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## Hearing Ancestral Voices Through Creative Art – A Tool For Environmental Education For Sustainability

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### Abstract

The research presented in this paper draws on a study in the Kgalagari region of Botswana where participant observation workshops were conducted to illustrate the impact of using the Arts in Education approach (AiE). This approach was used through traditional storytelling in lessons on environmental issues in a rural primary school in the Kgalahari region of Botswana. The *BaKgalagari* Standard 4 children participated in lessons in which community elders were invited to tell them stories. The lessons conducted offered the participants exemplary activities in conducting a teaching unit incorporating story-telling, dramatizing and visual art, whereby the story was embedded within the learners' contexts and in the idea of environmental appreciation. The outcome of the study demonstrated that this approach can enhance learning by yielding a more

egalitarian and communicative environment, which takes into account the voices of previously socially excluded learners, into the teaching and learning process.

### Introduction

In Botswana like the rest of Africa, the local traditions and ways of passing on knowledge to future generations for traditional communities such as the *BaKgalagari* is embedded in their culture and embodied in their language and practices.

This knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation orally (through narratives, stories/folklore, songs and poetry), visually (through arts such as ‘bushmen’ paintings, writings, craft, cultural rituals and dance) and practically (through doing and the artefacts associated with practice) (Shava, 2013, p. 384).

Therefore, for traditional communities such as the *BaKgalagari*, traditional approaches listed by Shava (2013) are very crucial tools in passing on knowledge as media for the representation and transmission of indigenous knowledge. A typical example is language whereby the two dominant languages of transmission in Botswana’s education system are English and Setswana. The indigenous languages such as *SheKgalahari* have, to a large extent remained marginalised and excluded from mainstream teaching and learning discourses (Khudu-Petersen, 2007). Changing language in interpreting indigenous knowledge in English and Setswana and/or writing down indigenous knowledge usually results in modifications, accommodations and loss of its fundamental features to fit the English or Setswana. That results in distortion or loss through transmission and translation (Agrawal, 1995).

This therefore calls for a need to create space for the traditional approaches in the mainstream curriculum in accordance with the renewed interest in Indigenous Knowledge (IK) by indigenous scholars who see these as the only ways that can ensure meaningful learning, through inclusion of all learners’ cultures in the education processes. In Botswana this marginalisation has specifically been exacerbated by the language policy in the formal education system in which Setswana and English are the only two languages that form the medium of communication in formal education. This does not adequately impart traditional or cultural values and skills that enable children to be active participants in their communities and equip them with skills to deal with the environmental crises in Botswana and specifically the environmental issues that are peculiar to the local contexts of the marginalized groups. As Batibo (2009) has correctly observed, in Botswana’s educational system,

... no efforts have been made to link traditional knowledge to the school curriculum or to incorporate indigenous knowledge into the school system. It is

usually left to the teachers' own initiative to familiarise the students with some traditional concepts and objects. Since most of the teachers come from the mainstream Setswana groups, this cultural information tends to reflect the worldview of the mainstream group, namely the Tswana (p. 89).

The teachers who dominate schools in the *Kgalagari* region's use of approaches drawn from their own cultures, limits the ability to impart cultural knowledge to learners because these communities which are in remote areas of Botswana are isolated from mainstream other Setswana communities who are predominantly in large villages and towns. In regions where these ethnic minorities are found, English and Setswana languages are foreign which inevitably disadvantages learners from benefiting from learning processes and methods that would otherwise draw on their cultural capital (Chigeza & Whitehouse, 2014). The United Nations 2005 World Summit Outcome (UNESCO, 2005) makes reference to the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development; social development, economic development, and environmental protection. The three pillars are intertwined in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (UNESCO, 2005) and a characteristic is that neither can be neglected in any teaching and learning process if education is to be relevant and meaningful to learners so as to "usher in a change in attitudes, behaviours and values to ensure a more sustainable future in social, environmental and economic terms" (Lupele & Lotz-Sisitka, 2012, p.4). Specifically for environmental protection, in Botswana, the hope was that this would be achieved through the infusion of Environmental Education which was first introduced into the school curriculum by the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education (Botswana Government, 1994). The policy recommended that Environmental Education be infused or integrated across the school curriculum in all subjects to respond to the environmental crisis in the country that has seen the fast depletion of natural resources.

