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Moving beyond a destructive past to a decolonised and inclusive future: The role of *ubuntu*-style education in providing culturally relevant pedagogy for Namibia

Karen L. Biraimah[1]

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Abstract Namibia has one of the most dehumanising and destructive colonial pasts of any nation in Africa, or, for that matter, the world. Before colonisation, the area now known as Namibia was home to diverse cultural groups. The successive colonial regimes of Germany and South Africa inflicted genocide, brutality and apartheid on the region. Namibia finally fought for and won its independence in 1990 – over three decades after Ghana became the first independent sub-Saharan nation in 1957. Today, Namibia strives to leave behind its troubled past and harness the power of education to provide greater equality of opportunity and quality of life for all of its citizens. The concept of *ubuntu*, with its emphasis on inclusiveness, equity and equality, is central to Namibia's pursuit of this goal. Significant challenges stand in its way, including extreme poverty, an emerging economy struggling with drought and a competitive world market, and a populace with multiple mother tongues and cultural traditions. After a brief summary of Namibia's colonial past, this study examines these challenges, noting that the same factors that provide Namibia with a rich and diverse cultural tapestry also pose great difficulties for educators determined to provide equitable education for all. Current inequities in Namibian education are assessed, with a particular focus on the divide between urban and rural Namibia and between the four major ethnic and cultural groupings: the White Afrikaans speakers, the Black African majority, the Coloured population, and the Basters. The study concludes by suggesting multiple ways in which education could be brought closer into line with *ubuntu* values. The author argues that the very same factors that currently pose challenges to the quality and equity of Namibian education (ethnicity, urban/rural location, gender and socioeconomic

✉ Karen L. Biraimah
karen.biraimah@ucf.edu; kbiraimah@unam.na

[1] College of Education and Human Performance, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, USA

class) might, if seen from a new perspective, become the basis for educational transformation.

Keywords Cultural identity · *Ubuntu* · Inclusive education · Namibia

Résumé Entre passé destructeur et avenir décolonisé et intégrateur : le rôle d'une éducation de style Ubuntu pour élaborer une pédagogie adaptée à la culture en Namibie – La Namibie possède l'un des passés coloniaux les plus déshumanisants et destructeurs parmi les nations africaines ou même mondiales. Avant la colonisation, le territoire couvert aujourd'hui par la Namibie abritait plusieurs groupes culturels. Les régimes coloniaux successifs de l'Allemagne et de l'Afrique du Sud ont infligé à la région génocide, brutalité et apartheid. Le pays a finalement lutté avec succès pour son indépendance acquise en 1990 – plus de trois décennies après celle du Ghana, première nation subsaharienne devenue indépendante en 1957. Aujourd'hui, la Namibie s'efforce de laisser derrière elle son passé douloureux et d'exploiter le pouvoir de l'éducation afin d'accroître pour tous ses citoyens l'égalité d'accès et la qualité de vie. Le concept Ubuntu, qui met l'accent sur l'inclusion, l'équité et l'égalité, est décisif dans la poursuite de cet objectif par le pays. Sa démarche est cependant entravée par des défis considérables, dont une extrême pauvreté, une économie émergente freinée par la sécheresse et un marché mondial concurrentiel, et une population caractérisée par une multitude de langues maternelles et de traditions culturelles. Après une brève synthèse du passé colonial de la Namibie, la présente étude examine ces défis et constate que les mêmes facteurs apportent au pays un paysage culturel riche et diversifié, tout en posant de grandes difficultés aux éducateurs déterminés à dispenser à tous une éducation équitable. L'auteure procède à une évaluation des inégalités actuelles dans le système éducatif, en particulier la fracture entre la Namibie urbaine et rurale, et entre les quatre grands groupes ethniques et culturels : les locuteurs afrikaans blancs, la majorité noire africaine, la population métisse et les Basters (bâtards). L'auteure conclut en proposant de nombreuses façons de rapprocher davantage l'éducation des valeurs Ubuntu. Elle avance que précisément les facteurs qui posent actuellement des défis à la qualité et à l'équité de l'éducation en Namibie (appartenance ethnique, milieu urbain et rural, sexe et catégorie socioéconomique) pourraient, à condition d'être considérés dans une nouvelle perspective, constituer le point de départ d'une transformation de l'éducation.

Introduction: the impact of destructive colonisation and apartheid

Namibia's story did not begin with its "discovery" by European explorers, though its modern history involved painful and debilitating experiences under German, and later South African, colonisers. The land which was to become the country of Namibia in 1990 has experienced a long, diverse and challenging history. Rock paintings between 25,000 and 27,000 years old suggest that human occupation began in the Stone Age. Towards the end of the Stone Age, San hunter-gatherers began living in the area. About 2,600 years ago the pastoral Khoikhoi migrated in,

followed by Bantu-speaking people who settled in what is now northern Namibia. Other cultural groups, including the Herero and Oorlam Nama, settled in the central and eastern portions of the country in more recent times. Thus, Namibia was never "discovered" by Europeans, though they did eventually locate the area for themselves some 2,500 years later when a Portuguese explorer named Diego Cao approached what is now the Namibian coast in 1486.

