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FAMILY LITERACY: ATTITUDES OF PARENTS TOWARDS READING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IN BOTSWANA

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Abstract

The paper surveys the attitudes of parents to reading in two rural communities of Thamaga and Letlhakeng in Botswana. Data for the study was collected from 107 semi-literate and illiterate respondents – 60 for Letlhakeng and 47 for Thamaga - mainly women, through a 16-item questionnaire that contained questions about the respondent's families' interest in reading, reading interests and attitudes.

The respondents have very positive attitudes to reading and are able to read in English and/or Setswana, the local language. Many of the respondents have reading interests that differ somewhat radically from their children's. Nevertheless, they, including those who are completely illiterate, encourage their children to read. This is to ensure, not surprisingly, that their children acquire for themselves a life that is educationally, economically and socially better than theirs.

Introduction

This paper surveys the attitudes of parents towards reading in two rural communities in Botswana: Letlhakeng village and Thamaga village. The survey is important because the family is now acknowledged to play a vital role in the literacy development of children. As Morrow (1995:6) notes, "Parents are the first teachers their children have, and they are the teachers that children have for the longest time." Therefore, as she (ibid) further rightly observes, "Parents or other caregivers are potentially the most important people in the education of their children". However, there are, to the best of our knowledge, no clearly defined family literacy programs that have been developed or are being used in Botswana to educate parents on the importance of reading to their children and to ensure the adequate development of children within the family. What is clearly defined is, as Maruatona (2002:738) notes, "...a large-scale national adult literacy program" which according to him "has been in operation since 1980." Because of the centralized nature of the curriculum (Maruatona, 2002: 740), the program does not reflect the varied geographical, cultural and social differences that exist in the country. In any case, as the program addresses family literacy issues tangentially, it is not central to the discussion in this paper.

Given the foregoing, it is necessary, at least initially, to survey what the attitudes of parents to family literacy are. The context in which the project would yield interesting results is that of the rural areas which in Africa lack the kind of resources associated with them in the developed world. In addition, the high volume of literacy activities in the urban areas of

Botswana precludes them from the study. More specifically, the study further aims at discussing the relationship between such factors as parents' educational attainments, parents and children's interest in reading, materials which children and parents read and those that their parents read and prefer their children to read. These factors, among others, collectively suggest the attitudes of the parents. 'Attitude' itself is also explicitly discussed. The discussion would show that the families in the rural areas used in this study provide a realistic literacy profile of rural parents that can form the basis on which viable family literacy programs can be based. Such a profile would also be interesting especially to the government and non-governmental organizations that are intimately involved with the provision of literacy to various groups in different parts of Botswana.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: section two reviews relevant literature on family literacy; section three looks at the methodology used in the collection and analysis of the data; section four presents and discusses the findings of the study; and section five concludes the study.

Review of literature

Family literacy is a relatively new area of research. One of the major issues that almost all researchers, especially the early researchers, tackled was the question: what is family literacy? Thomas, Fazio and Stiefelmeyer (1999:5) describe family literacy as:

... the natural, spontaneous literacy activity in which all families engage. It also refers to a wide spectrum of research related to families and their uses of literacy, and to institutional initiatives directed at assisting families in their literacy development.

However, as Morrow (1995) rightly observes, family literacy is a complex concept that precludes a simple definition. In view of the diverse views on the subject, the International Reading Association Commission (1994) on Family Literacy identified key elements involved in it. Five of these elements directly relevant to our paper are that family literacy:

- encompasses the ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community;
- occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children "get things done";
- may be initiated purposefully by a parent, or may occur spontaneously as parents and children go about the business of their daily lives;
- may reflect the ethnic, racial, or cultural heritage of the families involved; and
- may involve among many activities reading and writing.

Generally, research has flowed around the key issues identified by the International Reading Association. Thomas et al (1999) identify five major areas of research. The first is research into oral language as the basis of literacy learning. Quite a number of researchers, especially Wells (1981, 1986 and 1987) have studied this aspect. Well (1986), for example, has found that the frequency of experiences related to children's listening to stories ... was one of the strongest predictors to the children's later achievement in reading and oral language. Research on the family as educator has centred on the question of how families carry out the function of literacy teaching. More specifically, Thomas et al (1999) phrase the question thus: "Are there specific teaching activities in the home that are associated with literacy development? Or is the family's influence mainly a generalized one of creating positive expectation for literacy

achievement?” Certainly this area of research is very important because as Heath (1983) has rightly observed, the conviction that the family’s influence on literacy is critical is based on the view that literacy ... is a way of thinking, learned through communication in families.