A number of approaches have been taken up, focused on learner-centred initiatives which suggest that including students as key agents in the learning process best achieve change for a sustainable future (Silo, 2011). For Botswana, generally a number of teaching approaches have inevitably disadvantaged ethnic minority communities (Batibo, 2009; Khudu-Petersen, 2007; Ketsitile, Bulawa & Kgathi, 2013; Khudu-Petersen & Mamvuto, 2016). If it is important for learners to be active agents of learning, and teaching approaches do not speak to the cultural capital of students, then they are excluded from becoming agents. In Botswana the learners of the minority *BaKgalagari* and *BaSarwa* among others, have been disadvantaged because of de-contextualised and irrelevant pedagogic approaches used for learners in those areas (Batibo, 2009; Ketsitile, Bulawa & Kgathi, 2013; Khudu-Petersen, 2007; Khudu-Petersen & Mamvuto, 2016). New discourses about social difference and disadvantage have influenced the research agenda, as notions of diversity and ethnic/racial inequalities, advocate for the catering for such learners. (Batibo, 2009; David, 2007; Ketsitile, Bulawa & Kgathi,

2013). In Botswana this means that innovative ways that are more inclusive have to be sought through research to cater for minorities in the teaching and learning processes.

School curricula in Botswana have largely incorporated environmental education activities mainly through narrowly defined and often de-contextualised practices which are normalized into the structural functioning of the school system and curriculum cultures (Ketlhoilwe, 2007) without necessarily drawing on learners' locally relevant contexts. Environmental Education in Botswana has been normalised through emphasis clean-up and litter pick-up activities in most schools (Ketlhoilwe, 2007; Silo, 2011); activities which do not necessarily address environmental issues in the *BaKgalagari* communities as there is very minimal litter generation activities in these schools. It seems that school curricular then, largely ignores the trend in research that speaks to social difference and inequalities.

Such approaches do not incorporate wider and more democratically oriented concepts of inclusive participation and involvement of local and traditional resources in learning. The school curriculum does not utilize individual and local contexts when they implement the idea of action competence and responsive and responsible agency in learners (Carlsson & Jensen, 2006; Jensen, 2002; Jensen & Schnack, 2006). This has particularly disadvantaged the minority ethnic groups of Botswana such as the *BaKgalagari* and *BaSarwa* whose traditional or cultural values and skills that would enable children to be active participants in their communities are quite often neglected through the activities that promote the mainstream Tswana and Western culture in all teaching and learning processes (Batibo, 2009; Ketsitile et al, 2013; Khudu-Petersen, 2007; Khudu-Petersen & Mamvuto, 2016).

### ***A wider context of the BaKgalagari - The Environment***

People in the sub-Saharan region, the *BaKgalagari* of Botswana included, have experienced a steady population growth over the years. The over-exploitation of their natural resources is directly connected the rise in population which in turn has resulted in numerous threats to the environment including deforestation and species depletion. This situation particularly affects *BaKgalagari*, who live on land which is dry and less conducive for agriculture and growth of veld products which they largely depend on. Traditionally and throughout history an intimate relationship has always existed between *BaKgalagari* people and their natural environment. The resources have not only been vital for the subsistence livelihoods of these people, but also as the foundation for kinship systems and spiritual values.

Social, cultural and environmental diversity, especially along tribal lines in Botswana, has been the basis for a wide range of debate and exploitation when it comes to management and use of natural resources, as different social groups utilize natural resources according to their cultural and material needs. Not surprisingly, immediate survival requirements of the

*BaKgalagari* have seemingly always taken precedence over any longer term notions of conservation. However, similar to other African communities, traditional practices of the Bakgalagari, such as taboos (which are certain customs or activities which are prohibited in certain traditional groups), temporary bans on resource exploitation and the use of low-impact techniques, worked in favor of environmental sustainability by limiting the degree to which any one resource was exploited. While traditions remain strong in this area, traditional knowledge and ways of life are coming under threat as the *BaKgalagari*, like the rest of Botswana society, are increasingly being exposed to the effects of globalization. Urban lifestyles are increasingly spreading through television, reaching remote areas where they negatively influence traditional knowledge and ways of life that have radically muffled the Bakgalagari's ancestral voices. For example, the government's Remote Area Dweller program has separated children from their communities to attend boarding schools some 40 kilometers and further away and their parents. Teachers in almost all cases are from the mainstream Setswana groups. Often these teachers fail to see any value in the culture, language and lifestyle of the children, but instead condemn the whole community labeling it as "uncivilized". The teachers' perceived superiority is drawn from their competence in the national language (Setswana) and official language (English). Their claim of "civilization" is drawn from their urban lifestyles; having cars, living in electrified houses, owning fridges and television sets, while most members of the community have none of these assets. Therefore, children's indigenous practices are portrayed as primitive and inferior by their teachers (Ketsitile et.al, 2013; Khudu-Petersen, 2007). Yet research by Ketsitile (2009) with junior school *Bakgalagari* and *Basarwa* children revealed that they were getting better grades in literacy only when teaching conveyed important messages about their lifestyles which included storytelling, dancing, riddles and knowing about medicinal properties of plants. The schooling systems which takes the national curriculum teaching approaches are quite often narrow, irrelevant and de-contextualised resulting in young people being less rooted in traditional ways and this has resulted in a high school drop-out in these areas (Ketsitile et.al, 2013; Khudu-Petersen, 2007; Khudu-Petersen & Mamvuto, 2016).

