

Shades, Shadows and Reality

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As a person with strong allegiances to critical inquiry and action research, in the past I have maintained a cynicism towards the value of 'objective', statistical approaches to research. And as a woman, in this decade I have been drawn to post-modern feminism as an approach to better understanding my social/political contexts. Yet working in a new country with great cultural and social diversity, social injustice and educational disadvantage, without the support of statistical data as well as qualitative data, analysis and critique, the complexity of the problems, and the new problems which are being created, would be easy to overlook in the reality of day-to-day experience.

This paper is an attempt to demonstrate how I needed to draw from the strengths of all of these different research perspectives to develop an understanding of education in general, and teacher education in particular, in Namibia now, eight years after independence.

For the past two years I have been working in Namibia, supporting the development of the national teacher education program. I was employed by the Swedish international aid organisation (SIDA), in the Teacher Education Reform Project, and was based at the National Institute for Education Development (NIED), in Okahandja, Namibia. In my role as Advisor I worked with Namibian counterparts at NIED, and with teacher educators from the four colleges. The NIED counterparts are responsible for the co-ordination and development of policies and syllabuses for both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. Much of our pre-service syllabus development work was done through a series of workshops which brought together representatives of the four teacher education colleges. In that way we provided professional development at the same time as document development.

For me to gain an understanding of the complexity of the background and context of what it was that we were trying to achieve, and why, I found that I needed to draw on all kinds of statistical information, historical narratives, and prior research, as well as doing my own research which included document searches and listening to personal stories.

Some of this information I now present as an attempt to firstly paint a picture of the challenges which are being faced in Namibia as they work towards building a new national education system. And secondly to present some of the questions about both education and research which came out of the experience for me.

Namibia a traditional/postmodern society

Namibia covers an area of approximately 825,000 sq. km., and has a population of just over 1.5 million. Which in comparison with other countries is neither large, nor densely populated (it is slightly smaller than Nigeria which has a population of 109 mill). However, like Australia, the population density varies enormously. The northern regions, which constitute much of Ovomboland, has a density of greater than 10 people per sq. km. (GRN, 1994). Whilst other areas have less than one person per sq. km.

Namibia has some features which make it geographically and politically unique:-

- within and/or across its borders, to the east and west, it is bounded by two major deserts, the Namib, and the Kalahari
- the only perennial rivers are on its southern (Orange River) and northern borders (Kunene; Okavango; Kwando; & Zambezi)
- the country is characterised by extremes:- it has the largest sand dunes in the world, and the second largest river canyon; in some areas it is so flat that you can see a township 40 km ahead; in other areas the landscape is dominated by bare, rocky hill-scapes; and generally it is very dry, (two thirds of the country has an annual rainfall below 400 mm) and the vegetation is sparse. Except when it rains, and then the countryside is painted in the colours of wildflowers
- politically it is one of the youngest countries in the world, having gained its independence from South Africa on March 21, 1990, after a colonial/apartheid dispensation of 45 years, and an armed struggle which lasted for 24 years.

Socially and economically, like most other societies, in the complexity of the issues/problems which are currently being addressed, Namibia could be described as a post-modern society. However the issues which are being addressed in that society are not the same as those in developed countries.

Some of the complexity of the issues/problems exist because of the legacies left from the previous regime(s):-

- the colonial appropriation of Namibia by Germany during the 1880's and up until the end of WW1, resulted in land expropriation, wars of resistance, and displacement of indigenous peoples
- after WW1, Namibia was granted under mandate to the Union of South Africa. This resulted in the continued displacement of indigenous peoples and racial/ethnic

fragmentation (GRN, 1994). As part of this, the apartheid policy was officially introduced in 1962 when Namibia was divided into 11 independent mini-states, 10 black and 1 white.

- There is great inequalities between groups - financial; educational; personal rights and freedoms; and access to different knowledges and/or support services
- a large proportion of the population were pushed into an environment where water and land was/is inadequate to sustain them. In a country where the majority of the people share communal lands for grazing and basic food crops, the whites (between 5 - 7% of the population) occupy 80% of the best farmland and all of the areas rich in minerals (Amukugo, 1995, p. 60).
- asset stripping of the country through foreign ownership of arable land and mining rights
- many of the indigenous people developed coping strategies of passive resistance and/or compliance
- expectations for some people that the end of the war and self-governance would bring great personal as well as social benefits
- fear amongst the privileged minority that their advantages would be taken away

And, partly in response to some of these issues and problems not being addressed, the currently the national policy of reconciliation, which was important at the time of independence, is criticised by many people both black and white, because it has not enabled people to openly confront ethnic/racial tensions.

