

Conducting Assemblies in Botswana Public Schools

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In this paper, the author explored the teachers' experiences and their views regarding how assemblies are conducted in Botswana public schools. The author indicates that assemblies are a common feature in Botswana primary and secondary schools. The author adopted the Christian Privilege as the conceptual framework as espoused by Blumenfeld (2006) that the Christian religion is given an undue favor in various social institutions including schools, yet Botswana is a liberal democracy according to its constitution. The study drew on interviews from 18 in-service RE (religious education) teachers at the UB (University of Botswana)—Nine of the participants were primary school teachers, while the other nine were secondary school teachers. The sampled teachers were unhappy with worship in assemblies and were not aware of the conscience clause in the Botswana Constitution and Education Act which allows freedom to worship or not. The author concluded that collective worship is contestable since it emphasizes conformity, conversion and the promotion of the Christian religion and its values, hence making teachers uncomfortable especially those who are not Christians and those who do not practice religion. The author suggested that worship should be taken out of the school assembly and replaced by religiously neutral activities.

Keywords: school assembly, public school, liberal democracy, Botswana constitution, Christian privilege, domination, religious education teachers, worship

Introduction

Most of the former colonies of the West especially in Africa have inherited educational legacies of their former hegemonic powers. One such practice is worship in schools at assemblies, which Botswana adopted from the British education system. In Botswana public primary and secondary schools, teachers enforce worship, whereby students are required to start an assembly with the singing of Christian songs, reading of the *Bible* and ending with a Christian prayer. However, the practice can be located within the broader cultural practices since it tends to be a convention in terms of family, community and other public meetings. At times, students are asked to memorize some verses from the *Bible* in order to recite them during assembly. Worship is school-based religious activity, in which the whole school community or some classes gather at assembly with an aim of exposing the participants to Christian worship. A school assembly is that when the school community or a part of it meets together to share aspects of life that they deem worth to them. It is aimed at creating and sustaining a sense of community, so that the students and the school personnel live harmoniously in terms of sharing certain values (Hawkes, 2000). Worship is one practice that is sanctioned and is about giving praise to the object perceived to be worthy by a particular religion. Though collective worship is a common practice, there is little consensus regarding its aims. The practice is not without controversy since it is a contentious

activity and contestable especially in a diverse and plural society (Cheetham, 2001; Copley, 1994; C. Erricker & J. Erricker, 2000; Hull, 1998; Lester, 2007; Loudon, 2004; MacMullen, 2007; Watson, 1993; Webster, 2000; Yousif, 2000). Constitutionally, Botswana is a liberal democracy, hence worship brings a lot of disagreement in terms of the assumptions it makes and the type of knowledge it seeks to enhance, the type of behavior it proposes to promote and the wide range of ideals it tries to approve. Worship in the school community at assembly has been viewed as being able to bring harmony, stability and the maintenance of the social order in a group (Bastide, 1992; Klein & Chen, 2003; Webster, 2000). The aim of worship is to “turn the school into a worshipping community and the assembly into a place of worship” (Hull, 1998, p. 124). In public schools and also in liberal democracies, worship is viewed as out of place, irrelevant and inappropriate because a school is a collection of individuals representing diverse beliefs, cultures and backgrounds (Van Brummelen, Koole, & Franklin, 2004). For teachers and students who are Christians, it could be a source of joy and spiritual upliftment while that might not be the case with non-Christians. In the Botswana context and upon employment, a teacher is assumed to be a Christian and being enrolled in a school becomes an act of religious commitment on the part of the student. Consequently, this gives rise to sanctioning of Christian privileges in Botswana public schools. However, the Constitution of Botswana (Botswana Government, 1966) and the Education Act (Botswana Government, 1971) do not prohibit worship in public schools.

Conceptual Framework

Christian privilege is a system of benefits that confers dominance on Christians while subordinating members of other faith communities as well as non-believers (Blumenfeld, 2006; Loudon, 2004). It is the institutionalization of Christian norms or standards that establish and perpetuate the notion that all people are or should be Christians. The privileging of Christians and Christianity excludes the needs, concerns, religious, cultural practices and life experiences of people who are not Christians. However, in a liberal democracy, there is the accommodation of incompatible values (Moulin, 2009) as well as an emphasis on autonomy in terms of choosing one's beliefs (Thiessen, 1995).