The exploitation of resources in these areas is further complicated by the needs/desires of these communities who still largely depend on natural resources for food (hunting and gathering) and medicinal plants. The national, regional and global economy that has increasingly commercialized natural resources, often at the expense of the future livelihoods of the *BaKgalagari* people has also put a lot of pressure on these resources. The exploitation of the *devils's claw* (*sengaparile*), for example, to meet the demands of medicinal outlets, has depleted the plant throughout all areas of this region in Botswana where to meet the needs of other communities in high density areas of mainstream Batswana where the demand is particularly high. Similarly, the overexploitation of some wild animals to meet the demand for

game meat delicacies, in most parts of the country, threatens the diversity and future life of quite a number of animal species.

The government has made attempts to assist some communities in this region to develop village-level initiatives through Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and through the Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) programme (Botswana Government, 2010) to generate the resources needed to participate in the money economy. However an increasing number of communities/villages are exposed to the promises of companies offering quick but often minimal rewards in exchange for the exploitation of their resources. Some companies, for example, have promoted unsustainable harvesting of natural resources like the *devil's claw* while others have illegally exported it. Hunting and gathering of food and other resources from the forests remain vital for most people's livelihoods and a strong link between environmental degradation and poverty is apparent in these communities.

The socio-ecological risks posed to the *BaKgalagari* people and their surrounding landscape call for environmental education that can promote knowledge, skills and capabilities that draw on local cultures, practices and ideas in order to promote critical knowledge, skills, action competence (Carlsson & Jensen, 2006; Jensen & Schnack, 2006). It was against this background that the authors undertook the Arts in Education approach (AiE) with *BaKgalagari* school children in the teaching and learning processes in order enhance learning about their environmental issues in context.

### **Environmental Education in Context**

At the national policy level, the 1994 Revised National Policy in Education (RNPE) was the first major effort to place a focus on environmental education into the school curriculum by making specific reference to a strong drive towards recognizing and affirming the role of citizen participation in the care and preservation of the environment. Though Environmental Education is supposed to be infused (mainstreamed/integrated) across the primary curriculum, approaches to environmental education are largely teacher centered and thus do not draw on traditional or indigenous knowledge and resources of the local environment. In an attempt to embrace the participatory approach in the teaching of environmental education, Ketlhoilwe, (2007) observed that normalization of Environmental Education, which emphasizes litter pick-ups and cleaning activities is consistent with the *Setswana* authoritarian culture (Maundeni, 2002; Monyatsi 2005; Tabulawa (1997),). Power relations are embedded in classroom discourses as reflected by teachers who teach by giving instructions and learners responding as expected, in this case resulting in teachers from mainstream *Setswana* tribes neglecting the *BaKgalagari* content in their teaching. Though the curriculum recommends inclusive participatory approaches through varied methods of teaching meant to promote relevance of environmental education to the country's socio ecological challenges and needs,

teachers, using their power and authority, have come to see it as part of the education system's provision of theoretical and practical skills which do not necessarily directly relate to the reality around learners in these communities.

*BaKgalagari*, like many African peoples, are very much an oral society and, for most, storytelling continues to be an important way in which information is shared between adults and children. For most of their lives, for children in these communities there is always so much to learn from the surrounding terrain through their elders and peers. This usually includes narratives, stories/folklore, songs and poetry, arts such as 'crafts, cultural rituals and dance associated with practice (Shava, 2013). Like other ethnic groups living in areas with relatively untouched natural environment, they learn how to recognize plants, what fruits to relish, what roots they should dig out and eat, what plants and animals to avoid, what plants are good for a various ailments, what plants they could apply to wounds or burns to speed up healing, what animals to hunt and not to because they are sacred. From these experiences they learn to articulate the heterogeneity of their landscape and to come to terms with the seasonal variability and availability of plant and animal resources and their conservation. But in the school circumstance where these approaches are not used, information is scarce, educationally, it logically follows that attainment would relatively be low and communication is difficult (Batibo, 2009). This coupled with the authoritarian teaching approaches prevalent in most schools, it narrows the focus of environmental education and hence poor responses to local environmental problems that children encounter daily.

