother have promised to teach her how to make the baskets with their many different patterns. Each pattern means something particular. As the women weave, they also sing.

Singing is another form of literacy Receiver loves. They sang a lot on Saturdays at the hostels. Her sister taught her to sing. Singing is entertaining for her. I enjoyed to her beautiful singing. Receiver has a beautiful voice:

Song 1: *A lo a mo itse techere wa rona Lebati?*

A lo a mo itse techere wa rona Lebati?

A lo a mo itse techere wa rona

Tlhako sa sagwe ga se sefata sa dikgomo!

The song is about a favorite teacher who puts on beautiful shoes.

Song 2: *Ga mo mokgosi o lela,*

Ikgogela ko kgotleng

Mo mosong wa letsati

Pilediwa e a lwelwa

Pilediwa e a a lwelwa

Pilediwa e a lwelwa

A rialo mogologolo.

In the above lyrics, the elders remind people that when the village chief calls them to the *kgotla* (traditional meeting place), they should all go.

Receiver also likes singing because it helps her make friends when they share songs. This creates unity, peace and respect towards all people which her mother taught her.

Her mother and some of the women weave mats. Her uncles' cut wood to carve into tables, chairs and benches. This is important knowledge to her because people will learn how to carve wood into furniture. Her father collects firewood and sells it in the village.

Life at junior secondary school is hard. She never had enough toiletries and the toiletry she got from the social worker was not enough. She was fortunate that Pretty, a friend from Mochudi shared her toiletry. Pretty was different from the other non San students as she was very kind and helpful. She told me that Pretty had assisted her in class when Receiver did not understand something. Pretty always understands in class and did very well academically. She never called her names like the other students who called her names such as "*mogatla*" (tail) and the "ignorant one from the cattle post."

"These students look down upon us," she lamented.

The high theft at the hostels also made the already bad situation worse. Receiver said students (non San) steal anything they come across. They especially like to take clothes. After stealing the clothes, the thieves bury them under the ground. Then, when schools closes for vacation they dig them out and take them to their homes where they leave them when returning to school.

She longs for the bygone days when she was a primary school student at Kgomodiatshaba. Teachers in primary school were more understanding and kind. They assisted

her whenever she had problems in school and at home. In junior school, teachers never asked them what problems they have. However, her favorite teacher, Mr. Koko, a teacher of Setswana was kind and bought toiletries for her. Now in school, she never asked teachers when she did not understand in class because she is afraid they might speak harshly to her. I encouraged her to ask in class.

She remembers fondly the times when she was a member of the Drama Club in her primary school. Her favorite play was one in which a group of students littered the school compound. An old man came along and told them that littering is not a good thing. He told them to pick up the litter and clean up the school. This is literacy to her as it conveys an important message of not to litter. Although there is a Drama Club in junior school, she is not part of it.

During school holidays, she still goes gathering traditional grapes and other fruits with her mother and grandmother. Later, her grandmother sold what they had gathered. Her grandmother is also a traditional doctor of children's illnesses. She knows which plants cure a sick child's umbilical cord that is protruding and a distended stomach. To heal a sick head for example, she burns the leaves of the plants she has gathered. Then she mixes the burnt leaves with Vaseline and makes a cross on the child's head. This is important knowledge that can benefit everybody, according to Receiver.

Receiver reminded me of my childhood and how my grandmother used to tell us that the Basarwa people know a lot about treating childrens' illnesses. Even today, people living in urban Botswana will travel to remote areas to look for old women to cure their childrens' diseases. Some of these diseases can be fatal if not cured on time. For example, I know of a disease associated with the mother and father having sexual intercourse when they have a newborn baby. The baby can develop a big stomach and head.

Receiver will never forget the day in Form One when she had just arrived in the school. The form 2 and 3 (grade 9 and 10) girls literally enslaved them. Receiver and others did their dirty work for them day and night. Whenever Receiver was doing her laundry, they would come with their clothes and force her and other San to wash them. Also, they made them clean their rooms and polish their shoes. They were too scared to report them to the matron. As if that was not enough torture, one day Receiver said that the older girls sprayed them for bugs with real disinfectant. Receiver ran fast for dear life as the students chased after her and other San students. They were called names such as “long tails.” This incident made her even less excited about being in junior secondary school and she decided to withdraw and keep to herself. The students’ behavior shows serious lack of *Botho*, I thought. All this saddens her as she would like to pass and be a nurse one day so that she can assist the sick in her village.

It had been raining hard this November and when I arrived at Letsatsi village, it was wet everywhere. I met with Receiver under the tree and she told me an interesting story of a book that she read since we last met. The story was about a woman who was ill-treating a child who had lost parents. The child was left with her aunt who mistreated him. She sold him to a cruel man called Shumba. The man was so cruel to the boy that he ran away from the cattle post. He had been running for a long time when some people found him by the roadside extremely exhausted. He then told them how Shumba had been mistreating him. The good Samaritans took pity on him and employed him to look after their goats. Shumba went to look for him and one day when herding, he found the boy and beat him and took him away to his aunt. The aunt enrolled him in school. He excelled in school and got first position in standard seven. He proceeded to senior secondary school and then to university. After that he got married and lived happily ever after.

“In the story I learnt that I should study hard because life is difficult,” she said.

As we talk, *Basimane ba Kgosing* who always walked around singing in school pass by singing happily as Receiver told me the story of ‘Things Fall Apart’ (Achebe, 1958). In the story, Okonkwo, the evil leader adopts a son, Ekemefuna. He ill-treats the boy to the extent that he takes part in his ritual murder.

“What did you learn from this story?” I asked.

“I learnt that in life there are good and bad people,” said Receiver.

As we pick up our bags to leave our place under the tree, the boarding master greeted us followed closely by his little dog. He inquired of Receiver when she was going to take pictures of them.

During the second week of November, I happily accompany Ms. Peo, the English teacher to 2A, Receiver’s class for a literature lesson. On the way she cautioned me not to expect much from the lesson as students in the class were too quiet. Talking to her, I could tell she was the tough kind of teacher, the no nonsense type. On the way to class she rebuked a boy from standing in her path. When we get to class, she greeted the students and called out the attendance register. She then informed students that today the class was going to read a book ‘The Play of Google Eyes’ (Fine, 1995), by a British author. The teacher called to the front of the class four students (all non San) to read from the book. The students took on the different characters in Act two: Kitty, Jude, Gerald and Mum. I noticed that the reading is passionless and expressionless. As they read, the rest of the class either listened to them or followed what was being read from their books which they shared.

I noticed that the teacher did not comment on the quality of reading or the grammatical mistakes that students made. She was at her desk marking papers. About 30 minutes into the

class, I also noticed that most students looked bored and I was also half asleep. I could not make much sense from what was being read except that the children, Kitty and Jude were not happy with the man their mother was dating, Gerald who was always goggling at her. The teacher stopped marking and started to correct students' poor English pronunciation. She asked the students who were reading to sit down. She then asked the class questions based on Act two and those who could not answer were asked to stand up. Among them were two San girls and a San boy. I noticed that Receiver was as quiet as a mouse.

The play appeared not that interesting to students as few answered the questions correctly. The teacher did not explain to students words such as bloke, cracker, sarcastically, pigsty and pizza. During afternoon study, I went back to the class and asked a San girl if she knows pizza and she shyly answered "no."

I met from time to time with Receiver on Saturdays as she and her friends from Kgomodiatshaba were engaged in a variety of activities: singing, skipping, playing *diketo* or simply sitting and reminiscing about the good old days at Kgomodiatshaba. I also observed again in her class a week later.

Trust – Help! My Mother Wants Me to Drop out of School

After my talk with Love and News, my non San informants, I was looking forward to meeting Trust today. I have heard so much about him from Love and Peace, my non San informants that I felt like I already knew him.

"*Dumela Mma*," greeted Love. "This is Trust, a boy from my class," she said politely.

"Hello Love. Hello Trust," I greeted them cheerfully as I made space for him to sit on the bench.

Trust's face was familiar. I had seen him in his class but I did not remember him speaking. I remember how he and another boy, Thata crumpled their test papers into round balls after receiving them from Mr. Selepe.

Trust agreed to work as a co-participant in my research after Love and Peace had brought him to the meeting tree.

He told me that he comes from a family of nine in a settlement called Moshaweng not very far from Letsatsi village. The eldest sister schooled in Molepolole about 60km from Moshaweng. Unfortunately, her Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) scores were too low for her to be promoted to junior secondary school. Trust's older brothers' work as cattle herders or do nothing at home. This is also the case for his sisters since they have no employment. His younger sisters' go to Moshaweng Primary School.

Trust's father made wooden spoons and chairs that he sold in the village to make ends meet. He sometimes watched his father at work and admired what he was doing.

"But, I have never asked him to teach me," he said.

His mother worked as a cleaner at the *kgotla* (local meeting place) and she was paid by the Village Development Committee (VDC). In the quiet spaces between our words we listened to the nearby singing of birds:

Tswi tswi tswi tswiiiiiii

Tswi tswi tswi tswiiiiiii

Trust remembered his primary school years with fondness. He had lots of friends in those days and they walked long distances together to get to their school.

"The rain used to torment us and soak our school books," he recalled. As a result, when he got home, he could not read as he was cold, tired and hungry. An older sister would

encourage him to read anyway. He did well academically, especially in Mathematics and Setswana. He earned the grade C in both subjects in his Primary School Leaving Examination. His problem was with understanding English words and he was not that surprised when he got grade 'D' for English in the examinations.

Home was fun: much more fun than here in junior school. When he was home during the school holidays, he went hunting for small animals and birds.

"I enjoy playing with my younger siblings," he told me.

However, he stayed in school because he has a dream of becoming a soldier one day. During school holidays, he does not mind being sent on errands by the adults.

"But, I hate looking after goats. I fear being bitten by snakes," he said.

Also, herding made one so hungry and tired. "Sometimes I stayed the whole day out with the goats without eating anything," he said with a shake of his head.

He told me a story of how he once went out with the goats to graze. He took them to the usual spot and when they were grazing, he decided to leave them and to go back home for his sling shot to kill some birds. On the way, he came across a big cobra that chased him. He ran as fast as he could and when he got home he told his mother and grandmother what had happened to him. After some time the goats arrived and among them was a strange goat. When his brother came closer, it butted him and he fell down. They chased the stray goat away.

"I hate herding," he repeated.

He told me how during school holidays he helped in the fields. He rode the donkeys with his father while his mother and grandmother follow behind throwing seeds in the field. After the plants have come out, they chased away the birds. Harvesting is much more fun as they ate watermelon, maize and played hide and seek with his siblings and cousins.

Trust speaks Setswana at home and in school. He finds Setswana much easier than English. He did not speak of knowing any other languages. In junior secondary school, his favorite subjects were Setswana, Moral Education and Physical Education. He liked these subjects because he understood them. His favorite was Setswana because of the stories.

One day the teacher asked him to narrate a story in class. He told his favorite story of the hare and hyena and how they were always hungry. Then Hare asked the Hyena what they should do to get food. As they were talking, some Boers riding a tractor were approaching and Hare told Hyena that they should lay by the side of the road and pretend to be dead. As the Boers drove by one shouted to the other to give him a big stick. Hyena enquired of hare what the Boer had just said.

“Oh, he was asking for a twig,” lied Hare.

The Boer shouted again to his friend, “Give me a hammer!” Again, Hyena asked what the Boer had just said and Hare said that he wanted a small stick. The Boer shouted for the third time, “Give me a gun!”

Hyena asked Hare what the Boer had said and Hare replied that a gun can kill them and they should run away. They ran as fast as they could.

After some days, the Hare and Hyena decided to lay by the side of the road again. This time, the Boers saw them picked them up. They were thrown on the back of the trailer and threw them to the back of their tractor. On the way, the Hare and the Hyena offloaded the food from the tractor throwing on the side of the road. Then they jumped off the trailer and took the entire food home without the Boers knowing anything.

“That is the end of the story,” informed Trust.

“What a lovely story. What did you learn from it?” I asked.

“In the story I learnt what to do in order to survive,” said Trust. “I will ask for food instead of lying by the roadside pretending to be dead,” informed Trust.

Trust told me literacy was telling stories such as the one about the Hare and Hyena. His mother taught him to tell stories. In school, he sometimes shared his stories with his two good friends, Sam and Power. The two boys were from the northern part of Botswana, from the Ikalanga tribe, a minority tribe. Unlike Trust, they were doing very well academically. They were always kind and considerate towards Trust and they never called him silly names like other students did.

“Some days some boys *gwagisa* us and beat us with towels,” reported Trust.

I noticed he used a word ‘*gwagisa*’ which is neither a Setswana word nor an English one. He told me that *gwagisa* means to beat. However, he did not know the origin of the word. The boys who beat them are from remote area settlements such as Kgomodiatshaba. He reported the boys to the matron and they received a beating. He also does not like it when Form three boys force them to go to bed early after evening study.