The public school system is among the most important social institutions where this privilege is evident. The state in Botswana seems to have “officially” (emphasis mine) legitimized Christian beliefs as official practices of the state, for example, Christian prayers and hymns. In this way, schools become historical embodiments of ideological forms in terms of privileging certain groups and asymmetrical relations of power that sustain such privilege (Giroux, 1995). Schools then portray reality in unitary ways that fail to acknowledge the heterogeneous multi-layered and often contradictory nature of society (Giroux, 1995). Viewed in this way, schools then become ideological and political terrains out of which the dominant culture, in part, produces its hegemonic “certainties” and popular assurances or received orthodoxies (Giroux, 1995, p. 38). Christian values then become the dominant culture that schools reproduce, promote and protect. That is the reason why Giroux (1995, p. 38) said that as a result, schools become “implicated in the production of subjectivities”. In this way, schooling can become hurtful to particular students and teachers whose identities are ignored and excluded from the mainstream culture (Kincheloe, 2004). Such a practice privileges students from a dominant culture's background, while at the same time undermining the interests of those who fall outside it (Kincheloe, 2004). In public school setting, dominant power and control operates in numerous and often hidden ways (Kincheloe, 2004), hence it is difficult to uncover this privilege of Christian hegemony. Furthermore, students who are not Christians are not allowed to “make meanings and create their own cultural histories” (Giroux, 1995, p. 38).

Non-Christians in a school setting become a subordinated, restricted and disempowered group. In this way, the dominant privileged group imposes its own values on the subordinate group (Blumenfeld, 2006; Du Preez, 2004; Jankie, 2001; Miller, 1988). For example, non-Christian perspectives will be viewed as inferior, false or dangerous and their adherents perceived as non-believers who are immoral and misguided. The superordinate group imposes and defines its prescribed cultural norms, values and perspectives on members of the subordinate group (Bryan, 2011; Miller, 1988). The prescription and definition is in terms of what are good and evil, health and sickness, normality and deviancy, and how one should live one's life. The normative assumption is that non-Christians lack many things hence they live inadequate and abnormal lives. Due to this assumption, there are advantages that accrue to Christianity and stereotypes that are formed which are perpetuated by the dominant group and will then permeate society to the extent that they are not noticed or contested. Since the stereotypes are covert and hardly noticed, they are hardly, if ever scrutinized, analyzed or confronted by society yet they do exist. In this way, the dominant group successfully disseminates dominant social constructions as being commonsense, normative and universal (Gramsci, 1971; Young, 1990). Consequently, the experiences and culture of the dominant group becomes internalised and universalised by both groups.

Worth noting is that the subordinate group internalizes these stereotypes and the interiorized images of itself. Consequently, this group becomes invisible because its perspectives and cultural expressions become invalid and unacceptable and its members are marked as different. For example in Christianity:

Students of other faiths and non-believers, ... see few of their perspective and few if any, ... people who believe as they believe or people who adhere to the cultural expression that they adhere to introduced and discussed in their classroom lessons. (Blumenfeld, 2006, p. 198)

Since schools through teachers and the curriculum have authority regarding students' knowledge (Jankie, 2001), they describe and name the world using the language and cultural expressions of the dominant religion. For instance, in school assemblies, there is a great loss of identity and self-worth of non-Christians, since they are made not to belong to the "normal" and real world but are forced to see themselves through the eyes of the Christians. An assumption can be made that the state is "officiating" Christian practices and is aiming at socializing young people into a particular culture with an attempt to create a homogenous an ethnically homogenous nation state with a common culture in terms of language and religion.

Furthermore, this subordination may not be enacted primarily through official laws and policies but in informal often unnoticed and unreflective conventional practices of everyday interaction (Young, 1990). The dominant group unconsciously uses dominant social values to justify and rationalize social oppression. However, the dominant group often lacks awareness or understanding of the ways in which it is privileged on the basis of its social identity. For example, what a subordinate group may view as oppression, the dominant group views it as simply living their lives, because they do not understand themselves as agents of oppression. In this way, "Christian religious traditions are often observed... with little sensitivity to the religious beliefs of other groups" (Anderson & Taylor, 2008, p. 250). In school assemblies, Christianity is viewed as being a part of the natural order and a representation of what is normal in terms of religious holy days and organized prayers. Schools are turned into permanent worship places while Christian prayers are viewed as appropriate, preferable and acceptable. Non-adherents of Christianity cannot avoid worship, as it is forced on to them to incorporate it in their lives as members of a school community. Furthermore, the pervasive nature of Christian privilege is the

latitude of Christians to openly convert in schools. The study aimed at understanding the teachers' lived experiences as they are a part of the school community where worship is practiced and forms an integral part of school assembly.

