The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education
Volume 41 ▮ Number 2 ▮ pp. 218–228 ▮ © The Authors 2013 doi 10.1017/jie.2012.21

An Integrative Review on the San of Botswana's Indigenous Literacy and Formal Schooling Education

Lone Ketsitlile
Communication and Study Skills Unit, University of Botswana, Botswana

The San are Southern Africa's first indigenous peoples. They can be found in South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Namibia. The San peoples in Botswana still face discrimination, especially in the education sector, as their indigenous literacy and way of life are largely ignored. Their languages are not part of the school curriculum in Botswana and it is English (the official language) and Setswana (the national language) that are taught in schools. In theory, this should not be the case. This highly disadvantages San children as they underperform and drop out of school. Hence, very few have made it to the University of Botswana and the Colleges of Education. In order for Botswana to reach its aim of an educated and informed nation by 2016, San peoples need to be catered for in the education system of Botswana. This article is an integrative review about the San of Botswana and (1) explains what has been studied about the San with regard to their indigenous ways of knowing and reading the world; (2) gives a clear picture of their formal schooling experiences; and, (3) provides an overview of their English and Setswana language acquisition.

■ **Keywords:** San Indigenous learning, Indigenous literacy, San formal schooling experiences, English and Setswana language acquisition

Background on Botswana

Botswana is a landlocked country in Southern Africa. The total population in 2003 was estimated to be 1,850,360 (Central Statistics Office/Department of Non-Formal Education, 2004, p. 14). It has one of the lowest population densities in the world (3.2 inhabitants per square kilometre), and it is estimated to be the size of Kenya or France (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2004). Roughly, half of the population lives in urban areas and the other half in rural areas (Pridmore, 1995). The country is divided into eight administrative districts, and since independence from Britain in 1966, Botswana has enjoyed a thriving economy and has the highest rate of per capita income growth worldwide due to a heavy reliance on diamonds and beef to generate income, very good democratic governance, and stable economic development (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 2003). The names 'Tswana' and 'Botswana' are used throughout this article to refer to the people of Botswana.

English and Setswana are the two official languages in Botswana. There are about 23 minority languages in Botswana, but according to Batibo and Smieja (2000) it is difficult to determine the exact number of minority languages in Botswana because most minority languages, particularly the Khoesan ones, form language clusters involving several linguistic or socio-cultural entities. The term 'Khoesan', according to Andersson and Janson (1997), refers to two groups of people: the Khoi (formerly Hottentot) and the San (Bushman). 'Khoi' means 'person' and 'San' stands for 'bushman' (Andersson & Janson, 1997, p. 111). The Khoisan are classified into nine main ethnic groups, and they speak about 23 languages and dialects. Approximately 20% of the population's first language is a minority language (Anderson & Janson, 1997). The children among this 20% begin learning to read and write in a second language (Setswana) and throughout their formal education are never taught to read and write in their first language.

Basarwa/San of Botswana

The San, (also called Bushmen or Basarwa) are Southern Africa's first indigenous hunter-gatherers (Le Roux,

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Lone Ketsitlile, Communication and Study Skills Unit, University of Botswana, P/Bag 0022, Gaborone, Botswana. Email: lone.ketsitlile@mopipi.ub.bw

1999). The terms 'Bushman' or 'Basarwa' are contested terms in Botswana. According to Motzafi-Haller (2002), who did some ethnographic work in the Tswapong Hills (Botswana), social identities, particularly those known as Basarwa, 'are social representations constructed, used, and contested by the very people who make up the interacting worlds' (1998, p. 525). In the early 1980s the Twapong region was experiencing dramatic change as a result of national reforms. Motzafi-Haller observed the exclusion of those called 'Basarwa', and recorded public events where she saw signs of resistance towards the Basarwa. Difference and social hierarchy was associated with access to land, the organisation of community, and shifting leadership terrain. 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. In scholarly circles, the term 'Bushman' was replaced by the more neutral indigenous term 'San', introduced by Wilson and Thompson (1968).

The San are short in stature and very light in complexion (Shapera, 1951). Their languages are full of clicks (type of consonants), and the Basarwa group is made up of about 17 ethnic groups who speak different languages (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2004). In Botswana and neighboring countries, the San have lost rights to their land, and White farmers and the Bantu have pushed most San deeper into dry lands. Botswana has the highest number of San peoples in Southern Africa, and the approximately 50,000 San (Wagner, 2006) have found themselves residing in the very dry areas of the Kalahari Desert. They live in bands of about 50–100 people per band, and according to Nyati-Ramahobo (2004), due to their nomadic nature, they are present in seven out of the eight Administrative Districts in Botswana. The San are the poorest of the poor in Southern Africa, Botswana included; according to Kgosidintsi (1992), they have very few possessions and cannot sustain themselves without outside help. Forty to sixty per cent of the San in Botswana have been found to be living below the poverty line for Botswana, and low nutritional status has been reported among the very young and the old. A decline in hunting and gathering has worsened the social and economic lives of the San, according to Riemer, Gaborone, and Tshireletso (1997).

Saugestad (1998) posits that 'the San have been denied constitutional rights to which every other Motswana has claim. Unlike every other Motswana, they have no territory, no recognised paramount chief except for the recently appointed headman' (p. 33). Mazonde (2002) goes on to say that the San have been robbed of the socio-economic success that Botswana has achieved in the past two decades, and that the San have fared worse than the rest of Batswana: 'They have become poorer economically and more so socially, through the state's relocation policies' (Mazonde, 2002, p. 63). Hence, most San peoples are resigned to a life of servitude in Botswana, and many work as cattle-herders and do other menial jobs for other Batswana. Mogwe (1992) observed that a master/serf relationship still exists in the attitudes of Ghanzi cattle-owners towards the San in the Kalahari Desert.

