

Creating a constructive learning environment for democratic citizenship education in schools in Botswana

Reginald Oats

University of Botswana, Private Bag 00702, Gaborone, Botswana. fax +267 6510051

ABSTRACT: *This paper registers that there is a strong relationship between a favorable environment in schools and growth in democratic thinking and practice. As such, the paper calls for creation of a favorable environment in schools in Botswana for the birth and growth of democracy. The paper maintains that, for the nation of Botswana to be considered having relevant education, its curriculum should be seen incorporating components of democracy in a more robust manner. The article draws on the democratic theory and underscores educational implications of education for democratic citizenship. It further contends that there is a narrow conception of democratic citizenship education (DCE) in Botswana and this hampers the efficacious transmission of democratic citizenship education. Firstly, the school curriculum does not have adequate content on DCE. Secondly, teachers believe in active methods of teaching for DCE but perform the opposite in their classes. Thirdly, schools in Botswana have challenges that thwart effective training for democratic citizenship. The article, though, acknowledges efforts made by some schools in training learners who are active participants in the affairs of their society. The article raises a central argument that schools need support in their effort to transmit DCE without which Botswana's goal of achieving a democratic nation will remain an illusion.*

KEYWORDS: *curriculum, democratic education, character education, citizenship, pedagogy, school culture,*

INTRODUCTION

This article examined whether or not the educational practices in Botswana's schools have direct and robust methodological and organisational strategies to create a teaching and learning-friendly environment that encourages participation in communal and national undertakings. Jotia (2011:1) contends that, 'In order for democracy to be sustained in any state, it is fundamentally crucial that the education system should teach citizens about democracy and how to participate in the democratic process'. Fundamental to this paper is the fact that Botswana purports to be a democratic country that attempts to promote and cultivate democratic citizenry among its young people through the school curriculum. To accomplish this enormous task, subjects such as Social Studies are used to foster citizenship ideals to young citizens (Oats, 2014).

It is worth pointing out that, Botswana, a word normally used to signify all citizens of Botswana, originally referred to the country's major tswana speaking ethnic groups. These are the ethnic groups which came into the present day Botswana from South Africa in the early 1800 in fright of the Zulu-led wars (Oats, 2014). According to Wagner (2006), at independence in 1966, the Government of Botswana declared that its people will be called "Botswana" irrespective of their ethnicity, for purposes of nation building and national unity. This was largely influenced by the practices of the then apartheid regime in South Africa which had torn the ethnic groups in that country apart through a policy of segregation and discrimination (Wagner, 2006). This resolution had profound impact on the school curriculum. In this case, it can be argued that students as citizens did not have a choice and a voice in what they learnt but rather acted as followers of the curriculum that did not take into account their unique social and cultural identities. As such there

is need to further find ways of creating a more conducive learning environment for democratic awareness and participation. For instance, Gutmann (1999) notes that a democratic approach to education should recognise the importance of empowering citizens to ensure they get involved in policy issues. Such a practice will without fail enable young citizens to grow up with an attitude of making their decisions informed by democratic values and principles.

Nyathi-Ramahobo and Chebanne (2004) assert that Botswana is a society with more than twenty-six languages spoken in the country. Thus Botswana has several ethnic groups embracing Setswana and Non-Setswana speaking groups. This diversity in the ethnic groups, cultures and languages calls for attention and a school environment which takes into account issues of multicultural and inclusive education. This condition unquestionably demands that teachers as educators and implementers of DCE be well equipped with ideals of multiculturalism to be able to function in a culturally competent manner in their communities as promoters of democracy (Oats, 2014).

Democratic citizenship education and Botswana's Basic education curriculum

In a democracy, it is necessary that formal education be democratic for three reasons: democracy is a form of government, democracy is a lifestyle, and citizens have a right to democratic life. It is however essential to note that though democracy is taught in public schools in Botswana, learners are not given an opportunity to meaningfully exercise and practice democracy. While there may be deficiencies, it can be appreciated that the basic education curriculum (primary to secondary level) has a number of themes and topics related to DCE. However, two critical questions to pose are; *does what is outlined in the syllabi manifest itself within the school system and beyond?*; *Has DCE been successful in the production of an individual focused on democratic participation?* For this reason in recent years, many researchers have called for an improvement in our nation's public schools, particularly the way schools are run. Researchers such as Jotia (2011) and Oats (2015) decry school curriculum and management styles

which do not support the progress of democratic citizenship among learners. In view of this, there is need in Botswana for the development of responsive programmes that focus predominantly on knowledge, values and skills that develop citizens to understand and practice the principles of freedom and equality in their immediate society. Similarly, Jotia (2011) contends that in order for Botswana's citizens to actively participate in the democratic process, there is need for schools to shift their focus and promote democratic education in which pedagogies used are seen to be nurturing awareness of the concept of democracy among the learners