It was not until two centuries later that colonisation encroached upon the land now known as Namibia, when Germany declared the area surrounding Lüderitz a protectorate in 1884. Initial attempts to instigate a "protection treaty" were unsuccessful, as Hendrik Witbooi (Chief of the Witbooi Nama) refused to sign the document. There followed attacks by German forces and a year of guerrilla warfare until the treaty was eventually signed in 1894. During the German colonial era which ensued, Namibians were systematically dispossessed of their land by German colonial administrators, leading to devastating wars, death and starvation for tens of thousands of Hereros and other indigenous groups. Following Germany's defeat in World War I, the League of Nations confirmed a South African mandate over what was then called South West Africa. In 1948 the policy of *apartheid* was applied not only throughout South Africa but within South West Africa as well. There were decades of armed resistance by the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and other national movements until Namibians finally won their independence in 1990 (see Coleman 2015; Kossler 2010; Leys 2005 and Wallace 2011).

The diverse cultural mosaic that defines modern Namibia

Namibia boasts a rich mosaic of cultural diversity. Based on recent census results Namibia had a population of 2.1 million in 2011, approximately 60% of whom lived in rural areas. In that same year 36% of the population was younger than 15 years of age, which has clear implications as regards the provision of quality education for all. Patterns of ethnic and language diversity within Namibia also affect the delivery of quality education. The nation currently includes eight major ethnic groups, three major racial groups, and 13 recognised national languages. Almost half of Namibia's population is Ovambo, and 48% speak OshiWambo. The remainder is comprised of seven other major African ethnic groups (37.2%), Coloured or Rehoboth Basters (6.6%), and English, German, Afrikaner, Portuguese or "other" ethnic groups (6.4%) (CIA 2015; NPC 2012; UNESCO 2015a, 2015b). Namibia is also notorious among African countries for having one of the greatest divisions between rich and poor. The challenge for Namibian educators is to use this rich pattern of diversity as a pedagogical strength, rather than letting it become an obstacle to quality education for all learners.

A recent report on poverty and inequality in Namibia (Republic of Namibia 2008) concluded that "Namibia ranks among the most unequal and polarised of societies in the world", and claimed that the country's poverty is primarily a product of inequality within rather than between different population groups. The poorest 10% of the population share only 2.4% of the country's wealth, whilst the richest

10% enjoy 42.0% (see Levine and Roberts 2013; Sherbourne 2013; UN News Centre 2012). Moreover, poverty in Namibia is "closely correlated with a series of social, demographic, geographic and economic features of households, [with high levels of poverty found in] households that are female-headed, based in rural areas and [having] one or more children […] these findings underscore the centrality of strengthening the education system as an integral part of the national poverty reduction strategy" (Republic of Namibia 2008, p. 39).

What *should* Namibia's goals be for eliminating discrimination and providing access to quality education?

The challenges Namibia faces, such as unequal and limited access to quality education, high unemployment, and high levels of poverty, are similar to those of many other emerging nations in Africa and elsewhere. Since independence Namibia has established succinct policies which respect the diversity of the nation. Chapter 3, Article 10 (2) of the Constitution (Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms; Equality and Freedom from Discrimination) states that: "No person may be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status" (Republic of Namibia 1990). Moreover, Namibia's constitution enshrines the right to an education, as stated in Chapter 3, Article 20 (1) (Education): "All persons shall have the right to an education" (ibid.).

Perhaps more important than these words, however, are the actions of the Government of Namibia, which continues to invest heavily in public education. The 2015 *EFA Global Monitoring Report* records that Namibia's expenditure on education was 21.1% of total government expenditure in 1999 and 23.7% in 2012. These rates exceed those for sub-Saharan Africa (14.8% in 1999 and 18.4% in 2012) and the world (13.8% in 1999 and 13.7% in 2012) (UNESCO 2015a, pp. 386–387). Moreover, the current *2015/16 National Budget* has earmarked 26.4% for education (representing N$ 15.4bn of N$ 58.4bn) (Ministry of Finance 2015).

The desire to make equitable access to quality education a national priority was reflected in President Geingob's recent *State of the Nation Address* (April 2015) when he stated that "Education remains the great equaliser" in Namibia. However, while Namibia has enshrined the principles of equality and the right to an education in its Constitution, fulfilling these lofty promises has proved to be far more challenging. The following discussion focuses on how factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic class, disability, language and mother tongue can present significant challenges to the goal of providing access to quality education for all.