Theoretical Frameworks

In designing a theoretical framework for conducting empirical research on the San peoples in Botswana, I found Ubuntu/Botho Southern African philosophy, social constructivist approaches to knowledge, and colonial and post-colonial theories most suitable for understanding and addressing San educational problems in Botswana and possibly, the rest of Southern Africa.

Ubuntu/Botho Southern African Philosophy

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, 1995, n. p.). In South Africa it is ubuntu and in Botswana, botho. In Botswana, botho is a pillar of society, and in my opinion it transcends the social, political and economic lives of Batswana. For example, botho is taught informally in Tswana homes by children observing adults in their day-to-day affairs. It is also taught through story-telling, poems, proverbs and games. It is not only one's biological parents who reinforce botho teaching and philosophy to the young, but the whole community.

The underlying concern with ubuntu/botho is with concern with others and their welfare (Higgs, 2003). Letseka (2000) goes on to say that extending ubuntu/botho to other people shows that they are being treated with fairness, with the hope that one day they will also treat us with kindness. Unfortunately, botho seems to have evaded the San and they continue to suffer horrendously in Botswana. This goes against education for 'Kagisano' (peace) and tells of outright denial of human rights in a country that is well known for its 'shining democracy'. Research that treats the researched on an equal footing is very welcome in Botswana.

Social Constructivist Approaches to Knowledge

The ubuntu/botho philosophy can be used with other qualitative research methods. The world is the creation of the mind and it rests upon idealism (interpretive). Cultures can be understood by studying what people think about their ideas (Crotty, 2003) and what they believe in.

Colonial and Post-Colonial Influences in Botswana Education System

Colonial and post-colonial influences inform the present study in that they have a direct influence on the many socio-economic problems that Botswana and the rest of

Africa are faced with. The division of Africa in the 1800s resulted in the colonisers imposing their languages, cultures and systems in Africa to support their stay in the colonies (Mgadla, 2003). As a result, indigenous literacy and education became heavily compromised. For example, missionaries banned traditional schools in Botswana, known as *bogwera* and *bojale.* Bogwera initiated young men into manhood and bojale taught young girls how to become better wives and mothers. Chiefs were encouraged to do away with these 'barbaric' practices and adopt Christianity.

Like in the rest of Africa, after gaining independence from Britain in 1966 Botswana followed closely on the footsteps of its master. British education systems and curriculum were adopted without any consideration for Batswana ways of knowing and culture. Traditional schools became a thing of the past. Education became a tool for the ex-colonisers to continue their influence in Africa and Botswana and also to destroy indigenous cultures and replace them with Western carbon-copies (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999).

Methodology

The data was collected primarily through library database searches in Botswana and the United States. The researcher also read books and journals at the University of Botswana. After the initial readings, the data was sorted according to indigenous literacy of the San and their formal schooling literacy. After that, the data was sorted according to primary and secondary education.

San Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Reading the World

San Reading of the World Through Animals, Spirits and the Cosmological World

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 religious from their daily activities, but the two are integrated. God plays a central role in the lives of the San and he is the creator of all life: animals, plants and humans. Coulson and Campbell explain that according to San beliefs, 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 the land owns them both. 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 San holds the eland in very high regard as it is believed to have mystical powers and metaphysical properties; hence, the name 'people of the eland' (San). Like the giraffe, elephant, kudu and hippopotamus, the eland has a force that helps humans to administer health, harmony, the weather, wild animals and human rites of passage. Vinnicombe (1976) says that the giraffe and eland are important rain-making animals. In addition, the eland's meat is used during ceremonies for girls' and boys' initiation ceremonies into adulthood. The San believe that they have a lot to learn through animals as their god, *kaggen* or the praying-mantis lives in the bones of the eland. They also believe that God does not like it when they kill the eland and hence the hunter who kills an eland has to go through some cleansing and healing ceremonies in order to be 'purified'. A crocodile is also held in high regard as it is believed to represent great knowledge and eating its meat increases one's knowledge.

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 travellers in the Cape in the 18th century and 19th century; the travellers described the art as 'curiosities rather than as works of art' (p. 38). It is only in the last two decades that anthropologists, historians and researchers such as Shapera (1951) have shed light on San art and unravelled the meaning and communication behind the art. In the Kalahari desert alone, there are 4,000 red finger paintings comprising about 50% animals, 37% geometrics and 13% human figures (Vinnicombe, 1976). Again, this tells of the very close relationship that the San share with wild animals and how human behavior is seen through the lens of animals and the cosmological world. For example, in studying rock art in Southern Africa, Vinnicombe observed that the wildebeest was hardly painted, except for one picture. The explanation given 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, hence resulting in missed aim during hunting. Also, it is believed to live among other animals under false pretences 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.

The San also have a very close relationship with the sun, moon and the stars. According to Shapera (1951), the San pray to the moon for food and the moon should not be laughed at in case it goes into eclipse. Also, the moon should not be looked at when game has been shot in case the wounded animal gets lost or cannot be tracked. A girl is to report to her mother or an aunt when she 'sees the moon' (starts menstruating) and this culminates in a series of ceremonies that initiate the girl into womanhood.

The sun is a young girl married to an old man, the moon, and she is to be respected at all times. The stars are believed to be animals that once lived, and a typical day is divided according to the position of the sun, and time is used to denote distance. According to Shapera (1951), a San person, when asked how far a certain borehole is, points to the part of the sky which the sun will have reached by the time one gets to that particular borehole.