The next three areas described in Thomas et al (1999) are parents training for family literacy, parents and children together and focus on parents. These three areas have degrees of formal or informal training imbedded in them. Typical examples would be outreach programs organized by schools and communities, and adult literacy classes, parents groups. Some of these programs have reported varying degrees of success (Seaman, Popp and Darling, 1991; Morrow, Tracey and Maxwell, 1995; Thomas, Skage and Jackson, 1998; Edwards, 1990; and Toomey and Allen, 1991).

This short review has shown that there are basically two types of family literacy practices – those literacy activities naturally engaged in within the family and those initiated by outside agencies (Thomas et al, 1998). The second include those literacy programs already mentioned above. Morrow et al (1995) have surveyed and classified such literacy projects. Similarly, Neuman, Caperelli and Kee (1998) have studied the nature of such programs that have been funded by the Barbara Bush Foundation. Two good examples of literacy programs that are considered to be very successful include the Kenan Trust family literacy model” and the Goldsmith and Handel’s (1990) model. However, these family literacy programs are not the focus of this paper, and so their successes and failures will not be reviewed here.

Our interest is in those literacy activities naturally engaged in within the family that lead members of the family to be regarded as educators. According to Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) and Teale (1986), early research in this area produced mixed results. Some parents hardly ever converse with their children at length; some do not read and do not provide print materials for their children; yet others are very good readers, frequently read with their children and participate in their children’s leisure activities. Snow et al’s (1991) research shows that some parents are confident about their own literacy and encourage their children to read, although they are not always avid readers themselves and do not necessarily engage actively in “book talk” or read aloud with their children. Following Snow et al’s (1991) research, this study is also interested in ascertaining whether parents in rural areas in Botswana help their children in the acquisition of literacy.

In this paper we are also concerned to find out what effect rural areas have on literacy education without necessarily comparing rural areas with urban areas. The particular aspect of family literacy that we examine is reading, and the overall concern of the study is to see what the attitudes of parents are to reading and to what their children read. We are concerned to know whether parents are interested in reading and what they and their children read? We wanted to know whether parents have a positive or negative attitude to reading and what effect this has on their children’s reading. We would also like to know what effect the parents’ levels of education have on literacy in the rural community. And finally we are concerned to know what the parents’ expectations for their children’s success at school are, and how these are related to family literacy.

Methodology

As mentioned in the introduction, the data for the study was collected from two rural areas: Letlhakeng and Thamaga. Both villages are to the western side of the capital city of Gaborone, Letlhakeng being some 110kms while Thamaga is some 46kms away. This means

that the community in Thamaga is more prone to urban influence from Gaborone because of its close proximity to the city than Letlhakeng which is further west.

The data was collected through a 16-item questionnaire in which reading interest, the material read and attitudes of parents to reading were the prominent items. The questionnaire was administered to only one member of each family, mostly women who were immediately available to fill in the questionnaire. This is clearly evident in the samples: 60 (43 (72%) female and 17 (28%) male) families for Letlhakeng and 47 (36 (76%) females and 11 (24%) male) for Thamaga. The high number of women in the sample can be explained in one of two ways. In Botswana, there is a high number of female-headed families. There is evidence that women are particularly disadvantaged - many of them drop out of school for diverse reasons, including teenage pregnancy. As a consequence, some family literacy programs, as Neuman (1995) shows, now specifically target disadvantaged women. Two, in some instances, the males work in urban areas and so were not at home at the time the questionnaire was administered. It may well be that the findings of this study would relate principally to the opinions and behaviour of women, who constitute a larger number than the men, regarding literacy in the family.

Regarding educational qualifications, a majority of the respondents in Letlhakeng (55 or 92%) and in Thamaga (39 or 83%) did not graduate from high school. This is a very low level of education that should have some serious implications for family literacy in the rural areas.

The study has two limitations. The first is that in administering the questionnaire, no distinction was made between parents with primary school-going children and those with secondary school-going children. The second is that it is the parents not the children who report what the children like to read and what they actually read. It was very difficult to administer the questionnaire to the children as well, as this would have made the exercise more time consuming and complex. Nevertheless, it should be noted that a much more authentic data would have been collected had the children reported what they read or liked to read themselves. This major limitation must be borne in mind as readers review this paper.