Diversity and the current state of education in Namibia

Unfortunately, the same factors which make Namibia's cultural mosaic so rich and diverse can also limit learners' access to quality education. If students grow up in poverty, live in rural areas without access to quality schools, are disabled, or live in families without a legacy of sustained education, their chances of achieving a

quality education are extremely limited. Based on an annual overview of education in Namibia developed by Stellenbosch University (Van Wyk and Van der Berg 2015), it appears that Namibia has made significant progress towards its goal of quality education for all; yet significant hurdles remain.

Learner survival rates. UNESCO's *Global Monitoring Report* indicated that the survival rate for students enrolled in primary schools (through Grade 7) in Namibia was 84% in 2011 (UNESCO 2015a, p. 365). This compares favourably with the overall rates for sub-Saharan Africa which stood at 58% for the same period, though unfavourably with the rate of 95% in high income countries (ibid., p. 367). While the survival rates of Namibian learners through Grade 7 are admirable, those for Grade 8 and beyond show a significant decline.

Learner transition, dropout and repetition rates. Though 82% of Namibia's Grade 7 students transitioned to secondary school (i.e. were promoted to Grade 8), the dropout and repetition rates rapidly increased in Grade 8 and beyond, with the greatest dropout rates occurring during Grade 10. Chris van Wyk and Gervaas van der Berg (2015) indicate that Grade 1 enrolment was approximately 70,000 in 2014, but by Grades 11 and 12 this figure had declined to around 20,000. The 2011 dropout rate for Grade 10 learners (the point where students encounter their first "high stakes" exam) was 35%, compared to a dropout rate of 5% or less for pupils in Grades 1 to 7 (UNESCO 2015a, p. 372). Moreover, the highest pupil repetition rate in 2011 occurred in Grade 8, which was repeated by 34% of female students and 38% of male students (ibid.).

Urban-remote factors. While the high learner transition, dropout and repetition rates discussed above present a challenge throughout the country, they are even more severe in remote and rural areas. In 2009, only 14% of Grade 5 learners living in rural or remote areas passed English, compared to 52% of learners living in non-remote areas. The pattern is similar for mathematics, which was passed by 42% of learners in non-remote areas but only 20% in rural/remote areas (Van Wyk and Van der Berg 2015). Unfortunately, this gap has not diminished over the past few years. As Van Wyk and Van der Berg report, a significant urban–rural split persisted in 2012 with regard to mathematics and reading scores for Grade 7 learners. Students residing in cities (such as Windhoek of Walvis Bay) scored an average of 521 in mathematics and 572 in reading, while learners in isolated rural areas scored 448 and 464 respectively.

Two overarching conclusions. From these data, two tentative conclusions can be reached: (1) educational success rates in Namibia are strongly affected by where students live; and (2) rates of achievement for all students in Namibia remain unacceptably low. Clearly, in Namibia and elsewhere, the divisions imposed by race/ethnicity, class, gender, mother tongue and the like have had a negative impact on millions of children's chances of accessing quality education. The remainder of this paper will describe how these same factors could form the basis for more effective teaching and learning.

What *could be*: the role of *ubuntu*-style education in moving Namibia beyond current levels of poverty and inequality

Building upon these findings, Elizabeth Amukugo and her colleagues examined "Namibia's policy framework for long-term national development (*Vision 2030*)" and concluded that "the provision of quality education is an imperative for the realization of *Vision 2030*" (Amukugo et al. 2010, p. 109). The authors then discussed the meaning of quality education, reflecting on UNESCO's perspective that quality education should focus on learners' cognitive development and make reference to commonly shared values (UNESCO 2005a, p. 19). Amukugo and her co-authors expand on these ideas to fit the specific case of Namibia. Quality education in Namibia, they argue, requires: (1) "value for money", with more funds spent on actual educational activities and less on salaries and administration; (2) a qualified teaching staff able to ensure high achievement levels; and (3) low teacher/learner ratios; (4) high learner survival rates; and (5) the "creation of an environment conducive to learning, including responsible curricular content" (ibid., pp. 106–109).

While factors such as race/ethnicity, class, disability, gender and language often limit access to quality education, it is also possible for these factors to form the basis of quality education for all. This requires the creation of an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment reflective of President Geingob's (2015) vision of education as the great equaliser. We know that educators have the tools, skills and knowledge to bring about this transformation. Geneva Gay asserts that we are now in a position to transform cultural differences into assets, "… creating caring learning communities where culturally different individuals and heritages are valued" (Gay 2010, p. 31). In this way we can provide the transformational classrooms that every Namibian learner deserves.

To begin the process, this paper will now explore the goals, perspectives and applications of "*ubuntu*-style" education. Of course, for educators to have a lasting impact in their schools, they must first understand the theories that underscore the development of effective pedagogy and curricula. In other words, teachers must not simply apply recommended approaches to classroom instruction that they learned as teacher education students; they must also understand the theory behind these methodologies.