Research Question That Guided the Study

The research questions are as follows:

- (1) What are the teachers' views on school worship during assembly?
- (2) To what extent are teachers aware of the withdrawal clause of the Botswana Constitution and the Education Act?

Methodology

The author adopted a qualitative interpretive approach using purposive sampling in order to explore the practice of worship in school assemblies as experienced and lived by teachers. The practice is contestable and some have misgivings about it. The study draws on interviews from 18 in-service RE (religious education) teachers at UB (University of Botswana). Nine of the participants were primary school teachers, while the other nine were secondary school teachers. The author interviewed the teachers regarding their experiences about compulsory worship in school by asking them to say how it is done in the various schools where they teach. The author also solicited their views about their awareness of the withdrawal clause in the Constitution of Botswana (Botswana Government, 1966) and the Education Act (Botswana Government, 1971). The author used interviews in order to understand what meanings they associate with worship in schools since they are a source of rich data in terms of directly experiencing the phenomenon. In a qualitative research paradigm, one way of learning about people's experiences is to ask them about their experiences by listening carefully to their stories (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) and this is the reason why the author used interviews.

In the group of participants, there were three sub-groups and these were Christians, religious but non-Christians and those who said that they were non-religious. However, in carrying out this study, the author was being reflexive in terms of being aware of his values that he brought with himself into the study. The author has been a student in Botswana public schools where worship is practiced, as well as being a teacher of RE of which the subject of worship is always discussed as a dimension in the study of religion. As entering into the study, the author was also a source of knowledge about the phenomenon of worship in schools.

When collecting data, the author audio-taped the interviews which were transcribed and then coded according to the patterns and contradictions that emerged. From the patterns and contradictions that emerged, the author developed theoretical constructs (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) or themes that elucidated the experiences and views of the teachers.

Discussion and Analysis of the Findings

Teachers' Experiences on Worship in Public Schools

In Botswana, worship during assemblies is widely practiced from a Christian perspective. However, individual teachers have a legal right to withdraw and may not be discriminated against in any way for exercising such a right. The practice of this right tends to be unclear to teachers. Both the Constitution of Botswana (Botswana Government, 1966) and the Education Act (Botswana Government, 1971) protect the individual's right of conscience. Section 11(3) of the Botswana Constitution states that:

Except with his own consent (if he is a minor, the consent of his guardian) no person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if that instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own.

Similarly, the Education Act Section 22 (1 and 2) (Botswana Government, 1971) states that:

Religious instruction may be given in any school. If the parent of any pupil in attendance at any school request the principal of that school in writing that the pupil be wholly or partly excused from attendance at religious worship and religious instruction in the school, then, until the request is withdrawn, the pupil shall be excused from such attendance accordingly.

Teachers described a similar pattern of conducting assembly in their respective schools whereby worship forms an integral part of the activity even though it was also expressed in various ways by different teachers. Teachers indicated that worship is only Christian inclined, even though the school community is diverse. Teachers described their experiences regarding how assembly is conducted in Botswana schools. The following examples illustrate the place of Christian worship at assemblies.

Kelly: Assemblies are conducted daily or on certain days before lessons whereby Christian hymns are sung and prayers are said by both pupils and teachers. In some instances a pastor or any Christian is invited to conduct the worship, and later announcements and other items follows. The arrangement to invite a pastor is made by school administrators.

Kim said that: "In primary and secondary schools daily worship is conducted either each morning or any other day reserved for such an activity". Gertrude also observed that normally, assemblies begin with a Christian hymn followed by a Christian prayer, such as "The Lord's prayer" or "The Lord is my shepherd". Mosadi and Becky further emphasized the point of worship as a common practice.