Trust’s view of literacy included knowledge of the different plants. He showed me a photograph of a plant he took called *Lerete la ga Rangkurunyane*. The plant is used medicinally to protect a newborn baby from harm. The plant is grounded into powder and given to the baby in liquid form. Some of the powder is applied on the baby’s head.



Figure 8. *Lerete la ga Rangkurunyane* plant

The other photograph was of a plant called *Sengaparile*. This one is used for purifying blood to rid a person of diseases.



Figure 9. Sengaparile plant

The third photograph was of Sam and Power playing football on Saturday. This was something Trust liked doing.

“I love football,” he told me.



Figure 10. Sam and Power playing football in ‘Germany’

Trust was having serious problems with using English in junior school. He did not understand the words and this made him under perform in all his subjects, except Setswana which is not taught in English. He does not ask questions in class because some of the students laughed at his English pronunciation. However, sometimes if he did not understand in class he asked Thata, a boy who sits next to him in class, also from Moshaweng settlement. Thata is another one who always looked very bored and absent minded in class.

“I fear that even the teachers will beat me if I ask questions,” he told me. He was afraid of going to the staffroom because he would be forced to speak in English. In school, he finds Social Studies difficult, especially the questions..

At home, things were not any better.

“At home life is hard,” he said. “They say I should drop out of school,” he continued.

“Who are they?” I inquired.

He heard his mother was insisting that he drops out of school to look after his younger siblings when she is at the Village Development Committee. But, he was refusing to do so. I advised him to share with his mother about the importance of formal school and his dream of going to senior secondary school and eventually becoming a soldier with the Botswana Defense Force.

The next week I met Trust again with Trust. School was hectic because soon they would be writing their end of month test. He was worried about the tests because he had not performed well on his last tests. I asked to see those test papers but, I never got them. Also, he did not like it that some teachers have a habit of missing class for reasons unknown to him.

Trust had problems with science as he felt it did not connect with his ways of knowing and understanding. He cited as an example sexual intercourse. At home he was taught not to engage in premarital sex. He felt school was encouraging this because they were taught about premarital sex and condoms. The teaching in Science should be relevant to what is taking place in their homes, explained Trust.

“Like the dangers of incest,” he said shyly.

These things are happening in his community and he feels they should be exposed.

“It is ugly stuff. Some even have children out of their incestuous affairs,” he said in disgust. I could tell this was a subject that deeply hurt his feelings and I did not have the heart to ask him if it happened in his home.

A few days after my last talk with Trust I visited his Science class taught by Mr. Selepe.

“Today we are going to learn about the ear,” he informed the class at the beginning of the double period.

The teacher lectured on the different parts and functions of the ear. He told them of the outer and inner ear. I noticed that the students were very quiet all the time and no one asked the teacher questions. Also, Mr. Selepe did not invite students to ask questions. Apparently he just assumed that they understood everything he was saying.

“If someone is deaf, you can lip read as a way of communicating with them,” concluded Mr. Selepe.

The bell rang signaling the end of period 5. He informs the students that in period 6 they had to take notes about the ear.

“Turn to pages 128 and 129 of your textbook,” he said. “Look at the picture of the ear on page 128 and then read on page 129 to make notes,” he directed them.

Although most students had the required text book, only a few students opened their books to pages 128 and 129. I was sitting at the back of the class next to Trust and Thata and they looked lost and absentminded. Trust had the book opened but, at the wrong page and Thata had a dictionary opened. Whether he was reading that or not I could not tell.

A San boy sitting to my right was sweating and coughing profusely. It was extremely hot in class and most of the students (San and non San) were sleepy. I noticed that a San girl who had her chin on the window sill was fast asleep. Probably dreaming she was back home, I mused.

November arrived. Soon it will be end of year examinations. The Form Three students have left and life in school was much better, according to Trust. This was because he did not have anybody to *gwagisa* or bully him. He told me that at the moment, he was not reading any book. He last went to the library in term 1. During the first time that would have been in the month of January.

His favorite past time was playing football in 'Germany' with his friends. I encouraged him to study hard and ask the teacher questions if he did not understand. I, too was a very quiet student but, I encouraged myself to ask when I did not understand, I told him. The end of school bell rung and it was time for Trust to go for lunch. We planned to see each other again at the end of the term party.

CHAPTER 6

THE STAFFROOM AT LETSATSI SCHOOL

The staffroom of Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School is in the administration building of the school as it is in all community secondary schools in Botswana. Below is Table 2 that shows the list of teachers and non teaching staff at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School.

Most teachers only come briefly to the staffroom at the end of a class session and then they disappear. Only 3 or 4 teachers stayed in the staffroom most of the time. There were many days when I was alone in the staffroom and I used this time to expand my field notes. I had found my niche on a sofa by the large window, where I could see what was happening outside. From my spot on the sofa I heard teachers and staff talk about many things. These incidental moments of data collection revealed more about attitudes towards San students.

I vividly remember when I had been at the school for about a month when a teacher called me to witness a fight. I came out quickly only to see blood streaming out of the nose of one boy. The attacker showed how the boy had hit him on the back. The other teachers who had come out of the staffroom commented that they had come to the school to teach and were not law enforcers, hence, the police should be called to deal with the situation. One teacher commented that children from the Bush like to fight. Another teacher told us how some time ago, “a Mosarwa girl hit another girl until she fainted.” Her reason being that she had called her “Big Mama” because she had once dropped out of school due to pregnancy but was now back to resume her studies. Then one of my non San informants, Love, walked into the staff room and

Ms. Tswii told us that Love and some of her friends are going on transfer at the end of the term.

She said their performance would go down if they mixed with “these Basarwa children.”

Table 3. Teaching and Non Teaching Staff at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School.

NAME	POSITION
Mr. Selepe	Teacher of Science
Ms. Thuso	Teacher of English
Mr. Mogotsi	Teacher of Agriculture
Ms. Tau	Teacher of Guidance and Counseling
Mr. Koko	Teacher of Setswana
Ms. Tswii	Teacher of Setswana
Suzy	Teacher of Moral Education
Mr. Kitso	Teacher of Social Studies
Mr. Nthapelang	Teacher of Art
Mr. Loeto	Teacher of Social Studies
Mr. Thutego	Teacher of Art
Ms. Peo	Teacher of English
Mr. Thebe	Sports Master
Ms. Tsietso	Grounds lady
Ms. Tumelo	Receptionist
Ms. Oteng	Gatekeeper
Matron	
Boarding Master	
School Driver	

At that moment, the school matron, a woman in her early fifties, walked past us into the staffroom and she complained that she was very tired because the students keep her very busy. She has to wake up early in the morning and hardly sleeps as the students queue outside her door with all sorts of complaints. She complained of their fighting in the hostels and felt they were not “beaten enough.” Her belief was that without a thorough beating, no learning will take place in the school.

Despite the matron’s negative attitudes, I could not help but like her. She always made us laugh so much in the staffroom. She had a way of turning a very serious problem into a humorous one. I remember the time in the staffroom when some teachers were very worried about the sexual affair one of the employees had with a student. This same employee was in love with one of the teachers in the school, who happened to love the man very much. The matron jokingly advised that the employee needed to see a traditional doctor for African Viagra so he could manage to please the teacher and the student.

The Deputy Headmaster led the students to the staffroom where he gave them a thorough beating with a stick. I was scared their backs might break. I thought to myself that one of these days a student was going to collapse from being beaten.

Suzy the teacher assigned to Moral Education whom I knew because she went to school with one of my sisters said to me, “I hate this school. The children are being beaten like donkeys, especially those from *tenyanateng* (remote areas). Teachers put them in the messenger’s room and beat them! That is why I boycotted the prize giving day,” commented Suzy. “I am going to apply for a transfer to Gaborone. This place is so backward!”

A week after the fight, I was looking forward to my meeting with my non San informants. I sat patiently on the sofa near the staffroom window waiting for Done and News to

come for me. In the staffroom there was an interesting discussion occurring between the Art teacher, Mr. Thebe and Mr. Selepe, a Science teacher. Mr. Thebe complained that “these students (meaning the San) like to ask for permission too much. They are always asking to go to the clinic! I think it is an excuse to go out of the school grounds because they do not like being enclosed. I don’t really blame them.”

“I guess I would also do the same if I only got to go home at the end of the term,” commented Mr. Selepe.

“Where do they go?” I asked.

“To the village (Letsatsi) to drink beer and get some sex,” replied Mr. Thebe.

“Where are their parents?” I inquired.

“In their villages drinking *chibuku* (traditional beer sold in boxes). The government spoils these Basarwa children. They give them money for everything! The parents simply drink beer and leave the responsibility of their children to the teachers and the government!” he seethed. “No wonder they perform so badly. They are given everything,” he complained.

“These children are cursed, someone put a curse on them!” said Mr. Selepe.

Mr. Koko commented that many “Basarwa” children were failing.

“Hey, this government is wasting money! They should at least increase our salaries with this money they are wasting. These students will never change,” said Mr. Thebe. This is just how they are. They grew up believing that they are worthless and that is just how it is,” said Mr. Thebe.

“Teachers are also to blame. They treat students as if they were worthless because of their low self esteem,” countered Suzy who overheard Mr. Thebe’s comment as she walked into the staffroom.

“These students are useless! They never say a word in class. What are teachers to do?” cried Mr. Thebe. He was very passionate about the fact that nothing could ever change the San children. Their low self esteem was to blame, he said.

Yet another teacher gave a long narration, comparing Letsatsi students to Gaborone ones. The Gaborone students are self motivated and inspired to learn. She commented that if a teacher was doing teaching practice in a Remote Area Dwellers (RAD) school, one would fail! The students in RAD schools are just interested in fighting. She told how recently she found a group of Moshaweng settlement students discussing a fight they were looking forward too. This was all they think about: fighting.

End of Year Examinations have begun in full swing mid November and when I arrived that morning in the staffroom, I found two Art teachers marking students’ work and at the same time chatting. The conversation drifted to students work in Art and generally the teachers felt that students from the remote areas do very well in the Art practicals. The problem comes when they have to write tests and examinations. They underperform.

“You see, they have little motivation and don’t make use of their talents,” he added.

It was now the end of November and teachers were busy marking the end of month test. Most stayed home to mark. As I entered the staffroom, I was met by an ugly scene of the flogging of two boys by Mr. Mogotsi. I never found out why they were beaten because I never asked. I was aware that the students were beaten throughout the day for a variety of reasons. I looked up above the door leading to the staffroom to read a note which had just been put up by the Guidance and Counseling teacher, Ms. Tau:

The Guidance and Counseling Department would like to request members of staff to donate toiletry in order to assist students who are desperately in need of it (more especially cakes of bathing soap and powdered soap).

I was very much touched by this note (although it was not a new note since my research at Letsatsi School). I had witnessed firsthand how the students lacked basic necessities like bathing soap. Mr. Thebe, the Art teacher also saw the note:

“Donation time again,” he commented.

As the end of term was fast approaching, with each passing day the staffroom became more of a ghost area. In the hallway leading to the staffroom, there was a lot of activity as students returned their textbooks had been using throughout the year. The two cleaning ladies, Ms. Bathusi and Ms. Neo voluntarily assisted the teachers by collecting the books from the students. Occasionally, a teacher would come to collect books from his/her class, but generally, the two women collected the books.

Ms. Tau –Unexpected Informant

It was during my second day at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School (C.J.S.S.S) that the Deputy Head came looking for me at my usual place in the staffroom. He wanted to introduce me to the Guidance and Counseling teacher, Ms. Tau.

“*Dumela Mma,*” she greeted. “*Ao!* It is you? I have been hearing that there is a visitor in the school who has come to do research,” she said excitedly. “I did not know it was you,” she said in surprise.

I had met Ms. Tau in Roma, Lesotho in July 2007 when I attended a conference on education In Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia (BOLESWANA). She told me that since the conference in Lesotho, she has not attended any other conference outside Botswana.

“I hear from the Deputy that you are interested in Basarwa children. We are having so many problems with RAD (Remote Area Dweller) children. The major problem is their lack of enthusiasm for school. They are just not motivated. “Just last week two Basarwa girls dropped out of school.” Our brief exchange ended with her offer, “If there is anything you need, I will be happy to assist.”

The next day Ms. Tau called out to me, “Oh, you are here. I have been looking for you. I have something to show you,” said Ms. Tau. “I think you might find it useful” she offered with a twinkle in her eye. She showed me a long list of students who had withdrawn from the school. “You see, these students have many problems,” she said. “Some school heads are also a problem,” she said.

Ms. Tau then shut the door of her office as she confided in me. She told me the story of the school head and the fact that whenever he comes to school, he beats the students and terrorizes the teachers.

