

Race and Education Mosaic
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Oral History Interview
With
Mr. Shlolo Herbert Khiva
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King William's Town, Eastern Cape, South Africa

Interview with Mr. Shlolo Herbert Khiva (N)

Interviewed on August 19, 2015

Location: King William's Town, Eastern Cape, South Africa

Interviewers: Lucy Richman (I), Nyree Addison and John Morrow

Language: English

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I: How do you think students at your school are doing? Are they successful?

N: If one can look to the context in which they are studying, one can see that they are actually quite well because the school has never performed less than 80% since 2007. I was here since 2007. And if one can consider the number of students we have in our classes then we can see that the school is a performing school. Yeah, basically

I: That's wonderful. And so what do you think makes your school successful?

N: Really, the commitment of the educators. Maybe the channels of communication between the management and the staff. The role played by the parents because most of the parents are from a middle class background. They assist us a great deal, yeah.

I: So you mentioned the middle class background of your students – I'm wondering do you think in the education system as a whole do you think where a student comes from has a significant impact on how successful they are?

N: Yes, of course. If we can compare Bhisho High to other schools you can realize that there is a difference. The socioeconomic situations have an impact on how students perform in school because some of the parents do not know about education; they just send their kids to a school for the sake of sending.

I: And so, you mentioned that some of the parents send their kids to school just to send them there. Does that happen here or do they come here because they know it's a very successful school?

N: Yeah, we have that challenge to be honest because most parents now have realized that performance of the school, and then when they send their children to this school because they see it is as a success. As a successful school. And for that reason we end up with a big challenge of big numbers in our classrooms. For instance, we are in a situation where you have each about 55 learners in one classroom. For instance, I commonly teach grade 9 and we have enrollment of about 270 kids. Only 5 classes. You can imagine how the management of the classroom could be in that situation.

I: You mentioned class size as a problem that your school has. Are there other significant problems within the school and do you mind explaining what you think about those?

N: In the school generally, yeah I guess sometimes I think they are interrelated anyways. The classroom sizes, the [muffled speaking] stages, perhaps of the representation of their country also helps them a lot to misbehave because in professors rights without responsibilities so in most cases kids are kids so they will remain kids also you have to attach responsibilities to rights and in most cases the child becomes frustrated because they don't know how to deal with the misbehavior because they don't know the ways of dealing with problems that they encounter at schools.

I: When you were a student before you were a teacher, were there a lot of similar problems, or what kind of experiences did you have as a student?

N: There were problems when we were students. However, we didn't have these liberal course editions so teachers were at liberty to control us. There was a lot of the that so we wound up being disciplined, scared sometimes, we felt compelled to do the schoolwork because there was no way that we could resist, there was no way we could not do our school work because maybe we were scared that they would beat us.

I: So how do you feel about the changes since then?

N: Well, one could say the changes are both negative and positive. The results are mainly positive because now kids come to school in big numbers because they don't fear being punished and so forth. But negative because there is a huge lack of commitment from their side. Maybe its because they are still poor, I don't know. With the hope that they realize the purpose of being at school at later stages but as for now... [unclear] it's a big problem.

I: The lack of commitment, I understand that is a problem. How should schools help students so that they can better, achieve more, and be more successful? What can the schools do?

N: First and foremost I believe discipline is the bedrock of success. As schools require everything, for instance we have the [unclear], a code of conduct and more over we motivate them with the aim of promoting a healthy competition amongst them for the students and to expose them to different extra curricular activities like sports so that at least they can know that if one does not do well in studies that one might choose a sport that can be his or her future. Yeah.

I: Will you describe for us the types of extra curriculums that Bhisho High School has?

N: We have sport; there is soccer, rugby, cricket, and music. We have debate, drama, that is, I mean those are the extra curricular activities we have at our school.

I: Do you see students that participate in these activities being more successful in the classroom?

N: No, they like to participate in these activities because it gives them enough time to be out of the classroom. They don't really like the classroom but there are those who really excel in their studies. We call them the stars of Bhisho and they excel in their studies, some of them.

I: Do a lot of these students go on to university?

N: Yes that's what I like about them, they usually come to the school and they realize after they left the school that what they got from this institution is valuable. They come back to assist other students during holidays especially for those who are doing mathematics and science. They usually come back to our school, so most of them, yes they go to university.

I: That's wonderful.

N: Yes.

I: So I'm wondering a bit about your experience on a day to day basis, of how do you interact with students what types of things to do so would you mind describing what a normal school day looks like for you?