Potential pathways to quality education for all in Namibia through "*ubuntu*-style" pedagogy: the role of inclusive and culturally responsive instruction

Perspectives and goals of inclusive education

In Ángel Gabilondo's introductory comments to a recent work, he suggests that inclusive education means "pursuing excellence without sacrificing integration (and converting) schools into true learning communities, which could foster a sense of inclusion and mutual support" (Gabilondo 2011, p. 5). To this end Gabilondo suggests that inclusive schools must both integrate and celebrate diversity and

intercultural difference. Scholarship such as that of Elinor Brown has contributed to this notion by suggesting that inclusive education must provide a classroom environment which "adequately addresses student needs, validates diverse cultures, and advocates equitable access to educational opportunity for all" (Brown 2004, p. 325). Moreover, as Dena Samuels (2014), William Sanders (1998) and Sanders and Sandra Horn (1998) reiterate, culturally inclusive practices are critical to diverse student retention. Since "teacher quality impacts student achievement more than any other factor, including socioeconomic status and family background", a teacher's ability to enhance cultural inclusiveness within their classrooms will have a significant impact on student achievement and retention (Samuels 2014, p. 10).

Though much of the inclusive education literature initially emerged in Western nations, this pedagogical approach can also be applied worldwide. Based on Education for All, the *Global Monitoring Reports* and the Millennium Development Goals, UNESCO has defined inclusive education as "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education" (UNESCO 2005b, p. 13). A UNESCO-backed "Basic Education in Africa Programme" (BEAP) has helped implement inclusive education by emphasising the need for restructuring school practices in order to be responsive to the diverse needs of learners, with special attention paid to those at risk of being marginalised – a term which includes the lived realities of "orphans, poor children, displaced children, children with special needs and those suffering from HIV/AIDS" (Acedo et al. 2011, pp. 47–48). Building upon the key principle that "all learners should have equitable access to the same broad-based national basic education curriculum, and equal chances to complete the cycle and achieve core learning", BEAP states that "inclusion here means that all children and young people have equal opportunities of learning in the same school or in different types of schools, independent of their cultural and social backgrounds" (UNESCO BREDA 2009, p. 21).

Of course, inclusive education is not just a "feel-good" goal pursued by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), national, bilateral and multinational organisations, but rather an effective means of achieving extraordinary academic outcomes. A recent report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) regarding the Programme for International Assessment (PISA) results underscored the common-sense perspective that "in countries where there are fewer disparities within the education system, students tend to have better learning achievements" (OECD 2009, p. 220).

Perspectives and goals of culturally responsive instruction

In Namibia, the USA and elsewhere, far too many learners are underachieving. Whether this disappointing performance is linked to their race, ethnicity, language, disability, socioeconomic class, gender or a myriad of other factors, Gay (2010) suggests that "these disproportionally high levels of low achievement are long-term and wide-reaching … and are too devastating to be tolerable". She suggests that educators must stop this disempowerment by learning "to recognize, honour, and incorporate the personal abilities of students into their teaching strategies" (ibid., p. 1).

However, while culturally responsive instruction is a powerful agent of change, we should remember that it alone "cannot solve all the problems of improving the education of marginalized students". Other factors such as funding and policy-making must also be reformed in order to "eliminate the social, political and economic inequalities rampant in society at large" (Gay 2010, pp. 1–2, referencing Anyon 1997; Kozol 1991; Nieto 1999). Though the achievement of an equitable and fair society is a daunting task for every nation, Namibia's teachers can, within their own domains, directly and positively influence the quality of education they deliver to each of their learners. One means of achieving this goal is for educators to understand and implement culturally responsive instruction.

Describing the theoretical basis for culturally responsive instruction, Gay implores teachers to embrace the premise that "culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education" (Gay 2010, p. 8). Culture is a vibrant interrelated system which incorporates social values, cognitive learner perspectives, standards of behaviour, and the perceptions and beliefs that provide order to our lives and those of others worldwide (Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba 1991). In short, culturally responsive instruction insists that all learners will achieve greater educational outcomes when instruction includes and reflects their own cultural experiences. This means that current discontinuities between school culture and the learner's home culture and community are critically implicated in low achievement, particularly with regard to marginalised students. Conversely, it is anticipated that when their school's culture and curriculum and their teachers' pedagogy are built upon their own cultural and linguistic strengths, marginalised students' achievement will skyrocket.

In order for this to occur, teachers must have "unequivocal faith in the human dignity and intellectual capabilities of their students" and employ a pedagogy that "validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success" (Gay 2010, p. 46). According to Gay, teachers who embrace the concept of culturally responsive instruction must: a) demonstrate positive teacher attitudes and expectations for every learner; b) employ effective cultural communication within their classroom; c) include culturally diverse content in their lessons; and d) use instructional strategies that are congruent with their learners' cultures (ibid.).

While theoretical perspectives such as these are important for a critical analysis and redesign of curricula and pedagogy, the benefits of culturally responsive instruction for both educators and learners will only really accrue when theory and practice are clearly linked. The remainder of this paper therefore focuses on how these lofty theoretical goals can be actualised within Namibia's diverse classrooms.