However beyond that legacy, some of the complexity of the social fabric is because of the make-up of the society itself:-

- there are a vast array of different life-styles some of which are based on the technologies of western society, whilst others are little changed from traditional ways of past generations. This includes western urban; large property holders; itinerant and/or contracted workers; subsistence farmers; communal farming; semi-nomadic herdsman; nomadic hunters; and self-employed crafts-people
- there are at least 11 different indigenous languages (not all literate languages), plus European languages such as English (the official National language); Afrikaans; German; French; and Portuguese are spoken. People commonly speak two or three languages, and it is not unusual for one person to speak four or more languages, or to attend a meeting in which many languages are spoken
- depending on the way they are grouped, there are said to be somewhere between 10 and 14 indigenous racial/ethnic/cultural groups - and whilst there is some correspondence to areas and/or languages, these are not necessarily a specific relationship because of the multiple impact of forced migration; urban migration; plus overlapping of groups across borders into other countries
- there is a strong sense of tribalism, and a complete set of 'traditional' governing structures co-existing with the 'democratic system' which hold together and maintain traditional social organisation. Some of the tribal systems, and/or antagonisms, were promoted by/through the apartheid system; but some date back to wars between tribes - with practices of land acquisition and slavery which have been carried on over many centuries (Malan, 1995)

- there is a continuation of open contestation within some of the tribal/ethnic groups over leadership and/or entitlements (for example:- The Namibian, February 26, 1998, p.3; The Namibian, June, 25, 1998, p.5; New Era, September 18-20, 1998, p.15)
- the coexistence of European knowledge, religions, medicine and culture, with traditional knowledges, religions, medicine and cultures

These social/cultural/ethnic/linguistic differences are not subtle. Even after living and working there for almost two years and experiencing them as an every day, 'in-your-face' process, I find the differences and conflicts are quite stark. Because the people take pride in their heritage and live it, not just as a cultural event, but on a day-to-day basis. All of which has contributed to the richness of the society. It has also contributed to problems in the establishing of a new national education system, based on the four major goals of access, equity, quality and democracy (MEC, 1993).

Education - shadows from the past, influencing the present and future

Under apartheid the 11 separate mini-states which were set up each had their own education system which were funded un-equally and which had different levels of participation, teacher training and teacher qualifications. However racial/ethnic differential funding and access to schooling has a long history. This is shown in the first table which present figures for 1931 and 1941. Note:- Coloureds were not listed as a percentage of the school population in Table 1, which could mean that that group of people were included in the classification of 'African Education'; or that they set up and funded their own education; and/or that it was provided by missionaries. Any of which was not unusual prior to 1962 when the South African government established the Bantu system.

Table 1 Differences in expenditure and attendance rates of population groups pre-apartheid

Year	African Education	White Education	Percentage of total population	Percentage of school population
1931	R12 729 (9.8%)	R117 745 (90.2%)	Black 93%	Africans 23%
1941	R21 438 (11.9%)	R 157 736 (88.1%)	White 7%	White 77%

Source:- Amukugo, 1995, pp. 50 - 53

Not only were the total amounts of money provided for education for the different groups substantially different, but when this was translated into expenditure per child per year, and

pupil/teacher ratios, the resources and opportunities for pupils was significantly different (see Table 2).

Table 2 An example of differences in total expenditure, allocation per child, and teacher/pupil ratios of population groups during apartheid (1976/77)

Year	African Education	White Education	Coloured Education
1976/77	R 12 500 00 R68 per child per year P/T ratio 41.9:1	R16 100 00 R615 per child per year P/T ratio 18.2:1	R6 400 00 (---) R163 per child per year P/T ration 36.5:1

Source:- Amukugo, 1995 pp. 67 - 70

However this difference in provision of resources per pupil were not only evidenced between 'African', White and Coloured education systems, but also between the different race/ethnic groups which made up 'African Education'. Table 3 shows that whilst the white pupils received an allocation per pupil of more than twice any of the other groups, the northern tribal groups classified as Caprivians and Kavangos received significantly less than all of the other groups. Using figures for 1986, Table 3 shows the relative expenditures and sizes of the different groups. Pupils from Ovomboland make up approximately three-fifths of the total pupil population.