### ***Education for Sustainability***

As highlighted in the previous section, for the *BaKgalagari* communities are amongst ethnic groups who have maintained the practice of informal education system consists of various forms and means that have been practiced through existing cultural values and beliefs. This calls for Environmental Education in schools in these communities to re-orient its focus towards more diverse ways of contributing to children's learning that is meaningful and relevant to their contexts (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Ramis & Krastina, 2010; Valls & Kyriakides, 2013). All these authors contend that by connecting the school with the outside context, there is an increase in the meaning learners attribute to schooling, and it also facilitates the transformation of the overall learning context by making it relevant to their day-to-day experiences.

One of the themes of involving people in sustainable development actions is to develop appropriate, purposeful, and genuine participatory approaches and methods (Lotz-Sisitka, 2006). The southern Africa region, to which Botswana belongs, through the Southern African Development Community Regional Environmental Education Programme (SADC-REEP) has

established that Environmental Education needs to be strongly oriented towards contextual socio-ecological issues (Lotz-Sisitka, 2006).

This sustainable development initiative by SADC-REEP is part of a broader trend towards examining teaching and learning in the postmodern constructivist learning processes through access to language, cultural capital and through scaffolded pedagogical processes where it is strongly recommended that these processes are supported through the skills of the 'knowledgeable other' (Lotz-Sisitka, 2006). This support could be provided through, among other things, understanding how learning takes place in social and cultural contexts and using appropriate learner support resource materials (Lotz-Sisitka, 2006). To achieve this, O'Donoghue, (2007, p. 153) who has done a lot of research on Environmental Education methodologies in Southern Africa, suggests that there is a need to look critically at current curricula, methodological perspective and methods asking:

- Do the participants have access to all knowledge resources that might enable them to grasp and grapple more coherently with the issues they are engaging?
- Are learning interactions arising with close, purposeful social engagement in environment and sustainability concerns?
- Do learning interactions reflect practice-based deliberations that might allow the better mediation of choices that are more reality congruent and socially responsible? (p. 153)

O'Donoghue's (2007) methods can only be achieved when teaching approaches are diversified and relevant to learners' lived experiences and contexts by drawing on locally available resources. A good example of the success of such approaches is the Vanuatu communities in the Pacific. They have long used storytelling, music, song and dance to entertain and educate successive generations (Passingham, 2002). They have also used community theatre to explore issues and foster environmentally and socially responsible values, attitudes and practices that have been enthusiastically embraced in several countries in the region. Vanuatu, an archipelago in the south-west Pacific, is home to several groups that use theatre, and other forms of communication, to educate people about a wide range of health, social and environmental issues (Passingham, 2002). Similarly, schools in the *BaKgalagari* communities with their rich culture and tradition, can draw on these resources to foster environmental values to their young generations through the formal education system.

### **Conceptual and Methodological Framework**

In the 2011 UNESCO report, on ESD learning processes, Tilbury (2011) notes and recommends that in order for ESD levers and mechanisms to flourish, learning opportunities that can respond to real life challenges, can be drawn from actual experiences by learners



rather than from reviews of literature in which prescribed methods are used. This view is concurred by Barnhardt & Kawagley, (2005) in their study of learning processes in the native education of Alaska tribes. They also noted, in their observation of interactions within these traditional communities, that

traditional education processes were carefully constructed around observing natural processes, adapting modes of survival, obtaining sustenance from the plant and animal world, and using natural materials to make their tools and implements. All of this was made understandable through thoughtful stories and demonstration (p.9).

Research points to interdisciplinary methodologies combined with consideration of the learner's cultural background as a reasonable means to infuse sustainable knowledge and skills in the area of Environmental Education. However, teachers in Botswana often find themselves lacking the skills to put this kind of methodology into practice. Furthermore, as Khudu-Petersen (2007) and Khudu-Petersen & Mamvuto (2016) observed, the teachers are not especially trained to work with children of an ethnic background differing from the dominant culture represented at school.

The authors subscribe to the UNESCO Roadmap to Art Education, (UNESCO, 2006). In its promotion of Intercultural Arts Education (ICAE) it recommends a methodology termed Arts in Education Approach (AiE) which uses the arts as a binding agent within various curricular areas. The concept of this approach emphasises reform efforts and calls for inclusion of traditional cultural learning in all schools as argued by Baquette (2007), Charleston (1994), Demmert (2001), and Deyhle & Swisher (1997). Engaging local people in teaching arts, in regions where ethnic minority learners have to study a curriculum based on a different culture, can serve to pass on traditional ecological knowledge while also contextualizing traditional and contemporary native arts practices.

