

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



Scroll down to read the article.

Edwin K. Townsend Coles, *The History of Education in Botswana*, Macmillan, Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana, 1985, pp. 56, Price: P3.00

This book gives an overview of the history and development of education in Botswana from pre-colonial times to the present. Appropriately, the book begins with a background of pre-colonial Botswana education, that is, education imparted to the youth through parents, guardians and relatives, including initiation ceremonies where boys and girls were taught various responsibilities in society as they entered adulthood. However, one is compelled to mention the obvious oral data gap concerning this theme.

As it unfolds, the book discusses the advent of missionaries, the Hermannsburg and the London Missionary Society and the subsequent introduction of western education to Botswana. At this early stage, missionary education tended, understandably, to be rigorously religious thereby producing evangelists, or converts who would be proficient in reading the bible. The establishment of the Moffat Institution and the Seminary Institution at Shoshong in 1872 aimed at producing avangelist teachers.

It was not until the 1890's that rounded education was offered. Within that period, the Phalaptswa Central School came into being with the help of both Bangwato and the missionaries. Until the end of the 19th century, the history of education was in the hands of missionaries and local authorities. The book here lacks authentic documentation by the missionaries, especially in the early chapters. The London Missionary Archives in London, some of which are now available in the University of Botswana's library, would have given a stronger historical background concerning the development of education in Botswana. Education was in the hands of missionaries until the early 1900's and it is important to present the efforts and views of those concerned with the introduction of western education in Botswana. As it is, the book leans rather heavily on reports and secondary sources.

The book further discusses belated attempts by the colonial government to improve education in the Protectorate. An effort in that direction was the inspectorate system and the 1905 Sargant Commission which reported on the state of education in the Protectorate. The recommendations that followed the report proposed the establishment of school committees in various districts and for Batswana to pay an educational levy. Besides being concerned with the inspectorate system, the government seemed contented to leave education in missionary hands. It is not clear from the book to what extent the Protectorate government was involved in the development of education in Botswana. Neither does the author examine the Protectorate government's policy with regards education. Yet by the early 1900's the government dictated terms to the missionaries whenever they issued grants-in-aid. The colonial government appears to have stressed industrial education because it wanted Batswana to be trained as skilled and semi-skilled artisans so they would rid the whites of "dirty jobs".

The government's commitment to the development of education did not come to the fore until the appointment of H.J. Dumbrell as Director of Education in 1928. Dumbrell introduced the Board of Advice for native education charged with overseeing the development of education in the Protectorate. This board was helped by school committees in various districts in the Protectorate. A number of educational reforms came about during Dumbrell's era, teachers salaries were improved, training of teachers was stepped up, syllabi for the primary school were formulated and cattle post schools were introduced.

It is also not quite clear from the book why the colonial government became interested in education in 1928. Obviously the government was quite aware of the stark reality that its administrative structure needed personnel, more so that local personnel were cheaper to maintain than expatriate staff. The government also had committed duties towards European education well before 1928, yet this does not come out clearly in the book. The amount of funds spent on European education and the bursaries awarded therefor were well above what was allotted to African education. This is important because

it shows, among other things, that the retardation of educational development could be attributed to colonial neglect while European education at the time received undivided attention as it was granted allowances, funds for building schools and bursaries to study in South Africa and the then Southern Rhodesia.¹

The book further discusses the efforts of individuals, communities and private organisations to establish secondary schools such as Tati Training Institute, Forest Hill Agricultural College (later St Joseph's College), Bangwato College (later Moeng College), Seepapitso and Kgari Sechele schools. While secondary education was in the hands of locals, we need to know how these schools were organised, how local communities raised funds and what government policy was towards secondary education besides its encouragement for teacher training colleges.

Chapters Three and Four discuss the mushrooming of education since the country's independence in 1966. Since then, various educational institutions have come into being such as technical and vocational training institutions, teachers training institutions, adult education, non-formal education, the brigades and the University of Botswana.

From 1966 therefore, the government through the Ministry of Education, continued to show commitment to the development of education. Because of the limited number of secondary schools places, many elementary school leavers do not have access to secondary education resulting in unemployment. The Ministry of Education intends to redress this problem by building junior secondary, community, vocational and technical schools. In short, that is what the books discusses.

It is not evident from the book how the present government plans to deal with localisation, considering that scientific and technical skills remain largely in the hands of expatriates. Besides increasing junior and community schools the syllabi thereof need to stress the importance and relevance of these skills. The country needs doctors, engineers, town planners, draughtsmen and so forth in order to rely less on foreign expertise.

Turning to the details in the book, on page five one would like to know how surplus maize produced by Bakalanga was converted into elementary education. Specifics as to who they sold the maize to and the schools they built with these resources need to be exemplified.

Chapter Three, first paragraph, gives the numbers of pupils and schools, but figures and narration without analysis is just not enough. Factors contributing to the increase in number of students, schools, the percentages of passes and failures need to be brought to the fore.

On page seven, the author needs to indicate the languages spoken in 'Rhodesia' that are similar to the Setswana language; and a little more careful proof reading would have alleviated the problem of misspelling the names of ethnic groups such as Bangwaketse. It is also important on the same page, to specify why the numbers of girls exceeded those of the boys in elementary schools.

On page eleven, the author mentions two schools in Serowe, the missionary school and the kgotla school. What is important to note here is that the kgotla school came into being as a way of showing the missionaries that Bangwato were discontented by the way the L.M.S. handled educational matters in the Protectorate.

On cattle post schools, page fourteen, one of the subjects taught was moral training. One wonders at the seriousness of this subject considering that it was part and parcel of Tswana custom.

In conclusion, this book tends to be a narration of educational events from early times to present, and lacks analysis and interpretation on how these educational events happened the way they did and their effects on Batswana. Despite these short-comings the book offers a useful but brief guideline to the development of education in Botswana and highlights the need for more analytical studies and further research on the history of education in Botswana.

Dr. P.T. Mgadla
History Department
University of Botswana

Notes

1. See P.T. Mgadla, "Missionary and Colonial Education among the Bangwato 1862 to 1948" (PhD. thesis Boston University, 1985) pp 317 - 321; also see B.N.A. European Education 1930; B.N.A. S168/8 minutes of the European Advisory Council, compulsory education, 1932.