“As a Guidance and Counseling teacher, I don’t believe in these senseless beatings. No wonder these children drop out of school,” she said in frustration.

“Which ones are San students?” I asked, looking at the list of students who have dropped out of school.

“The problem is that they all have taken Tswana names.” She promised to look into the list of dropouts and give me the relevant information soon. Then Ms. Tau told me a story about students from the village called Malwelweng who were suspended by a former head in this school. Ms. Tau explained that she had tried to intervene arguing that suspension was too harsh but the school head ignored her and chased her out of his office. She went further to tell me that he was a chronic drunk who left the office many a time to drink in the village. She used to send

members of staff to get him from the bar. Apparently the Chief Education Officer in Gaborone got involved and told the school head to solve the matter of the suspension amicably. So the school head asked one teacher to drive him to the remote settlement to talk to the parents of the students who were suspended. Little did he know a team of teachers, including Ms. Tau were also going to the village. They arrived before the school head only to find some parents and children sitting at '*di spoto*' (drinking places usually under some tree), drinking *chibuku*. At first, they did not listen to the teachers but, later relented and heard what the teachers had to say.

Meanwhile, the school head and the teacher were delayed because on the way they stopped in Mogoditshane, so the school head could buy alcohol. Not long after he began drinking, the school head started an argument with the teacher because he wanted to go back to Malwelweng village. Meanwhile back in the village of Malwelweng, the villagers were waiting for the school head and the teacher. Ms. Tau and I could not help but, laugh at this incredulous story.

After that story, I left Ms. Tau's office only to meet with the Deputy Principal in the corridor.

"How is it going on with the students?" He asked. He was always very cheerful and smiling, except when he was beating students. He started to tell me a story about a Mosarwa boy who committed suicide a few years back in the school but, we got interrupted by a teacher who needed his assistance.

It was a week after the school's sports day arrived that I talked with Happy. Talking to her reminded me of the Guidance and Counseling teacher, Ms. Tau and what she was always complaining about regarding "these students." They have serious learning problems and are always homesick, she would say. Of all the teachers in the school, I appreciated Ms. Tau's

eagerness to let me know her views regarding San children and their formal schooling woes. She would go out of her way to look for me to talk about what was happening to San students in the school. That Monday was no different. She found me in the staffroom and called me to her office. She complained that students have no interest in reading and that they always sleep in class.

“Have you observed that?” she asked me.

“Why is that?” I asked her.

Ms. Tau told me that sometimes when there is shortage of English teachers, she is asked to teach by the Headmaster. She informed me that she always tells people that reading is the core to learning. Without the skill of reading she did not see how the students could pass. She was concerned also about the illiteracy of “these children”. According to her, “these children” were ignorant about HIV/AIDS issues although there was so much HIV/AIDS literature in schools.

“Girls share a razor blade to shave pubic hair. These students do not use the condom because it takes time to put it on and they jump the school fence to go out to drink beer in the village,” she revealed.

It was then not surprising that they were dropping out of school at a high rate.

“You see, for some of these children, English is a third language!” she stressed.

“I remember a case of a San girl from Kgomodiatshaba who came to school with her mother to report that she was dropping out of school. As a guidance counselor, I agreed that she drop out of school because she was doing very poorly, because she was failing to understand a thing in class. Her grades were very bad.”

“This is an example of a case when I allowed a student to drop out,” she informed me with regret. “Being in school is a waste of time for such a student. In some cases we refuse students to drop out because the grades might improve,” she said.

According to her, “these students” are simply “Basarwa” and they do not care about anything. The possibility of buying a new car and owning a house does not motivate them. New clothes also fail to motivate them. While some San students do compliment teachers on their new clothes, they are not motivated to study. New clothes do not motivate them.

She explained that partly the parents are to blame because they complain of being separated from their children. They sometimes asked to stay with their children for at least one week because they miss them so much. Also, in school, children were faced with poverty and learning problems that made learning difficult.

I met again with Ms. Tau a week later at the beginning of November. I had been talking to Mr. President outside his class when I saw her coming from the direction of the hostels. By then, the Form Three students had finished their examinations and were waiting to go home.

“Hey, there is a crisis in the students’ toilets,” she informed me. “They are so filthy! If the health people come from Gaborone, we will be in serious trouble,” she said. She then described in detail how dirty the toilets were.

“These students are like animals (San and non San). They can’t even see the dirt but, they just keep on relieving themselves in all that dirt, even on the floor,” she said in disgust. I was very glad that she did not invite me to go and see what was taking place in the students’ bathrooms!

“I will have to get some students to clean the toilets,” she said with determination.

At that point I felt sorry for her. She was really doing more than enough in the school and I wondered how it would be without her. Recently, she told me that she had attended an interview in Gaborone as she had applied for another Guidance and Counseling Education Officer post. My friends (San students) will be lost without her, I thought sadly. The Guidance and Counseling teacher never stopped to amaze me at how active and helpful she was. Drought had told me recently that she was the most helpful adult in the school and genuinely cared about them, especially regarding the toiletry issue.

“Dumelang Bo Mma,” I greeted a group of San students I met near the dining hall during tea break a few days after my last talk with Ms. Tau. Among them was Done, one of my San informants.

“How is school I asked? “

“It is okay except that when we fail we are beaten,” complained one girl.

“Are you studying hard?”

“No,” replied Done.

She told me that they do not have the motivation to read.

“Why?” I asked

“Just okay,” replied Done with a shrug of her slim shoulders.

One girl called Kgomotso from the settlement of Bodungwane told me she had written a poem about her family. I asked her to tell me what she had written but, unfortunately she could not recall it. Happy was amongst the group and she had recently written a poem on *‘Maitseo’* (good manners). The poem was about the importance of good manners and she liked it. Happy also told me that she was performing much better in Agriculture compared to other subjects. She mostly liked planting maize, wheat and sugar cane. Then Happy told me the story of what

happens before planting. Her grandfather, a witchdoctor would throw some traditional medicine on the field so that thieves would not come and steal the seeds or crops.

“Does the medicine work?” I asked.

“Yes. This is a good thing to do,” said Happy. “If no traditional medicine is thrown in the field, thieves come and steal,” she said. “Such knowledge is important,” she said.

I asked her if it should be taught in school and she agreed.

I left the group to talk to Ms. Tau, who was coming from the dining hall. We talked about the coming examinations and she was worried about the performance of “these students.”

“These children should be encouraged to do more practical work since they do much better with it. The theory part is a problem. I wish our system did not focus only on the theory but, also gave out certificates recognizing students’ learning in practice. This would help them get jobs,” she pointed out.

“I think it is important that teachers should be allowed to use Setswana in class. These children do not understand English, really it is a barrier!” she continued in frustration.

“Will that help?” I asked.

In her previous school, an English Speaking Policy was in place and it was very successful. She found it difficult to implement the English Speaking Policy at Letsatsi School. She had suggested to the Chief Executive Officer to brief the parents about the English Speaking Policy.

The parents were not impressed and they told her that she wanted to turn the school into an English Medium one. She was confident that if the school board and the Parent Teachers Association could have agreed on this, it could have been successful. They had badges for English speaking to motivate students and they ranged from ‘excellent’ to ‘try harder’ which they gave to students according to their performance. During my visit at Letsatsi School, I had

never seen any student wearing these badges. Setswana teachers were also not very supportive because they thought that the Setswana language would be given less attention and students would therefore fail it.

In the English Speaking Policy endeavor, there was no support from teachers, parents or students in the school. According to Ms. Tau, It was important for students to speak English because this also motivated the teacher. She used to tell them that it was always difficult to adopt another language. Once one dropped it all the vocabulary goes and it was always good to practice it. Even teachers have difficulties with other languages and that was why when the schools re-opened they always showed poor communication in English.

“I always tell all students that I have a novel that I read every day to improve my vocabulary and I tell them that they should always give themselves 10- 15 minutes to study some English words just before class, but they complain that they do not read because at night there are no lights,” said Ms. Tau.

“The problem was that these students sleep a lot,” she said. She told me how sleepy the students were yesterday when she was teaching and because she doesn’t like punishing students, she asked one of the students to demonstrate a certain game that they played at some workshop to activate the class. The student wanted to do it in Setswana but she refused. While she tried it in English others started laughing at her. “I even suggested that they would have to go to the grounds to jog,” she said.

“These students are not motivated no matter how hard you try. We have suggested so many strategies during meetings but interventions have always failed because students do not cooperate. I feel very fortunate because I came from a very good school, Tlokweneng,” said Ms. Tau in frustration.

“In Tlokweng, there was a teacher from America who formed a club called a Learning Support Program which was very helpful,” she said. “It worked very well and it was very interesting,” said Ms. Tau.

Ms. Tau told me that at Letsatsi School, there are just a few students who were eager to speak English all the time but, unfortunately, they already want to leave for other schools. However, she said these students (transfer ins) were not perfect. They too are also problematic.

“You see, they fight these under privileged ones and ridicule them and say that they wear clothes bought by their parents while they put on the donations,” she said.

“They (transfer ins) sometimes ask for permission just to go to Gaborone for fun,” she complained. “These students would do whatever they can to drop out of school,” she informed me. She told me an interesting story of the student who cut her nails and put them in a plastic bag. She did this for some time until she had quite a number of cut nails. She then took the nails and went to report that some other students were trying to bewitch her. As the Guidance and Counseling teacher, Ms. Tau had to write a letter to the parents of the girl to explain what had happened and why they had to send her home. The girl did not go straight home but, went to the village of Mochudi first to visit her friends. After a few days the school made a follow up to find out when she would be coming back to school only to realize that she had just got home and she had not even delivered the letter to her parents. The nails were nowhere to be found.

“The next time she mixed leaves, coal and Vaseline and claimed she was being bewitched,” said Ms. Tau.

It seemed this girl was very determined to get out of going to school. The matter was reported to the headmaster and the social worker. Ms. Tau put the leaf mixture in the cupboard and this time, the student was not released to go home. What saddened Ms. Tau was the fact that

the girl was very intelligent but ended up with failing grades. Sometimes, other Basarwa students would claim to have seen the dead and they would cry so that they would get released from school. The school then decided to give such students a booklet to read that helped with coping mechanisms.

“Some would run away from school and claim that they have been chased away by the headmaster,” informed Ms. Tau. “Sometimes teachers take them to the *Kgotla* for disciplinary measures,” she told me. “Some would lie to get permission and when they got it they visited their lovers,” said Ms. Tau. Sometimes students would lie about not having shoes and when they got home they were never asked the reason for being home. “Some just run away but there are also dangerous animals that can harm them,” she said.

Ms. Tau informed me that it was difficult to send the letters by mail to their parents and that was why they always gave them the letters to deliver.

“At home the students are faced with insurmountable problems,” informed Ms. Tau. Some problems arise at home because sometimes one would find out that were 11 in the family and there is only one hut for all of them. Lighting is a major problem as paraffin was expensive to buy and not easy to come by. Hence, they would not read and they ended up going to bed early.

“Some students excel and go to senior school but, they dropped out,” she said with a shake of the head. “The social workers are always trying to solve problems of poverty,” she told me. The school assisted by raising funds for the very poor. The problem, according to Ms. Tau was that the parents are not trying hard enough to care for their children.

“We were always donating to these children,” she said.

She admitted that sometimes when children tried to ask for help genuinely from teachers, they got overwhelmed and became very insensitive towards certain issues. They encouraged those who donated to bring toiletry instead of money.

It had been about two weeks since I last saw or talked to the Guidance and Counseling teacher, Ms. Tau. Teachers were busy preparing for the End of Year Examinations. In addition, they were trying to finish their teaching and complete their schemes of work. The Form Three students had gone and the school was on the quiet side without them. I no longer saw or hear *Basimane ba Kgosing* singing around school. Everybody was looking forward to the end of the year and going home. There was only two weeks to go, I thought.

On entering the staffroom, Ms. Bathusi, the cleaning lady informed me that Ms. Tau was looking for me. I found Ms. Tau busy rearranging her office as she had just received a new computer. All of a sudden, her office looked rather crowded, I thought.

“Come in. I have not been well. Listen, I spoke to the Deputy Head about the First National Bank’s wish to donate toiletry to the students,” started the Guidance and Counseling teacher. “But, the people in this school are a problem. He tells me that I should inform the Chief Education Officer in the region, I don’t understand why,” she said. “People are voluntarily extending a helping hand so we do not have to contact anyone,” she pointed out.

Ms. Tau felt it was not necessary to inform the Chief Education Officer about the donations. She was going to go ahead and compile a list of students who desperately needed toiletry.

She told me that last year the Principal asked for donations from Botswana Television. The Deputy Principal buys “these students” toiletry every month without fail. Hence, they should accept donations.

“In that regard, they were trying. But, they should not shun away from asking for donations outside the school,” she said.

I was not surprised by all these acts of kindness as Batswana people were known to assist their fellow men as espoused in the spirit of *Botho*.