In analysing the data, the responses for each questionnaire item was compiled. In instances where opinions differed, each body of opinion was separately compiled. The responses were then expressed as percentages of the total responses for each item. The results were compared and/or interpreted based on the researchers' knowledge of trends in family literacy worldwide or on the economic, social and cultural realities of Botswana. The findings of the study are discussed in the next section.

Findings

The findings of the study are presented under four headings which emerge from the key research question given above. Each of them is discussed separately.

Parents and children's interest in reading

We gauge the families' interest in reading by ascertaining whether they (parents and children) like reading and/or the level of enjoyment they derive from their reading. There are two interesting but contrasting results as Table 1 shows. A high percentage of children in both areas (Letlhakeng 76.6%) and Thamaga (74.4%) like or enjoy reading. This result is matched by parents in Thamaga (76.6%) but not in Letlhakeng (56.7%).

Table 1: Parents and children's liking/enjoyment of reading

Response	Parents		Children	
	Lethakeng (N=60)	Thamaga (N=47)	Lethakeng (N=60)	Thamaga (N=47)
Yes	34 (56.7%)	36 (76.6%)	46 (76.6%)	35 (74.4%)
No	13 (21.6%)	11 (23.4%)	13 (21.7%)	7 (14.8%)
No answer (N/A)	13 (21.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	5 (10.6%)

Apart from the fact that Lethakeng is more remote in terms of distance from Gaborone, the main urban centre, it is difficult to account for the lower percentage of parents who do not like or enjoy to read in Lethakeng. One important point that emerges from these results is that the 40% of parents in Lethakeng who are either not interested in reading or provided no response to this questionnaire item do not seem to have influenced their children negatively regarding their interest in reading. This recalls Snow et al's (1991) research where some parents who were not avid readers still subtly (that is, without realizing it) encouraged their children to read. We will return to the question of the encouragement that parents give to their children when they read. It is necessary for now to discuss the reasons why parents like or do not like to read.

Table 2 below gives a summary of the responses regarding parents who gave reasons why they like or do not like to read:

Table 2: Reasons for enjoying/not enjoying reading

Reasons for	Liking to read		Reasons for	Not enjoying reading	
	Lethakeng (N=27)	Thamaga (N=33)		Lethakeng (N=10)	Thamaga (N=2)
Educational	16(59.2%)	13(39.3%)	No time	1 (10%)	2 (100%)
Religious	2 (7.4%)	10(30.3%)	Blind	2 (20%)	- -
Pleasure	3 (11.1%)	5 (15.1%)	illiterate	3 (30%)	- -
Current affairs	5 (18.5%)	2 (6.0%)	No interest	1 (10%)	- -
Culture	1 (14.2%)	3 (9.0%)	Tiresome	2 (20%)	- -

For those parents who like to read, two reasons stand out. These are that parents read for educational and religious purposes, especially in the rural area of Thamaga. Apparently, pleasure has very little to do with why respondents like to read. It is unclear why religion plays such a prominent role in Thamaga but not in Lethakeng. The data, especially as it relates to religion in Thamaga, suggests that when literacy programs are to be designed or selected for a particular community, we should find out the reasons why the people in the area are interested in reading and then tailor the programs to their reading needs. Education is prominent in both rural areas. Previous research, for example, Arua and Lederer (2003), shows that education is the driving force of literacy activities in Botswana. It is not surprising then that it has been cited in both rural areas as one of the main reasons why parents read.

Very few respondents provided reasons why they do not like to read. However, we know from Table 1 that a sizable number of respondents do not like to read. The reasons provided by those who responded to this questionnaire item could be used to understand why some parents generally do not like to read. The reasons are fairly clear. It is either the parents have no time to

read or have some problem militating against their desire to read. Only a very small fraction of the admittedly few people who responded to this section of the questionnaire expressed a lack of interest in reading. It must be clear then that there are people who need literacy programs to be mounted for them. It is impossible for an illiterate or the blind to read, unless they are helped. The kind of help needed would include those literacy programs which we discussed in the literature review.

Reading profiles of parents and their children

It is necessary at this stage to consider the reading interests of both parents and their children. In the section, we will also discuss parents' attitudes to what their children read. Table 3 below gives an overview of what the parents and their children read.