Mosadi: Worship is widely practiced in Botswana primary and secondary schools. We start with a Christian hymn and everybody joins in the singing, followed by a reading from a Bible and a prayer. The worship takes place in the morning to begin the day and it is compulsory for every member of the school community to worship.

Becky: In Botswana primary and secondary schools, worship takes place during assembly in the morning. During worship, Christian songs are sung, followed by a Bible reading and lastly a Christian prayer. When students refuse to sing or pray, they are seen as disrespectful and are punished. Teachers are under pressure to Christianize worship to a point that when they talk about values, such as cooperation and patience, they read some stories from the Bible to justify what they are saying.

There was an indication that missionary work has an influence on the way assemblies are conducted in Botswana as expressed by Kay who said that: "Worship was actually pioneered by the Christian missionaries". Solly further emphasized the point by saying: "Christian missionary influence has led some to view schools as a continuation of the practices of the Christian faith community".

Lonnie said: Historically Christian missionaries were the pioneers of formal education in this country and their missionary work had also an impact on our culture in Botswana because many were converted to Christianity. As a result Christianity formed an integral part of our culture whereby children now understand Christian practices without being converted to it.

Not All Members of the School Community Are Practicing Christians

Teachers were uncomfortable with the practice of worship at assembly, because they argued that the school community comprises people who belong to diverse religions and even those who do not subscribe to any religion. Jakes indicated that the school community comprises people who do not all belong to Christianity

even though all may have an idea of what Christianity is. Kim and Kelly had a similar view.

Kim: I do not support worship in school because it has an element of indoctrination hence makes me uncomfortable. It does have room for the diverse cultures let alone diverse religions. It is always Christian-based it is not inclusive and has no place in a modern democracy. It is usually assumed that everybody in the school is a Christian and the assembly is regarded as a sacred place. The practice fails to accommodate people from diverse backgrounds that make up the school community.

Kelly: I am not against Christianity, Buddhism or any other religion, but I do not support worship in schools, because it enslaves pupils instead of giving them freedom of choice. It is also a sign of insensitivity to followers of other religions that are different from Christianity who are viewed as unimportant in this context.

During assembly, teachers would naturally show respect to the practice by suppressing their beliefs and pretending, as if there were no religious differences. Matty was of the view that schools assume that there are no differences in terms of Christian religious beliefs or even lack of them. She said that: "When pupils come to school, they already have their religions or beliefs and they should not be forced to abandon them to follow Christianity. Pupils are conditioned to accept Christianity and its teachings". The point was further corroborated by Gertrude and Mosweu.

Gertrude: Worship is of a Christian character and ignores the diverse composition of the school community which comprises members from different backgrounds like beliefs and faiths. This practice makes some people conform to Christianity. In some primary schools, children are punished by being beaten for failing to sing, lead prayers or recite some verses from the Bible properly. Other schools even go further to reward pupils who lead in Christian songs sung during worship at assembly which is totally unacceptable. Rewarding students who engage in a religious ritual gives the impression that Christianity is unique and better than other religions. Similarly, punishing students for failing to practice a foreign religion is offensive to the conscience of the student. Personal and private beliefs need to be separated from the public values.

Mosweu: Although Christianity is dominant in this country, not all are Christians because some school-going children practice the religions of their parents who are not Christianity. The rights of the few are infringed upon because they are denied the opportunity to practice their religion whilst others are allowed and supported by the school.

Some teachers were of the view that worship should not be practiced in schools, because it is morally inappropriate. For example, Sandra said that, "This act of worship is not appropriate and therefore does not have a place in our schools". Solly was against worship because he said, "It is a private act that should be confined to the home or church and the school should be left for syllabus instruction". The issue was taken further by Rita.

Rita: I think worship should not be practiced in schools. If schools see worship as an essential part of pupils or students' moral development then it should be designed and conducted in manner which does not favor one religion over others.

Just like other teachers, Mosweu observed that, "Worship during assembly is aimed at converting and indoctrinating the students".

Mosweu: Worship during assembly aims at converting students to Christianity by painting a positive image of God and Jesus and this makes children adopt Christianity and turn against their religion. This is not right because at this tender age, children are easily influenced because for some worship at school might be their first religious experience.