In the context of American Indians, Charleston, (1994), Demmert, (2001) and Deyhle & Swisher, (1997) have argued for consideration of indigenous cultures in the school curriculum. Like in the context of Botswana, where cultures of ethnic minority learners are neglected, analysis in the US, have revealed that schools serving American Indian learners taught "almost nothing about the Native cultures, languages, values, religions, music, and art that continue to survive in this country in spite of the American education system" (Charleston, 1994, p. 22). In consent with Charleston, (1994), Demmert, (2001) and Deyhle & Swisher (1997), whose research is mainly based on American Indians, we argue that in Botswana, the Eurocentric curriculum ignores the complexity of the education worlds of learners from ethnic backgrounds, causing them to struggle for success in Western-model

schools. The AiE approach draws on the concept of “multiple intelligences” (MI) which among other aspects, describes how culture influences what constitutes intelligence, intelligent acts, and intelligent teaching (Sternberg, 2007). The MI framework provides an alternative approach through which AiE’s can be used in teaching children in indigenous communities as it aims to extend the benefits of Arts Education to all students and subjects. The approach

utilizes the arts (and the practices and cultural traditions related to those arts) as a medium for teaching general curriculum subjects and as a way to deepen understanding of these subjects; for example, using...the visual arts ... to teach ... or introducing drama or music as a method to teach... (UNESCO, 2006, p.8).

This approach offers an opportunity to contribute towards positive change in educational practice, and a holistic interdisciplinary concept of Intercultural Arts Education (ICAE) (UNESCO, 2006), which encompasses the AiE to meeting the learning needs of children in their cultural contexts. Intercultural Arts Education is the collaborative intercultural teaching of creative and performing arts as a truly integrated strategy, with interdisciplinary approaches towards other disciplines that can be adopted in Botswana’s attempt to infuse environmental education. A crucial component of ICAE could mean actively involving adult members of the community, who represent the local ethnic minority cultures, in planning and conducting lessons in schools using varied methods based on experience and adaptation to local culture and environment where cultural knowledge, resources, language and values form a prominent part of the learning process (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005).

### **The Study Methods**

Based on the postmodern approach of AiE as a holistic interdisciplinary education approach and with the Arts as its catalyst we conducted a project lessons for a Standard 4 class in a primary school in the Kweneng West Sub-District. The project area is predominantly inhabited by members of the non-Tswana ethnic group, *BaKgalagari*.

The study sought to explore alternative methods to the prevailing ones that are used in Botswana schools, where dominant culture determines the school’s culture of teaching and learning. The methods seek to recognize and embrace the culture of the ethnic minority learners and how this may contribute to learning that is irrelevant to these learners.

### ***The project steps***

We introduced the model project based on a *Shekgalagari* story with an environmentally related content. This model project covered seven periods of 45 minutes. It included one Cultural

Studies lesson with the topic ‘story telling’, two *Setswana* lessons with the topic ‘comprehension’ and ‘extracting the moral of a story’, one Arts lesson with the topic ‘drama’, two Arts lessons with the topic ‘collage’ and one Music lesson with the topic ‘traditional songs and dances’. We conducted the lessons with the villager playing the role of telling the story in the children’s mother tongue *Shekgalagari*. The role of teachers who spoke Setswana and English was to demonstrate the official school culture of the ‘normal’ day to day teaching to indicate what the stories, drama and collage were all about relating to environmental issues.

### ***Cultural studies - Story telling***

In the role of a villager, we asked two village elderly ladies to tell *Shekgalagari* folk tales in their local language *Shekgalagari*, using typical *Shekgalagari* mimics and gestures and typical *Shekgalagari* habits like dramatising and involving the audience in dramatization, comedy and song. Both folk-tales were about animals common in that environment. Through introducing this ‘*Shekgalagari* atmosphere’ we hoped to reduce tension in the children and make them feel more comfortable in a homely situation and give them a chance to grasp the content of the story. After the story, squatting down with children, we asked them to discuss the moral of the stories in groups and make a general presentation. In most cases the children viewed some animals, for example, as the gods or protective spirits over them and they spoke with genuine respect and fear about taboos and beliefs relating to the animals and plants and their sacred nature. Some children even narrated on how they still strongly believed in these taboos in their day-to-day lives as they hunt and gather with their parents.