Applying "*ubuntu*-style" pedagogy to ensure the role of education as the great equaliser in Namibian classrooms: six examples of inclusive and culturally responsive instruction

Culturally responsive caring in the classroom

While many educators believe *caring* to be a critical component of effective teaching, many are unable to clearly define or characterise it. Conventional wisdom

and best practice attest to the positive effect of caring classrooms on learner achievement – but what are the specific attributes of a caring teacher? Research (Mercado 1993; Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse 2006; Case and Hemmings 2005) continues to suggest that what teachers believe about their students directly influences the quality of their classroom instruction. Additional research is now available that provides concrete suggestions of what "*ubuntu*" pedagogy focusing on the development of culturally responsive and caring classrooms might look like. Gay suggests that culturally responsive and caring classrooms are ones in which teachers: a) exhibit patience with all students, regardless of their ability or cultural background; b) recognise and reward student persistence to continue, regardless of frustrations and setbacks; c) facilitate learners' ability to understand; and d) validate and acknowledge the worth and value of every learner in their classroom (Gay 2010, pp. 53–58).

Inclusion of early childhood care and education

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is often defined as "socialization, education and readiness for school, as well as the provision of basic health care and adequate nutrition, nurturing and stimulation within a caring environment for children" (Gertsch 2009, p. 4). Research has shown that quality ECCE can enhance a child's chances not only of participating, but of succeeding in school and in life (Heckman et al. 2010; Asian Development Bank 2010). For example, better health and nutrition for learners also helps to neutralise socio-economic inequalities in society. This is particularly applicable to Namibia and other emerging nations. Early intervention by quality ECCE can negate multiple socio-economic inequalities and disadvantages which, in the past, have inhibited children from accessing quality education. (Of course, the quality of individual programmes must be assessed before a positive impact on learners' future educational and life experiences can be assumed.) Unfortunately, "less than 12% of African children currently have access to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) services" (UNESCO 2016). In Namibia the prospects are not much better. In 1999 (the most recent data reported in the 2015 EFA Global Monitoring Report), only 33% of five- and six-year-olds in Namibia were enrolled in pre-primary education. In comparison, sub-Saharan pre-primary educational enrolment stood at 11% in 1999, as against 72% in high income countries (UNESCO 2015a, pp. 340, 342).

Inclusion of mother-tongue instruction to achieve effective and equitable education

It is indisputable that mother-tongue instruction can improve learning outcomes in multiple ways. First, the use of mother-tongue instruction enhances parental support of children's learning and communication between the child's home and their school. Second, from a more pedagogical perspective, Adetunberu and Oluwafoise (1992) posit that mother-tongue instruction has a positive impact on cognitive abilities. Third, learners who receive mother-tongue instruction in primary school experience a smoother transition into secondary and higher education (Iyamu and Ogiegbaen

2007). Fourth, the use of mother-tongue instruction helps bridge the gap between home/society and school/society, thus contributing to a higher degree of social and political harmony (Acedo et al. 2011. p. 51). Finally, research (Brock-Utne 2007) finds a strong link between achievement in second language skills (such as English or French) and initial grounding of literacy skills in the learner's first language.

Despite these proven advantages, comprehensive and appropriate mother-tongue instruction remains an unrealised goal in Namibia, even though Ministry of Education guidelines stipulate that all learners should begin school in their mother tongue before transitioning to English. This is because many learners are unable to understand what their teachers are saying (as the teacher's mother tongue is often not the learners' mother tongue), and because most primary school workbooks and materials are in English. The lack of quality mother-tongue instruction often reduces the teaching process to teacher-centred rote learning, which excludes most learners from equitable access to quality education.

Clearly, some of these problems might be corrected if teachers were assigned to areas where their own mother tongue was also the language of instruction. However, this is unlikely to occur in the near future, as the Namibian Ministry of Education continues to assign teachers to schools nationwide, often without regard to language alignment. Moreover, teachers need to be trained in how to teach these languages and/or how to teach effectively when the students' mother tongue is the language of instruction. At present the University of Namibia is not graduating enough primary education majors with these language skills, and quality educational materials in learners' own languages have yet to be developed. Thus, even though the Namibian government announced in 2014 that using mother tongue as the language of instruction was to be extended through Grade 5, with the transition to English being delayed until Grade 6, implementation of this policy remains a distant goal.

