

KEYNOTE ADDRESS, GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

The History and Relevance of the Tiger Kloof Educational Institution: Nationally, Regionally, and Globally The Global Educator's Seminar held at St. Stithians College from 10th to 14th February, 1997

To begin, I would like to speak about some of the very positive aspects of the experience I had which belonged to Maru a Pula and which led me towards Tiger Kloof. I would find it hard to speak of St. John's College - not that it is not an integral part of me - but that I have grown away from its essential structure and would feel uncomfortable speaking of the past as though it were the present.

When I was at Maru a Pula, enrollment spanned over thirty different nationalities: our richness as people lies in our diversity - not in our uniformity - and this is so obvious in a place like Maru a Pula. I remember speaking often of the need for tolerance, not because we are the same but because we are so different.

I believe people were required at Maru a Pula to be individuals for most - no, let me say, some of the time: their identity became important to them scattering that awful cloud of conformity.

The last goal of this Seminar, I am sure, is that we should all be the same! Yes, we must endeavour to be global citizens, learning from each other - learning from the variety of solutions which have been arrived at for what could have been essentially the same problem - but we must retain our individuality, our culture, our beliefs - those things which make us different, those things that make us what we are.

Being tolerant towards another's culture does not mean abandoning one's own. Had this been appreciated, would Apartheid have been born? Of course, it had huge economic safeguards for the white people of S A, but it also was set up to protect Afrikaner culture. The removal of challenging influences: how sad, how sterile and yet how attractive to the culturally insecure! The Jews have much to teach us - there are German Jews, American Jews, Australian Jews, S A Jews - they absorb other cultures without abandoning their own. Is this not a key factor in their global influence and success?

If time permits and, if it is a point worthy of discussion, I would like to return to what I have referred to as "the awful cloud of conformity".

Maru a Pula insisted that the menial tasks which surround everyday life be part of the curriculum. Things like washing-up after meals, cleaning the classrooms, working in the gardens, preparing the playing fields have much to teach the somewhat careless, superficial teenager. They have much to teach old men! We seem to work too hard to smooth the path of the school-goer by providing this, that and the other service. I suggest that we examine this service provision closely as we may be throwing away gold from the total curriculum. Learning by doing is a powerful tool.

Maru a Pula also insisted on community service. This is hugely important in engaging the young in social issues, in problem solving and in developing life skills. Of course, it does much more but one of the aspects which interested me was the adult/child interaction it produced. Rarely did this seem strained, threatening or anything but very natural.

Placing adults and children in a learning situation which threatens both is unwise. Placing them in a team working co-operatively together with each side bringing skills the other largely lacks is different.

There is much I have not touched on with regard to Maru a Pula: the Cultural Centre, the unfounded fears of the sharing of facilities with the community, the absence of prefects, the role of volunteers to mention just a

few, but I am leading towards Tiger Kloof - perhaps we can touch on them in discussion. I particularly am convinced that the prefectorial system needs to be critically reviewed.

I retired from Maru a Pula in 1991, delighted to leave Malcolm in the driving seat. Much of my Maru a Pula learning shaped my approaches to the Tiger Kloof challenge.

I remember being assured by the many Old Tigers I met in Botswana that Maru a Pula was "alright but that it could not compare with Tiger Kloof." Sentimental talk perhaps but Tiger Kloof had been a remarkable institution. There cannot be many schools world-wide that were built by the pupils of the school. There cannot be many schools which had nine schools in the one institution. There cannot be many schools that empowered its pupils more than Tiger Kloof did. It was enormously relevant and important to those who went through it, for it altered their lives irrevocably.

Tiger Kloof was a missionary school, founded by the London Missionary Society only in 1904 at the request of many of the surrounding Chiefs, Khama the Great in particular, its founding having been delayed by the Boer War. It was located on the railway linking the Cape to Botswana, Zimbabwe and beyond, midway between Mafikeng and Kuruman, two important centres at the time. It was therefore accessible to a vast area, most of which accommodated small and scattered populations.

The request was for an industrial, commercial and secondary school, a teacher training centre and a Bible School where men would be trained as ministers or evangelists. Tiger Kloof prospered as did many other missionary schools in South Africa as they were the only acceptable source of education for the black population until the mid fifties when the Bantu Education Act was imposed, formalising black education. This Act limited what might be taught to the black people, thereby safe-guarding the technical skills for the whites, and directed much of its venom towards destroying the missionary schools which were busy creating a pool of independent black thinkers, the very last thing which Verwoerd wanted.