Traditional Schooling of Children

The traditional San pattern of learning and teaching children about the world is admirable. Everything the elders do is a learning experience for the young. Play among San children is characterised by games, songs, telling stories, making beads, hunting and gathering games and dances (Pridmore, 1995; Shostak, 2000). Children learn a lot through watching and doing (Barnard, 1992, as cited in Pridmore, 1995). Play is mostly an imitation of parents' day-to-day activities, and older children teach the young during play, according to Pridmore. Of all the play activities, dancing is especially a favorite of the San, and the dances (which are rarely planned, but mostly spontaneous) are not only for entertainment, but also for ritual purposes. Through dance, children are taught about the lives of animals and how to hunt them; hence, the baboon, eland, grasshopper, giraffe and bee dances. An important San dance (which is depicted in scenes in rock paintings in Botswana and across Southern Africa) is the trance dance or healing dance. According to San popular belief, diseases and illness are sent by evil spirits (Shostak, 2000). In order to heal a person, a healer goes into trance, 'a state that is so profound, so deep and coma-like, that their own spirits, which are said to have left their bodies, may not return' (Shostak, 2000, p. 36). In this state, the healer cooperates with the gods and the spirits to heal the sick. A circle of dancers imitating various animals surround the healer and they clap and sing as the spirit of the healer leaves his body in the form of an animal (such as a lion) to wrestle with evil spirits. By laying on hands, the healer 'takes out' the sickness, the *n/lum* (pronounced xlm) into his own body, where it is ejected through the top of the spinal column of the healer and then *num* is then transferred to heal the patient (Shostak, 2000, pp. 295–296). Shostak goes on to say that through soul travel, the San healers explore the 'psychological needs of others, reflecting intuitive knowledge and often profound insight. In trance, relieved of the necessity to process information within 'normal real reality', healers open their minds to the subtle conversations people have within themselves' (Shostak, 2000, p. 40).

Among the San, there is nothing like the 'best' healer, dancer, gatherer or hunter. San peoples' culture encourages equality and adults teach children to avoid competition and individualism and hierarchies are not encouraged. As a result, children's games involve almost no competition and they are taught to share and respect one another at a very early age. According to Shostak (1981), it is considered extremely rude to draw attention to a person's talents: 'Each child attempts, through repetition, to become more accomplished, not to defeat or outshine someone else' (p. 108). Children are with their parents most of the time, but a lot of the time they are left to their own devices as the San believe children are 'without sense' (Shostak, 2000, p. 111) and do not know right from wrong, and as a result they should not be punished. Children are also encouraged to learn from one another. It is during times like this that children experiment with sex, and sexual play is common (Shostak, 2000). Children set up their own little villages and play 'father and mother games'. It is worth pointing out that San culture does not segregate by sex; neither sex is trained to be submissive or brave. This is a marked difference between the San and other Batswana peoples where the girl child is socialised to believe she is inferior to the boy child.

Tilling the soil is a taboo as it is believed to anger the gods (Barnard, 1992, as cited in Pridmore, 1995) and as a result, the San are primarily hunter-gatherers. Girls go gathering for veld foods (berries, nuts and various roots) with their mothers and other women in the clan. Their fathers teach boys how to hunt and track animals. A boy is likely to kill his first large animal between the ages of 15 and 18 and this marks an important period in his life: two separate events are held to celebrate the killing of the first male and female animals. This period also marks the transition to manhood. It is clear that the San teach their children in authentic literacy practices that include the environment around them.

San Formal Schooling Experiences

Background

Since independence from British colonisation in 1966, there have been two important government documents that have set policy for Botswana's educational development. They are the 1977 National Policy on Education that was written by a Commission appointed by Sir Seretse Khama, the First President of Botswana. The second is the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education. In both documents, policy issues pertaining to education are viewed not according to tribal groupings, but as one entity. This has the unfortunate disadvantage of lumping all tribes in Botswana, hence disregarding the uniqueness of minority/indigenous peoples (Mazonde, 2002). Mazonde refers to this as 'the big family mentality' in Botswana education (2002, p. 66).

The first effort at bringing San children into formal education in Botswana started in the late 1960s. The first school attended by San children was started in 1967 by the Dutch Reformed Church Mission at D'Kar (pronounced Xaga) in the Ghanzi district. In 1986, the first school boarders were taken in from the Central Kalahari Reserve as an experiment in bringing education to the nomadic San groups, but they dropped out of school. The Botswana

government took over from the Dutch Reformed Church in 1978. Le Roux (1999) has observed that most of the programs that were started to assist the San had nothing to offer them in the 20th century and that the best course for them (according to the Botswana government) was to assimilate them into the Tswana culture as fast as possible. Western education was seen as the tool towards such change. This, of course, has posed many problems for the San, as their way of life continues to be largely ignored. Le Roux goes on to say that the emphasis of modern education is on the product and not the process, and this clashes with San beliefs as problem-solving is a continual process for the San and not an accumulation of knowledge (Biesele, 1999, as cited in Pridmore, 1995).

Although San children have been going to school in their respective countries for the past 30 years, Le Roux (1999) reports that only a few have made it to tertiary education, and educational authorities in Southern Africa are helpless in controlling the high dropout rates. According to Ketsitlile (2009), the major reason for high dropout rates in formal education among the San is because school literacy fails to accommodate San students' indigenous literacy. Hence, the San students feel left out and do not connect very well with what is happening in schools. A study carried out by Le Roux among the San in Botswana reveals that education for the San is still a problem, although acculturation is taking place among the San all over Southern Africa. Le Roux (1999), Wagner (2006) and Tshireletso (1997) reported that San children are found to have cultural and material problems that hinder their education. In his study, Le Roux identified three distinct periods (or crises) in the life of a San child on the road to formal education: (1) Crisis 1: the first 2 to 3 years of school, which is characterised by poverty and health problems; (2) Crisis 2: the years around puberty when stigmatisation and emotional abuse takes its toll; and (3) Crisis 3: late adolescence, when poverty faces the San child and the pressure to 'fit in' is at its highest.

