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Identifying Who Students Really Are

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ABSTRACT

Students come to school to learn. They are taught by teachers or their trainers. Not only are the students taught new things but they also have something in them that teachers might or might not realise. At Devare Adventist High School in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, the use of Tok Pisin and vernacular is common. English is not spoken widely except in the classroom as means of communication between the teacher and the student. The students lack English reading and speaking skills, but they still produce good work. This paper will discuss the reasons for why this happens.

INTRODUCTION

Who are the students?

Students are those “who are engaged in a course of study and instruction, as at a college, university, or professional or technical school.” (The Macquarie dictionary)

This is a brief study about the students of Devare Adventist High School in Bougainville. It reflects on how the students with different cultural backgrounds are able to focus on their education.

Most of these students are teenagers and it took patience and courage to mould them on how they would become in the future. Malpo said that head teachers are agents of change. She also said that “Schools are being set up to teach the skills, attitudes and values required for young people to develop into adults contributing to our society (Malpo, 2011, p.169).

This was how the students of Devare were being taught. They do theory and practical work. The practical work was specifically through the subject of Agriculture where students learn how to farm the land.

IDENTITY OF STUDENTS

The students of Devare High School are mostly Adventist students. They come from Adventist primary schools all around Bougainville. However, there are also other church denominations attending the school. The students socialise a lot with their peers in their own cultural groups.

The cultural groups, starting from North Bougainville to the South Bougainville, are:

- 1) Buka/Atolls
- 2) Taonita Teop Tinputz
- 3) Wakunai
- 4) Kieta
- 5) Nagovis/Siwai/Torokina Kunua/Kereaka and
- 6) Buin.

The school is located at Inus in the Tinputz District but the highest number of students enrolled at the school come from Buin and Kieta Districts.

Activities done in school

Apart from school work, the students do morning charges, work line very Monday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoon. They play sport very Tuesdays. They attend church activities which include morning devotion and evening worship, as well as observing the Sabbath.

Teaching is a ministry in which there is passion for teaching and correcting the right from wrong, so we encourage students to take part in devotions and worship, so they grow spiritually. Bugbee and Cousins explained that the gift of teaching is the divine enablement to understand, clearly explain and apply the Word of God, causing greater Christlikeness in the lives of listeners (2005, p. 93).

The work line given to them in class was not done well when given in their cultural groups. This also applied to sports, cooking and worship. They take pride in their cultural groups, as they tell where they come from and what they used to do, so they perform best in their groups. It also makes communication easier for them.

Some people often recommend teaching vernacular language to students when they saw the importance of it. In fact, Bishop Navarre had stressed, among his directives to teachers, the importance of teaching local languages (Aerts, 1998, p.133).

Aerts further explained that students who have been having lessons in vernacular at the early stages of their schooling have been able to read, speak and write proper English.

Even though the students in Devare Adventist High School don't speak English as their first language, the use of vernacular has helped develop the understanding they have in their work.

Cultural groups

Cultural groups were set up for students to do sometimes work line and other activities but most of the time it is used for Sunday evening cultural worship. After worship the students advise themselves or discuss issues affecting their group.

Advice was given in English, Tok Pisin or their own vernacular. Advice was given to them by their cultural patrons or matrons, their cultural prefects and any other ordinary student who wishes to raise a point for discussion affecting the cultural group members.

Bougainville Day

The school never did cultural shows. On the 16th of June 2016, the school decided to do something to celebrate the Bougainville Day.

The students presented their items in their own cultural groups. We realised that some students have the background knowledge of their culture but never practised it unless given the chance to do so.

It took the students two days to practise and prepare their dance attire but they managed to give it their best shot.

These are the shots captured during the Autonomous Region of Bougainville Day.



1. Buka, Atolls Cultural Group

The boys performed a bird dance while the girls performed a Solomon dance. The Atolls girls performed their own dance.



The girls sang and beat the bamboo while the boys did their dance. When it was the girls turn, the boys sang while the girls did their dance.



With the Atolls girls, there were only three girls attending the school so one of them sang and beat the bamboo while the other two girls performed the dance.

2. Taonita Teop Tinputz Cultural Group

The Tinputz Taonita group are known to students as the land owners of the school.



They were given the honour to be the first presenters. The students did a bamboo dance in which they walk around in circles tapping the bamboo on the ground.

3. Wakunai Cultural Group



The Wakunai group were known to be the fore fathers of the provincial symbol on the Bougainville flag: the 'Upe'. The Upe is a traditional hat or sacred crown that is being protected when being worn.

Here the Wakunai students walk around a student who is wearing the 'Upe' as the girls chant their song with high pitch voices. The boys agree in murmuring sound blowing bamboo flutes while another boy blows the conch shell.

Most staff and students who have no idea how the people of Wakunai protected the Upe were able to catch a little glimpse of what this group presented through their brief presentation.



4. Kieta Cultural Group

The Kieta group got did their best both in their song and dressing. Most of the students went in to full swing with traditional dressing. Observers watching had their minds wondering back home to their villages when this group came out to perform.

Although it was difficult to find the right type of flutes to be blown, the boys were creative enough to at least make some flutes within a day to be ready for presentation.



5. Nagovis, Siwai, Torokina, Kunua, Kereaka Cultural Group



This group did their presentation on bride prize ceremony that is normally done in their own area. From the presentation, one could tell that though they are young, these students know how it (custom) was in their areas.



6. Buin Cultural Group



The Buin students also did bride prize payment. Their drama demonstrates how bride prize is done in their area. It is different to the other cultures too.



STUDENTS AS LEARNERS

Students are always eager to learn. They try their best to at least learn something when being taught. Things to do with their culture are not new to them, as most students come from villages in which much of their culture is being taught to them by their parents or community elders.