Even though teachers were in support of a school assembly, they were of the view that worship is

inappropriate in a multi-cultural and multi-religious nation such as Botswana. Teachers indicated that worship of a Christian nature is an unfair practice to some teachers and students who are not Christians since it offends their conscience. Teachers viewed worship as being discriminatory against those who are not Christians and also making them conform to a religion which is not theirs, hence creating unclear identities especially on children.

Rita: Compulsory worship in schools is not right because children who are not Christians are being discriminated against at an early age. I am against the practice because it can mislead children to think that Christianity is the right religion. Children from a Christian background enjoy it because it is what they practice in their own religion because if a pastor preaches to the school community some will be shouting "hallelujah amen", clapping hands and expressing their shared experiences with the preacher.

Sandra said that Christian worship in school assemblies is unfair, because it is not inclusive of other religions. She argued that it discriminates because it exposes students to Christianity only. Similarly, Becky was of the view that since Christians are a majority in Botswana, they use their numerical strength to oppress the minority non-Christians. Rita complained that forcing children to participate in worship encourages them to live a life of pretence. Similarly, Solly was of the view that compulsory worship could have a negative impact on children who may end up hating religion.

Rita: Children then pretend to be holding the same beliefs with those who see meaning in Christian worship. This practice can encourage such children to be dishonest in life because they may think that in life you can survive through pretence. Moreover, they may have a low regard for religion by perceiving it as a fallacy.

Becky: The assumption and belief is that most people in Botswana are Christians so worship should be Christian. This clearly indicates oppression of the minority. Non-Christian students and teachers are expected to betray their beliefs and express what they do not believe in by singing songs and prayers that are Christian. This demeans the integrity of these individuals and also violates their freedom of worship and conscience. Forcing non-Christian children to sing and recite Christian prayers is not proper and is legally unacceptable according to the Constitution of Botswana.

Alternatives to Collective Worship

Teachers suggested alternatives to worship, conducting an assembly in a public school that was not necessarily religious in nature. Gertrude and Kelly suggest that assemblies can still be used to address issues that may not necessarily be of a religious nature. They said that the assembly could be used to teach about emerging issues, such as environmental education, HIV (human immuno-deficiency virus) and AIDS (acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome), truancy, vandalism and theft.

Another alternative to worship was to expose students to various forms of worship in different religions. For example, Becky was of the view that religion can still have a place in an assembly if various religions formed a part of worship.

Becky: During assembly different activities from different religions can be done instead of drawing all activities from one religion-for instance a hymn can be from Christianity and a Muslim student could be asked to pray. Students from different religions could take turns in preparing for and conducting assemblies. Adherents of different religions could also be invited to present at assembly. Including various religions during assembly does not only promote diversity but also make assemblies interesting and broad as opposed to the mono-cultural worship which is narrow and monotonous. Another alternative would be to give students time to reflect and have an inner dialogue with themselves by devoting some minutes of silence.

However, some found that such a move could be a source of conflict where each religion would need a

space in the school calendar to express its worship forms. Others were of the view that it would be superficial if such an arrangement were to be made. There were those who were of the view that worship should completely be removed from assembly in public schools. Becky's point was corroborated by Matty who said that, "The schedules should be drawn in such a way that it caters for students of various religions in school and not Christians only". Maggie emphasized the point further by indicating that the different religions that exist in a particular society should be reflected in school worship to show the inclusive nature of the assembly. Inclusion of different religions looks attractive, but that might not be a plausible alternative bearing in mind that various religions compete for space, which is not the aim of education to see religions competing. After all, Christianity might have leverage, since outside the school it is viewed as "the religion" (emphasis mine).

Religious Education Teachers Should Conduct Worship

The RE teachers were unhappy that their colleagues in schools viewed them as the appropriate people to conduct assembly and worship.

Sandra: Since worship is of a Christian nature, it makes work and life difficult for RE teachers who teach a multi-faith curriculum. We find ourselves talking more about Christianity at assembly and nothing about other religions and this makes students to question our credibility as RE teachers. Other teachers in the school expect us to conduct assemblies because during assembly worship which is a religious activity takes place. This even leads to some RE teachers not seeing the need to teach some aspects of the curriculum which they believe are covered during worship at assembly.