Table 3: Parents and children's reading interests

Materials read	Parents		Children	
	Letlhakeng (N=60)	Thamaga (N=47)	Letlhakeng (N=60)	Thamaga (N=47)
Newspapers	22 (36.6%)	23 (48.9%)	3 (5%)	16 (30.4%)
Letters	5 (8.3%)	8 (17.0%)	3 (5%)	4 (8.5%)
Bible	24 (40%)	26 (55.3%)	1 (1.6%)	11 (23.4%)
Hymn book	13 (21.6%)	19 (40.4%)	1 (1.6%)	- -
Novels	10 (16.6%)	8 (17.0%)	7 (11.6%)	6 (12.7%)
School texts	13 (21.6%)	4 (8.5%)	38 (63.3%)	34 (72.3%)
Magazines	20 (33.3%)	21 (44.6%)	6 (10%)	14 (29.7%)
Anything readable	2 (3.3%)	- -	2 (3.3%)	0 (0%)
No response	17 (28.3%)	- -	17 (28.3%)	6 (12.7%)

The reading patterns of both groups are markedly different. Firstly, many of the parents read newspapers and magazines mainly. There is no contradiction in semi-literate parents reading newspapers or any other material for that matter. It is obvious that some of the respondents have sufficient education to be able to follow current news in especially 'Daily News', the free government newspaper in Botswana. Added to this is the fact that the newspaper also has sections that are written in Setswana, Botswana's national language. The parents therefore read in English and Setswana, a subject that they learnt throughout their primary school and junior high school careers.

Secondly, the parents also read bibles and hymn books. Some of the parents read bibles that are written in Setswana. This is not surprising. Our earlier discussion above mentioned parents' interest in reading religious materials. Unwin (1995) describes a situation in which Elizabeth, one of the subjects she studied, read the Bible almost daily because it was integral to her family and personal life. According to her, Elizabeth's "Bible reading was perhaps the most important literacy-related activity that her children saw her demonstrate" (p.553).

The children, on the other hand, are reported to read school texts mainly. Again, this is not surprising; we mentioned earlier that education seems to be the driving force of literacy in the rural areas. There is a marked difference between the responses for Letlhakeng and Thamaga, especially in respect of what the children read. According to the parents, a sizable number of children in Letlhakeng (28.3%) do not read. A small percentage of them (11.6%) and (10%)

respectively read novels and magazines. On the other hand, only few children (12.7%) do not read in Thamaga, and a sizable number of them read newspapers (30.4%), the bible (23.4%), and magazines (29.7%). There are also those who read novels (12.7%). One factor that may account for the different reading profiles of children in Letlhakeng and Thamaga could be the availability of reading materials. As Thamaga is nearer to the city of Gaborone, this may account for the ready availability of reading materials in the area. Another factor could be the attitudes of parents to the materials that their children read. We will return to this point shortly.

Encouraging children to read

In this section, we examine four related questions: why do children read at home? Do parents like what their children read at home? Why and how do parents encourage their children to read? And what materials do parents encourage their children to read? These questions are discussed in turn.

There are three main factors that show why children read or do not read at home. Table 4 below shows these reasons.

Table 4: Reasons why children read or do not read at home

Reasons for reading	Letlhakeng	Thamaga	Reasons for not reading	Letlhakeng	Thamaga
Children interested in reading	6 (10%)	10(21.2%)	Children not interested in reading	2(3.3%)	1(2.1%)
Motivation/ encouragement from parents	14(23.3%)	17(36.1%)	Lack of parental encouragement	2(3.3%)	1(2.1%)
To do school work/ acquire knowledge	- -	7(14.8%)	Children read at school	- -	1(2.1%)
			No idea why not	11(18.3%)	- -
			Children too playful	3 (5%)	2(4.2%)

The most important factor in respect of children who do not read at home in Letlhakeng is that their parents do not know why they don't do so and presumably do not encourage them to read. This point is important because it points to the fact that some of the respondents do not know that it is important to understand why their children do not read. They do not understand that they can encourage their children to read. This group of respondents falls into the category of those who may need help in order to encourage their children to learn to read. Very few respondents in Thamaga provided reasons why their children do not read at home.

A majority of the children who read at home in both rural areas do so because their parents encourage or ask them to. In addition, they are children who are interested in reading. It should be noted that children's interest in reading and parental encouragement are together a powerful combination that ensures literacy harmony in the home. Generally, it is easy to conclude that parents in Thamaga are more aware of the reasons why some of their children read than those in Letlhakeng, if we go by the responses laid out in Table 4.