She told me that today she had a visitor, a social worker who came to the school.

“She manages Basarwa students very well,” informed Ms. Tau.

The social worker came from the nearby village of Mochudi to ask for a list of students who needed help. She was employed by the Government of Botswana to assist Remote Area Dweller students with schooling problems. Ms. Tau showed me a big box full of blankets that the social worker had brought for the students. As I peeped inside the box, I could see that they were the ‘donkey’ type. These were the cheap blankets that get the San students mocked by other students in school, I thought.

The social worker was looking into a case involving a Mosarwa boy, a cousin of Trust. The boy recently dropped out of school. The surprising thing, according to Ms. Tau was that while everybody was concerned about “these students,” their parents indulged in alcohol and do not care about their children’s welfare.

I made a mental note to buy some toiletries for the students. Just the other day, I had a meeting with the Souvenir Manager at the University of Botswana to ask for donations. Also, the First National Bank had promised to assist by buying students toiletry. I was beginning to feel like a social worker but, it is shows *Botho* to care for students’ school work and welfare. The two cannot be divorced, I thought.

“Their parents can afford to drink alcohol when their children do not have school shoes,” she said with a shake off her head. “One day I was so angry that I ended up getting into a car accident,” she said.

Apparently, schools had closed but, two Basarwa students had not gone home because the driver refused to let them on the truck. He said that he did not want an overload because students do not have insurance.

“I do not know what he was talking about as all these children are not insured,” she said. “Also, he was driving a 7 ton truck and had only 9 students in that truck headed for Moshaweng settlement,” she said.

As we were talking, there was a knock at the door and Drought came in. She had come to report that she had come back from the clinic.

“Are you feeling better?” asked Ms. Tau.

“Yes,” replied Drought. “The nurse gave me some ointment to apply to the wounds,” she said.

“See me tomorrow,” said Ms. Tau. “Come look for me,” she requested of Drought. She told me how sometimes she forgot students’ appointments because she dealt with so many students.

According to Ms. Tau, “most of these students were not well informed on the importance of acquiring knowledge and learning”

“If we do not follow after them and find the kind of problems they have, they just keep quiet,” she said. “Sometimes they have learning problems and they do not tell their teachers,” said Ms. Tau.

She said even when they were sick they would not tell anyone.

She gave an example of last year's case where by one of the students had an abortion but she would not come forward to get help. Hence, there was a bad smell in class and with her assistance; the student got the help she desperately needed as she nearly died from infection.

By the time we left Ms. Tau's office, I was in awe of all her stories. There was no doubt that her life was busy with looking after the students and attending to their day to day affairs. There was no doubt that she had a lot of energy. We went our different ways at the school gate. Ms. Tau went to her house in the teachers' quarters while I went to the bus stop to wait for the bus back to the city my mind still reeling from all that I had heard and seen today. As usual, I looked forward to coming back to Letsatsi junior school the next day.

As I got off the bus that November morning, I could not help thinking how the school was so quiet without the Form Three students. Only Form One and 2 students were in school.

"Dumelang Bo Mma," I greeted Ms. Bathusi and Ms. Neo, the two cleaning ladies.

"Dumela Techere," they replied.

The staffroom felt empty as I was the only one there. I decided to go and sit in the hallway leading to the staffroom and chat with Ms. Bathusi and Ms. Neo. Soon, we were joined by Ms. Tau, the Guidance and Counseling teacher. She put up a note informing teachers to forward names of students they selected for position of head boy in the school. Then, she told us a story of a former head boy, Martin who was efficient and trustworthy.

"That was the last head boy in the school who was..." said Ms. Tau

"We liked him so much," chipped in Ms. Neo.

"He was so good. At exactly 6:45 in the morning, he made sure all students were in class. Unfortunately he was not brilliant. The problem was that he had missed two standards in primary school."

“Why?” I asked.

“His stepfather forced him to drop out of school to look after cattle. When he came back, he was too old to be put in the same class as his peers. Again, he looked liked he would work hard and make up for lost time,” said Ms. Tau. “The other students were so scared of him,” she said laughing.

“For next year, I think Maleko will be a perfect head boy,” said Ms. Bathusi.

“I think he is too proud. He has the possibility of harassing other students. I am scared of that guy. Last year when they arrived in school, he was one of the students who bullied other students,” said the Guidance and Counseling teacher.

“Where does he come from?” I asked.

“From Gaborone,” replied Ms. Tau.

“I once heard him speaking very rudely to his mother,” said Ms. Neo. “When I reproached him, he did not care,” continued Ms. Neo.

A San girl stood at the door and Ms. Tau asked her how she was feeling. She replied that she was feeling much better.

“Ao! You were probably just missing home,” commented Ms. Tau.

A teacher, Mr. Mogotsi came into the hallway leading to the staffroom and Ms. Bathusi assisted him in finding textbooks for his class. She informed him that she was suspicious that some students stole the books they returned for others.

“Some steal books and change the numbers. Some parents have no money at all to replace the stolen books,” she said. “This is painful. Teachers should also make sure they record the numbers somewhere,” she advised.

Suzy, a teacher who went to school with one of my sisters’ looked surprised to see me.

“These days I don’t see you much. These students have abducted you,” she said laughing.

Outside the staffroom, students had come in large numbers to return the textbooks to their teachers after writing examinations in the individual subjects.

I met Ms. Tau again a day before the last day of school to give her research money for my participants. I thought it would be too hard for me to say goodbye again after our end of year party. Hence, Ms. Tau agreed to give them the money. After that day, we kept in touch by telephone the remainder of the time I was in Botswana before leaving for the US. I promised to communicate with her while in the US.

Parents – Did You Bring us Any Snuff?

One day after schools had closed for the holidays a friend of mine drove me to Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. As I entered the school building, it felt so empty and quiet. I was there to see Ms. Neo, one of the ladies who clean the staffroom. She had agreed to organize a group interview with three parents. These were not biological parents of San students but, relatives.

As I walked down the hallway leading to the staffroom, I was surprised to see a group of teachers sitting quietly in the staffroom. After all it was December; a week after schools had closed.

“Dumela *Mma*. You have come to visit us. I can see you have not forgotten us,” greeted Ms. Tumelo, in a cheerful manner.

“Dumela *Mma*,” I replied. “What are the teachers doing here?” I asked in surprise. Ms. Tumelo chuckled and said in a low voice, “You have not heard? The Form Three results are out and this year Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School performed very badly. I hear it was the school’s worst performance ever!” she said with a shake of her head. “Hence, the school

head called an emergency meeting to discuss the results. He was extremely angry with the teachers,” she informed me.

It was about this time that Ms. Neo arrived. She was ready to take us to a nearby home. It was a short 15 minute drive.

“We have arrived. As you can see these Basarwa are really suffering, just look at this,” Ms. Neo said with a wave of her hand at the buildings. “This is painful.”

I could not help noticing the mud hut that had almost fallen to the ground. Adjacent to the hut was a one room house built of bricks. It looked dilapidated and the paint had peeled exposing red bricks and mud. Only a few patches of white paint remained. I thought the very clean yard looked out of proportion for the two small buildings. My friend parked his car under the one tree in the yard.

“*Koko! Koko! Koko!*” called Ms. Neo announcing our presence as we all waited at a respectable distance under the tree. A small boy surfaced from somewhere. My heart went out to him as I took in his tattered clothes and appearance. Despite his disheveled appearance he was handsome.

“Hello, *Monna*,” greeted my friend the driver. “Do you go to school?” he asked. The boy told us that he was starting school in January 2009. My friend then gave him P10.00 (1.50USD) to buy himself some fat cakes.

“Call your mother for us,” said Ms. Neo to the boy.

The boy went inside the little mud hut and soon his mother came outside. Even from a distance, I could tell that she was a beautiful woman. She had high cheek bones and a beautiful smile.

“Dumelang,” she said as she shouted to the boy to bring some plastic chairs. Ms. Neo told her that I had come to see her about some important matter. The mother then invited us inside the little mud hut. However, my friend chose to remain in his car as he had some work to do.

Inside the little mud hut it was dark except for some sunlight from a small window near the wooden door. There was no furniture except for a bed and two plastic chairs.

“Dumela Nkuku,” (grandmother) I greeted an old woman who sat on top of a bed high off the ground. Her swollen legs hung down and I could not help noticing the cracked toes as I sat opposite her. Underneath the bed I saw that four bricks were used to elevate the bed. I could also see a couple of things under the bed from where I was sitting: a plastic container, some shoes and a suitcase.

“*Dumela ngwanaka* (greetings my child). I am dying in this old hut,” she said casually. I laughed as she asked me if I had brought any snuff from the city.

“*Dumela Neo*. Where have you been hiding? I have not seen you for a long time,” complained the old lady.

The good looking mother to the boy introduced herself as Ketshephile Ene. She looked like she was in her mid thirties. After Ms. Neo asked about one of their neighbor’s, Ketshephile went to call the third participant, a blind lady who stayed nearby with her granddaughter. After a few minutes Ketshephile carefully ushered the old lady who walked with a cane inside the mud hut.

“Bo Nkuku, your child here has come to ask for help from us, started Ketshephile.

“We hear you. But, we want to know who she is? Where she comes from and who her parents are?” said the old woman sitting on top of the bed.

I told them that I was from the University of Botswana and that currently I was doing some work at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. I am the daughter of Mr. Ketsitlile and come from the village of Kanye. I had come to visit to learn about their children's' formal education. I invited them to share with me any problems they or their children might be experiencing at school. The lady on top of the bed complained of poor accommodations.

"I sleep in this hut with 6 children," she told me. "The children sleep on the floor and it is difficult especially when they have the candles lit for studying," she lamented. "Also, my grandchildren are suffering. They do not have adequate clothing and food," she offered. "Tell the government about these things," she pleaded.

"As you see me, this is all you see," said Ketshephile. "I have 8 children to feed and my sick mother to look after. I am not working and recently, I was removed from the care of social workers," she complained.

"They say I am capable of working but, who would look after my mother?" she asked. "To make matters worse, my husband recently abandoned us."

I must confess during the talk it was difficult to focus on literacy related matters as the conversation always drifted back to issues of their welfare.

"How are the children performing in school," I persisted.

"Did you bring us any meat and snuff from the city?" asked the blind old lady. I told them that I was going to give Ketshephile P150.00 (about 20.00USD) for food and a uniform for the boy we had met in the yard earlier.

"Do not cheat us," said the blind old lady wagging her finger at Ketshephile as we all laughed.

Ketshephile promised to buy the meat and tobacco as soon as we were done. She told us about her daughter, Kitso who is in grade 4 at Letsatsi Primary School. Her teacher, who had just passed on as a result of an unsuccessful operation, was very impressed with her.

“Kitso likes to read,” she informed us. “The problem is this poverty. I do not know if she will complete school. Who will support her financially? Her late teacher used to assist,” she said sadly.

She told us a story about her eldest son who was staying with a family in the village of Mochudi. They have been looking after him for the last 2 years and he is in Form Three and doing very well academically.

“When is this talk going to finish,” complained the blind lady. “I really need my tobacco,” she complained as Ketshephile told us about her teenage daughter.

“She is starting Form One at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School next year,” she said proudly. “Please ask the school to register her for toiletries,” she requested.

I took down her name and Ms. Neo offered to communicate with Ms. Tau, the Guidance and Counseling teacher about the matter. I could tell that although she was experiencing extreme hardships, Ketshephile was not resigned to her hard life. “I sometimes wash people’s clothes to make ends meet,” she had told me.

“Please do not delay with the snuff. I am glad today we will eat,” said the old woman on the bed gratefully. “I thank God you came today my child, or we were going to starve.”

Ms. Neo and I said goodbye to the two old women and my friend with the car offered Ketshephile a lift to the store. On our way to the store, we stopped briefly at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School where we dropped off Ms. Neo. On the way, I asked Ketshephile about

the whereabouts of her other children and she told us that they leave in the morning to go and play with their friends in the village and come home in the evening.

As she got out of the car, she thanked us and promised to buy the uniform for the boy. I promised to visit them again in the following year.

Letsatsi School on Saturday

Saturday, October 25, 2008 was going to be a big day in the Kgatleng region. All nine Community Junior Secondary Schools (C.J.S.S.) and the one senior school in the region will convened at Letsatsi C.J.S.S. for the regional sports competitions. All week at Letsatsi, the Sports Master and his two assistants had been busy with the final preparations. They phoned schools to inform them of last minute details, arranged accommodation and food for the day. Students were not left out of the preparations. The whole week they were busy cleaning and clearing the sports ground of any grass. There was excitement in the air.

“Hello. I have been looking for you,” greeted Mr. Thebe. “We need your help on Saturday. Will you assist the Director, Botswana National Productivity Centre (BNPC) to give out the medals and prizes on Saturday?” he asked.