In order to address San educational disenfranchisement, the Botswana government came up with what is known as the Remote Area Development Program (RADP) in 1974 to deal with the upliftment of the San (Pridmore, 1995). In the Remote Area Development (RAD) areas, the San live together with the few Batswana who face poverty like them. This has been seen as a political strategy to acculturate Basarwa and more easily assimilate them into Batswana society. However, the Botswana Government is adamant that the aim of the RADP is to assist the RAD peoples economically through government financial assistance plans such as the Arable Land Development Program (ALDEP). Of importance, the RADP is said to 'fill the void of parents not able to willingly take responsibility for their children's education' (Le Roux, 1999, p. 18). Non-San groups complain that the program makes the San too dependent on the government and that San parents are failing to take full responsibility for their children. The San peoples themselves complain that they have been forcibly removed from their ancestral lands because of diamonds. This culminated in a bitter High Court case, resulting in the Botswana government losing to the San and Survival International labelling Botswana diamonds 'blood diamonds', and prominent people such as Britain's Prince Charles campaigning against Botswana. In 1993, Botswana hosted the second largest regional San Conference in Gaborone (Le Roux, 1999, p. 18) and it was at this conference that San peoples expressed their concerns about formal education. However, very little has changed since this conference, as continued denial towards the San in Botswana is the norm (Mazonde, 2002).

Separation from Parents and Abuse in Schools

Many obstacles face San children in the quest for formal education. They are forced to leave their parents and move to a school some 20 to 40 kilometers away. Mazonde (2002) says that in those settlements San children live in low quality hostels, usually sleeping in overcrowded rooms on the floor. There have also been reports of sexual harassment of female San students in the hostels by males who come from outside the school (Mazonde, 2002, p. 66). The *National Development Plan 7* of the Botswana government reports that hostel conditions prevent parents from enrolling their children in school, and many drop out of school. Pridmore (1995) notes that very few San children reach secondary school and hardly any go on to tertiary education. This is not surprising, given the fact that parents do not trust schools, due to the insurmountable problems their children face at school. They also believe that school is interfering with their culture and traditional norms. One parent interviewed by Hays (2002) complained that school was robbing them of their children, as they did not see them often enough to teach them traditional ways of life such as hunting and gathering the *mongongola* nut. In addition, according to Pridmore (1995), parents complain of not having enough money to sustain their children at school. Of serious concern to San parents is the separation from their children as San culture encourages parents and children to be together all the time, including sleeping in the same hut. Beatings by teachers and non-San students only helps fuel the already existing problems.

Name-calling and verbal abuse at school by non-San students is reported to be a norm (Le Roux, 1999). The San children are called all sorts of names, including 'dirty, backward and primitive' (Le Roux, 1999, p. 83). In her study of San children's views on literacy, Ketsitlile (2009) found name-calling to be the norm in the remote area dweller junior secondary school she included in her study of the Kgatleng District of Botswana. One participant, Receiver (pseudonym), shared with her how non-San students in the school called her and other San students 'long tails'. The non-San students resorted to spraying the San students with a bug-killing disinfectant. This history of abuse inflicted on the San and other minority peoples in

the Kalahari Desert can be traced to their lives of serfdom among the rest of the Batswana. Traditionally, they are cattle-herders of the Tswana. In his study of farm-workers' conditions, Mogalakwe (1986) reported an alarming increase in the use of San children for child labour by Ghanzi farmers at their cattle-posts. This is against San culture, as the San believe that children should not do any strenuous work, but they should learn by playing games, experimenting and observing adults at work (Shostak, 1981; Pridmore, 1995). A report by a man from Ghanzi captures well the attitudes of the Tswana towards San education: 'When I went to school, there were very few San. They told us, what gave you the right to think a San may go to school like others?' (Le Roux, 1999, p. 83). As far as I can remember, the San in Botswana have always been treated as less than human beings, and children cry when others call them 'mosarwa ke wena' ('you are a Mosarwa', singular for Basarwa). This is the meanest thing to say to another person in Botswana. A similar observation about Basarwa was made by missionaries who came to Botswana in the 18th and 19th centuries, such as David Livingstone, who commented in one of his letters that 'they are a poor degraded enslaved people. The other tribes consider them as inferiors; keep constantly hunting for them' (Shapera, 1951, p. 37).

Poverty and Dependency

Extreme poverty also makes the San child stand out significantly in school from other children. Wagner (2006) says that San children go to school without shoes and adequate clothing. Le Roux (1999) highlights a pathetic situation in which children had to bask naked in the sun as they waited for their uniforms to dry. This resulted in children running away from school due to humiliation and feelings of inferiority. Also, San children complain that they always feel hungry at school, and Le Roux (1999) reports that it is not necessarily true that the children are starved, but San children are not used to eating at set times and eat whenever they feel hungry. Teachers reported that children dropped out of school, especially during the rainy season, due to the abundance of veld foods and the excitement of gathering for food with their parents.

Research has documented that it is especially the young San child who suffer tremendously from the effects of poverty, such as hunger, disease and cold. Due to extreme poverty, some San children are completely excluded from formal schools (Meyer, Nagel, & Snyder, 1993), and it is not then surprising that a study conducted by the Botswana government in 1995 revealed that only 18% of the San children were in primary or secondary school. A similar study conducted by Good (1999) reported that with a total of 77% illiteracy, the San are the least literate of all minorities in Botswana. Feelings of powerlessness and dependency are made worse by having no control over their children's education at school, and having no power over their land. It is not surprising that most San peoples have resorted to excessive drinking and drug abuse, and school-age children are not exempt from such abuse (Pridmore, 1995).

However, like many marginalised peoples in the world, the San are not proud to be heavily dependent on the Botswana government and the Tswana or 'Blacks' (the name the San call the Tswana) for everything. They especially view the Blacks as advantaged people, and there is a clear distinction between the two. It is not surprising that the San feel that quality education is reserved for the Blacks and that they belong in the bush and at the cattle posts owned by the Blacks. Wagner (2006) captures the sentiments of a San man who said: 'Our system is very discriminatory. It discriminates . . . there's no second chance . . . unless you go to a private school' (p. 93). However, private schools are expensive and out of reach of the San. As a result of acute frustration, some San have resorted to violence in their groups, and Mazonde (2002) informs that in one school near Dobe (Botswana), San students complained of abuse from a rival San group, the Xanikhwe, who urinated on their blankets. This only serves to show the level of despondency, powerlessness and melancholy San peoples face in Botswana.

