The Development and Preservation of the Basarwa’s Traditional Culture through Art and Education in Botswana

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Introduction

In countries around the world—developing and developing—providing curricula that honors language and cultural practices has proven to be an effective measure in assisting indigenous minorities attain the practical skills they need in order to become productive members of society. It has been stated that the challenge development practitioners face in providing indigenous children with educational provisions in its cultural context, pedagogical methods and local environments that foster rather than undermine respect for indigenous culture—will be significantly reduced if education is conducted in the local language and culturally relevant content is included. This is in turn, will provide educational experiences that are authentic and economically in the national context (Schimmel 2007). The language in which education is a distribution in an often overlooked position within various education systems around the world, yet the distinction this linguistic shift causes language minority students is far from negligible. Education is obviously an important component of the development process. Indigenous lawyers, activists, and teachers who have endorsed formal education understand this. A 10-year sentence for non-Indigenous students, and those indigenous educatees tend to play a vital role in informing local, national, and international development movements and policies related to the education rights of indigenous peoples worldwide (Hays 2011). Contemporary human rights organizations such as, the World Declaration on Education have proposed laws that state, “Indigenous knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage have a value and validity in their own right and a capacity to both define and promote development” (Hays 2011). This section will present the reader with examples of successful language-minority programs and cultural curricula around the world, and present the reader with a solution that may work for Basarwa students in Ghanzi.

Discussion

Indigenous populations in Botswana still have the lowest educational attainment in Botswana (Hays 2011). While the Khoswani in Ghanzi may not be ready for complete assimilation, views of development amongst this group have changed significantly since 1966. Most people in this region were not interested in education immediately after independence, however, now they are. Many students drop out, but a few survive. Since education is only linked to upward social mobility in Botswana, many dropout in Ghanzi join the ranks of the unemployed in Botswana, and those who matriculate have the chances that are themselves denied.

When indigenous minorities do matriculate through formal education systems they tend to play a significant role in advocating for better education in their communities. Of the two college-going respondents I interviewed, both stated that they would like to help in regional Ghanzi. One stated, “With my degree, I plan to use my skills to get into community development initiatives in the Ghanzi region.” The other stated that he would like to provide jobs for citizens in the region.

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Figure 1. Basarwa Students

Methods

I interviewed Khoisan residents that were from Ghanzi: 2 were employed and 3 were students at the University of Botswana. I asked them questions pertinent to their culture, traditions, educational experience, educational attainment, and views of development in order to gain a better sliver of education’s holistic effect on personal development in Ghanzi. While their views and experiences may not serve as the general perspective of San located in Ghanzi, the questions I asked produced fascinating results.

I am beginning to interview Basarwa as well to assess their views and knowledge of San art and culture. More importantly I will analyze how those views and notions affect their interactions with San citizens. In this case the San and Botswana views on development may not vary as much due to their close association in mainland Twana society. This affects the findings in my study, because I am not able to visit a community where a larger Khoswani population is available. If I did go to the CDR to conduct interviews the results and responses may have varied more, and would have given the reader a more balanced perspective on this very important issue.

Results

When asked about the cultural functionality of art, four out of five respondents agreed that art was culturally significant. Some cited the historical significance of rock art, and others talked about the gender roles and meanings as expressed in the traditional arts. All respondents agreed that art was a fundamental part of Khoisan culture. The respondents said that they did not really learn about their culture much in school. Four out of five stated that they were exposed to art, but their culture was represented in their art. Two out of five stated that they did not see their ability to matriculate through formal schools. When asked about the state of formal education in Ghanzi, all respondents described the schools they went to as inadequate. This means that the quality of staff, the environment, curriculum was lacking. Shortages of staff available to teach, shortages of classroom and lack of resources, hostile environments, and location of schools were all reasons for their views. All five agreed that a Basarwa language transition program would have helped them in school. One respondent stated, “It felt like I was using foreign knowledge. More so, I felt like I was expected to follow the rules in a foreign learning environment. It was like brainwashing.” He went on to say that this feeling did manifest itself in his low academic performance. Another respondent said that the foreign hostile environment in which he received his instruction caused him to drop out at the age of eight years old.

Of the 5 Khoswani members interviewed, all of them were males. All identified themselves as ‘Masarwa’. Their mother tongue is a vowel, and another spoke a language that the Other spoke two languages and speak SeSotho and the two spoke SeSotho. Both of these languages are dialects of Setswana. Four out of five subjects believed that their native language was both culturally significant, and beneficial to their personal development. All interviewees spoke multiple language including English and Setswana. All five agreed that in their view two languages was functional for their socioeconomic development. Four out of five subjects were introduced to English and Setswana in formal school. Four out of five graduated from primary school. Two out of five currently in college. There are currently working and enrolled in some form of regular education. All respondents recalled being introduced to Western and Tswana culture more than their own culture in school. They expressed dismay in the small amount that they learned about their own culture. One stated that she was exposed over the intricate arts of San living such as initiation, a traditional trading techniques, and ritual practices.

Four out of five respondents saw a barrier for the San in development. However, all respondents stated that they did not believe that the formal education system helps the San fully develop. One respondent said, “It doesn’t because it is not in a coördination with the Basarwa’s style. As it is, but our language should be recognized, and we should be taught in the same language and culture during our primary school years.” Another respondent stated, “They force us in these schools without understanding the Basarwa mentality. They don’t understand our manner. We learn through our hands, friends, neighbors, and the spirit. We experience education; it isn’t something you can just read to us.” All subjects stated that they did not have a single class taught in SeSotho throughout their matriculaciones.

References


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