Just like Sandra, Mathew indicated that, "The school community thinks that teachers of RE should be at the centre of worship during assemblies because they teach about religions" and should always lead assemblies which he felt was not appropriate. He further complained that a wrong message is sent when RE teachers are expected to be the ones to start meetings and briefings, because such a practice might make students to think that RE teachers are examples of Christian models.

According to Becky's statement that: "Before conducting an assembly, other teachers often approach RE teachers to seek advice regarding the passage to be read from the Bible". Rita also observed that other teachers expected RE teachers to be well-versed in preaching and in the interpretation of the *Bible*.

Rita: Not all teachers are competent in Bible reading and its interpretation. RE teachers are made to feel uncomfortable, because they are forced to do what they never do in their lives. Someone who never goes to church cannot be competent in the content of Christian worship. Another bad thing is when some teachers ask their pupils to deliver the Bible message to other pupils during assembly.

Awareness of the Withdrawal Clause

Teachers were not aware of their rights in terms of conscientious objection to worship in school. Jakes observed that teachers were ignorant of the clause because they never think of opting out of a Christian inclined assembly. Kim also said that, Teachers are not even aware that it is against the constitution of Botswana to involve children in a worship activity without the consent of parents and guardians. Unfortunately, teachers do not know their rights. The point was also made by Becky who said that, "Teachers have to be sensitized about the law regarding religious instruction because most of them engage in worship out of ignorance". Furthermore, teachers felt that unlike pupils who are minors and explicitly covered by the law, they are not clearly protected by the law, yet the school administration expects them to engage and lead in worship.

Mike: Statutes should state clearly the stand of teachers in connection with worship because with pupils it is clear that their parents may withdraw them yet nothing is said about the teachers. Currently, it seems some teachers conduct worship

just because they want to please their supervisors. Sometimes, the manner in which some teachers conduct assembly says a lot about their attitudes towards worship. No parents or faith communities have ever questioned the act of worship in state schools.

It was also observed that parents were equally unaware of the withdrawal clauses in the Constitution and the Education Act.

Jakes: I have never heard of parents who withdrew their children from taking part in worship. This is because they are unaware of the withdrawal clause in the Education Act.

Kim: Students and parents are never asked if they accept worship and whether they are comfortable with a Christian based assembly which emphasizes the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ.

Kay: I do not know of any parent who knows about the withdrawal clause of the Education Act. Someone must sensitize parents on this issue. Furthermore, parents accept everything that the school administration says. Due to ignorance, some parents assume that it is an appropriate practice which is sanctioned by law, while others may know about the clause but would not want to voice it out due to fear that their children might be intimidated or discriminated against.

Becky and Kim observed that both teachers and parents were unaware of the withdrawal clause hence they needed to be sensitized about it. Rita was of the view that even though worship in schools is not compulsory and gives parents and guardians freedom to remove their children from such an activity they may not want to do so because that could have negative consequences on the child. She said that removing a child from school worship could isolate the child from the rest of the school community and make the child vulnerable to discrimination by both the teachers and students. What Rita said is in line with the thesis that religion and particularly Christianity has been given undue prominence over other social institutions. In this regard, the lack of identifying with Christianity makes students and teachers who are not Christians prone to isolation and discrimination.

Economic Status of Parents and Guardians

The low economic status of most parents and guardians was cited as another major factor, since they have no choice as to where they could send their children. Children from parents with a poor economic background attend public schools where fees are low and where worship is a practice.

Kay: In Botswana, many parents cannot afford to take their children out of the public schools which do not respect religious differences. The main reason being that, all government schools which offer almost free education, do practice worship, while the private schools which can be an option are expensive for ordinary citizens to take the child to. Parents who do not subscribe to Christianity remain helpless and leave their children to be indoctrinated in Christian values.

Worship as a Way to Enhance Morality

Despite of a strong voice from many teachers against worship, some felt that worship could enhance good morals in young children.

Moja: I do support worship in schools because it is one way of raising children in a disciplined manner. During worship, learners are taught good behaviors like the fear of God as well as good and acceptable behavior. Children are brought up through church life which can be very helpful to them. Worship can bring children together under one supreme body of Christ.