N: A normal school. Every person every stakeholder from the part of the kids has to be punctual. Should abide by the code of conduct and the one critical aspect needs to maintain relations good between educators, between learners, educators and learners themselves. There is a there is what you call you will need super ego, child ego, parent ego, so you need to be parent to them you they must see a father figure

and mother figure in yourself then once they establish that in you as the educator they expect you once you show commit and they committed as well.

I: do you do find that that's a reality in your school or is it not quite that way?

N: No it's a reality in our school. If one can go to the conduct office we do love them as our kids. Even if we punish and they don't really take that seriously because they know that you for the sake for there own good will. There's what you call a couple relationship. You must, we have to attack the problem not the person so that is general approach that we use in this school. From the management to the learner we use the a couple of approach because you have I have to tell you if you are wrong and you have to tell me that I should not take that personally.

I: that sounds like a really good way to go. There are sounds like there's a lot of respect between teachers.

N: You can even, you can even witness that by the way they dress, there dress code our learners are very neat. They know that what is good for them they must..., yeah.

I: Yeah everyone seems to respect each other and on other side of it how I wonder have you ever experienced any discrimination in your school either against yourself or against your students?

N: That is not what we promote here, so we have no ground for any form of discrimination so we don't discriminate against any person.

I: That's wonderful to hear. We've heard a lot of stories as we been here about students that have been discriminated against and so I'm wondering in the system overall not only in your school. Do you think it's common or are more school coming like Bisho?

N: Come again?

I: So do you think discrimination is common in school in South Africa?

N: Definitely, sure because of our set history. So for instance right now we hear over the news that the black principal is appointed in the corrupt school then the parents in that school do not want that principal because he is black so we still experience that in other school. That is basically based on the past as time progresses we will realize that segregation is not the way to go.

I: So how do you think a learner skin color or race identification effects their success in school here and at other school?

N: How do I think personally? That race effects schooling. As I say this is the process people are still living in the past but I strongly believe that as time progress as I said that things will completely change because it is not easy to undo the legacy of the past and a short space of time, but I think we are good track as a country. To see each other as human rather than as white or black.

I: So it's been 20 years since the end of Bantu education and you think the country is on a good track what do you think will happen within the next 20 years from now?

N: Uh I just hope that our country leaders will one day realize what we need to employ on merit. So that we can move forward as a country not using the liberties and because I think that officials of the education system of South Africa is that trend of employing people related to each other without using the merit, and that kills our system the political enemy of our education because there are too much politic in our education. If I may make an example we have a while I may not mention the name because I might get in trouble the unions who are sell the jobs to people who belong to the union because they want to remain a dominance in the system so if we can just undo corruption employ people on merit and not using

[unclear] not using language, not using any form of disability so that the person can be able to perform in the school so that the school can produce results.

I: Have you found that there are a lot problem in your school or other schools in the area with teachers and principal who are hired under this corrupted system. Do they hurt their students academically or otherwise?

N: Yeah, unfortunately I didn't start teaching in the eastern cape I started teaching in western cape where you are employed don merit. I am one of those victims I applied several times without being called for interview. The recruitment process is manipulated from top to bottom, so maybe your interview, forms are just thrown out because you are a very unknown entity. So I think that is one of the problems for eastern cape and for that I would like to live there the province.

I: Do you find that a lot of your students here understand the corruption and maybe don't want to become teachers themselves because of it?

N: Yeah most of the learners do not want to be teacher because teaching was known as a noble profession then, but if you can look to the government officials they don't really respect profession itself even though it is the mother of all professions. They don't respect educator an educator has become a simple person in the living dispensation. And for that leaners not really want to be educator and discouraged by their parents that they must not take teaching. And the state doesn't pay teachers the way they should.

I: How do you think they should train teachers, I know we talked with other people and a lot of teachers were trained during apartheid so maybe aren't trained to teach the way people feel the students should be taught now, and that's creating a problem for some of the learners. Do you encounter that here?

N: First, let me say this our country is still a developing country therefore the government has to put forth the resources for education, so the country can be uplifted it's an open secret to say that the group moving towards the learning. The situation like ours is very impractical to follow that trend because of our class because of lack of infrastructure. I think tried to introduce the learning maybe western cape will follow the suit if they have not done it. But I think the department has the obligation to retrain teacher so they can be able to meet the standards of the industrial community. So that they can our country can be self-sufficient, they couldn't make [unclear] otherwise.

I: And so you said they you feel the government should be obligated to retrain teachers have they done that?

N: For me they are not doing enough, for instance they don't really make a salary for teachers. And even a short time just for the sake we have done abc. Without the clear papers as I say the educators themselves they needed to be trained. Because they are employed based on their relationships with some people at the top so they are not even employed on merit so that is the problem.

I: So in the workshops they do have do they ever receive training in how to teach students with special needs.