The class teachers watched our interaction with children with amusement. However they could not squat down on the floor with children; they could not appreciate children’s non-formal contributions like skills acquired outside the school of the knowledge they already had because the outcome did not satisfy their expectations according to the prescribed curriculum. The children’s response to the drama activity was positive. They participated actively in dramatizing a few segments of the story, obviously enjoying that they easily understood the story as it had been told in their mother tongue *Shekgalagari*. Throughout the story telling, they were laughing and giggling and producing the *Ooohhh!!! Aaahh!!* sounds which are exclamations in their culture. As a result, the teachers appreciated our child-centered approach though with some level of uneasiness.

### ***Drama***

Children were issued with worksheets in which we asked them to mime selected parts of a story in groups of about four to five. The worksheet was written in Setswana, which is the formal language of instruction. They had to practice the drama outside on the school grounds. The drama had to have a musical comedy that focused on the dilemmas the community faces such

as the importance of animals mentioned in the story in terms of the importance of their conservation. We used pantomiming to allow pupils to express emotions without demanding verbal formulations in a language banished from school (*Shekgalagari*) and to provide pupils an opportunity to communicate outside of a language not yet mastered sufficiently (*Setswana*). We chose group work to allow pupils to decide on their level of participation and contribution without risking exclusion of those who were shy. During the drama exercise the children had to note down in their worksheet things that denoted the plight of animals in relation to conservation issues. An example would be where a hunter is moving around in tip-toe movements so as not to scare the animals or hunt those that are sacred and are not supposed to be killed. In the worksheet the children would explain what he is doing and why?

Many children did not understand the guiding sentences written in Setswana on the worksheet, but even those who understood were obviously afraid of making mistakes (under 'normal' circumstances which is punishable). The class teachers 'assisted' by warning the children to 'read and do what it says'. We had to move around assisting them with one of the authors (Khudu-Petersen) and an assistant researcher (who both are indigenes of the *BaKgalagari* tribe) explaining in *Shekgalagari*.

As the teachers realized that our assistance and our helping the children to understand the task by explaining and even participating in pantomiming, they also decided to read and explain the task to the pupils. Soon the pupils felt free to act, they tried and discussed in their groups means of pantomiming recognizable actions; they obviously had fun and enjoyed the exercise. The class teachers obviously felt uncomfortable watching the children laughing and playfully teasing each other, they cautioned them to 'be more serious', but as they realized the ease and even our interaction with, and encouragement of the children, they gradually let the children have fun.

Back in the classroom the children had to make presentations and they made very lively presentations. Considering the fact that formal communication in the classroom is hardly ever in the form of interactive discussion between children, but is usually a teacher initiated and directed one-to-one communication between the teacher and individual children, we noticed with interest that children actively inter-communicated directly to decide on ways of performance and coordination in their presentations.

### ***Visual Art: Collage***

The next exercise was for children to represent the part of the story that they dramatized in collage. We showed pupils how to draw a background using chalk on an A1-sized manila paper. Thereafter pupils drew elements of their part of the story in groups, cut them out and pasted them on the prepared Manila paper to make a collage, mostly pictures of animals that

are held as sacred in the community. Pupils displayed their collage pictures in the right sequence on the wall to illustrate the whole story. In groups, pupils retold the whole story in Setswana guided by the pictures and where they had to clarify, they were allowed to use *SheKgalahari* language.

Timidly most children started drawing soft lines on their paper; only after we encouraged them verbally and by example to draw roughly in strong, careless and ‘messy’ movements, a few children dared rubbing the chalk hard on the paper. It took some time until all pupils enjoyed experimenting effects of drawing, applying differing levels of pressure and using different colors. All class teachers watched the exercise with interest. Four children tried to draw their own background, and they all appreciated having learned new drawing techniques.

Most pupils drew figures much too small and too detailed to be cut out and pasted. After some explanation and demonstration, four of the seven teachers who participated helped the children by encouraging them to ‘use space’ and to simplify drawings, reducing details of the contour to the minimum. Some children only understood after trying and failing to cut out too small and detailed shapes, but finally, with some help, all pupils had produced a colorful item. The children placed their items on the background to produce the collage, firstly without using glue, which allowed them to discuss and to design the final product in group work. After this decision had been taken glue was applied and the collages displayed on classroom walls in sequential order, exhibiting the whole story as a ‘picture story’.

During this exercise the children worked independently with high concentration. They got used to asking us for help and about half the groups managed to work in groups with equal division of tasks. In other groups two or three pupils took over the decision making and instructing other group members about their tasks and duties. The children tried to communicate with us in *Shekgalagari*, but as we responded in English and Setswana, the children soon tried to communicate with us in English, first shyly, soon excitedly, laughing about their attempts to pronounce English and Setswana words correctly.