Quality workbooks and other educational materials in learners' mother tongues are clearly an essential ingredient in the provision of quality instruction in primary schools. However, local educators and linguists must also critically examine how local languages were first recorded. It appears that the Western missionaries who undertook this work often did not understand the division between multiple indigenous languages and dialects, and therefore passed on errors that need to be addressed if learners are to be provided with quality educational materials. For example, in northwest Namibia, where most of the indigenous populations live and where several OshiWambo dialects are spoken, Western missionaries wrote the two dialects, OshiNdonga and OshiKwanyama, as if they were separate languages, when in fact they are dialects of the same language (Prah 2008). OshiNdonga was first recorded by Finnish missionaries, OshiKwanyam by German missionaries. Interestingly, there are other OshiWambo dialects which are far more different than the OshiKwanyama and OshiNdonga so-called "languages" (Brock-Utne 1995, 1997; Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir 2001; Laukkanen 2009). Clearly, linguists and certified mother-tongue instructors need to assess the quality of written materials to ensure that learners are exposed only to those that are current and accurate, and not to poor quality materials that reflect Western missionaries' lacunary understanding of Namibian languages.

Namibian educators must also realise that the increasing popularity of English-medium primary schools (for those who can afford such an elite education) not only

ignores the positive impact of quality mother-tongue instruction on young learners, but remains a questionable policy considering the lack of primary school teachers who have a strong command of the English language. These issues call into question the true quality of education received by learners who attend English-medium primary schools.

Assuming that the Ministry of Education and the University of Namibia can address these monumental challenges and implement mother-tongue instruction at primary school level, the country will begin to move towards a more inclusive and culturally relevant education for all of its primary school learners, which will then enhance their access to quality education at higher levels.

Culturally diverse curriculum content

Research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s (Apple 1985; Wade 1993) found that textbooks formed the basis of 70% to 95% of all classroom instruction. Though the infusion of computers into classroom instruction has reduced the dependence on textbooks somewhat, they still remain the most influential teaching tool. According to Gay, "most students consider their authority to be incontestable and the information they present always to be accurate, authentic, and absolute truth … [when] called upon to defend the validity of their explanations and understandings of issues, students often respond, 'Because the book said so'" (Gay 2010, p. 129). Unfortunately, in many societies, school textbooks continue to be controlled by the dominant group (for example, European-Americans in the USA), and therefore reinforce that group's values, contributions and preferred knowledge base. Moreover, as textbooks usually maintain an uncontested authority and pervasiveness throughout schools, it is critical that we understand the degree to which they do, or do not, value and encourage cultural diversity and inclusivity.

In order to assess the degree to which textbooks in Namibia reflect and enrich the nation's cultural diversity, the representation of factors such as ethnicity/race, gender, age, socioeconomic status and disability in a randomly selected textbook were analysed. The textbook selected was *English for All for Namibia, Grade 5* (Long and Gardner 2007). This book underwent content analysis based on established protocols (Silver 1986–1987; Strahan and Herlihy 1985), focusing on the overall content of each reading section. The race/ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, gender and age of characters within the book were scrutinised. Ideally, in order for curriculum to be culturally inclusive, textbook topics and characters should reflect a cross-section of the Namibian population. The results of the analysis are summarised in the following section. They reveal the degree to which textbooks, as a proxy for curriculum, reflect inclusiveness and equity. Though multiple analyses were conducted, for brevity's sake only an overview will be discussed.

Analysis of the gender, age and disability of characters in the textbook

Whether within the text or in illustrations, far fewer female than male characters were represented in this textbook. 63 characters (55.8%) were male and only 50

(44.2%) female. In illustrations the imbalance was even greater: the book contained pictures of 81 male characters (65.9%) and only 41 female characters (34.1%). Perhaps understandably in a book designed for young readers, elderly people were represented by only seven illustrated characters (6.2%). Individuals with disabilities were not represented at all, either in the text or the illustrations. (No attempt was made to identify ethnicity within the text, as insufficient written or illustrative data were presented to make an informed decision.)

Analysis of characters' roles according to gender

To assess the roles of male and female characters in the textbook, two key dimensions were recorded: a) the number and variety of male and female roles; and b) an analysis of these roles. As with the number of characters in the book, the number of different roles portrayed by male characters was greater than that portrayed by female characters: 14 (58.3%) as opposed to 10 (41.7%). Similarly, in the illustrations, male characters were portrayed in 13 different roles (61.9%) as compared to 8 roles (38.1%) for female characters.

Perhaps even more important than the number of different roles portrayed by male and female characters, however, is the nature of these roles. Males in the written text were depicted in a wide variety of largely positive roles, such as gods, kings, heroes, famous sports figures, TV stars, students, fathers and boyfriends. Female characters, on the other hand, were usually characterised as relatives (daughters, mothers, girlfriends, etc.), students, or travellers (though a few were also portrayed as TV stars, authors, teachers and victims). A similar pattern of role distribution between male and female characters was also identified in the illustrations. Males were most often illustrated as students, sports stars, chiefs, gods, firemen, warriors and hunters, while females were most often depicted studying, performing domestic chores (cooking, sewing, etc.), or playing games such as hopscotch. Few elderly individuals were portrayed in any roles at all (with the exception of grandmother and grandfather).