Reading through various syllabi for basic education curriculum, it becomes clear that a number of topics taught in subjects such as Social Studies, Moral Education, Religious Education, History etc have content that appeals to DCE. In other words, the curricula have a number of themes and topics in some subjects that relate to democracy. For examples the major goal of Social Studies in Botswana is to foster citizenship education. It is also clear from reading through various syllabi that on completion of their studies learners are expected to have acquired skills, values, attitudes and beliefs that will prepare them for good citizenship. However, most syllabi do not specify the skills, values and attitudes and beliefs that are to be covered and imparted to learners. This implies that an effective programme for DCE must specify values such as respect, compromise in a diverse ethnic society, tolerance, Compassion, open-mindedness, loyalty, generosity, and Civility. These values need to be included in various subjects' content because Botswana has diverse ethnic groups which need to be harmonised through a robust educational campaign to capacitate different groupings to drive the national agenda as one.

It is noted with a positive view that global connections are propagated through subjects such as social studies at different levels. That is, learners are expected to acquire knowledge and understanding of global developmental changes and trends that are taking place. For this reason Jotia (2011) posits that globalisation has become an ideological discourse that drives change within the nation-state and even beyond and in order for

this change process to be effective, the ways of doing education has to change in order to align with the global dictates of producing citizens who are self-confident and also morally and socially responsible. It implies that the education system and approaches chosen need to be aligned to global waves. Jotia further contends that in order to be relevant and effective education systems must make every effort towards production of democratically conscious, cosmopolitan and self-confident citizens who esteem democratic values and principles.

In recent years, the challenge of developing good citizens has been made more complex by global developments intertwined with internal developments in Botswana. There has been a constant decline for instance in academic performance of learners at all levels and this has shifted focus of both schools and authorities towards putting all energies on improving performance. In the process other fundamental functions of education are overlooked. Consequently, citizenship has become increasingly topical. This has become a very important area for learners since it gives exposure on world issue as learners acquaint with worldwide events and develop appreciation for other cultures. It is this exposure that later translates into citizens that can champion unity in diversity, accept and tolerate others and work harmoniously with all. The only challenge regarding global connections is that curriculum concentration is on international organizations and arguably, anything outside these organisations is not considered vital. The paper calls for more content addition on globalization. Globalization in this era is a fashionable word as countries are increasingly coming closer to each other on political, economic, social and technological spheres. Chinnammai (2005) also Opine that ‘a global education should teach about issues that cross national boundaries, and interconnected systems on ecological, cultural, economic, political and technological grounds such as the Globalisation program which draws upon expertise in many areas such as humanities, social science and environmental science’.

As such, it is evident this far that a transformative educational curricula is needed today in Botswana

to propagate action for democratic citizenship. Ministry of Education in Botswana can learn lesson from Kelly (1995) who outlines basic principles of education which are of significance to democratic society as, the principle of human rights, equality to entitlement, openness in the face of knowledge, individual autonomy and empowerment. Along the same, Kensler (2010) cited in Renuka, Mncube & Potokri (2015) refers to ten democratic principles in schools as such: purpose and vision, dialogue and listening, integrity, accountability, choice, individual and collective bargaining, decentralization, transparency, fairness and dignity. There is therefore need to consider this fundamental principles of democracy and revamp curricula at all levels and prepare it in such a way that it will empower schools and enable them produce citizens who possess core values driven by participation in national and global agendas. As such Basic education curriculum should have areas which deliberately nourish students by giving them platforms to interact and discuss issues and ideas and alternately pass their polished ideas to national authorities.

Power relations in schools as barriers to implement action for DCE

It is important for Botswana as a nation to realise that the challenges plaguing our schools with regard to democratic dispensation are rooted in the way our society is organised. We live in a competitive society where those in power continually seek advantage and hegemony over the subordinates. In the school setup in Botswana, teachers and school managers continue to oppress students and deny them a voice in the running of school affairs. Simply put, the hierarchy of power is perpetrated by staff within Botswana schools and as such has marginalised the voices of students’. In this way such a practice provides an irregular school environment for the birth and growth of democracy within schools. It is therefore not surprising that our school system is designed to handpick children out and leave many uneducated. For instance in our schools some learners are rewarded with prizes while others are publicly punished for failure in academic subjects. The researcher is however aware that schools also operate under orders from the governors whose

ideals they have to uphold. To this, Apple (1979) posits that schools as caught up in a nexus of other institutions—political, economic, and cultural—that are basically unequal. Apple argues that schools exist through their relations to other more powerful institutions, institutions that are combined in such a way as to generate structural inequalities of power and access to resources. As such in their efforts to implemented orders from higher authorities, schools endup generating these inequalities through their curricular, pedagogies and day to day rules and regulations.