The teachers were quite helpful in supporting the children in their exercise though some still kept a distance. One teacher produced her own collage, adopting the role of a pupil, jokingly, in competition covering up his work to prevent children from ‘copying’ from him, telling them to go and do their own pictures so that they could see whose collage was the best. The teachers walked throughout the classroom looking at children’s work, partly critiquing, partly making fun of their performance.

## Discussion

While it often draws on the prevalent teaching methodology, the ‘Intercultural Arts Education’ (ICAE), is entertaining and thought provoking because it transmits information and is actor centered as demonstrated in this study. ICAE approaches can be used as ESD tools to deepen notions of inclusive concepts of quality – to be inclusive of culture, local context and issues and practices that have meaning in local societies such as environment and sustainability practices (Lotz-Ssitka & Lupele, 2012). Our study set out to engage in community arts partnerships with *BaKgalagari* children and community members who are bearers of cultural knowledge in their respective areas. The aim was to construct and try out an interdisciplinary learning experience, in which the arts are used as a basis for learning. On these grounds, community members who were invited to class to work on art projects with teachers and learners created an enabling environment which bore relevance for learners.

The interaction created a learner-friendly atmosphere that recognized specific cultural needs and appreciated mutually beneficial associations between an indigenous society and its local systems. Through story telling for example, by being oral and highly visual, by providing a chance to identify with characters and empathize with the dilemmas learners face, and by active participation in activities, performances, discussions and sometimes in the plays themselves, made ideas and information meaningful to the children. The approach involved the children from one of the most disadvantaged and marginalised group in Botswana. In doing so, it offered children of the marginalized *BaKgalahari* communities a realistic and meaningful exploration of the contexts in which teachers considered options and could make choices in their teaching approaches. It demonstrated to these teachers who came from the privileged mainstream Setswana tribes the potential to use ICAE approach as effective teaching medium and a powerful means of achieving positive changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices for these children who were formally excluded from the learning processes. This also inevitably leads to more learning for these children who are usually confined to an alien curriculum that is not contextualized. The drama, for example, had a musical comedy that focused on the dilemmas the community faces in trying to address conservation issues. The play’s use of song, dance and humor conceptualizes a culturally appropriate way of encouraging such dilemmas in a way that is inclusionary (Bojuwoye, 2009; Christenson, 2004; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011).

‘Intercultural Arts Education’ (ICAE) approaches also have the advantage of being flexible (Bequette, 2007). It is often easy to change information or to develop or adapt activities for particular audiences and situations. For example in this study we had to adapt how we mediated the activities as need arose such as the use of *Shekgalahari* language where children did not adequately understand the language of instruction, Setswana. ICAE approaches usually require little equipment and activities can be performed in a variety of settings – under

a tree, in a village meeting area, in a classroom or on a street corner. This was demonstrated in this study where drama was performed outside at choice of the children's preferred spot. The collage they made used materials which were readily available in the classroom. This is an indictment to teacher education to equip teachers with skills to notice available resources in whatever context they find themselves teaching.

Members of communities with a common culture, like the *BaKgalagari* value their beliefs, value system, and patterns of perception and responsibilities towards their environment. These are transmitted through stories/folklore, songs and poetry, visually through paintings, craft, cultural rituals and dance (Khudu-Petersen, 2007; Shava, 2013). These cultural patterns are not regarded as individual variables, an aspect that teachers coming from dominant ethnic who are the ones teaching children in schools in these community group fail to realize. ICAE approaches create traditional settings and environmental perceptions that are still created within a heritage that is based on the longing for harmony between people and their natural environment. These elements can be passed on through the generations through the teaching and learning processes both in informal and formal education as illustrated by this study. The approaches can evoke a deep-rooted attitude and sense of appreciation and love of nature that originates from the *BaKgalagari* children's dependent on it for their livelihood (Fuhker, 2002; Passingham, 2002).

Some rationalist perspective might see this approach as based on a lack of access to scientific explanations of learning within these communities. It was evident from the outcomes of this study that the natural and local resource elements are imbued with values through practical and spiritual experiences of these children and that they highly appreciated it. For example most children viewed some animals as sacred and as the realm of the gods or protective spirits that have to be conserved and preserved for the survival of their livelihoods (Fuhker, 2002). In this way, animals and plants become symbols of positive values and a conduit to the source of life because it is from there that the desire to conserve and preserve these resources becomes fully meaningful to the learners from these communities.