“That will be a pleasure. I will come on Saturday,” I promised.

“Be at the sports ground 7.00 AM o’clock sharp,” he said with a smile.

The following day, at exactly 6:45 am, I arrived at the school gate in my University of Botswana sports attire.

“Dumela Rra,” I greeted the gatekeeper cheerfully.

“Dumela *Techere*,” he replied. “Today it is very windy. We have to pray hard for rain in this country or else we will not have any water melons and sugar cane to eat next year,” he said.

“I have a piece of land not far off from here that I can sub-divide and sell for you,” he offered. I promised to speak to him later about the land.

As I walked towards the sports field, I saw two government trucks with a group of students sitting or standing at the back. Their teachers were sitting at the front of the trucks. Most students were having breakfast: coffee and thick slices of bread. I could see that the Director, Botswana National Productivity Centre had also arrived.

I went to greet Ms. Oteng, one of the gatekeepers. She was with Ms. Tsietso, the grounds lady.

“Please come later and buy our fat cakes and fried chips,” implored Ms. Tsietso as they were busy kneading dough in some huge containers.

Standing with them were two students, busy peeling potatoes for making fried chips. Two other students were making a fire and putting cooking oil into the big three-legged pots.

“Hello girls. How are you Ms. Leshibitse?” I greeted.

“Ms. Leshibitse” was a beautiful San girl from one settlement near Letsatsi Village. I called her

“Ms. Leshibitsi” because I considered her to be the most beautiful girl in that settlement. Mr.

Thebe and a few teachers were busy trying to put up a small tent for the Director and myself.

Every time they had succeeded in putting it up, a strong wind came and flattened it to the ground.

Finally, they gave up in frustration.

“Do you mind not being in a tent?” asked Mr. Thebe.

Of course I minded! It was so windy and hot at the same time. However, I did not tell him that.

“Don’t worry. We are just fine not being under some tent,” I assured him.

He got some plastic chairs and put them for us by the field. After that, the organizers called us for a brief meeting in one of the classrooms. Mr. Thebe explained that the four men wearing

white tee shirts with red ribbons were from Botswana Family Welfare Association (BOFWA). Apparently, BOFWA was sponsoring the event.

Although three of the participating schools had not yet arrived, the organizers agreed to start the event because it looked like it was going to become even hotter as the day progressed. Also, the wind was getting stronger and as we got out of the classroom and walked towards the field. I felt sorry for Ms. Oteng and her cooking friends because of the heat. Sports masters from the different schools called their students for short meetings and I could see Mr. Thebe busy talking to Letsatsi students. The four men from BOFWA set up a small stage and erected a small tent by it. This was going to be where students would be tested for HIV/AIDS on this day.

The first race was the long distance one. The competitors ran around the field for about 12 laps. Most fell by the wayside and only 3 students made it to the last lap.

“Go Horse! Go Horse! Go Horse!” shouted a group of students from Molefi Senior Secondary School. I noticed that amongst the 3 finalists, there was no one from Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. The race was won by a very tall girl from the senior school who all the students called “Horse.” She ran barefooted wearing a pair of striped colored leggings. I wondered how she got the name, Horse. I assumed it was because she was a fast runner.

It was the short distance race that drew even more excitement in the audience. The students cheered wildly as their friends ran across the field. Ms. Oteng, a gatekeeper went wild with cheering as her niece and daughter won every race, ending in position 1 and 2 respectively.

“Tshego! Malebo! Tshego! Malebo!” she shouted excitedly.

Tshego was a standard six student at Letsatsi Primary School. She trained with the junior school students under the supervision of Mr. Thebe. She was well known in the region for being

a fast runner and her aunt once told me that later in the year she was going to represent Botswana in Namibia. I gave her P50.00 (about 6.00 USD) to buy running shoes in order to encourage her.

“WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH!” The wind was merciless as it brutally lifted the sand from the ground and blew it on us. I could taste the sand on my lips. We were all covered in sand but, we did not care because we were having so much fun. The Director had also joined in the fun and cheered the runners on.

“I don’t know why I bothered to take a bath this morning,” laughed one teacher.

I moved to stand by a group of students from Letsatsi. In their midst was the boarding master and his little dog. It was wagging its tail as usual, eating anything it came across. I noticed that the students were standing in their usual groups: Kgomodiatshaba settlement in one group, Moshaweng settlement in their group and the transfer-ins who come from a variety of places. Happy and her friends seemed to be enjoying themselves although they were not taking part in the sports competitions. I waved to Mr. President and his group and as usual, he was very cheerful.

“If our students from *tengyanateng* (remote area dwellers) were running today, we would be telling a different story,” Mr. Mogotsi, a teacher from Letsatsi lamented during the tea break.

“Basarwa children suffer from low self-esteem and that is why they are not involved in the sports competition,” a teacher from one of the schools explained. Another teacher called it “inferiority complex” and as a result, they find safety in numbers even in sports. He explained that, that is why they all play the same sport.

“For example, take volleyball. If one or two played the sport, the others would follow suit,” he said.

After tea break, the wind had abated a little so I felt hotter. I moved to the tent near the loudspeaker and the Master of Ceremony, one of the BOFWA men boomed into the loudspeaker:

“Come and test for HIV/AIDS! you get your results in 10 minutes,” he promised.

“We will test after the event. We don’t want to spoil our fun,” shouted a woman teacher from Rasesa Community Junior Secondary School, sending the crowd around her into laughter.

By now, the excitement was in full swing and most seemed to have forgotten it was hot as students danced to the music of Mapetla and V. From the corner of my eye, I saw Done and her group dancing the donkey dance as V pelted out one song after the other.

“VVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVV,” shouted the students excitedly.

The Master of Ceremonies had us in stitches of laughter as his skeletal body swung left and right with his legs spread apart. He was a really funny man, I thought.

“We have come to celebrate with the people of Letsatsi,” he shouted into the microphone grabbing my can of coca-cola and giving me a friendly wink.

“First prize goes to (*long pause*) Molefi Secondary School!” announced the Director, BNPC. The runner named Horse proudly held the gold trophy high in the air for all to see.

The second prize went to Sikwane Community Junior Secondary School and Letsatsi C.J.S.S. came third, ending with a bronze trophy. We awarded the best schools gold, silver and bronze medals. After that, we all went for lunch. The students ate in the school hall and all the teachers and invited guests in one classroom.

The Saturday after the sports day I returned to Letsatsi junior school. I had promised my co-participants and San informants that I would bring them toiletries. All of them had run out of toiletries and I was moved when Done told me she had to ask for left over soap from other

students in order to bath. As I entered the school gate, I could not see any students and I decided to go straight to the hostels.

“Dumelang batsadi bame,” (greetings my parents) I called to the cooks as they were busy outside the school hall preparing lunch for the students. There were big bowls full of meat. They were busy cutting the meat into the three-legged pots and I guessed that the electrical pots in the dining hall had broken down again. Honestly, I had lost count of the number of times those pots have broken down. The boarding master shouted a greeting to me in the Ikalanga language and I laughingly told him that I did not know any Ikalanga but, I was eager to learn. As I came towards where he was sitting by the school hall, he shouted to one student to quickly bring me a chair. As the girl brought the chair he teasingly commented that she was ugly. It was a Mosarwa girl and she just laughed nervously.

“Ao! You are so beautiful,” I complimented the girl. *“One day you will get married to a nice man.”*

“I don’t think so,” said the boarding master laughingly. His little dog was wagging its tail between one boy’s legs, sniffing the ground.

“So, students are studying hard? Examinations are so near,” I asked looking towards students sitting on the ground at a respectable distance from us, eating their breakfast of soft porridge.

“These students don’t read. I have to chase them from the hostels during study. In the morning I have to chase them to class too. If not, they just play.”

The boarding master complained that students from towns were disobedient unlike Basarwa students. However, the administration relies on town students to raise school results.

“Basarwa don’t take education seriously. Education is not a priority to them,” he said. “Look at the lovely trees here. They should be taking advantage of all these by reading in the shade,” he added.

“These ones from the towns are disobedient,” complained the boarding master once more. “But, the school relies on them to push up Form Three results.” He told me a story about his friend who did research at Kumaga settlement among San people. He left frustrated because he did not understand them at all although he stayed with them for some time.

“*Heela*, News!” I called out.

“Don’t you hear that you are being called? Look at his nose as if it is sensing rain!” he laughed at News came hurriedly towards us.

“*Dumela*. Come to the tree later,” I told him.

“*Monna*, you also know how to hold a camera!” teased the boarding master. “I saw you the other day taking pictures,” he said in surprise.

News smiled shyly as he walked away.

“You must be treating these students very well,” he commented. “I can tell they like you a lot. But these students are not cut for education.”

He remembered the time when he was a boarding master at Khakhea Community Junior Secondary School in the Kalahari Desert. The students there performed poorly academically.

“These students do not want to be separated from their parents. In this school when students are in Form Three it is worse. Schools do not close for the whole year. This is a problem because the students cannot stay for a long time without visiting their parents.” At home life is complicated for these Basarwa students.

“Their parents make siblings for them in their presence as they all sleep in the same room,” he said as he laughed.

He then told me the story of two Basarwa lovebirds in Letsatsi School. They were so much in love that no one could separate them. They had to be chased from the hostels to the classrooms all the time. However, he sympathized with “these students” Where he comes from, the Basarwa are proud of their heritage. Even those from Ghanzi District are not ashamed of being recognized as Basarwa.

“The problem is that Bakgatla peoples do not show *Botho* towards these people,” he said sadly. This makes them to hide their identity and be ashamed of whom they are, lamented the boarding master.

I left the boarding master and found Receiver, Drought and their friends from Kgomodiatshaba singing under the meeting tree. From a distance, I could hear them singing and laughing. There was something about that tree, I thought. When one was under it, it brought so much peace, tranquility and love. That tree has so many memories for me, I thought. It has brought me friends, as I affectionately called my co-participants and informants. As I approached, I could hear them singing:

Ke kile ra utswelwa morabaraba

Iyeleiyelele, kele ra utswelwa morabaraba

Iyeleiyelele, a ho iyeleiyelele, yeleiyelelele

Iyeleilelele...

I gave some toiletries to Done to give out to the others. At a respectable distance, a group of students (San and other minorities) watched and I felt sorry that I could not buy toiletry and clothes for all of them. Last week, I spoke to First National Bank Manager about possible

funding for San students at Letsatsi CJSS. She promised that as a bank they will assist as they have discretionary funds. I reminded myself to speak to the guidance teacher to identify the more disadvantaged students for the bank to assist.

Trust was not among the group. I asked Mr. President where Trust was but, he did not know. I decided to leave the group and go and look for Trust. I was worried about him. He was just too quiet and reserved. He needed to get out more and interact with the other students, even for a short while. Whenever I saw him around school, he was always alone.

News came with me and on the way he told me the story of the chicken and the duck. The chicken and duck were the best of friends and were living together in the bush. One day they were so hungry that they decided to go to the village to ask for food. When the chicken arrived in the village, it got lured towards the warmth the fire. He could not leave the fireside at all, especially since was winter. The duck waited and waited but, there was no chicken in sight. “That is how the chicken became a domesticated animal,” said News as a matter of fact.

Around the hostel area, students were busy doing their laundry, playing *diketo* and *koi*. There was not much going on as I went around the different groups chatting to them about school. We found Trust playing *morabaraba* game with another student. He was pleased to see us. He and his friend followed us back to the meeting tree.

My final day at Letsatsi was a Saturday. It was both exciting and painful. It was painful because it was going to be my last Saturday with my participants after the end of term party. On Monday morning, they were leaving to return to their different settlements. I did not want to see them in the government trucks that transported them back home. I did not want to witness the event. I felt it would be too painful to part with them although I was happy that at long last they were going to be with their families.

To make this day special, I had brought biscuits, lots of sweets, chocolates, drinks and yogi sips. Ofe, my youngest daughter wanted to come with me and I had agreed.

As Ofe and I got off the bus, we met the boarding master and his little dog. He offered to assist us with our heavy bags filled with things for the party.

On the way to school he narrated a sad story of a San boy who recently dropped out of school. The boy had convinced his mother that he should leave school. Upon reaching the school, the boys' mother changed her mind but, the boy refused to stay in school.

In the school yard Ofe and I met with a group of students singing beautiful traditional songs. We went to a group playing '*koi*' (traditional skipping) and as they played they also sung. All of us, including my participants close friends, went to a classroom where we feasted on biscuits, crisps, sweets and drinks. As we partied, a group went by singing.

"This little girl is so pretty," said Drought about my six year old daughter Ofe. And the others echoed the compliment.

"She can speak English so well!" they said with surprise.

"Say something please," one begged Ofe. However, Ofe would not say a word and I could tell she was feeling extremely uncomfortable.

"She is going to be your wife one day," I teased Mr. President who smiled shyly.