The above structural arrangement implies that learner safety in schools in Botswana is compromised. Many learners are not safe and without a safe environment it is difficult for teachers to implant democratic habits and for learners to acquire and practice them. Jotia (2010) argues that corporal punishment which is rampant in schools in Botswana is a danger to democratic education. This practice is an antithesis to the goal of a school as seen by Dewey (1935) that schools exist to instil an ability to think reflectively and critically, for learners to become successful members of a democratic society. Based on this argument, I call on teachers in Botswana to know that the use of coercive power serves to control learners for a few hours but does not teach them democratic values. This practice additionally does not promote the country vision 2016 pillars of ‘An Open, Democratic and Accountable Nation’ (Pillar 5) ‘A Safe and Secure Nation’(Pillar 4) and ‘A Compassionate, Just and Caring Nation’(Pillar 3),among others (Government of Botswana, 1996). In a sense, the use of corporal punishment violates democratic ways of associating with learners in the school environment (Jotia, 2010).

Strategies for fostering DCE in Botswana

This section focuses on strategies schools in Botswana could consider adopting so as to create a conducive learning environment for the birth of democracy. Specifically, the paper suggests the need for basic education curriculum improvement, use of pedagogies that nurture awareness of the

concept of democracy among the learners and creation of a learner friend school culture.

Improving the basic education curriculum

To democratise education there is need to start by designing and developing a curricula that will reinforce democratic habits ad ideals. In democratic schools, apart from rebounding democracy within the hidden curriculum, it should be reflected in the planned curriculum (Apple and Beane, 2011). Democratic education could take multiple forms, ranging from the micro level of within class democracy to the more ideal macro-level of whole-school democracy (Morrison, 2008). I argue that curriculum should offer such room because without inclusion on planned curriculum it becomes difficult for schools to provide such a space.

In order to design a democratic educational environment in the classroom level, objectives, instructional methods & instructional materials, school environment and management styles and evaluation elements of the curriculum should have characteristics that support a democratic educational environment. For instance, effective objectives for democracy should not be too detailed and should allow learners to reach them with different schedules and ways. In addition, an effective democratic education should aim to help students gain necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for self-improvement and a democratic lifestyle. With respect to content I propose that learners in Botswana get involved in the curriculum development process and assignment should be individualized and reflect real life. Human rights, conflict resolutions, and social roles and responsibilities should also be part of the content. A pragmatic curriculum would be well placed to help foster civic-mindedness and political consciousness among the citizens, thus enabling them to fully participate in the country’s democracy (Jotia, 2011).

A key feature of DCE curriculum is teaching about roles and responsibilities. Kelly (1995) concurs that the major tasks that education must perform in a democratic society is the proper preparation of young citizens for the roles and responsibilities they must be ready to take on when they reach maturity. This denotes that

democratic education aims to primarily cultivate the virtues, knowledge and skills necessary for effective participation in society. It is however lamentable that school curriculum in Botswana does not have adequate content to raise up a democratically aware young citizenry. For example the teaching of rights, responsibilities and values in the spheres of human, social, ethical and global are not detailed in various syllabi. That is, to be effective the syllabi must emphasise the basic human values such as love, compassion, tolerance and justice. Without such values, the curriculum for democratic citizenship can be termed deficient because it lacks the capacity to promote democratic citizenship thinking. Students are key stakeholders in any learning institutions; therefore their experiences need to be embodied in the curriculum. To support student experiences, “teachers need to learn to select and construct curriculum that...represents and connects to their students’ lives and experiences” (Darling-Hammond, Banks, Zumwalt, Gomez, Gamoran Sherin, Griesdorn, 2005). I argue that the time is now to revamp various syllabi with a view to encompass the democratic values and ideals.