Mike: Worship is a good practice. Look, there has never been any chaos or riots in our schools due to religion like in other parts of the world. People here regard themselves as Christians because in most of their communal gatherings, such as weddings, different celebrations and parliament sessions, they perform Christian worship before they could start any of these events. Schools are, therefore, trying to align themselves with what the larger society is doing.

Matty: Pastors do a good job because they give words of encouragement and hope in times of doubt especially that people are faced with challenges of HIV and AIDS and natural disasters.

Jakes: The school administrators and government officials have this belief that Christianity can enhance positive attitudes in children. Many people in Botswana believe that Christianity can develop a sense of community spirit, promote common ethics and shared values. I have also observed that even during large communal or national celebrations such as Independence Day, the agenda will always start with a Christian prayer because most people believe that all events will go on smoothly and calmly if they start by connecting with God through prayer.

Findings

Several themes emerged some of which were teachers' experiences about worship, the diverse nature of the school community, the influence of missionaries in education, teachers' awareness of the withdrawal or conscience clause, low economic status of parents and guardians, worship as a way to enhance children's morality and the inappropriateness of RE teachers to lead worship and alternatives to worship.

Teachers are aware that worship is still widely practiced in Botswana public schools. They are in agreement that it is an inappropriate practice in a society that is pluralistic and where government statutes are clear on freedom of conscience. However, teachers gave various reasons why worship in public schools is inappropriate. For example, they indicated that if it is forced on people, worship could demean the faith of the believers and render it a mockery. They further articulated that worship becomes hypocritical and a superficial act if teachers and students who are non-Christians make proclamations of a belief system that they do not hold dear. Furthermore, it is immoral for some students to participate in what is foreign to their belief systems while being denied the opportunity to exercise what they believe in and what they learnt at home from their parents. They further argued that formal education should not bring about conflict between what children learn at home and what is practiced in schools. They further observed that compulsion to worship runs against the democratic values of freedom and respect of individuals which schools may seek to promote.

Furthermore, RE teachers expressed discomfort when the school community expected them to be the appropriate people to lead worship at assembly. Even though there was disquiet among teachers, there were some ones who still felt that religion was necessary and should be an integral part of assembly as a necessary moralizing agent. Some of the teachers were of the view that worship may be serving an important purpose in terms of contributing towards the promotion of spiritual, moral and social development of students. Other teachers disagreed and argued that morality could be tapped from various sources and not from religion only and especially the Christian religion. Teachers indicated that students from low income parents and guardians are left without an option regarding where to attend school except in government schools where fees are low. Furthermore, teachers suggested several alternatives to conducting assembly among which are exposure to various religions at assembly and have a religiously free assembly.

Conclusions

Since assembly is compulsory in Botswana schools, worship renders non-Christian teachers and students captive converts and worshippers. The need to appreciate religious differences should be the goal of schools. Furthermore, public schools are supported by taxes of citizens from different religious affiliations and even from those who do not practice religion at all. Schools need to promote diverse ways in which young people make sense of the world by affirming their full humanity irrespective of their religious affiliation or lack of it. Assemblies need not be places where students are made to conform, but should be places where they make

sense of themselves and other people's cultures and personal behaviors. It is only then that students can have the capacity of being truly democratic citizens of their country and the world. Worship in schools marginalizes non-Christians and non-religious school personnel through institutionalized stereotyping. Non-Christians sacrifice their identity and self-worth, something that is recognized by the law in a subtle manner. This subtle acknowledgement of Christian supremacy is reinforced in the interest of Christians and at the expense of the subordinated non-Christians. In the Botswana context, there is a presupposition of unanimity of views regarding religious matters and assumptions are clear about the students' and teachers' religious commitments whereby Christian values are regarded as being common to all and capable of binding all members of the school community. The conventional wisdom in Botswana is to create an ethnically homogenous nation state in terms of culture including religion which is a distortion of a liberal democracy.

Furthermore, incorporating different religions in assembly may prove cumbersome and inappropriate, since such a move is capable of bringing about tensions in the school community. Consequently, different religions cannot be incorporated in one assembly as a way of satisfying them since that could lead to the emergence of factions and hatred in the school community since religions will be competing against one another for space and time. Lastly, strengthening of bonds and sharing of common values and experiences within an institution can still be enhanced through other means which may not necessarily be of a religious nature.

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