The need to be educated is something which is driving these students to press on, no matter what happens. Most are looking ahead and dreaming of what they want to achieve in the future, so they make good use of the opportunity they have while they are at Devare.

According to Goasa on level 2 of classification of effective outcomes, students have three responses to educational experience:

- 2.1 Obedience in responding- the student not only pays attention, He agrees to respond to it; perhaps he does so because of fear of being punished if he does not do so. He is obedient but not self-motivated.
- 2.2 Willingness to respond- the student is prepared to respond on a Voluntary basis; he or she is co-operative and not merely obedient.
- 2.3 Satisfaction in responding- the student responds even more positively; the student likes what he or she is doing. (Goasa, 2012, p.21)

When they are given the help needed, they sometimes give the best of the work expected by them, e.g., story and poetry writing, producing a leaflet, posters, etc., and outside activities like work line, sports and leading in church worship. Singing is an art that never needs practice and is the students' favourite.

A collection of the school's anthology is underway to publication. Most of the stuff in that book is writings that students have been taught to do in classes during their lessons.

Other activities done in school



A total of 19 students were baptised in June this year. The whole school and the stakeholders were there to witness the baptism program.



Workline is important as much as any school activity done by students. If students don't do workline then the school will have to spend more on labour as the school owns large farms which need a lot of labour. There are pawpaw, banana, pineapple, and cocoa farms, as well as coconut and forestry.

Johns (2002), when writing Hosea Linge's biography, said that most students often complain about the work given to them, especially if it is a project. Linge, who was a teacher in 1929, set up the Vunairima College with the help of the students clearing the land.

The students of Devare do the same thing. No work means no gain, as the saying goes, so students just met with the expectations expected of them. They were being taught mentally, physically, socially and spiritually.

CHALLENGES AFFECTING STUDENTS LEARNING

a)

b) Students often find it hard to speak English in school. They are very good in their own vernacular. However, due to the influence of Tok Pisin, the lack of understanding in comprehending also rises. Thus, this affects students who are not so keen in their vernacular and who tend to mix Tok Pisin with their vernacular.



c) Reading skills are also lacking, as students stick more often to mobile phones. Mobile phones have their advantages and disadvantages. Some students, who have access to mobile phones, often spend too much time on social network, such as FB or Whatsapp, or listening to music.

Bugbee and Cousins (2005) said that networking in God's ministry creates a place of service as long as believers are fruitful and can fulfil their obligation as servers.

Students, who get their minds set on certain ambitions, also reach their destiny. Most students also find it hard to grab a book, as the book which is of interest to them is not available. Those who develop the passion for reading, continue the same trend; others, who are bit reluctant, misuse their free time, fiddling with their mobile phones.

Thus, there is a great need for new reading books, especially fiction books. Yet, students do own a bible (World Changers) and they are encouraged to read them. In fact, most of the lessons done are often related back to the bible which is the original source of everything. It is a must that students register in the beginning of the year with a bible.

STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Ninety-seven Grade 10 students wrote a personal letter to their loved ones about their view of the school. The letters were not posted but were used as a questionnaire.

Here is the letter:

Write a personal letter to your parents, guardians or loved ones, telling them about your stay at Devare Adventist High School. In your letter, tell them:

- how you felt when you first arrived here,
- what your favourite subjects are,
- the type of food being prepared here,

and tell them your views about Devare Adventist High School.

The results gathered from the letter answered were listed and then grouped into three questions and analysed.

Question 1:

What is your favourite subject?

This is the tally of what the students favour. Favourite subjects being taught:

English-49 students

Maths-43 students

Science-31 students

Social Science-35 students

Business Studies-23 students

Agriculture-16 students

Bible-7 students

The 97 students did not favour only one subject. Some of them favoured more than one subject.

Question 2:

What is your view about the food being served at the mess?

Students view about the food.

Best food served-45 students

Food not best-26 students

26 students forgot to state their view about the food or they just didn't want to talk about it.

Question 3:

What is your view about your stay at Devare?

Students general view of Devare Adventist High School

Positive views-89 students

Negative views-8 students

92 % of the students who wrote the personal letter still think Devare is one of the best schools. They each gave their own point of view.

8% did not like being at Devare but for the sake of learning they are here. They also expressed their own dislikes.

RECOMENDATIONS

1. If students still have difficulty in speaking English in their own free time, one solution is to turn to reading. But the question of getting the right type of books to suit the students' interest still hangs like a vine still growing long. The problem will be solved if only students produce their own reading books based on the lessons they have in class. Yet, the difficulty of getting them published is another issue.
2. Speaking in vernacular and translating to English worked well with some students. Aerts (1998) found out that when students started learning in their own vernacular, they could read, speak and write English very well compared to the other schools of their time.

However, not all students are good at this, except for those who can easily translate vernacular directly to English. For those who speak Tok Pisin, the spelling is often mixed up with that of an English word.

CONCLUSIONS

When God created us, He imparted the knowledge to us. It is up to us to shape that to become who we want to be in the future. If we want to change and shift from one dimension to another, then the decision lies within ourselves. Students come to school to learn and, once exposed to something naturally good in terms of learning, they easily fit in.

Sometimes we are too ignorant in adjusting to what is happening around us. This is similar to the students. When they are taught in a way which makes them give up learning, they lose the passion for educating themselves and turn to illicit drugs or misbehaviours.

Sometimes we, facilitators, are too busy with our own world of teaching, and we forget to identify the potential our students have. All in all, the classroom is a world filled with curious faces with different questions in mind about to explode in terms of finding the right answers. But when the questions are being answered, there is always a smile, when one is happy at finding the right solution to a problem.

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