"We are leaving on Monday," they kept saying excitedly.

After the party, my participants cleaned up the classroom. Mr. President, Knowledge and some of their friends said goodbye as they were in a hurry to go to 'Germany.' I tried not to look too sad as I said goodbye to my participants who I thought of as my children. Drought, Receiver, Happy and a group of their friends walked Ofe and me to the school gate. This time the bus ride back to the city felt much longer than usual because I was so very sad.

CHAPTER 7

THE CONCLUSION: DISCUSSION OF THE STORIES

The purpose of this study was to investigate San students' formal schooling and literacy (ways of knowing and reading the word and the world) at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School in Botswana, Southern Africa. My role in the study was that of participant-observer. I gathered information through informal interviews with six co-participants, (I regarded them as active partners in the research process) four informants and an interview with parents. In addition, I conducted classroom observations, innumerable informal observations, and collected students' photographs taken by my co-participants. The narratives I wrote from these data show that San students have a lot of problems with formal schooling. In addition, I sought to understand what literacy means to them. In this chapter I present conclusions as they relate to other relevant literature. The conclusions were identified through my analysis of recurring themes found across the thirteen narratives presented in the preceding chapter. In addition to conclusions I present recommendations for teaching San students and the limitations of this study.

1. What are San students' understandings of their learning experiences in school and how do these impact on students' identities (based on memories of primary and on current attendance in junior secondary?).

The participants in the study repeatedly expressed a desire to learn in order to pursue a career. Happy had high hopes of being a nurse, Drought a researcher on San children's education and Trust had dreams of becoming a soldier one day. However, they all faced many challenges at

Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. They had to leave their parents to go and stay in boarding schools, both at primary and at secondary school. In the hostels, life was not easy for San students as they were crowded in one room. In most cases, I found that a room had 12-14 children, with very little space between the beds. This concurs with Mazonde (2002) that San children live in low quality hostels. The six San students I came to know hated living in the student hostels. They shared rooms with other Batswana students who were more privileged than them and looked down upon them. The non San came from neighboring villages such as Malolwane and Mochudi. The students who came to the school on transfer from Gaborone were known as “transfer-ins” and were seen as more privileged by other students, especially those from very remote areas such as those of the San.

Boarding schools are not unique to Botswana. Native Americans, First nation Canadians, Aboriginal Australians and Indonesian children had to endure the horror of separation with their families, which was a completely new experience for them (Smith, 1999). This was done deliberately to ‘remove the indigenous from them’ and immerse them in Western culture. Although boarding schools are a thing of the past in most Western countries, the San in Botswana and Namibia still have to endure the hardships of attending school far from their families by living in hostels.

Poverty and Dependency.

Extreme poverty made the San children stand out significantly from other students at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. They never had enough toiletries. During my visits on Saturdays, I observed how San students wore the same clothes Saturday after Saturday. Wagner (2006) has also written that San children go to school without proper school clothes. I found that clothes were important to their identity and feelings of belonging. Five of the

participants told me that their parents did not work and as a result, they had no money to buy them new clothes and toiletries. Trust's mother worked at the Village Development Committee as a cleaner at the *Kgotla*, traditional meeting place but, even then she could not afford to buy him school clothes. Love, one of my non San informants reported that Trust did not have school shoes. This was in direct contrast to other students in school, especially those from the city of Gaborone and surrounding areas or 'transfer-ins.' Love and Peace, my non-San informants told me how San students ran errands for them in exchange for the food that their parents had brought them.

The San children and other children in need relied on the government social workers for toiletries and clothes. Sometimes, teachers contributed to buy students toiletries but, these were never enough because of the theft in the hostels. Hays (2002) writes that supplying the San (and other children) with toiletries and clothes results in stigma, shame, humiliation and the children being called RADS. According to Hays, then it is not surprising that many San children drop out of school. The ongoing concern about personal care is similar to that of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. He writes about the importance of self actualization, esteem, love/belonging, safety and meeting physiological needs for human motivation (<http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/regsys/Maslow.html>).

When interviewing the parents, they were very concerned about the poverty of the San people and saw this as a hindrance to their children getting a good education. Wagner (2006) reported that San parents generally feel that quality education is reserved for non San Batswana. They feel the 'Blacks' (Mazonde, 2002) a name San people call non San Batswana are more privileged than them. According to Hays (2002), all over Southern Africa, San people complained of feeling powerless due to lack of ownership over their land and education. Le

Roux (1999) goes on further to say that the paradox is that the San people are aware that school literacy would help them to regain their power. However, they strongly feel that formal education is used to prevent them from regaining power and education.

Name Calling and Verbal Abuse

Name calling and verbal abuse by non San was common at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. This is something that has been acknowledged in the literature (Le Roux, 1999). In this study, all six participants complained of being called names. Drought for example, complained of being called “Mosarwa.” Receiver hated being called “Long tail.” Hence, it is not surprising that school was a hostile environment. This is especially so since the San culture values peace, respect and harmony (Le Roux, 1999; Shostak, 1981; 2000; Wagner, 2006). Corporal punishment was another thing that the students hated. The students told me that their parents do not beat them at home. This has been mentioned by (Le Roux, 1999). Hence it is not surprising that some of the participants reported to be missing home a lot. For example, Happy told me that she misses home a lot. At home she feels needed and competent.

However, there were some friendships between some San and non San students. Receiver was good friends with a non San girl, Pretty who shared her toiletries with her. Drought was friendly with Keteng. Trust was very good friends to two Ikalanga boys, Sam and Power but, not Peace and Love.

Teacher Frustrations

To make the situation worse, non San teachers added to the problems of San children at Letsatsi because they failed to understand them. To them, they were simply “Basarwa” who were lazy and do not want to learn. Teachers resorted to corporal punishment with the stick. Wagner (2006) also found this to be true in a study he carried out among the San students in Botswana.

Unfortunately, this alienated San children even further and made them hate school even more. It is then not surprising that all the six participants reported fearing teachers. This affected their interaction with the teachers and prevented them from asking for extra help that desperately needed. All the six participants preferred primary school to being in junior secondary school because they had many friends then and did not face as much abuse. Also, they performed much better at primary school and their teachers were more understanding. At Letsatsi it did not help that some teachers were frequently absent from class and Happy and Trust complained to me about that. It is then not surprising that junior secondary school was described as “boring” by Drought, Receiver and Happy. When teachers have low expectations of students it has often translated into lower student achievement (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Irvine, 1990; Lopez, 1999). Drought mentioned that in class the teachers made learning hard for them (students from her village Kgomodiatshaba) because when they raised their hands up to answer questions; some teachers call upon them.

Research points to the fact that teachers add to the indigenous formal educational frustrations (Lopez, 1999; Valdes, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). In many indigenous communities in the world, the children are taught by teachers from mainstream societies who know very little about the culture of the indigene and diverse groups (Brock-Utne, 1995; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996; Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992). According to Abbate-Vaughn (2008) in the U.S. research indicates that white pre-service teachers show little interest in working in diverse settings. I found something similar to be true at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. Most of the teachers and administrators have lost touch with indigenous ways of knowing and have fast adopted the ways of the west (Rains, 1999). Rains speak for all indigenous peoples when relating her experiences of school as a Native American student “for Indian children like me growing up,

it means having your culture assaulted by teachers so ignorant of your culture, history, and the indigenous knowledge...” (p. 324).

It is then not surprising that teachers are blamed for making the already bad problem in schooling worse by not caring enough (Gay, 2000). She adds that teachers need to “demonstrate caring for children as students and as people” (p. 45). If this is done, students will excel academically, morally and culturally and suspicions and hatreds between teachers and diverse students will be drastically minimized (Cortes, 2000; McAllister, 2002; Nieto, 1992).

Identity Crisis

Negative learning experiences affected the participants’ identity, except for Mr. President. Five of my participants felt uncomfortable with being associated with San culture. It was only Mr. President who took pride in being San. Indigenous children are socialized to believe that their traditional ways of knowing and reading the world are inferior and archaic (Bray et al, 1986). As a result, the participants did not want to be recognized as Khoesan because that is essentially being recognized as Basarwa or Mosarwa . Hence, as a researcher I developed a discourse to avoid the words ‘*Mosarwa, Basarwa and San.*’ I used words like “these students, our friends and your friends.” All six participants had Setswana names and for the purposes of this study I translated them to English pseudonyms. According to Le Roux (1999) Setswana names help the students to fit in or blend in school easily.

According to Clayton, Barnhardt & Brisk (2008) a person’s identity is more than a person’s color or group they belong to. They write that identity is “multidimensional” (p.36). Identity is not static but evolves over time (Day, 2002; Kanno, 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Multiple factors such as historical, cultural, social and political shape whom we are (Clayton, Barnhardt & Brisk, 2008). For example, being non San in Botswana has more

status than being San, hence, more access to power. It is obvious that, “Feelings of powerlessness can have the opposite effect-a more-negative sense of self” (Clayton, Barnhardt & Brisk, 2008, p. 36). Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, (2001) use the term social mirroring to describe the phenomenon whereby students change who they are in order to fit in with the “popular group” (Clayton, Barnhardt & Brisk, 2008, p. 36).. Society and others reflect to us positive and negative images that can greatly influence how we see ourselves. Clayton, Barnhardt & Brisk (2008) found that students’ from diverse and marginalized groups “generally want to speak Standard English as a way of not only communicating but also identifying with the dominant culture” (p. 38-39). Clayton, Barnhardt & Brisk go on to write that teachers should help students to be proud of who they are. Negating ones’ identity affects learning and results in poor self-esteem as it was with all six of participants in the present study.

Solidarity

Carrying out research at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School revealed some of the coping strategies that San children use in Botswana. I found many positive things that the San students did with each other for solidarity. The boys, for example, had created their own sports field that they called ‘Germany.’ Whilst the other students trained in the official sports field, ‘Germany’ was a safe haven for the San boys. The girls loved to sing and dance. Sometimes after during afternoon study and on Saturdays, they would sit together in their little groups and play *diketo*, share stories or go out to the thick bush behind the hostels and look for wild berries and fruits. They did all these activities to avoid the boredom at school.

The students moved in groups depending on where they came from. Those from the settlement of Kgomodiatshaba moved and studied together and the ones from settlements such as Bodungwane and Leshibitsi also did the same. In class, San students sat next to other San. Only

in a few cases did some non San Batswana sit next to San students in class. I observed that in class there was no group work as most of classroom instruction was through the lecture method.

In the library, the students sat in their usual groups and shared newspapers and books.

2. What are San students' experiences with in the humanities and science based subjects?

Language: Tool or Weapon?

All six of my participants found English difficult and it is then not surprising that they performed poorly in it. Also, they found reading in English not only difficult but, also boring. This poor performance meant that they failed subjects taught in English. They performed better in the class on Setswana because it was taught in Setswana and they told me that at home they speak Setswana. They especially found English vocabulary difficult to understand. The poor performance in English by San students has also been documented by Mokibelo & Moumakwa (2006) in a study they carried out among San children at Motshelagabedi in Botswana.

According to Love and Peace, my non San informants, they had observed that San students at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School had resorted to pretend reading.

However, all six participants acknowledged the importance of English in understanding content area subjects. The paradox was that although English was so difficult, it was held in very high regard by these students and they had a longing to be able to use English to communicate in school. Knowing how to speak English well was also viewed as a sign of intelligence by the students. This is not very surprising as English is the language of prestige and social mobility not only in Botswana but, Africa at large (Masendu, 2000; Olebile, 1999). One needs to be eloquent and literate in English to get a good job and the participants hoped for good jobs one day. However, speaking English made other students laugh at them and they became the silent students in class.

Language is the number one weapon used by mainstream societies to subjugate the indigenous (Almeida, 1998; Mule, 1999). According to Mule (1999) and Reagan & Osborne (2002) language is not only important for communication, it is also a carrier of a peoples' culture. Blot (2003) goes on to write that "language is inescapably a badge of identity" (p. 3). The San students in my study informed me that they did not speak their mother tongues because they do not know them. However, I had noticed during my informal talks with them that they made errors speaking in Setswana which led me to suspect that they might be speaking another language at home. Only Mr. President said that he understands the San language that his father and grandfather always spoke to him but he does not speak the language. He lamented the fact that after the passing on of his grandfather and father, there was no one to speak the language to him.

According to Meyer, Nagel and Snyder (1993) among many others, there is still a lot of confusion on the languages of literacy and learning to be used in schools in Botswana. They write that colonial influences are still very much in place and students' mother tongues are not taught in schools. This concurs with Chebanne and Monaka (2005) who wrote that Setswana culture is a huge barrier for KhoeSan people. According to them, when children go to school, they are exposed to different languages, most foreign, in the school system. The same is true for other indigenous peoples in the world. For example, Native Americans have been forced to learn in English in the U.S. This has had dire consequences for them for decades. A Hualapi boy (Native American) captures well the negative impact of language repression by saying,

I don't feel complete...Sometimes I feel apart from my peers, the ones that are my age that *do* speak, and they all know that I don't speak...Coming to terms with my identity

and seeing my deficiencies, I could tell the kids today that if you don't know your language, you will feel (as I do) (Watahomigie & McCarty, 1997, p. 101).