Relevant pedagogies

Most teachers in Botswana would agree that teaching children to be active participants is an important goal of education. Hitherto to accomplish this, given all the loads currently placed on teachers, is challenging, to say the least. I should hasten to point out that espousing democratic principles in a classroom is not sufficient. I contend that if learners are to truly learn what it means to be active members of a democratic society, then these principles must become part of the working fabric of everyday classroom life (Oats, 2014). Fundamental ingredients for effective and responsive classrooms are the values of respect to all. That is, students must feel that they are recognised and that their voices are heard and matter. Learners must feel respected to be able to respect others. They must feel valued as individuals but understand the importance of their contributions to the group. I suggest six teaching strategies teachers could adopt and utilise for the birth and growth of democracy in their classrooms. The

strategies are based on the model developed by Peterson & Tamor (2003) model. These are:

1. **Morning Meeting:** gathering as a whole class each morning to greet one another, share news, and warm up for the day ahead. This practice has potential to encourage togetherness which is vital for democratic citizenship.
2. **Rule Creation:** helping students create classroom rules to ensure an environment that allows all members to meet their learning goals. Such a habit makes learners develop participative habits moving forward.
3. **Positive Teacher Language:** using words and tone as a tool to promote children's active learning, sense of community, and self-discipline. Along the same vein teachers should respond to misbehaviour in a way that allows children to fix and learn from their mistakes while preserving their dignity.
4. **Classroom Organization:** setting up the physical room in ways that encourage students’ independence, cooperation, and productivity.
5. **Working with Families:** creating avenues for hearing parents' insights and helping them understand the school's teaching approaches.
6. **Collaborative Problem Solving:** using conferencing, role playing, and other strategies to resolve problems with students. Along the same guided discovery could be used in introducing classroom materials by using a format that encourages independence, creativity, and responsibility.

The school culture: whole school approach

A school’s culture has been referred to as a school’s ethos or climate and it is generally agreed that it involves a group phenomenon based on the quality and character of school life and patterns of people’s experiences (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, 2009). As such, democratic values are not promoted by only presenting lessons about democracy through subjects such as social studies but most importantly by construction of a school climate to teach important values of mutual

respect, co-existence and tolerance for differences are transmitted. These, in turn, result to a situation where all feel safe and free physically, emotionally and socially. Apple & Beane (2007) also indicate that democratic schools, like democracy itself, do not happen by chance but are a result from explicit attempts by educators to put in place arrangements and opportunities that will bring democracy to life. Among other arrangements and opportunities to be created, the authors suggest the creation of democratic structures and curriculum that will give young people democratic experiences.

In light of the above, the researcher opines that the creation of a favourable environment cannot be made by one teacher but through the whole school approach. If Botswana wants to continue holding the assertion of being a shining example of liberal democracy in Africa, there is need to do away with school management styles that suppress learners' views and subject them to abuse through inhuman punishments which do not yield any positive results in as far as development of good attitudes and behaviours are concerned. The present state of affairs in our schools endangers any efforts geared towards relevant and quality democratic education and needs to be transformed. The current state of affairs also is an antithesis to democratic theory which informs this study and the principle of whole schooling. That is, according to Gutmann (1987), democratic theory refers to "conscious social reproduction—the ways in which citizens are or should be empowered to influence the education that in turn shapes the political values, attitudes and modes of behaviour of future citizens". In the same manner, Prinsloo's (2003) research findings indicate that democratic leadership style accentuates teamwork, two-way communication, delegation of tasks, as well as a healthy balance between a people-oriented and a task-oriented management style. O'Hair et al. (2000) cited by Renuka, Mncube & Potokri (2015) also articulate that two concepts among many describe democratic education best. These concepts are schooling for democracy and schools as democracies. The former involves preparing learners for living in a democratic society while the latter is concerned with creating schools that are organized, governed and practiced as democracies.

In light of the above arguments, I call on schools in Botswana to work towards protecting learners individual rights as well and civil liberties and further to enhance the growth of participatory democracy in the entire school business. As such, there is absolute need to move away from school structures and policies or regulations which perpetrate undemocratic contexts of learning (Jotia, 2010). Along the same, Renuka, Mncube & Potokri (2015) posits that democratic schools that promote a democratic way of life will assist learners in participating in a democratic society, which in turn assists in sustaining democracy. In light of these arguments, I propose that as education and school rules are constructed cognisance should be given to ensure that such rules are simple and clear and are capable of establishing a safe democratic and productive school climate. Another important element to consider in developing school rules is to ensure that every affected individual should have a voice in determining such rules. One other strategy commonly used to incorporate student decision-making in a whole-school approach is the enactment of student governments or councils (Hahn, 1998; Osler & Starkey, 2005; Potter, 2002). The authors advance their argument that such councils provide opportunities for students to have a voice in the decision-making for the school, to implement school-wide strategies and present concerns to the School Boards. In Botswana these councils are called Student Representative Councils. The challenges of this arrangement in Botswana schools however, are such bodies do not have the power to make meaningful changes in the way schools are managed. Another concern regards the fact that in most cases a limited number of students are usually involved in student representative councils and this result in a large number of students who do not get to experience the benefits (Davies, 1999).