N: Eh you know have schools of course for kids with special needs so it is rare for us to be trained on how to look to the interest of kids with special needs. Maybe they do the training for those institutions for that are specific to kids of with special needs.

I: Ok. Do almost all of the student with special need go to that schools are some still in your high school and other high schools around?

N: South Africa is both rural and urban. I hate to say, but I have to say that some of the children do not have access to these schools that have special needs because of the lack of information and because of the high level of level interest amongst the parents. So I don't think I mean the knowledge is hard to access education through these schools.

I: And so then for the student who aren't able to go to these school do you find that they tend to drop out more and do more poorly in school then other students?

N: Yeah because they struggle because one of the challenges that we have in our system unlike western cape we don't have the special school psychologist because teachers can not teach and do psychology at the same time especially because of large numbers even in our cases you discover that a child is a slow learner naturally maybe of a nature of the post that we don't know. We don't' have time to have the parent of the child so that we can share information about the child so we can assist one learner. So we have that challenge as well we don't have psychologist in our school, which we should have. Yeah.

I: So in the school then without the psychologist it what happens to the student who you think should be sent to a school psychologist-?

N: In most cases they ended up dropping out of the school. Because they can't cope because we are unable to enlist a psychologist to come.

I: Do you know what Bisho's drop out rate is?

N: I can't maybe the principal has that information if she has I don't know.

I: Yeah that's alright. [both laugh] Absolutely. So then I guess one other question we have about your personal opinion I know that Seve here was telling me to pass from

one grade to the next you need to pass with 30% is that the case here if so do you think that is appropriate what should that be changed to if not?

N: I was very critical of the requirements of the because during our day we use to pass with 40% that was the minimum requirement but other than that new compensation those requirements change they were lowered and I thought it was the same was a way to get rid of our learners that was my interpretation my personal interpretation however maybe because of many people the requirements has changed now because in your mother learner because it is the language of teaching and learning so if you have not met one of those requirements then you refrain but what is more disturbing about our system they change things continuously, they are not stable. It is as if we are still wondering what will be the best implications is to remember after 1994 we introduced a system which was [unclear]... education. Which has failed these days now. Now we have NCS then it's CAPS now so we are always [unclear] because we are still not yet sure what system we have to follow, as a country so we can be able to make the political accommodation needs of our country.

I: And so in what way do you think these quick changes affect the success of your learners?

N: Firstly they are further [unclear] their educators you get used to this system and then they change and you have to familiarize yourself with the new system. As for learners I am not quite sure they get affected and I think they can only be affected by the way we deliver the lesson because I think these systems are only different in approaches so because we aren't used to new approaches which in most cases are not relevant to our situations because according to government laws at high school you are expected to teach 35 learners but as I said I have 55 learners that is abnormal. Yeah.

I: Yeah I can't even imagine teaching a class of 55 students in it do you find personally that you are able to interact with each of your students individually and give them attention?

N: To be honest, it is a process you cannot achieve that. For instance you end up not knowing their names, you only recognize them by their faces maybe you take one year or two years to know their real names it's not supposed to be like that again you struggle to arrange the after school sessions with learners who are struggling because you are also tired and it takes time to recognize that so and so is a slow learner.

I: Mhm. And so then does this affect the way that you are able to prepare for your classes as well do you try to make your lessons help the slow learners as well as the learners that are keeping up. Does everyone just have to work at the same rate?

N: Under CAPS we have the letters of question but that doesn't really help because we have to prepare for the entire class and we don't have special preparation for learners who struggle and that when it becomes abnormal.

I: Well thank you so much for your time. I would just like to know specifically at Bisho high school are there any special things that the school has done to help your learners be as successful as they are.

N: One thing for sure the educators at Bisho have accommodated are prepared to work for extra mile especially for Matrics because that is the status of the school is in most cases judge by the Matric results. They organize Saturday classes program the science programs right now we have [unclear] we have association with university to assist learners. Another challenge that I think is a challenge to not really interact with the committees and with the conduct staff our committees for instance Eastern cape is run and the goal of this part of the country relies on land so our country has not really defeated the elites of the rich because we don't have our

culture in our school and that is what I [unclear] we need to redirect our learners to culture as well so that they can have a broader scope of their choices not only math, science, physics [unclear]. Not everyone will be a scientist.

I: Well it seems like your school is doing some wonderful things for your students. I just want to say thank you so much again. Just the last thing we would really appreciate if you would fill out the consent form you can choose to fill this out if there are any restrictions you want to make on this if you don't want us to post the footage on the internet or anything fill free too—

N: To be honest I, I have nothing to hide so you can do whatever you want to as long as they are not going to arrest me. [Signs consent form]

I: Wonderful.