The next major point to discuss is whether parents like the materials that their children read. A majority of the respondents in Letlhakeng (40 or 66.6%) and Thamaga (33 or 70.2%) indicate that they like what their children read. Some of the parents (20 or 33.4 for Letlhakeng) and (11 or 23.4%) said the question was not applicable. Some of those in this latter group indicate, among other things, that they had no idea whether what their children are reading is good or bad. Some do not bother to check what they are reading while others say they do not have the power to change what their children read. A couple of respondents however say that some of the materials their children read corrupt them. According to them some of the texts are not appropriate for the ages of the children. The main point of course is that many parents were unable to respond to the question of whether they liked what their children were reading or not. This implies an inability on the part of the respondents to perform any of the five key elements which are part of those that the IRA Commission on Family Literacy (1994) has identified. Consequently, it should be possible to educate them regarding the need to get involved in making reading choices for their children. This calls for a more formal adult/family literacy program similar to Thomas et al's (1999) parents training for family literacy program.

Below is the Table detailing the reasons why parents (and they are in the majority) like what their children read.

Table 5: Reasons why parents like what their children read

Reasons	Letlhakeng	Thamaga
Textbooks are educational.	3 (5%)	10 (21.2%)
Books give children their future.	1 (1.6%)	2 (4.2%)
They are harmless.	6 (10%)	8 (17.0%)
Books/bibles mould their lives.	4 (6.6%)	2 (4.2%)4.2
They are provided by the schools.	2 (3.3%)	1 (2.1%)

Admittedly, a very small fraction of the total population of the sample responded to this aspect of the questionnaire. However, the entries give an indication of the reasons why some parents like what their children read. One of the strongest reasons is that the materials will make the children grow academically. The materials are also in their view harmless. There is the additional belief that books issued by schools are harmless, and that schools' book selection policies cannot be questioned. In respect of the bible they are sure that it would mould the lives of the children. All of these reasons, except as they relate to schools book selection policies are fairly uncontroversial, and show that some of the parents are discerning in matters related to the literacy education of their children.

The third main point in the section relates to whether parents encourage their children to read at home. A majority of the respondents in Letlhakeng (56 or 93.3%) and Thamaga (40 or 85%) answered in the affirmative. Respondents were asked to say why they encourage or help their children read at home. The reasons that those who responded to this aspect of the questionnaire give are similar to those given above.

Table 6: Reasons why parents encourage their children to read

Reasons for helping/encouraging reading	Letlhakeng	Thamaga
So that they are educated	21 (35%)	15 (31.9%)
So that they have a bright future (including financial independence & keeping them off the streets)	10 (16.6%)	3 (6.3%)
Because reading is life/to develop culture of reading	8 (13.3%)	2 (4.2%)
So that s/he can take care of me	1 (1.6%)	- -

As in the previous tables, the single most important reason for parents encouraging their children to read is so that they can be educated. All the other reasons are complementary. The pragmatic intent of the parents' literacy endeavor on behalf of their children can be summarized as follows: they (parents) help or encourage their children to read so that they can become educated and have a brighter future when they will be financially independent. With an approximate 40 or 66.6% of the respondents from Letlhakeng providing reasons why they encourage their children to read, it should be clear that encouraging the children to be literate is a matter very dear to them. Not only do the respondents demonstrate an understanding of the importance of reading, they, understandably, do not wish for their children the life of illiteracy and financial deprivation. This is also true of the Thamaga respondents to a lesser extent.

The next question is: what do parents encourage their children to read? The answer is overwhelmingly in favour of school texts as Table 7 shows. In Letlhakeng, 50 or 83% and in Thamaga, 40 or 85% of the respondents encourage their children to read