Content analysis

In order to move beyond an analysis of characters to a more general discussion of textbook content, each chapter was analysed to determine its overall theme. Cultural, historical and geographic content was taken into account, as was the representation of various socioeconomic classes and activities. This analysis revealed that 10 of the 19 chapters (52.6%) included references to African or Namibian heritage, culture, history and oral traditions, and/or to lower socioeconomic roles within African or Namibian society, while 9 did not. Those chapters that did reference African/Namibian heritage focused on themes such as a) the importance of knowing about your ancestors, family and history; b) the importance of knowing and passing down African/Namibian folktales and praise poems; and c) current issues related to Namibian sports teams and tourism. Nearly half of these chapters represented the lifestyles of Namibia's urban and relatively well-educated middle class; many also featured non-African content such as bridges in Europe.

Topics included: 1) the importance of beauty and clothes when attending an urban birthday party; 2) learning to play hopscotch; 3) learning how to bake chocolate squares; 4) the importance of tunnels in Western societies (and wars); and 5) how to read a TV guide. Needless to say, such topics have little relevance to the lives of students coming from homes without electricity or other urban creature comforts. Rural and/or poor students, and students from communities with few professionally employed adults, were conspicuously absent from the textbook's representations. If this 5th Grade Reader is anything to go by, it is therefore to be expected that such students may not feel included or culturally represented within the curriculum. Only the final segment of the book, which focused on how to survive a fire, had clear relevance to all segments of Namibia's population.

Inclusion of learners with disabilities

The World Education Forum met in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 to set a goal of achieving Education for All (EFA) by 2015. Though this goal was not fully achieved, it remains a landmark attempt to bring into the educational mainstream groups that have been excluded and marginalised throughout history, including girls, those living in poverty, ethnic minorities, and children with disabilities (Kalyanpur 2011, p. 1053). Also in 2002, the World Bank presented the Millennium Development Goals as another means of implementing EFA, and "argued that disability, being both a cause and a consequence of poverty, needed to be targeted specifically in any development efforts" (ibid.).

A summary of the Education for All achievements as of 2015 suggests a dismal track record for educating children with disabilities worldwide. A recent UNESCO summary reported that: "Between 93 million and 150 million children are estimated to live with disabilities, which increases their risk of being excluded from education. In developing countries, disability tends to be linked with poverty, and it hinders access to education even more than socio-economic status, rural location or gender. Girls with disabilities can be especially marginalized" (UNESCO 2015c, p. 23). The reasons for this exclusion can be traced to a lack of understanding regarding various disabilities and the needs of the disabled child, a lack of appropriate teacher training and facilities, and "discriminatory attitudes towards disability and difference" (ibid.). These results echo earlier research conducted by Plan International (2013) which underscored the plight of disabled children in attempting to access the same quality of education as their non-disabled peers. Plan International reported that: "1) children with disabilities are substantially less likely to attend school than children without disabilities; 2) when children with disabilities do attend school, their level of schooling is below that of their peers; and 3) children with disabilities are much more likely to have had a serious illness in the last 12 months, including malnutrition, than children without disabilities" (ibid., p. 6).

While these three major findings are sobering data for educators intent on providing access to quality education for all learners, teachers in Namibia and elsewhere can help to minimise the second finding, which suggests that disabled children in the classroom currently receive substandard instruction compared to their non-disabled peers. Whenever possible, teachers need to understand the

reasons for non-attendance, “as the likelihood that a child with a disability did not attend school was often ten times greater than that for a child without a disability” (Plan International 2013, p. 24). However, the greatest reason for disabled children’s absence from school was not lack of access, but exclusion from appropriate schooling due to their disability. Moreover, “the inclusion of children with disabilities is highest for those with vision or hearing impairments and lowest for those with learning, physical or communication impairments … This indicates that the level of exclusion can be linked to the type of impairment” (ibid., p. 26). Across the world, even when children with disabilities are enrolled in school, “they are generally at a lower level of schooling than their non-disabled peers of the same age” (ibid.). This suggests that those disabled children who do enrol in school do not access equitable education, and thus do not progress with their peers.

Clearly, adaptive education, special training, and economic investment in equipment and materials that provide more equitable access for disabled children in the classroom are essential. The United Nations Social Development Network reported that in 2012 Namibia “launched a five-year *National Agenda for Children* with special emphasis on children with disabilities, to address situations where as many as half the children with disabilities receive no schooling” (UNSDN 2012, p. 1). It also noted that Namibia had ratified the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* in 2007. However, according to UNSDN, “despite these policies for inclusive education, in reality the majority of Namibian children with disabilities appear to be attending special schools or not accessing education” (ibid.). Moreover, “a ‘disability policy audit’ by the Southern African Federation of the Disabled, conducted in 2008, shows that as many as 50 per cent of children with disabilities never attended primary education, especially in rural areas” (ibid.). This situation remains unresolved, at least in the Zambezi Region, as a newspaper report of 14 October 2014 describes: “There is widespread disregard for children living with disabilities in Zambezi Region where barriers in school settings such as inaccessible buildings and lack of specially trained teachers, often puts disabled children at a disadvantage” [*sic*] (New Era 2014). The same article also notes that even though the Namibian Ministry of Education has an inclusive education policy, no special schools have been identified in the Zambezi Region, where the Namibian Statistics Agency has indicated that there are approximately 4,000 disabled individuals, mostly in the more remote areas.