Teacher education for DCE

Inclusion is the major issue facing education systems throughout the world (Booth, Nes & Stromstad, 2003). The authors further argue that teacher development has to be at the heart of initiatives for developing inclusive practices in schools. I therefore argue that no matter what their

subject specialities are, all teachers play a key role because it is them that determine what will be taught and how it will be taught regarding DCE. That is, schools are places where democratic ideals such as equality, freedom and justice are instilled in individuals. It therefore suggests that teachers' beliefs, thoughts and decisions on educational matters occupy the major part of the teaching context and process. As such, the most important component of the formal education for democracy is the teacher. Booth, Nes & Stromstad (2003) propose that approaches to teacher development have to be school based, set within organisational arrangements that will provide appropriate support for teacher reflection and experimentation. Therefore, teachers need to have not merely an understanding of democratic society, ideals, behaviour and attitudes but also need to exercise this knowledge and understanding in the classroom else theoretical information about democracy would not work out in the long tenure.

In addition to the above claim, there is need for transformation of the teacher training programmes to give deeper awareness of democratic citizenship education. Teacher training institutions need to work towards democratisation of their pedagogy so that their trainees learn the ideals and skills of democratic practice throughout their training involvement. DCE deserves outdoor activities and therefore active teaching approaches which training institutions could fully adopt and utilise. Botswana has a lot of natural and artificial features which could be taken advantage of. Additionally, there are several social and cultural groupings, government departments, and non-governmental organizations, which could be visited to provide the needed data in a practical manner (Oats, 2014). Arrangements could also be made for short term placement of student-teachers to gain practical experiences. This is in harmony with the principles of Education for Kagisano of 1977, which advocates for the involvement and voice of all stakeholders in education matters for the effective build-up of well rounded, sound, accountable and responsible citizenry.

Further, the papers proposes for democratic management within Teacher training institutions in Botswana to cultivate an environment which

produces lecturers and students who are not just skilled and knowledgeable but also politically conscious and dedicated to democratic ideals and are prepared to acknowledge their future responsibility for the rights and those of others. Therefore there is need to challenge the status-quo where management teams in teacher training institutions and lecturers act as supreme autocratic beings with unlimited authority to make decisions without the voices of the student-teachers. I remind that it is by listening, observing and participating with democratic educators and students, parents and the community that we forge the meaning of democratic education (Jotia, 2010). This is a necessary move considering that the current condition in which power and privileges were wielded by the most powerful voices in Botswana learning institutions marginalise the voices of the students and generate an uneven atmosphere for the growth of democracy in our institutions and the country at large.

Final thoughts

I conclude this article by pointing out that as an aspirant of deeper democracy; Botswana needs a responsive school environment that promotes the growth of democratic citizenship. This based on the recognition that the logic of democracy begins with education and as such I maintain that schools in Botswana have the potential to deepen our understanding and practice of democracy. Jotia (2011) posits that it is undeniable that democracy and active engagement in the democratic process can only be legitimized through education. Along the same, Booth, Nes & Stromstad (2003) indicate that inclusion concerns the overcoming of barriers to learning and participation for all, regardless of ability or disability. Simply put, there is no need for overemphasize on the need for creation of a favorable environment in schools in Botswana for the growth and sustenance of democracy. This article reveals that teachers in Botswana have a narrow conception of democratic citizenship education and this condition has impact on the transmission of action for DCE. I argue that to be able to produce learners who are focused on democratic participation, schools need responsive and relevant quality curricula to democratise education. The genesis of this task should be the

designing and developing of curricula that will reinforce democratic habits and ideals. Along the same vein, there is need for adoption and application of relevant teaching methods, strategies and techniques that strengthen democratic conducts. The study also reveals the need to challenge authoritarian school regimes as this thwarts the growth of democracy in schools in Botswana. Over and above all, schools in Botswana need to have day to day activities that promote practical democracy. As such students need to be respected and involved in the running of educational matters. My trust is full to capacity that such activities will give students exposure and hands-on experiences to practice democracy.

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Dr Reginald Oats is a Lecturer in the University of Botswana, Faculty of Education where he teaches courses in Curriculum Theory and Design. He attained his MEd from the University of Botswana, a DEd from University of South Africa, South Africa.