Table 3 1986 Education Expenditure in Rands per pupil according to different population groups

Race/Ethnic Group	Number of Pupils	Expenditure in Thousands of Rands	Expenditure in Thousands of Rands per pupil
Whites	16 773	53 891.0	3.213
Caprivians	17 622	9 836.2	0.558
Damaras	9 144	9 030.3	0.988
Hereros	14 657	15 704.7	1.071
Kavangos	31 837	16 973.5	0.533

Coloureds	15 776	18 768.4	1.190
Namas	14 667	11 885.2	0.810
Tswanas	850	14 005.0	1.648
Ovombos	180 081	10 228.0	0.985

Source:- Amukugo, 1995, pp. 194

Another area where I found information which enabled me to understand some of the problems in developing a national teaching program were the statistics on the changes in enrolment figures, and the duration of education between population groups. Table 4. Gives an indication of these differences, for one year (1974) which showed up the extent of the differences in education opportunity, the value placed on education by different groups; the stipulated requirements for attendance, and/or the quality of the education provided. Note that: (i) these figures use the initial enrolment number as the basis for further calculations. It does not mean that 100% of children attended school in grade 1; and (ii) that, even though these figures are post-1962, details are only available for Whites and Africans.

Table 4 Figures for school enrolment (1974) indicating numbers and (percentages) of population groups in the different grade level (equivalents) during apartheid

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 6	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 12
Africans	43 285 100%	26 659 62%	20 852 48%	10 006 23%	6 444 15%	1 473 3%	185 0.4%
Whites	2 247 100%	2 193 98%	2 137 95%	2 016 90%	1 922 86%	1 919 85%	891 40%

Source:- Amukugo, 1995, pp. 66

At that time (1974), schooling for 'African' children was not compulsory. Schooling for African children was made compulsory up to the third year only from 1976. However these figures showed me that only two-thirds of the initial African enrollees progressed beyond grade 1; less than half beyond grade 2; less than a quarter progressed to grade 6 and beyond that point only a very small percentage continued their education.

However these figures do not explain why so few 'African' learners who began their schooling did not continue. To look beyond that information, to not only get a sense of the history of schooling, but also the kinds of education which the majority of the teachers, and teacher educators would have experienced, I needed to look at syllabus materials, read policy documents and/or histories of schooling, and talk to individuals about their personal experiences.

What I found was that not only was there in-equality of resources and enrolments, there were also inequalities in the kind of knowledges which were considered to be appropriate for the learners. As was described in a number of policy documents as well as descriptive narratives of the apartheid - Bantu Education system, the education for indigenous Namibians was geared towards a cheap African labour force (MEC, 1993; Amukugo, 1995). The philosophy which informed this process was that:

Natives will be taught from childhood to realise that equality with Europeans is not for them. People who believe in equality are not desirable teachers for the Natives There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. (Amukugo, 1995, pp. 57 - 58)

The content of the syllabuses was selected and taught on that assumption. Future labourers and house workers were assumed to need only minimal literacy (in their own language and a European language) and numerousy, but needed a great deal of guidance and teaching in bible study, manners and hygiene. Besides this, if pupils remained beyond grade 3, the girls were taught domestic science and the boys basic carpentry and/or brickmaking or agriculture. Most of the early schooling was done in 'mother tongue' with English, German, and/or Africaans as an additional language. One, possibly unintended, advantage of the apartheid system where young children were taught in their 'mother tongue' was the preservation of the indigenous languages as culturally important.

Teacher preparation

Even at the level of teacher education, in 1986, in the 2 year teacher education program taught in Ovomboland, the Ongwediva Teacher Education College, there was no mathematics or science subjects available for student teachers.

Added to this, the majority of the 'African' teachers began teaching as a classroom apprentice, or came into their training, after only 8 - 10 years of schooling. And whilst this improved over the years prior to Independence (see Table 5), there is still some rural regions where only 40% of their teachers have grade 12 (in 1992 Rundu region this was 20%).