Table 7: Materials parents encourage their children to read

Parents' choice of material	Letlhakeng	Thamaga
School textbooks	50 (83.3%)	40 (85%)
Bible	2 (3.3%)	5 (10.6%)
Newspapers	4 (6.6%)	5 (10.6%)
Magazines	2 (3.3%)	5 (10.6%)
Library books	2 (3.3%)	5 (10.6%)
Anything	6 (10%)	4 (8.5%)

the texts. Again, so overwhelming is the need for education that the parents concentrate almost exclusively on such texts. This reliance on school texts accounts, perhaps, for the reason why parents, as mentioned earlier, do not question the book selection policies of their children's schools. Yet again, the Letlhakeng respondents appear to be more desperate to better the lot of their children. It is not at all certain that the parents' attitude is the right one, for although educational success is very important, it is even more important to get children to develop a love for reading. The love of reading is generally acknowledged to be a good predictor of academic success. It appears that the parents are putting the cart before the horse in insisting that children read only school texts. This is because this attitude has the potential to turn children away from this kind of reading in which they have no choice. Indeed, as Gordon (2003:6) implies, the reading environment, both rural and urban, should include a variety of popular texts such as short stories, novels, plays, comic strips, biography, travel, religion and adventure.

One question that is missing in this discussion relates to how parents encourage, aside from modeling reading behavior, their children to read. This question is only partially answered in respect of the type of materials that parents encourage their children to read. It should have been possible to ascertain exactly what parents do when they say they encourage their children to read. In answering the question, the respondents would have provided answers to the kind of intervention that they actually make. We would then have been able to ascertain how effective such interventions are. In this way, it would have been fairly easy to suggest the kind of literacy programs that would be suited for the rural areas from where the data was collected. As we continue our research we will need to address this issue and the issue of suitable literacy programs for the rural areas of Botswana.

Traditional and social issues militating against reading in rural areas

The final discussion in this study is that of issues militating against reading in rural areas. This is an important issue to address because it enables us to identify obstacles to family literacy and to suggest ways of overcoming them. Apparently, there are hardly any traditional or social issues militating against reading in rural areas, according to 58 or 96.7% and 34 or 72.3% of the respondents in Letlhakeng and Thamaga respectively. The disparity in the response pattern may well be due to the groups' perception of traditional and social problems. For example, one of the problems which some of the 11 or 23.45% of the respondents who identify problems in Thamaga cite is "running errands in the home" or "home chores." It is normal to expect children to do a certain amount of work in the home. So this cannot be regarded, in the view of respondents from Letlhakeng and certainly in our view, as a social or traditional problem.

In spite of the foregoing, some of the respondents cited poverty, lack of interest in education and marrying girls off early. These are problems that certainly affect literacy in a profound way. Poverty is the most debilitating of the problems mentioned. Many people in the rural areas cannot find gainful employment. This, as in most other places, has triggered rural-urban migration. While poverty is a serious debilitating problem, it does not affect the children's education as such, since schooling is virtually free from primary through junior secondary school in Botswana. Poverty may however profoundly affect family literacy. It will be extremely difficult for a hungry parent to encourage an equally hungry child to read or study.

The other problems mentioned are also serious to varying degrees. Marrying off children at an early age is an abuse of the rights of girl-children. As an overwhelming number of respondents have indicated that education is the primary goal of the literacy efforts they make in the home, it seems that the factor of lack of interest in education is no longer a serious problem even in the rural areas.

Respondents were asked whether they approved of the traditional or social practices that they mentioned. Almost all (59 or 98.3% and 39 or 82.9% in Letlhakeng and Thamaga respectively) did not approve or thought that a question whose answer is so obvious should not have been asked in the first place. Apart from highlighting again the importance of education or literacy, the respondents said that all such problems should be controlled in order not to disturb the education of their children and consequently their bright future. Once again, the respondents indicate that education and thus literacy is an important aspect of their (children and parents') lives.

Conclusion

The paper reported the findings of a study of the attitudes of parents to reading in two rural communities in Botswana within the framework of family literacy studies. The respondents who were mostly female have a positive attitude to their children's reading. They are very much aware of the importance of education, and so support their children mainly by encouraging them to read their textbooks. The reason for this positive attitude is that they want their children to succeed educationally, economically and socio-politically.

Our view in this study is that while the positive attitude of the respondents is commendable, the emphasis on the reading of school texts is worrying. The goal of any informal literacy activity in the home as it relates to reading should be to encourage life long reading habits which necessarily include reading for educational development. It seems to us that the respondents may be doing incalculable harm to their children because of the possibility that they could be turned off reading, as a result of being forced to read school texts only. The respondents, in our view, need a two-pronged training program. First, they need to be educated on the importance of reading for life long development. Additionally, they need family literacy (awareness) programs that would enable them to understand how to help their children in practical terms. This calls for the government of Botswana and other interested parties to reassess the Botswana national literacy program and modify aspects of the program to address some of the issues raised in this study.

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