Classroom Environment

A study carried out by Mokibelo and Moumakwa (2006) entitled 'An investigation into the reading texts in English by Khoisan children: A case study of Motshelagabedi Primary School in the Central District' reveals that for San children, the only way to develop their reading abilities is during formal education as it might be the only opportunity in which they have access to books. However, the learning materials in rural schools have been found to be 'very scarce, inappropriate and in some cases, non-existent' (Magogwe, 1999, p. 54). Knuth (1998) posits that successful materials should reflect the local culture. She correctly observes that if materials do not reflect the local cultures, it is a waste of time. For the San and other marginalised peoples in Botswana, this is a sad truth, especially for the San, who do not have written orthographies in their languages.

Non-San Teachers

According to Mazonde (2002), San teachers are very scarce. For example, in New Xade, only one out of eleven teachers are San. Almost all the teachers are Blacks. Mazonde reports that the teachers make learning extremely difficult for the San children, with the hope that they will return to their parents and leave school. It is obvious that they do not understand the children and their culture, and this makes teaching and learning laborious and painful (Ketsitlile, 2009). Gay (2000) is of the view that culture influences student and teacher expectations. In elucidating the experiences of African Americans in the United States, Gay notes:

> *The energy and exuberance with which highly culturally affiliated African Americans invest their interactions (what Boykin [1986] calls 'verve') is troublesome to many teachers. They may view this behavior as impulsive, overemotional, and out of control. . . . The students are often reprimanded for undesirable behaviors more than they are instructed on academic learning. As a result, high level achievement is seriously constrained under these conditions. (2000, p. 54)*

The same has been found to be true among the San children. Teachers have been found to beat students for being 'stupid' and for not understanding them. Also, the teachers have very little confidence in the children and do not envision a bright future for them (Ketsitlile, 2009). In a study carried out by Le Roux (1999) among the San, many teachers commented that San children are only interested in sex, and not education. An interview conducted by Mazonde (2002) in the northwest of Botswana reveals the unhappiness of San parents regarding non-San teachers, who are not only oblivious of their culture, but also did not know their languages. Insensitivity of teachers towards children and their parents has also been blamed for school dropout. Mazonde observed that the children who attended school in Xangwe were Wayeyi, OvaHerero (also minorities in Botswana) and the San. The highest dropout was among the San children (Mazonde, 2002, p. 68). What I find surprising is that non-San teachers reported a high intelligence rate among the San students (Saugestad, 1998). As a result of feelings of rejection and discrimination inflected by the Blacks on them, it is not surprising that the San children do not like to mix with non-San students in formal educational settings (UNICEF). In her study of a remote area dweller school in Botswana, Ketsitlile (2009) observed that non-San students discriminated against San students in school and had a very condescending attitude towards them. It is then not surprising that San children reported to her that they missed home and school was a nightmare.

English and Setswana Language Acquisition Botswana Language Policy

When Botswana regained independence from British colonial rule in 1966, English became the medium of instruction in schools, starting from Standard 1 (Grade 1). It is also the official language of the law and courts, business and social mobility in modern-day Botswana (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2004). At independence, teachers were allowed to code-switch between Setswana and English at the lower grades to facilitate student understanding (National Commission on Education, 1977). A shift occurred with the National Commission on Education (1993), which reduced the use of the number of years for Setswana as medium of instruction to one. The Commission regarded a child's first language as a threat to second language acquisition (English), which is the language of prestige in Botswana. Although the Commission also recommended the use of minority languages at pre-primary education, the Botswana government rejected this. According to Nyati-Ramahobo (1991, p. 201): 'the language planning processes in Botswana are influenced by an orientation which views language diversity as a problem, a reversal or negation of democratic gains, a threat to unity, social harmony and to development'. According to Nyati-Ramahobo (2004) the Botswana government opposes the use of minority languages in government, education, politics and business, under the guise of national unity, to the advantage of Setswana, which is marketed as a unifying language in Botswana. I concur with Mooko (2006) that this 'unity' disregards the importance of cultural diversity in Botswana. The Revised National Policy of Education in 1994 (Republic of Botswana, 1994) reversed the decisions of National Commission on Education (1993) and recommended that Setswana be used for instruction in the first 3 years of a child's schooling, and that English be taught from Standard 3.

Effects of English and Setswana Language Learning on the San Child

Language plays a major role in San formal education frustrations. The San and other minorities in Botswana are forced to learn in languages that are foreign to them: English and Setswana. For the San children, Setswana and English are usually second and third languages. The San are disadvantaged in schools, especially at initial entry, as they often do not understand the language of instruction (Wagner, 2006). What makes the problem worse for the San child is that the gateway examinations at primary and secondary schooling are in English. These examinations are very important because entry into college and university depends on them. Ron, one of the San tribal elders, said the following during an interview with Hays (2002): 'Children normally start with the very difficult two official languages other than starting with the mother tongue languages. That makes it very difficult for some children to capture school at the same levels as the young Setswana speaker' (p. 93). Numerous studies carried out in Botswana at the advent of San formal education 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 (Biesele & Hitchcock, 2000; Hays, 2002; Mazonde, 2002; Magogwe, 2007).

The language barriers experienced by San children in Botswana are demonstrated in a study carried out in 1995 by Pridmore in Ghanzi district, Western Botswana. The study involved two sets of children: primary school children ('little teachers') and preschool children. The 'little teachers' role was to transfer health messages to the preschool children in Setswana, and this was done under the supervision of teachers. The preschool children were tested before and after the intervention, and in both sets of children it was noted that no health messages were learnt.