All of the older and present black leaders -- there can be very few exceptions -- are the products of one or another of the missionary schools. Tiger Kloof was one of these schools. Botswana's first Cabinet, formed at Botswana's Independence in 1966 under Seretse Khama, were all but a few - Old Tigers.

It was such Old Tigers like Quett and Lady Masire, Dr. Chiepe and Archie Mogwe of Botswana and Ruth Mompoti, currently S A's ambassador to Switzerland, who insisted that places like Tiger Kloof be restored to the people. They saw the relevance of these schools in the reconstruction of South African society.

If Tiger Kloof were to be resurrected, it would have to be resurrected as an equally relevant place in comparison with the institution it originally was. The social picture which faces a school opening in the mid-nineties in the remote Northern Cape, now part of the North West Province, has a far from clean sheet. We still have damaging inequities - the legacy of apartheid and its infamous tool, the Bantu Education Act, are still deeply ingrained in the North West and, indeed, the national social fabric. We are still a damaged society.

In Vryburg, amongst the black peoples, the patient, dignified conduct of the elderly stands apart. The unempowered, semi-trained, frustrated young and middle aged adults and the host of single parents mingle unproductively with the short-lived optimism of the young. Amongst the white people, there is a reluctance to accept change, a reluctance to move, a reluctance to accommodate. The most lively group are the Indians with the Coloured people trapped somewhere in between. Unemployment and dis-empowerment are the dominant themes.

This is the background to the determination of the Old Tigers to see their school re-formed. They knew what it had given them and they had the vision that it was through the likes of Tiger Kloof, that the dis-empowered and the un-empowered would regain their rightful place in the line for human dignity and self-respect.

This is why on 1st October, 1995 when Tiger Kloof was officially re-opened, that President and Lady Masire were there, Desmond Tutu, whose mother attended Tiger Kloof, was there, Ruth Mompoti was there, Lady Khama was there recording Seretse's Old Tiger status together with some three thousand others. All were

there to celebrate the Tiger Kloof legacy of empowerment which had contributed so significantly to Botswana's independence. All were there to endorse the re-birth, the re-kindling of the Tiger Kloof vision, for the new and for the not-so new young South Africans. It was a great day; it was a great moment in the resurrection process of a whole set of people - a set of people for whom Tiger Kloof had never died.

However, the feasibility study had critically to review the old Tiger Kloof model to ensure that it would continue to be relevant not only to today's needs but also to tomorrow's. In this critical review some key principles emerged. I list them not necessarily in their order of importance.

The first principle was that Tiger Kloof must be an adult centre as well as a school. Historically it had been, but could this mix still be effectively managed? I was positive: certainly it could in the shorter term if we linked our training to any function we had to perform. We needed to plan the re-building of Tiger Kloof over a number of years if we were to avoid a huge wave of building which could not be sustained. This tied in well with the plan to enroll the school over 5 years, growing by a new standard or level each year.

Second, Tiger Kloof would have to be re-opened in its original buildings if its resurrection, its history were to be meaningful. There was considerable debate about this. It would have been cheaper to start afresh and to re-locate Tiger Kloof closer to town. But the forlorn and abandoned ruins of the church, the clock tower and of the deliberately destroyed village were extremely powerful symbols and reminders of what had been so fine. In addition, Archbishop Ndungane, then the Bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman, reminded us of our role as stewards of a vision as well as of resources, and so we decided to rebuild.

(Incidentally this act of rebuilding has acquired huge moral significance for the community as a whole. There is an admiration and a pride expressed from what may be described as the most unlikely quarters of local society. Clearly the ruined Tiger Kloof was an uncomfortable symbol of reproach. Clearly the restored Tiger Kloof is a symbol of hope.)

But there were difficulties. The farmer who owned the land on which the ruined buildings stood, saw huge profit coming to him as the local enthusiasm to re-open Tiger Kloof grew. We would have to bide our time if we were not to pay a huge price. I spent 1993 in Vryburg in a job-creating effort of making bricks, in an adult training programme and in a literacy project. This was a valuable experience. I learned how fickle the buying public is, how difficult it is to manage a cash flow with little cash and began to understand the magnitude of the task, the task of re-empowering a people.