Table 5 African teachers' qualifications, 1970 & 1977, shown in percentages

1970		1977	
Percentage of teachers in 'African Schools'		Percentage of teachers in 'African Schools'	
had only grade 8	62%	had only grade 8	37.4%
had neither Grade 11, nor professional qualifications	36%	had neither Grade 11, nor professional qualifications	27,2%
had Grade 11	1.4%	had Grade 11	24.6%
had a university degree	0.3%	had a university degree	1.5%

Source:- Amukugo, 1995, pp. 69

A consequence of this was that, in 1985, it was estimated that more than half of all teachers (including White teachers) in Namibia did not have grade 12.

Put together this material builds a picture that not only did very few 'African' learners continue their education to the higher grades of secondary school, but that only a small proportion of 'African' teachers had educational experiences beyond the middle levels of secondary school, and the content which was taught in the schools and/or the Teacher Training programs was restricted. Besides this, the dominant form of teaching was teacher-directed memorisation of materials in preparation for examinations. All of which created a cycle of low-level understanding and/or expectations, and a limited range of teaching approaches and/or knowledge about learning.

But even these statistics do not begin to describe the actual experiences, struggles and determination, of 'African' people who did want to get an education and who did survive in the system. Amongst the black Namibian teacher educators who are currently teaching in the four Namibian Colleges of Education there is a wide diversity of pathways of how people did remain in, and become successful, despite the barriers which they were required to overcome.

The following is a very brief account of the hurdles which one of my counterparts had to master in order to become qualified as a secondary teacher.

Herta began her schooling in her home language of Oshindonga. After completing grade 3 she then had to move to another school where the medium of instruction was Afrikaans, and where she had to live in a hostel because the school was too far away for her to be able to walk to school.

At the end of grade 10 she again had to change school, and the language of teaching/learning, because the language of instruction for Grades 11 - 12 was English.

After successfully completing Grade 12, Herta won a scholarship which enabled her to study at one of the black universities in South Africa. All of her studies at that University were in Afrikaans.

During her studies at University, she, like all of the other Namibian students, was accompanied everywhere that she went by a fully armed soldier with a guard-dog.

Another of my counterparts had similar experiences for the early years of her schooling but her pathway to becoming a qualified teacher was different because at the age of 16 she chose to go into exile.

Peggy left home and went into exile so that she could become a teacher without having to attend the local teacher's college (see the following extract). She worked as an apprentice and gained her training with the support of international aid in Angola. Her teaching experience was in the 'camp-schools' which periodically were under air attack and had to be re-located.

She was later offered a scholarship from the Russian government to further her studies at the University of Moscow. She accepted the offer and successfully coped with the challenge of studying for her Master of Education, in Russian.

Neither of these accounts describe the experience of studying to be a teacher during apartheid at one of the Teachers Colleges in Namibia. The following is a description by the current Vice-Rector of Ongwediva College.

The College staff-room was (and still is) divided into two sections. One was designated for Black teacher educators and one for white.

Most of the white teacher educators were South African Soldiers who came to the college each day in full battle dress including their rifles and hand grenades. In the corner of the white staff-room there was (and still is) a rifle stand to accommodate the rifles.

But the soldiers/teacher educators did not leave their weapons in the staff-room. When they went to teach they took their rifles with them and stood them in the corner of the classroom.

With this context as a basis, the new education system, working towards the goals of providing access to an equitable education for all learners and, at the same time, changing the content and teaching/learning approaches so that they support the development of a democratic and unified society is a huge challenge.

This challenge is based on careful analysis and preparation which began even prior to independence. Recognising the need for changes, in 1988, the United Nations Institute for Namibia stated that:

The new education system in independent Namibia will need to correct the wrong perpetuated by the illegal regime. An alternative education policy must therefore view the need for change as its central theme. (UNIN, 1988, p. 521)

Teacher education was designated as part of, and leading, this change and reform (MEC, 1993). Because it was/is believed that reform would come through changing the approach of teachers.

But perhaps what was not fully anticipated was/is the difficulty of changing a whole education system, even when the hearts-and-minds of the great majority of educators support the need for change and reform.