This further corroborates research that attest to the fact that children learn better and faster in their mother tongue (Kembo, 2000). However, according to Magogwe (2007), all school-going children in Botswana find Setswana difficult — especially marginalised children.

A related study carried out by Mokibelo and Moumakwa (2006) among San children at Motshelagabedi shed more light on San second language woes. From the 67 Standard 1 students who sat for the vocabulary test, 20 were interviewed. All of them said they were unable to read English words, but were able to read Setswana. Most of them said: 'English is too difficult', or 'I do not understand English words' (Mokibelo & Moumakwa, 2006, p. 32). All of them complained that they found it extremely difficult to read texts in English. In another study by Mokibelo and Moumakwa (2006), five Standard 3 and 4 students were asked to read the following sentence: 'I am a pupil at Motshegaletau Primary School. I like going to school because I learn a lot of things' (2006, p. 32). Four of the students could not read the sentence at all, and even the one who made an attempt at reading the sentence did a poor job. This has the possibility of affecting content subjects, as English is used for instruction from Standard 3. An interesting observation made by Mokibelo and Moumakwa (2006) was that 'Tswana pupils were able to read the sentences without difficulty' (p. 32), and the reason for this might be that unlike San children, Tswana children use English as a second language and not a third.

The language policy in Botswana has caused the promotion of English and Setswana at the expense of indigenous/marginalised languages. I see this as a dilemma for San children in Botswana in many ways. First of all, it creates what I call a vacuum in their home-school connections. At school they have to learn and speak English and Setswana, which also includes acquiring the two cultures to some extent. At home they have to speak their San language(s). This has the dire effect that children become caught in two cultures and do not, in my opinion, excel in either one. I concur with Nyati-Ramahobo (2002) that language and culture cannot be separated. She speaks for others when she says that pruning and hiding some of these diverse cultures and languages is impoverishing Botswana's rich culture. Clearly, a loss of language means a loss of identity (Gatsha, 2005).

Ironically, the Botswana government states in *Vision 2016* (Republic of Botswana, 1998) that 'Botswana's wealth of languages and cultural traditions will be recognised, supported and strengthened in the education system. No one will be disadvantaged in the education system as a result of a mother tongue that differs from the country's two official languages' (p. 5). This insensitivity towards minority/marginalised languages seems to be the unfortunate status quo of most of the world's indigenous peoples (Pang, 1990; Schecter & Bayley, 1997) and I will shed more light on this topic in my next comprehensive question. Second, it is not surprising that San children choose the easy alternative and dropout of school.

In looking closely at the phonology, morphology and syntax of English and Setswana, I find a marked difference with San languages, which are full of clicks. This disadvantages the San child even more as there is very little resemblance between Setswana, English and San languages (Andersson & Janson, 1997). For example, Khoisan languages do not have noun systems like the Bantu languages; and unlike the Bantu languages they have gender class (masculine, feminine and the common gender), according to Andersson and Janson (1997), who liken these phenomena to Indo-European and the Afro-Asiatic group of languages. In addition to the differences in linguistics, what also makes learning Setswana and English difficult for the San child is the fact that teachers do not allow code-switching in class (Prophet & Rowell, 1990).

In the eastern part of Botswana, it is interesting to note that most San peoples have lost their languages and speak Setswana or Shikhalahari as mother tongues. Teachers have reported good progress for the first 3 years of schooling with these children, but they noticed a decline in school performance as a result of the medium of instruction changing to English from Standard 4 onwards (Le Roux, 1999, p. 71). In the Mahalape subdistrict, Botswana, teachers reported that even though English was introduced as a subject in Standard 1, it was not easy for children to switch to it as a medium of instruction as it was not spoken daily in their lives. In areas where San languages are still spoken as mother tongues by children, they have to quickly adopt Setswana and English as languages of school, and as I have indicated earlier, this is not an easy task.

Breakthrough to Setswana

The National Setswana Language Council (1983) has expressed many concerns about the learning of Setswana by mainstream students and minority students in Botswana. It was agreed by members that minority students such as the San be assisted in Setswana learning in schools as Setswana is a second language, and students faced many barriers in learning it (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1999). The Botswana bridging program for reading acquisition in schools, called 'Breakthrough to Setswana', was implemented to ease the learning of Setswana and make it more interesting and productive for all children. However, an evaluation of the program revealed that it benefited first language learners more than minority ones. Children who are second language learners of Setswana are given a year or two to 'breakthrough' (Recommendation 100c of the National Setswana Language Council [1983]). Children work on their own, assisted by a self-help kit. This works well for San children as they value independent

learning. However, teachers reported that this is temporary as children resort to experiencing problems in Setswana acquisition and learning after graduating from the program (Pridmore, 1995).

San Preschools

Another endeavour to scaffold San learning of Setswana and English is in the introduction of preschools by the Kuru Development Trust (independent NGO). This was done to prepare children in mother-tongue language, with the overall aim of building their self-esteem, identities in learning second languages and in their day-to-day schooling. In a related project in Serowe (St Gabriel's Mission School), volunteer teachers with the help of Tswana speakers mobilised to assist San classmates with an aim of improving their Setswana and English language skills.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this article has highlighted the San's indigenous ways of knowing and reading the world, their formal schooling experiences, and their English and Setswana language acquisition. It has brought to the fore how San read the world and make meanings from animals, spirits and the cosmological world. Children are taught to be independent and learn a lot through play, observations and experiments. In formal schooling, the San face insurmountable problems, and schooling is characterised by abuse, discrimination and learning in second and third languages (Setswana and English). Hence, it is not surprising that many San children drop out of formal schooling and even fewer make it to the University of Botswana. Formal schooling is described as 'torture' (Ketsitlile, 2009). As discussed in this article, a serious anomaly is that San languages are ignored in formal schooling in Botswana, and this is a huge disadvantage to San children. Riemer et al. (1997) suggest that Setswana be gradually introduced by teachers trained in the theory and methods designed to promote second language acquisition. Tabachnick (1980) supports a few years of mother-tongue instruction, followed by gradually introducing a second language — in the case of the San, Setswana and English. This would 'alter the winds of change' in San formal education greatly. In addition, Pridmore (1995) is of the view that a less formal model of schooling, and training of culturally sensitive teachers is a must if the San are to compete equally in today's global world and not feel the 'bottleneck' that they experience in Botswana formal education (Wagner, 2006, p. 95).