Clearly, learning in foreign languages is one long battle for indigenous children the world over. Reagan & Osborne (2002) write that in the U.S. language rights have been ignored and linguistic genocide is the norm as English is imposed over other Native American languages.

In addition, research attest to the fact that students instructed in their mother tongue did much better than if they are instructed first in a foreign language (Le Roux, 1999; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006) and this is also good for their second and third language acquisitions. In Hawaii indigenous people perform much better in school as a result of the total immersion followed in schools. This is in direct opposition to many African countries which inherited a foreign language policy, disregarding the resulting cultural and political problems (Mateene, 1980). This cultural and mental subjugation by a power is still very much in control today in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, it is the indigenous people who are suffering most often; English is a third language for them, for example, the San of Botswana. These children face insurmountable problems in schools resulting in high school dropout. Research points to the fact that many school dropouts cannot read in their mother-tongue, or in an international language, such as English (Muthwii, 2004). I concur with Muthwii (2002) that there is a misconception that English comes “naturally” (p. 4) for children from multilingual backgrounds. With reference to Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School, I found this to be true. The teachers expected all students including the San to be eloquent in the English language and did nothing extra to assist them as they failed not only English but, all school subjects.

Hence, it is then not surprising that numerous studies carried out in Botswana at the advent of San formal education (by non-San Batswana and foreigners) attest to the fact that these

children face insurmountable problems on the road to formal education, especially as a result of being compelled to learn in Setswana and English (Bieseke & Hitchcock, 2000; Hays, 2002; Mazonde, 2002; Magogwe, 2007; Nyati-Ramahobo, 1999 & Pridmore, 1995). According to Le Roux (1999), the San people are receiving little education in Botswana schools. The languages of school, English and Setswana make learning difficult as they are often second and third languages (Batibo, 2004). One finding that is new is that the participants wanted to learn English and admired Ofe (my 6 year old daughter) who was so young and could speak it with proficiency.

Researchers (Gatsha, 2005; Mooko, 2006; Nyati-Ramahobo, 1999; Pang, 1990; Schechter & Bayley, 1997) continue to point to the fact that cognitive development occurs effectively only through a language that the learner knows very well, for example, a mother tongue or a first language (I understand this to mean full understanding of a language in all socio-linguistic and cultural domains) as explained by the father of sociolinguistics, Dell Hymes (1964). In addition, for the learner to understand, organize and select information, it is crucial that they are proficient in the first language (Cummins, 1984). I concur with Kembo (2000); Mule (1999) and Stroud (2003) that Africa (Botswana included) needs to radically rethink the place of indigenous languages of education for a successful future in all spheres of life.

Although English was revered, the six participants in the study preferred to read Setswana books to English ones. This was because of the difficulty of English and their familiarity of Setswana. Students looked for stories, poems and idioms in Setswana books as they had a lot of meaning to them. For example, from the data, students told interesting stories. Mr. President told a story of '*Makepe*,' Knowledge shared a story of '*Tomatoma*' and Drought told me about 'The Lion and the Monkey.' Almost everything they shared with me was through

stories. However, their preference for Setswana over English did not mean that they excelled in it. On the contrary, all six participants reported failing Setswana. Love and Peace, my two non San informants had observed that “these students” had problems with Setswana as well as English. According to Chebanne and Monaka (2005) it does not help that school materials reflect Setswana culture and ignore other cultures, for example, the San. This disadvantages students such as the San. The same has been found to be true in the U.S. for indigenous peoples (Reagan & Osborne, 2002).

Similar sentiments are expressed by Reagan and Osborne (2002) about U.S. classrooms. They lament the fact that although there is some progress in the curriculum towards eliminating bias in textbooks, the curriculum is still skewed towards the knowledge of the groups that are empowered. For example, stereotypes and distortions are still evident in social studies textbooks towards Black people and Native Americans. The same is true for the San in Botswana. It is then not surprising that indigenous students fail to participate in classroom activities because school literacy practices and materials are unfamiliar and not rewarding to them (Au, 2006). Hence, they do not experience ownership of literacy (Au, 1997). It is then not surprising that indigenous students often show ownership of the home and community literacy while not at school (Au, 2006). Multicultural education encourages the use of materials and literature that indigenous students can relate too (Au, 2006; Kretovic, 1985). This will equip students with the tools to analyze, critique and question societal injustices. Students should be able to read novels for example and say how they make meaning and how this influences how they view literacy and the world they live in (Kretovic, 1985).

Content Area Literacy

Three of the participants, Knowledge, Happy and Receiver liked Social Studies and Agriculture more than other subjects because they were somewhat related to their ways of knowing and reading the world. Recently, the San people have slowly moved into an agrarian-based economy as they became assimilated into Tswana culture and society (Mazonde, 2002). Happy loved agriculture as it reminded her of the school holidays and how she assisted her parents and grandmother to plant in the fields. Later when the crops came out of the soil, she and her siblings chased the birds away. The topic on the environment was dear to Knowledge because it reminded him of his village Kgomodiatshaba and how the villagers cut trees. This resulted in soil erosion which is not a good thing. Receiver could relate with social studies as it talked about the San people and their way of life. She felt it was important to teach other students in school about this.

Science was labeled “difficult” by five of the participants. They found science to be divorced from their home culture and only Happy found some relevance to the subject as it reminded her of the importance of cleanliness, something her mother had taught her. For Happy, science connected with her ways of knowing and reading her world. Trust and Mr. President mentioned that they were taught to abstain from pre-marital sex at home but, schools encouraged pre-marital sex by promoting the use of condoms. In addition, social evils such as incest should be taught in science, according to Trust as they are happening in their communities. Drought strongly felt that teachers need to connect their teaching to students’ cultures. She gave an example of a plant called “*Lerufa*” and that knowledge of this bulb can mean a difference between life and death in the desert as it has a lot of water.

Plants and herbs were some of the things that they said were important for them. Knowing about the plants found in their home environment was considered to be literacy according to some participants. Trust said plants such as *Lerete la ga Rangkurunyane* and *Sengaparile* are important for protecting a newborn baby from harm and purifying a person's blood respectively. Drought talked about *Borumolano*, a plant that is valued because of its healing powers over children's diseases. She also talked about plants used in the healing of a sick child's distended stomach and those for curing snake bites. Drought, Receiver, Happy, Mr. President and Trust felt such knowledge is important for survival and should be taught in schools for the benefit of non San students, especially in the science based subjects.

Receiver's view of literacy was basket weaving and reading the different patterns on the baskets. Drought also said that knowledge of the different grasses used for thatching was literacy to her. Making wooden spoons and chairs was considered to be literacy to Trust as it could benefit those who did not know and encourage them to learn.

Playing games such as '*Koi*,' '*Diketo*' and '*Morabaraba*' was also considered to be literacy to Drought, Receiver and Happy. Such activities helped to relieve them of the boredom they experienced in school.

Foreign Instruction and Discipline Styles

On entering school, indigenous students face many challenges as it was evident with San students at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. Indigenous knowledge is not planned but, occurs spontaneously and naturally (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). At school, children are forced to get used to a set routine such as a school timetable (George, 1999). More recent studies and social woes of the San in Botswana point to a culture which values peace, non violence, and free interaction between adults and children. Hence, it is not surprising that the San experience a

cultural clash in formal education in Botswana because traditional San education is informal and incorporated into the everyday lives of the children (Le Roux, 2002; Mazonde, 2002 & Wagner, 2006).

Classroom observations shed even more light on San students' experiences with literacy in the humanities and science-based subjects. Most of the teaching was through the lecture method and this meant that student participation was very limited. This has been found to be the norm in classrooms in Botswana (Fuller & Snyder, 1989; Prophet & Rowell, 1990). In instances where the teacher asked questions, San students did not participate because they feared being laughed at by non San students and their lack of confidence in using the English language prevented them from saying anything. All my six participants told me that they have resorted to saying nothing in class for fear of being laughed at by non San students. Trust shared with me how other students once laughed at his wrong pronunciation of an English word. In class San students were very quiet. Hence, it is not surprising that Love and Peace, my non-San informants reported to me that the San students were always daydreaming in class. Non San students participated much more than San students when asked a question by the teacher.

In the classroom observations at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary Schools, children were treated as 'tabula rasa's' empty vessels who came to school with no knowledge at all (Freire, 1972). Constructivist theory stresses the importance of bringing each student's prior knowledge and experience to the classroom (Semali, 1999). In the English and Science classroom observations, the teachers failed to draw from San culture in their teaching. This is sad as indigenous children are taught through experimentation, observations and repetitions (Kirk, 2001). Constructivists believe students can relate to the subject matter and consequently "generate an interest and ownership in the subject matter..." (p. 106). According to Semali, this

creates a connection between what is learnt in the classroom and what is already known as “indigenous literacies provide an important database for any follow-up to learning” (p. 106). Freire (1972) and Shiva (1993) are right in saying that allowing students to bring their indigenous knowledge empowers them greatly and this helps in preserving such knowledge’s. I concur with Semali (1999) when he says that “when learning is matched with local needs, education, whether indigenous or formal, can have a galvanizing effect on the lives of the learners” (p. 108).

Clearly, formal schooling for the San children in Botswana is a difficult endeavor. Walker (2000) assumes the role of an ambassador for all indigenous peoples when he says that due to the fact that formal education structures are based on foreign cultures and identities, indigenous peoples find schooling a “painful journey” (p. 68) as they are denied a voice. It is then not surprising that many indigenous children find formal schooling meaningless and continue to drop out of school in high numbers. Below are the sentiments of an Appalachian indigenous boy who described his emergent literacy experiences as: “Those failed early literacy efforts flattened my self-esteem and acted as a punishment, and left me feeling dumb, stupid, and illiterate” (Kirk, 2001, p. 420).

Few attempts are made at indigenizing the curriculum for the indigenous (Brock-Utne, 1995). Unfortunately, this has the dire effect of indigenous children losing their home culture. One Navajo boy relates his school experiences by saying, “school was a totally different environment...I had to change everything, from my eating habits to my clothing, values, religion and other expected ways of doing things” (Kirk, 2001, p. 72). Failure to change resulted in beatings, harassment and detention as in the case of the Kurds in Turkey (Phillipson, Rannut & Skutnabb-Kangas (1994). One boy had to endure horrific abuse at the hands of teachers who

“washed his mouth with yellow soap” (p. 73) as a result of speaking a native language. Semali (1999) says a ‘marriage’ of schools and the community is almost impossible as schools do not take community knowledge seriously. I found this to be true at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School as schooling was divorced from San students’ home literacies.

According to current literature, modern science is seen as the only “correct path to knowledge acquisition in popular Western culture” (Jegede, 1999, p. 123). This relegates indigenous knowledge to the status of “superstition, myths and stories” (Semali, 1999, p.2). Indigenous peoples all over the world have been forced to learn in knowledge systems that are foreign to them in every way, thus, ignoring indigenous knowledge systems which have been in existence for centuries. Drought is of the opinion that indigenous knowledge can benefit all students in school. Mr. President echoed her sentiments when he talked about the teachings he got from his late grandfather on life skills and traditional education such as how to make a successful hunt.

Schools, through the encouragement of competition, encourage regurgitation of knowledge, especially during examination times. Children give back to the teachers what they have ‘learnt’ at school and there is very little practical application to the community. This, in my opinion, does not cultivate a ‘holistic’ child and one who can think critically and ‘beyond the box’. During my classroom observations at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School, I found that during the times when teachers were absent from class, students made their own notes from the school Science and English textbooks. I observed that the students (San and non San) copied the words directly from their textbooks to their notebooks without understanding. According to Kirk (2001) some Native American children mimicked the teacher’s reading without understanding. I concur with Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1994) that formal

schooling “has been and still is the key instrument, on all continents, for imposing assimilation (forced inclusion) into both the dominant language and the dominant culture” (p. 71). The implication of this has been two-fold: the imposition of one culture on another (Western over indigenous) and a lot of confusion among indigenous peoples who are torn between two very diverse worlds. I found this to be true for San students at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. It was like there were two schools in one. On the one hand, there was a school for non San students and on the other, a school for San students and others like them from very remote settlements. The six participants and non San informants told me that non San students looked down upon them and laughed at them. For example, Receiver and Drought reported being laughed at for singing traditional songs.

