

Kholiswa Ntlokonkulu: History Teacher
Interviewer: Patti Kotrady

August 20, 2015

Patti: Hi My name is Patti and I am interviewing a long time teacher here at the Steve Biko center in South Africa

Teacher: My name is Kholiswa Ntlokonkulu. I'm staying here in King Williams Town, otherwise I come from Port Elizabeth, and I am a history teacher and degree in Xhosa. I am here in King Williams town, I arrived here in King Williams town in 1982, I have been teaching since the early 90's.

P: What do you enjoy most about teaching?

T: I enjoy the kids, and the interaction with them. You always get new things, you don't know what it will be. Everything is new.

P: That's great. And how would you describe your classroom environment? How would you physically describe it?

T: Explain it physically, the class is not packed because not all the learners are doing history. Its history, physics, it's a combination. Some are doing history, some are doing physics, So some go to a different class then others, so its not tight. The class, the history class has never been a big class.

P: But you say some classes are packed?

T: Very, very, in a class like xhosa, there are 70 kids.

P: 70?

T: yes, yes.

P: wow. And how would you describe your classroom behaviorally? How do the kids interact with you? How do they behave in class?

T: Since this school, most especially this year, I have been calling one class of grade 12. In the class of grade 12 the class is more mature then other classes.

P: Good. And how would you describe your teaching style?

T: oh oh, well I have been teaching for the past 10 years.

P: wonderful, so do you do more lecture based teaching? Do you talk to your kids most of the time in the front of the room, or do you have them do discussions? What kind of strategies' do you use?

T: It's me who is doing the talking. So question then answer, then question.

P: So what are you currently teaching in your classroom? Like what were you teaching today or this week?

T: this week I have been teaching a TRC: the truth and reconciliation committee.

P: So how do you usually teach these difficult topics of South African history? Things such as apartheid?

T: For instance if I do teach South African History, we do have a chapter on Steve Biko, so but I'm sure an old member, if we're going to start that chapter, I take my learners to visit this place. Then the tour guides takes my kids to the nearby areas. The clinics that were established by Steve. The on-call offices and they come here (Steve Biko Centre) are given an explanation, they are taught, they are given by this guy Jogen (inaudible name), explain about Biko, that it works together, what are some rights for them at school. Most of the time we will read the chapter of Steve Biko, even they give a film on Steve Biko before that part there. Another chapter is on TRC. With TRC, I bought a cassette from Radio Xhosa, from SABC, where they have the actual happening where these seating were. Usually, I usually show them that was in East London. And then they have an idea of what the victim, the perpetrators

P: and how do you think the curriculum has changed from pre-apartheid to post-apartheid. I know you were teaching between both eras, do you think it's changed a lot in those times?

T: Not really, because what you are teaching now, we have taught it before, before 1994. There is not much of a change. Except they have taken off, what they have done in the school. For instance what we are teaching now, we started teaching it last year. 2014, 2015, 2016. Then after 2016 there will be other topics within South African History. There changes the topics.

P: What sort of changes have there been with the topics?

T: For instance they would take the past 30 years for 2014, 2015, 2016. They will take Steve Biko, They will take it to another paper, not the paper this year. Before papers we used to have, history wherever it was South African. But now with this new era there are different changes with South African history.

P: So you learn about specifics in South African History.

T: right. No both, we learn the same.

P: and how much flexibility do you feel you have in changing the curriculum? Do you feel that you have any say in what goes into the curriculum?

T no, no. I don't have any say. We don't, we just teach what we are given. WE don't have any say as teachers. We are given the curriculum and they say this is what you're supposed to teach what we are given, we don't have any say. Then it's for me to go and try to get information ready to teach about that particular topic.

P: so who is the one that does have say, that does put it together?

T: I am sure those above have say, those subject advisors, and there are others. We are just given, and told that this is what we are supposed to teach, this has changed to this, and this is what goes on in the classroom. As teachers we don't have any say. We are given a booklet for 2014 to 2017 then next year they will give us the 2018, 2019 and 2020. We don't have any say.

P: and what do you think about that? Would you change it if you could?

T: Yes. With teaching grade 12 there is no such, uhh, no support, with grade 10 and 11, there is no continuity in the syllabus. What you teach in grade 12 it does not continue from what you learned in grade 10 and 11. We find it difficult to teach grade 12 something that you don't even know. It becomes much better with grade 11 because there is continuity at least in this part of South African History with grade 11.

P: and with South African history is there a difference on how you have portrayed colonialists throughout the years? When dealing with oppressive forces, from the Europeans coming over and changing the land and enforcing apartheid, is the way you've taught that differed from the beginning of your teaching to now?

T: Is there a change in...

P: In how you teach Europeans coming over to Africa?

T: We don't teach that History, no.

P: You don't teach that? Hmm... and what are some of your personal goals for your students?

T: For my students? Is for them to achieve what's presents because as I'm saying with history I am told which subject they struggle with and it helps them, to pass. So I encourage them to apply to go to a university. I want them to go far, but because, of this, I get people to talk to them, and invite people to encourage them, but they don't have that. But, we find out, out of those that passed 10 percent go to university, even if some more have good reasons to go.

P: And what about textbooks? Do you use textbooks in your class?

T: we use textbooks, but mostly by paper. It's one of our problems. The reason being, things change after three years, because they change the syllabus. However when you go to the school you will find books of history, but they are not books you want to teach. As a result, there is a lot of problems when it comes to books.

P: So what are the other problems you feel you face as a teacher in a rural school? Do you feel your challenges are unique from those other schools?