The dilemma for emerging nations is that special education often has a much higher cost per pupil than educating a non-disabled student. Moreover, regardless of the time and funds invested, there is no guarantee that the cost-benefit ratio will ever equal that for the non-disabled child. Educators need to set aside the issues of cost and availability of appropriate educational opportunities for disabled students, and reflect from first principles on what an *ubuntu* pedagogy for the inclusion of such students might mean.

Effective pedagogy for teaching students living in poverty

Given the level of poverty in Namibia and throughout the world, teachers can and must recognise that education can act as a great equaliser, provided that it focuses

on children's resilience, not their deficits (Gorski 2013, p. x). Those who focus on the latter often conclude that the poor are intellectually, culturally and spiritually inferior, taking their poverty as evidence of these deficiencies. Teachers' expectations of poor learners' abilities are correspondingly low. If, instead, teachers learn to recognise the resilience of children who thrive under extremely challenging circumstances, then education can become a tool for redressing the balance and providing more equitable opportunities for all children. In this way, educators will view low-income families as robust and worthy, rather than as laden with deficits.

To this end, Paul Gorski suggests adopting an "Equity Literacy" approach, which closely parallels President Geingob's (2015) vision of education as the great equaliser. For Gorski, educational equity should include "the skills and dispositions that enable (teachers) to recognize, respond to and redress conditions that deny some students access to the educational opportunities enjoyed by their peers" (Gorski 2013, p. 19). Gorski suggests that teachers who wish to provide equitable education for all their learners, including the most destitute, should recognise: (1) that the right to equitable educational opportunity is universal (though enormous gaps in school funding guarantee that the most economically vulnerable learners are denied this basic right); (2) that poverty does not exist in a vacuum, but rather is linked to factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability and other identities; and (3) that poor people are diverse, and that the notion of a "culture of poverty", implying that all poor individuals share the same culture and values regarding education, is simplistic. Internalising and living by these ideas will require most teachers to adjust their beliefs about the poor and to discard a number of biases and prejudices. Only then will they be able to teach poor students effectively. Moreover, according to Gorski, teachers will not understand the relationship between poverty and education until they understand the biases and inequities experienced by people living in poverty. They must recognise that poverty is a complex problem linked to multiple social issues such as unequal access to health care and a lack of jobs offering a living wage. Finally, educators need to understand that test scores are inadequate measures of educational attainment, as they do not take into account differential access to facilities such as libraries or educational materials in the home, school health care, or a parent's educational attainment and socioeconomic status, all of which have a significant bearing on a student's academic performance.

In sum, it is clear that disparities between rich and poor learners are the result of inequities, not cultural differences. Educators determined to promote an *ubuntu* pedagogy need to recognise this and value the resilience of students living in poverty, rather than focusing on their stereotypical deficiencies. While these perspectives provide the means for educators to provide a more equitable education to all their students, including the poor, they may also challenge the current dispositions and pedagogy of teachers worldwide. However, given the current inequities in Namibia and throughout the world, the time for embracing such *ubuntu*-inspired pedagogy is long overdue.

Concluding remarks

Inclusive and culturally responsive instruction cannot be bought; it can only be achieved through the skills and dispositions of educators who insist that every child reach their full potential. The perspectives discussed above are closely in line with *ubuntu* philosophy, which holds that education is a fundamental right of all children worldwide, and must be characterised by both inclusiveness and equality. Clearly, Namibia and other emerging nations cannot afford to lose the talents and contributions of their youth, regardless of race/ethnicity, class, gender, language or disability. All learners have talents, and all must be provided with an education which transforms these nascent qualities into lived realities that help to build a nation.

These fundamental notions also echo the basic concept of equality entrenched in Namibia's constitution. However, while such lofty objectives are easily articulated, their application remains far more challenging. If teachers within Namibia and worldwide are truly concerned about the achievement of every learner (particularly the marginalised), they must seriously consider adopting an inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms. This is a tremendously difficult task, but it is often the greatest challenges that afford the greatest rewards.

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The author

Karen Biraimah is Professor of Comparative Education and Director of International and Special Programs at the University of Central Florida, and served as a Fulbright Senior Scholar at the University of Malaya, Kenyatta University, and the University of Namibia. Prior to these experiences she was a Peace Corps Volunteer teacher in Ghana, and a faculty member at the University of Ife, Nigeria. She is Past-President of the Comparative and International Education Society with research interests that focus on issues of educational equity based on factors of race, ethnicity, class and gender within the context of comparative and international education.