Although boarding schools are not a new thing among the indigenous, they are still a thorn in the flesh for the San students. Native Americans, native Canadians, Aboriginal, Indonesian and other indigenous children have had to endure the horror of separation from 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 that accompany life in the hostels. The San children have to stay long periods away from their families and only get to see them during school holidays. In today's competitive world, it is very important that San children also acquire a quality education to compete favourably with mainstream children. However, barriers such as foreign languages, foreign teaching styles, abuse, and poverty and home-school disconnection hinder their success at school. In addition, teachers who fail to understand the students' culture (Gay, 2000) have added salt to the injury. Instruction in a foreign language is especially 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. Whereas formal education has failed dismally to address the unique needs of the San and other marginalised peoples in Botswana, it is important to draw from lessons learnt from formal education as a way of improving the status quo in education in Botswana.

Botswana needs to emulate what is happening in the regions of South Africa and Namibia (Hays, 2011) and other parts of the world — for example, Australia, Canada and the United States — which are taking indigenous people's education very seriously. The following should be adopted as a matter of urgency:

- San peoples need to be closely consulted on how they want their children to be taught. This means that they should have an input in the curriculum and policy decisions at all levels. Ketsitlile (2009, 2011) reported in her study that San parents complained of not being properly consulted on their children's education. One parent interviewed complained that teachers did not consult them as much as they should. They complained of not being invited to school.
- The San peoples should be gatekeepers in San academia (Ketsitlile, 2009). There is a dire need for San teachers, lecturers and other professionals who will voice the San people's needs and how best those needs should be met. It is important to have a San liaison parent in the remote area dweller schools who can act as a go-between for the San students and schoolteachers. This will help to bridge the cultural gap.
- The Botswana government needs to recognise diverse cultures and ways of knowing. It is time Botswana moved away from its assimilation policy to recognising diversity.
- The San should be allowed to be San, by giving them freedom not only in education but in all spheres of life in Botswana. This is particularly important as the San are proud of their unique culture and heritage.

References

Andersson, L.G., & Janson. J. (Eds). (1997). *Languages in Botswana: Language ecology in Southern Africa.* Gaborone: Longman Botswana.

Batibo, H.M., & Smieja, B. (Eds). (2000). *Botswana: The future of the minority languages.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Boykin, A.W. (1986). The triple quandary and the schooling of Afro-American children. In U. Neisser (Ed.), *The school achievement of minority children: New perspectives* (pp. 57–92). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Biesele, M. (1993). Land, language, and leadership. *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, *17*(2), 57.

Biesele, M., & Hitcock, R.K. (2000). *Ju/hoan language education in Namibia and its relevance for minority language education in Botswana.* Retrieved from http://www.kalaharipeoples.org/documents/Bies-Hitch.pdf

Chilisa, B., & Preece, J. (2005). *Research methods for adult educators in Africa.* Cape Town, South Africa: Pearson Educational.

Coulson, D., & Campbell, A. (2001). *African rock art: Paintings and engravings on stone.* New York: Harry N. Abrams.

Crotty, M. (2003). *The foundations of social research.* London: Sage.

Gatsha, G. (2005). *Multilingualism in Southern Africa education-sharing experiences.* Position paper presented at the International Mother Language/Tongue Day Celebrations: Gaborone, Botswana.

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive pedagogy.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Good, K. (1999). *Review of government policy. Consultancy to the European Union on the condition of the San in Botswana.* Unpublished consultancy report, Gaborone.

Government of Botswana. (2004). *Central Statistics Office.* Gaborone: Government Printers.

Hays, J. (2002). Education and the San of Southern Africa: The search for alternatives. In I.N. Mazonde (Ed.), *Minorities in the millennium: Perspectives from Botswana* (pp. 17–28). Gaborone: Light books.

Hays, J. (2011). Indigenous education in Southern Africa: Research and action. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education: An International Journal*, *5*(2), 71–75. Retrieved from http://www.mmegi.bw/2006/december/saturday2/94020008321.159.html

Higgs, P. (2003). African philosophy and the transformation of education discourse in South Africa. *Journal of Education*, *30*, 1–22.

Kembo, J. (2000). Language in education and language learning in Africa. In V. Webb & S. Kembo (Eds.), *African voices: An introduction to the languages & linguistics of Africa* (add pp. 286–311). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Ketsitlile, L.E. (2009). *San junior secondary school understandings of literacy in school and at home: A case study.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, GA.

Ketsitlile, L.E. (2011). San junior secondary students' home-school literacy disconnection: A case study of a remote area dweller school in Botswana. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education: An International Journal*, *5*(2), 88–99.

Kgosidintsi, N. (1992). *Poverty in Botswana.* Gaborone: Botswana Christian Council.

Knuth, R. (1998, August). *Building a literature environment: Using oral-based reading materials to facilitate literacy.* Paper presented at 64th IFLA General Conference, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Letseka, M. (2000). African philosophy and indigenous knowledges: Competing perspectives or complementary frameworks? *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *18*(3), 82–91.

Le Roux, W. (1999). *Torn apart: A report on the educational situation of San children in Southern Africa.* Commissioned by Kuru Development Trust and WIMSA.

Magogwe, J. (1999). Teaching English effectively: A challenge for teachers in schools where resources are scarce? In D.T. Letsholo (Eds.), *Advocating instructional improvement in the new millennium: Developing strategies for teacher education in Botswana* (pp. 158–166). Gabarone, Botswana: Ministry of Education.