T: Yes. One of the major challenges have been our school isn't disciplined. Our kids are not disciplined. Because I am teaching in rural area, you find out, they don't stay with their parents. Their parents are in other towns working. They stay alone, or with their siblings are running the house. Others are staying with grandmas and pas. So, you just have to be strong. That is quite alright, because our school is one of the schools that get top results every year. I'm trying, I'm trying. I'm trying, for them to receive good results. But at the end of the day, they sit there. Another challenge, is that though you're in this demographic government, they are trying to provide for most other things, but you find out that it is not enough as it could be.

V: My name is Vuyo Bikitsha, I work at the center,

T: Do you know me?

V: No, I don't.

V: This change in the syllabus, like what are you as teachers, or the teachers, have done about it, like, can you try to, to, protect it.

T: No, no, nobody has asked from us to change, I don't know the subject advisor, those that are above us. We as teachers are given the syllabus, and who are given the documents it is for me to know the topic. Sometimes you will be caught by the Subject Advisors to find the programs with this new syllabus. If it is not enough you will get an advisor to teach us about the programs. So we know exactly what we are doing.

V: So this change is based on the subject advisors feeling of...

T: As I'm saying it was for this change, for these three years it was for 2014, 2015, 2016, we are teaching this. It was for this, 13, 12, 11, it was something else. 17, 18, and 19 we will be teaching something new. I don't know how they come to a conclusion, let us change this to this, but not all the topics are changed. They are changing there, and there.

V: So has this worked better than the other...

T: Yes, because in the event your saying, if I don't know this topic (phone rings)

P: If you prefer one subject over the other...

T: At times we have the same topic. At times if you enjoy the same topic. A new something else will be introduced.

V: It will have the impact on the teachers...

T: On the teachers

V: Learners as well?

T: No, no what I'm saying that, learners, will not have a problem because the one I'm teaching this year they ask me who. So if you're teaching new learners that learner is very good, because they are encouraged to go to this. To colleges to try to pass. It is for the teacher to tell how the learner is doing with this new thing

V: How do you feel about the percent passing mark?

T: Oh! It's discouraging on the part of the teacher. It is very hard for them to go to 30%. As teachers it is very hard, but for the amount of kids you are teaching, they find it very difficult, to get that result.

V: Yeah cause I think it's It's not, not a good component, cause they have to pass with 50%

T: Usually those who pass with 30 or 50% they don't qualify for university.

P: Great, is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish, about your experience teaching?

T: No, I'm enjoying teaching. Teaching for the next 10 to 30 years. It's a profession I really like. With the exception that when it comes to the department of the government. There's not a current teacher. Otherwise it's a profession I really enjoy. I will retire in the next 2-3 years' time...

P: Are you retiring?

T: Yes.

P: Good. If you could talk to the government about how they could more support teachers

T: Support teachers

P: How would you do that? Like what kind of support would you want as a teacher, from the government?

T: I want so more than anything, you know we as teachers, you are a teacher, you are a social worker, you are a parent, as teachers you don't have a strategy, like I've said, as a teacher, you always meet new challenges every day. It's new, and that child is dependent on you. And they got that, my, my teacher, is going to help. But at times, you don't know how to help this child. You don't know what part to say, what more to say. I think, teachers, the government, if only they can see, a teacher is someone who is supposed to stand in front of the child, if only the government can support teachers, by taking them, as it used to be, before telling them to. In service training, and telling them, at the end of the day, oh I'm leaving. Telling them to come back time and again, trying to support. Even at 2pm telling learners, you find out you end up having problems from the school, problems from home, all these things, Most of the time, teachers have lost interest in this profession.

E: Is there an encouragement or support that you as a teacher, and other teachers give to one another? Is there a big teacher support system?

T: Teachers no, there are what we call subject advisors. It is that person who specializes, what their saying is true. They are strict, and it is then that they say this is what is taught, and nothing else. Not the problems we are having. There is no way to have the need to discuss about the problems you are encountering in the school, there is no such thing.

E: If you had the chance would you like to gather teachers at your school to talk about those problems?

T: Yes! So you can have mixed ideas about solutions so you know. And shared experiences. IF you like this profession then it will be interesting, otherwise, it is a boring profession. Most of the time teachers in South Africa are here to work salary. And you find out other problems with teachers. You found out that I will be retiring in two years' time. So the question of payment of the teachers is a problem.

P: And do you think what makes teaching boring in the past few years has to do with the curriculum standards?

T: Not necessarily you see because with the curriculum, you as a teacher are given the curriculum, you see that you are not allowed to dissect it. You are confronted to make them understand it. It is but a problem.

V: Now that you have been teaching so long, you were teaching before we became a free country, like how, has been the transformation you know from before 1994 to now?

T: Now has I've been saying, with this demographics, there was nothing serious with teaching, before democracy, your teaching was taken very seriously, even by government officials. Now, only concentrate to learners, they don't have that understanding of filling teachers interests. There are more to retired. Hence we have the learners rights, but there are no teachers rights. You clash heads and you find even the results, You find this years, is totally different then the one before democrats. Learners too are democratic, they have got freedom. That freedom makes them not to be serious, hence they are frustrated as their teachers, hence they find something that is very frustrating in teachers.

P: I think that's all the questions we have. Congrats on retiring soon, and on high passing rates in your class!

We just want to make sure that its ok with you that we use the footage that we took of you for our research. Would it be ok for us to use your research in the US. We will share it amongst our peers and the community. We would like you to print and sign your name on this form if that's ok.