It is then not surprising that San parents and elders complain that due to foreign knowledge systems, their children no longer respect them and the land (Wagner, 2006). The same is true for Native Americans as the elderly are a source of knowledge (Cajete, 2004) and major decisions are approved by them. It is even more unfortunate that indigenous parents complain that they are not actively included in the education of their children and they reason that this is so because they do not know the school language, for example, English (Valdes, 1996). In my interview with some San parents, they expressed a desire for their children to become educated. Latino or Latina peoples in the U.S. feel that their culture and ways of knowing are not taught in schools, hence, their children, like many other indigenous children in the world, are losing their ways of knowing, according to the sentiments expressed in the book ‘*Con Respeto*’ Valdes (1996). This resonates with African traditional beliefs that it takes a whole village to educate a child (Semali, 1999). Knowledge to the indigenous is not confined to the four walls of the classroom, but, it is deeply embedded in the homes, communities and the

environment. Semali & Kincheloe (1999) write that continuing to ignore local knowledge resources “only perpetuates postcolonial legacies and maintains oppressive knowledge systems” (p. 113).

3. What do San children value and find meaningful in their home and school environments? How does this relate to the possibilities for literacy learning?

Initially when talking to the participants and informants (San and non San), they understood literacy as school success: getting high grades. But with further questioning, the meaning of literacy extended to their home cultural environment. Looking across the stories of the participants and informants, literacy generally is viewed as anything that conveys an important message. For example, the students shared interesting stories with me and they found value in these stories. This concurs with Shostak (1981; 2000) who lived among the Kung! that San people love to tell stories. Recently, Wiessner a Professor of anthropology at the University of Utah found this to be true (Wiessner, 2009). The message in the stories taught them how to survive, good morals, importance of honesty, respect and *Botho*. Singing and dancing was considered to be literacy to all six participants. The songs are important for the messages they convey. For example, Drought sang a song warning Batswana to be careful and not commit passion killings. Receiver sang a song about her favorite teacher, Lebati. Playing was another form of literacy at home and in school. Happy, Drought and Receiver loved to play *Koi*, *Morabaraba* and *Diketo*.

Formal education, according to the indigenous, does not produce a holistically educated child: morally, physically and intellectually upright. To many indigenous peoples of the world, goodness of character is viewed to be fundamentally important (Mosha, 1999; Reagan, 2000; Smith, 1999). For example, among the indigenous Chagga peoples (Africa), an educated person

is one who is morally and traditionally smart, a university degree does not qualify one to be educated, according to Chagga beliefs (Mosha, 1999). Hence, they distinguish between the ‘*mpunde*’ (educated person according to local traditions) and the ‘book-educated’ person who has a lot of classroom education, but, lacks spiritual and moral education (Mosha, 1999). The home literacy of the six participants in this study meant a lot to them. For them, such knowledge is important and as Mr. President and Drought said, it should be included in formal schooling.

Recommendations

Without doubt, San students at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School face many challenges in their formal schooling endeavor. Recommendations based on thirteen narratives and preceding conclusions are presented in the areas of teacher preparation, pedagogy, curriculum content and home-school connections.

Teacher Preparation

Culturally relevant pedagogy needs to be at the center in Botswana’s teacher education programs. Botswana teachers need to acknowledge students cultures and prior knowledge (Bulawa & Chalebgwa, 2000). According to (Freire, 2003; Gay 2000; Nyerere, 1968; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999 and Shujaa & Afrik; 1996) culturally relevant pedagogy is a must if the disparities existing between the groups of power and the marginalized are to be closed. Imposing certain literacy only serves to perpetuate the status quo among the San people of Botswana. In Du Bois’s essay “The Field and Function of the Negro College and “Education and Work,” (Aldridge, 2008) the mis-education of African peoples throughout the diaspora is discussed. Du Bois (1996) and Lee (1992) express the sentiments that teachers of African American students need embrace true literacy practices of diverse groups for school success. The same is also true for the San of Botswana. A multicultural approach needs to be

adopted in teacher education. Jankie (2004) has written about her experiences in offering a course on multicultural literature in Setswana and English for secondary school teachers. Some of the teachers were uncomfortable teaching literature that addressed a range of cultural issues. Teacher educators across the nation need to do more to infuse multiculturalism into the curriculum.

In addition, teachers who failed to understand the students' culture and relate to students with care (Gay, 2000) added salt to the injury. Teachers need to have the skills and knowledge of teaching San students and also to appreciate their uniqueness inside and outside the classroom. They also need to appreciate the fact that San students have a unique way of reading the word and the world.

Pedagogy

Freire (1972) was of the view that classroom teaching should be married to students' background knowledge, experience and environment. One way teachers of San students can do this is through using the games the San play to achieve curriculum objectives. Games have been found to have a galvanizing effect on student achievement (Omaggio, 1982; Rivers, 1983 & Wright, Betteridge & Bucky, 1979). A study needs to be made of ways in which the games align with learning objectives. For example, teachers could teach students to play games such as '*koi, morabaraba and diketo*' in English. This could have a positive impact on other subjects studied in school and result in a possible reduction in the failure rate of San children. In addition, San students should be allowed to bring in their indigenous knowledge into formal classrooms as they have great stories to tell.

Stories are central to the lives of African societies, and the San people also love to tell stories and joke around with visitors or researchers (as seen in the books Nisa, 1981 and The

Return of Nisa, 2000). In addition, stories help to disseminate information and tell of a people's culture and history. Everything the participants said to me was through life and family stories. The teachers can ask the students to tell, dramatize and write stories to create content to advance English and Setswana language skills. According to (Au, 20001 & Manyak, 2001) culturally responsive instruction entails hybridity or hybrid events. Au (2006) writes that "hybridity refers to the creative combining of elements from students' home cultures with elements typical of the classroom and academic learning" (p. 116). For example, when the teacher was using the play "Google Eyes" to teach English she could have related it to the students more explicitly by asking them the kind of food they like to eat at home. In the play, the children like pizza a lot but pizza may be unknown or unfamiliar to the San students who have little contact with restaurants in urban Botswana.

From the present study it is evident that the San students at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School loved to tell stories. Stories were not only for entertainment but, a way of life. Through stories the students learnt about life in general. They also learnt about the importance of peace and the concept of *Botho* and what a lack of it means at home. Adopting stories and the games they love in the curriculum will be a way of respecting the San people and extending *Botho* to them.

Group work is another pedagogical imperative. It can help to scaffold learning as was evident in that the six participants and their friends enjoyed moving in groups and doing things together. According to (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994; Noel; 2000) group work has many advantages in the classroom. First, it encourages cooperative learning and sharing of ideas as each member of a group has a specific role to play. Second, through small groups, students can win the respect and recognition of their peers as they contribute to the literacy development of

others. Third, students feel more secure in small groups and hence, do not feel overwhelmed when they make a mistake in the group. Fourth, a small group offers students the opportunity to extend their literacy abilities much more than whole class discussions. Fifth, through group work, the students feel a sense of ownership of literacy in the classroom (Noel, 2000). Lastly, “when teachers organize small groups effectively, they can send the message that they recognize students’ competence and trust them to begin taking responsibility for their own literacy learning” (Noel, 2000, p. 92). Small groups are well suited for San students because traditionally they are discouraged from competing against one another. They are encouraged to share with others (Pridmore, 1995).

Curriculum Content

Formal schooling is an important avenue for San people to prove that they are a people who can think, produce and invent things. Their unique ways of knowing and reading the world should be respected and given a place in the school curriculum. Five of the six participants in the present study found science divorced from their ways of knowing and understanding. Literacy to these students were those things that had a lot of value to them. For example, singing, telling stories and playing games such as *diketo*. Allowing San students to bring their indigenous knowledge into formal schooling will result in meaningful education. Teachers can modify the curriculum to include those things that represent San culture and ways of understanding. This kind of knowledge will also benefit non San Batswana as Drought and Mr. President pointed out. In addition, the San students will have ownership on what and how it is taught in schools. Representation of San culture and ways of understanding in textbooks needs to be adopted.

In addition, innovative ways and strategies need to be adopted in the teaching of English to San students. They have to learn in English and Setswana, the two official languages in

Botswana (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1999) and this makes formal schooling a painful and meaningless journey as it is evidenced in the many apt examples in this study. Although the six participants in the study found the need to know and understand the English language for formal schooling success, they had problems with it. Hence, they did not read in English and this resulted in a dire impact on their academic achievement. The students reported failing other school subjects such as science, agriculture and social studies as they are taught in English. Although they all had dreams of excelling in junior secondary school and making something of their lives, without good grades in school, this was only a wish.

Family-School Connections.

Excellent family-school connections have been found to be essential for students' school success (Brook-Utne, 1995; Valdes, 1996). Parents need to be encouraged to visit the school more and the government trucks that frequent the settlements can transport the parents to school to discuss their children's' progress. Schools need to be more accommodative of the parents and invite them to come to school. Teachers can invite parents into classrooms to share with all students their culture and stories. These will make parents feel they have something to contribute to their children's' formal schooling education (Valdes, 1996). Teachers need to spend time in the San communities and develop friendly relations with the families of their students. If schools could hire a parent liason who could be a go between this might facilitate better communication and understanding for all involved (parents, teachers, administrators and students).

As formal education towards the San people is in Botswana today, the San people are denied being San. Through formal education, they are forced to assimilate to the dominant culture of the non San Tswana groups and this is not always automatic as I found out with the participants at Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School. Hence, their languages and

cultures are heavily compromised. Instruction in a foreign language, especially, is the number one barrier that stands in the path of these children's education as is evidenced from the many examples in the present study. What is needed in Botswana is an education that educates to empower, liberate, transform, shape identities and extend *Botho* towards the San and other marginalized groups in Botswana.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, I did not carry out as many observations in Humanities and Science classes as I would have liked to because they were cancelled frequently as a result of personal or administrative reasons. Hence, I did not meet the participants that much in class as I hoped I would. Also, I experienced resistance with the classroom observations. Second, I did not follow the students to their homes because they were not allowed to go home during weekends and public holidays. I feel I would have gotten important information if I had observed the students in their homes with their families. Third, although I had planned to meet and talk with the social worker who worked with the Guidance and Counseling teacher, this was not possible due to time constraints. Also, she was very busy as she was not only responsible for Letsatsi Community Junior Secondary School students but, other remote area dweller students in the Kgatleng Region. Meeting her would have enriched the stories I got and added to further understanding of San students formal schooling problem. Finally, due to lack of accommodation at the school, I could not observe in the evenings and at night.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

BOTSWANA ETHNIC GROUPS MENTIONED IN THE STUDY

Ethnic Group	Non San/San
Bangwaketse	Non San
Bakgatla	Non San
Bakhalahari	Non San (also Minority)
San	Indigenous
Ikalanga	Non San (also Minority)
Wayeyi	Non San (also Minority)
Bakwena	Non San

Appendix B

Student Interview Protocol

Interview Guide (I conducted the interview in Tswana a language known to the students).

In the interview, my aim was to get information and an understanding of the students' literacy and schooling experiences. This information helped me understand their views on formal schooling, including classroom interactions, subjects learnt, school/home connections and so on.

In the first interview, I tried to get some information about the language background of the students, preferred languages at home and in school and preferred school subjects.

- Which languages do you speak in school? At home?
- Which is your preferred language and in what situations?
- Which subjects do you enjoy in school? Why?

Secondly, I sought as much information as possible from the participants on their formal schooling literacy.

- What does literacy (or being literate) mean to you? In school? In your community?
- Tell me a story about a positive experience you had in school that stands out in your memory.
- Do you have stories about negative school experiences? Would you tell me any of those stories? (What was your worst school experience?)
- Most of the time how do you feel about being in school (What do you enjoy about being in school? Or what are your feelings and thoughts about being in a boarding school?)
- What are the benefits of attending school for you? (Do you think coming to school is important? Why? Why not?)

Finally, I asked the students about their teachers, past and present. In addition, I sought some information from them about their parents or guardians.

- Describe your relationship with teachers.
- Tell me a story about a favorite teacher. (Who is your favorite teacher and why?)
- What do you like reading and why?
- Briefly tell me about a story you read or heard and what you learnt from the story Do you have stories you like to tell?
- What difficulties do you encounter in reading and writing at school?
- Describe your relationship with other students (San and non San).
- Describe your relationship with your parents (guardians etc) or tell me something about your relationship with your parents or guardians.
- Please describe your teacher's involvement with your schooling experience.
- Does what you learn in schools that remind you of your culture / ways of reading the world? Yes or No. Please elaborate.
- What changes, if any would you like to see in your class, school?
- Where do you see yourself ten years from now?

Appendix C

Parent Interview Protocol

The interview with the parents was meant to shed more light on children's literacy practices. In addition, I hoped they would express the changes they envision in their children's schooling, especially how the San's way of life could impact positively on their formal schooling.

- What problems do they experience in their children's schooling?
- Have you ever been to school? If yes, what is your highest level of education?
- How many children do they leave with?
- How do they children perform in school?