Magogwe, J. (2007). An investigation into attitudes and motivation of Botswana secondary school students towards English, Setswana and indigenous languages. *English World-Wide*, *28*(3), 311–328.

MazondeI. (Ed.). (2002). The San in Botswana and the issue of subjectivities-national disintegration or cultural diversity? In *Minorities in the millennium: Perspectives from Botswana* (pp. 57–71). Gaborone: Light Books.

Meyer, J., Nagel, J., & Snyder, C.W., Jr. (1993). The expansion of mass education in Botswana: Local and world society perspectives. *Comparative Education Review*, *37*(4), 454–474.

Mgadla, P.T. (2003). *A history of education in the Bechuanaland Protectorate to 1965* Lanham: University Press of America.

Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. (2003). Gaborone: Government Printer.

Mogalakwe, M. (1986). *Inside Ghanzi freehold farms: A look at the conditions of farm workers.* Gaborone: Ministry of Local Government and Lands Applied Research Unit.

Mogwe, (1992). *Who was (t)here first? An assessment of the human rights situation of Basarwa in selected communities in the Gantsi district* (Occasional Paper no. 10). Gaborone: Botswana Christian Council.

Mokibelo, E.B., & Moumakwa, T.V. (2006). *An investigation into reading texts in English by Khoe children: A case study of Motshelagaletau primary school in the central district.* Unpublished research report. A study funded by UB-TROMSO, Gaborone, Botswana.

Mooko, T. (2006). Countering the threat of language death: The case of minority languages in Botswana. *Journal of*

Multilingual and Multicultural Development, *27*(2), 109–125.

Motzafi-Haller, P. (2002). *Fragmented worlds, coherent lives: The politics of difference in Botswana*. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.

National Commission on Education (NCE). (1977). *Education for Kagisano*. Gaborone: Government Printer.

National Commission on Education (NCE). (1993). *Report of the National Commission on Education*. Gaborone: Government Printer.

Nyati-Ramahobo, L. (1991). *The national language: A resource or a problem*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, PA.

Nyati-Ramahobo, L. 1999). *The national language: A resource or a problem*. Gaborone: Pula Press.

Nyati-Ramahobo, L. (2002). From a phone call to the high court: Wayeyi visibility and the Kamanakao Association's campaign for linguistic and cultural rights in Botswana. *JSTOR*, *28*(4), 686–709.

Nyati-Ramahobo, L. (2002). Ethnic identity and nationhood in Botswana. In I.N. Mazonde (Ed.), *Minorities in the millennium: Perspectives from Botswana* (pp. 17–28). Gaborone: Lentswe La Lesedi Pty Ltd.

Nyati-Ramahobo, L. (2004). Language planning and policy in Africa. In R.B. Baldauf & R.B. Kaplan (Eds.), *Language planning and policy in Africa* (pp. 21–78). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Pang, V. (1990). Asian American children: A diverse population. *The Educational Forum*, *55*, 49–65

Pridmore, P. (1995). Learning and schooling of Basarwa (Bushmen) children in Botswana. *Prospects*, *XXV*(4), 707–722.

Prophet & Rowell (1990). The curriculum observed. In C. W. Snynder & P. T. Ramatsui (Eds.), *Curriculum in the classroom: Context of change in Botswana's Junior Secondary School Instructional Program* (pp. 1–56). Gaborone: Macmillan.

Reimer, F., Gaborone, S., & Tshireletso, L. (1997). *Improving access to basic education for Basarwa children of Botswana* (Unpublished UNICEF Consultancy Report). Gaborone: UNICEF Botswana.

Republic of Botswana. (1994). *The Revised National Policy on Education*. Gaborone: Government Printers.

Republic of Botswana. (1998). *Vision 2016*. Gaborone: Government Printers.

Saugestad, S. (1994). Developing Basarwa research, and research for Basarwa development. *Anthropology Today*, 20–21.

Schecter, S.R., & Bayley, R. (1997). Language socialisation practices and cultural identity: Case studies of Mexican-descent families in California and Texas. *TESOL Quarterly*, *31*(3), 513–527.

Semali, L., & Kincheloe, L. (1999). Introduction: What is indigenous knowledge and why should we study it? In L. Semali & J.C. Kincheloe (Eds.), *What is indigenous knowledge? Voices from the academy* (pp. 3–57) New York: Falmer Press.

Shapera, I. (1951). *The Khoisan peoples of South Africa*. London: Lowe & Brydone Printers LTD.

Shostak, M. (1981). *NISA*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Shostak, M. (2000). *Return to NISA*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonising methodologies:Research and indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books.

Solway, J.S. (2002). Navigating the 'neutral state: 'minority' rights in Botswana. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, *28*(4), 711–729.

Tabachnick, T. (1980). Primary schooling for children of remote area dwellers Gaborone/Madison, U.S.A. *(unpublished report)*.

Tshireletso, L. (1997). 'They are the government's children' school and community relations in a remote area dweller (Basarwa) settlement in Kweneng district Botswana. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *17*(2), 173–188.

Vinnicombe, P. (1976). *People of the eland: Rock paintings of the Drakensburg Bushmen as a reflection of their and thought*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

Wagner, R.W. (2006). An endless desert walk: Perspectives of education from the San in Botswana. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *26*(1), 88–97.

Wilson, M., & Thompson, L. (Eds.). (1968). *The Oxford history of South Africa* (Vol. 1). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

About the Author

Dr Lone Elisabeth Ketsitlile is a lecturer in the Communication and Study Skills Unit, University of Botswana. In 2006, Lone was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study for a doctorate in Reading Education at the University of Georgia. Her PhD dissertation explored a case study of San Junior secondary students' understandings of literacy in school and at home. Lone has published on San literacy and research methodologies in journals in Botswana, Southern Africa, West Africa, the United States and New Zealand.