The ICAE approaches used in this study illustrate that support for learning can be offered not only when an 'expert' provides knowledge, but also when other adults promote supportive interactions between learners, always based on the same curriculum content, objectives, and activities but using diverse culturally relevant methods (Valls & Kyriakides, 2013, p. 25). The approaches demonstrate that culturally located concepts and experiences can assist with enabling learners to "come to know" what could be complex concepts presented in abstract languages, because they are more familiar to the learner (Lupele Lotz-Sisitka, 2012, p. 18). It is more useful in bringing issues forward in locally relevant terms while seeking locally appropriate solutions (Hopkins & McKeown, 2002). The approach has a high chance of

facilitating sustainable environmental care practices as it is built on collaboration of the stakeholders. The UNESCO Roadmap for Art Education encourages such collaboration because,

Successful partnerships are dependent on mutual understanding of the goals towards which the partners are working, and mutual respect for each other's competencies. In order to lay the groundwork for future collaboration between educators and artists, the competencies with which educators as well as artists enter their profession need to encompass insights into the other's field of expertise – including a mutual interest in pedagogy (p. 8-9).

In adopting these approaches, not only does this create relevance to learners, but as well it makes learning meaningful, which could contribute to and enhance their performance resulting in high academic attainment in areas where for many years it has consistently been low (Ketsitile et al., 2013; Khudu-Petersen & Mamvuto, 2016). The resultant impact would be a generation of learners that can respond to their environmental issues meaningfully for their sustainable future.

### **Conclusion**

This study illustrated that community based education using true community-school partnership demands that schools as a foundation of formal education, appreciate the culture(s) of the concerned communities. The use of ICAE for example in this study demonstrated that there is demand of a postmodernist approach that embodies the value of social pluralism, ethnic diversity, tradition and contextualism (Hamblen, 1991) and values local knowledge and the input of non-experts (Bojuwoye, 2009; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011).

In using the ICAE in the school, we laid emphasis on appreciating local knowledge in form of artistic skills and representing the cultural capital of the dominant culture. Inviting a local cultural practitioner contributed towards local knowledge not being 'lived' rather than 'taught about' in the classroom. Besides placing value on their community culture as equally appreciated, this postmodernist approach did not replace teaching 'technological expertise' and putting value on modernists aspects, but rather offered a door opener for learners to access the arts taught through such conservative methods. The approach was also a door opener for the teachers to discover educational value in the culture of the communities within which they live and work by highlighting the locally available resources they can draw on. ICAE activities offered teachers a chance to experience the children as active learners rather than mere consumers of knowledge. They were able to see members of local communities as contributors in education, contrary to most teachers' assessment of (the largely illiterate)



parents as non-cooperative and uncaring about the education of their children as is usually the assumption held by Botswana teachers.

Children were the main beneficiaries through being encouraged and enabled to participate and to offer contributions in lessons. The introduced holistic view through lessons rooted in their home culture, connected to their community, and class activities interconnected on interdisciplinary discourse, helped children to perceive themselves as integrated part of educational efforts. It helped children truly understand and bring into context what had been taught at school. This approach to Art Education is affirmed by the 'UNESCO Roadmap for Art Education' issued after the World Art Education conference of March, 2006, which states:

Any approach to Arts Education must take the culture(s) to which the learner belongs as its point of departure. To establish confidence rooted in a profound appreciation of one's own culture is the best possible point of departure for exploring and subsequently respecting and appreciating the cultures of others (p.7).

During ICAE lessons teachers adopted a more empathetic view of the community cultural discourse; they changed to more child-centred methods and appreciated villagers' contributions to lessons. The cultural community practitioners who had been involved in contributing to ICAE lessons felt culturally recognized as they experienced how their input was valued. As a result, they developed a sense of responsibility for their children's performance at school, shown through their preparedness to get further involved in classroom teaching. Still, ICAE as introduced in the school could not guarantee sustainability. As researchers, we were merely a catalyst for the actions, which led to the changes; with our withdrawal, as one teacher expressed it, 'teaching will be back to normal'.

However, if teachers could adopt the use of ICAE as a teaching method it could bridge the gap between the various stakeholders in the children's education. By working with teachers, community members could gradually lose their inferior complex and exaggerated respect or fear for the teachers. Teachers' emotional distance that was clearly visible during the activities which was evident in the way they were reprimanding children, could also be reduced. Therefore, we see collaborative work which is part of Intercultural Arts Education approach as a possible means of facilitating the teachers to empathize instead of despise the community's values and culture hence enabling them to mainstream and integrate these in their teaching approaches.

The outcomes from this study convinced us that in order to achieve sustainability in the use of child-centered approaches and interdisciplinary action, based on holistic views to schools in marginalized areas of Botswana, teacher training institutions need to take the lead in the

professional development of teachers to equip them with the necessary skills. Not only do pre-service programs need restructuring in order to achieve these aims; the urgency demands efforts for suitable in-service training for teachers in the field as well.

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