Reforming education

The reform of Namibian education, and the establishment of a national system, based on the goals of *access, equity, quality and democracy* (MEC, 1993), with a new national language, English, is a huge undertaking. And as pointed out by my counter-part Peggy Shilamba (1999 forthcoming)

A democratic approach to education is necessarily learner-centred and takes into account the language, cultural and ethnic differences of the learners. In practical terms this means the need to develop syllabuses and appropriate resources for all to learn; to provide sufficient schools, classrooms, and even books and chairs; to train enough teachers and enhance the qualifications of continuing teachers; and prepare resources for teaching and learning in the range of Namibian languages. All this has been a matter of urgency.

To achieve this reform there are many inter-related problems which are required to be addressed simultaneously, these include:-

(a) Issues of resources

- a great inequality of resources between regions and also between schools (this can be understood from the previous information)
- insufficient schools/ teachers /chairs/books to cater for universal education
- a large proportion of the teachers (and teacher educators) were/are unqualified or under-qualified
- an extreme shortage of teachers who have anything other than a minimal background in maths and/or science

b. Issues of teaching approach

- teaching in both the missionary and the apartheid regimes was, almost without exception, authoritarian, and learning was understood as a process of memorisation
- this meant that few teachers/teacher educators had had any experience with '*learner-centred teaching and learning*' which was introduced as official policy (MEC, 1993)

b. Issues of knowledge

- the content of syllabuses for all areas and levels of education needed to be examined and changed
- this has led to attempts to make school content more relevant, at least in some areas
- which in turn has raised questions about what kinds of knowledge are important - traditional/western

b. Issues of language

- English is a minority language, even amongst the white population of Namibia (in 1997 of almost 17,000 teachers, there were only 57 who had English as their first language (MBEC-IS, 1998)).
- the policy of mother tongue teaching up to grade 3 has been very complex to implement because of mixtures of linguistic groups within school populations, and/or shortage of teachers in some languages. (The Language Policy stipulates that wherever possible the medium of instruction should be mother tongue or familiar local language in Grades 1 - 3, and at the same time they should learn English-as-a-second language. In Grade 4 the balance is switched so that English becomes the medium of instruction and the learners should continue to learn their mother tongue or familiar local language as subjects (MBEC, 1996)).

Becoming aware of the legacy of the previous regimes, and the personal histories of some the people I was working with, has given me a much better understanding of the extent of the changes which have been mandated. And to also understand at least some of the reasons why:-

- a. there has been such a push to establishing national education and teacher education systems
- b. creative approaches have needed to be employed to over-come problems
- c. there has been a strong reliance on outside 'experts'

- d. the change process was/is moving very slowly and its impact is patchy
- e. there is still no shared understanding/meaning of some of the key terms and phrases such as 'learner-centred'
- f. there is an overwhelming need to listen to each other, respect different perspectives, and to learn together

This knowledge also helps me to understand why it is that answers frequently bring more questions. Some of the most pressing and/or significant of these are:-

- a. how is it possible to balance the language and equity policies within the current reality
- b. how can traditional forms of teaching/learning which encourage initiative and responsibility be fostered within the school environment
- c. how can traditional knowledges be given equal recognition
- d. is schooling essential for everybody - i.e. what can schooling offer the children of traditional herdsman in return for the potential destruction of their way of life

Summary

In preparing this paper I have been thinking about the title 'Shades, Shadows and Reality' with two very different meanings. One is the context of my work in Namibia where the impact of the many different social/cultural/ethnic/linguistic strands have left shades of meaning in the unique mix of the current social fabric, and where the shadow of past inequalities and struggles are still part of, and impacting on, the society, the education system, and on individuals. The second meaning is in relation to the research processes which I have drawn upon. It is this latter meaning which I will focus on in my summary.

In the Namibian context it became very clear to me that none of the research processes on their own provides a complete picture. Each offers only a small window into understanding. Which not only conforms the idea that it is where you stand, and the tools which you use, which shape what you see, but, at the same time, contests the notion that certain kinds of research are more (or less) valuable. Each way of looking has its own validity and its own purpose and can be valued for what it can contribute, not as an answer, but as a lens. With the recognition that reality is all of these perspectives, and none of them. The whole is much more than the parts. To use a very Namibian metaphor - 'you cannot see the horizon and your feet at the same time'.

I am not sure yet what this means in the Australian educational context. Except to wonder whether we might also use research here as a way of trying to look at things differently. Perhaps in an environment where we are familiar with the context it is easy not to probe things so deeply, to search the horizon so widely, or to question why, as well as what, and how. With the consequence that our research is not as vital as it might be.

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