In October, 1993 we bought the land on which most of the original buildings stand for R 1 million from the farmer who bought it for R 25 000 a few years earlier. That we could do this was largely due to the faith and generosity of the Genesis Foundation. We appointed our building instructor and foreman and began the restoration and training programme in January, 1994. We were accredited by the Building Industries Training Board and over the period from 1994 to 1996 have trained about 100 builders in the skills of bricklaying and plastering, painting and decorating, plumbing, and carpentry. The re-building of Tiger Kloof has been done entirely by local men and women. All the money paid for labour has gone into the local economy. What has been built reflects the skills which are now a part of the local community. They have every reason to feel proud.

Principle number 3, Tiger Kloof, historically a missionary school, would not be resurrected as a Church School. It would have to be unconnected to a particular group if it was to belong to the community as a whole. This was a major decision - the Church would play a vitally important role in the life of Tiger Kloof but not in its ownership, management and administration. I feel that this allocation of roles is soundly balanced. Tiger Kloof today is a Section 21 Company, that is a non-profit company, which sets out to work closely with the Department of Education and to use its independence to maximum advantage to all concerned.

The fourth principle was that Tiger Kloof should play an active role in the reconstruction and development of local people who had been so unfairly discriminated against by the Bantu Education Act: the re-building of a people has to be tackled in little bits; it has to be flexible - no two people's requirements are the same. There have to be many exit points and therefore many re-entry points. Courses have to be modular, they have to be specific, they have to be short, they have to be able to stand alone and, to make this all possible, the facilities

available at Tiger Kloof have to be shared with the community. The school is a part of the community; not separate, not independent, but a vital part.

The fifth principle was that we would combine education with training. At the adult level, wherever we have had a function to perform, restoring the old buildings, building new ones, we have linked this function to a training programme. This year, with the school in its third year, we have grades 8, 9 and 10 (that is standards 6,7 and 8 in S A parlance) in place. At grade 10 we have introduced a compulsory skills training element of either building or catering, building being associated with Technical Drawing and catering with Travel and Tourism. We have continued our Business Skills courses throughout as we have languages and a variety of mathematics and science courses. Computer literacy is followed in grades 8 and 9 and music, art, dance and drama play an important enrichment, elective role in all years. Sport is coming into its own with the construction of two fields and an all-weather surface. These facilities will accommodate the needs of our adults as well as of the school.

The sixth principle was that Tiger Kloof will always seek to enlist the services of volunteers. Up to now we have enjoyed the services of foreign volunteers only. They have enriched our curriculum immeasurably and have given us a glimpse of a global perspective. We must never lose this. However, I am disappointed that we have so far failed to attract South African volunteers.

The seventh principle was that Tiger Kloof would seek state aid and form a close partnership with the state. Financial aid comes in the form of teachers' salaries, the number of teachers being linked to the number enrolled. This allows us to keep the operative costs low so that more than half of the parents are able to meet the fees charged; no parent pays nothing. However, it remains a disappointment that, even though our enrollment is confined to the North West, no state assistance is given in the cost of running the boarding hostels for which there can be no alternative and this has forced us into seeking as much bursary support as we can possibly find. Tiger Kloof has been very fortunate in gaining financial support in this area.

The eighth principle was that Tiger Kloof would be a learner centred institution at both adult and school levels. Throughout we have actively tried to involve our learners in what they are learning. Learning by doing plays a major part in this process. The learner playing a passive role is all too common a phenomenon in S A schools. Rarely is the learner consulted in what he or she is taught or required to learn. This is surely fundamentally wrong.

Learning must involve a growth and an empowerment if it is to have a relevance to the learner. Ownership and attention follow. I am convinced of the merit of this process; but I am struggling to make it happen! The pattern of rote learning, once established, is hard to break. It is so much easier not to have to think! Having to do something encourages thought and understanding even if the motive is only to find the easiest way to complete the task!

The ninth principle was that Tiger Kloof would serve the community. Tiger Kloof is located 10 km from Vryburg so community service has not been easy to establish. Through Rotary we will soon have a combi which will allow us to follow the Maru a Pula lead in the matter of community service. In addition we have to become more environmentally aware and this may come through a vegetable growing project we are about to start and a major landscaping programme which both adults and the school will implement.

The tenth principle was that Tiger Kloof must be developed to become a centre of resource, upliftment and empowerment for the entire Vryburg community. Hilary, my wife, who has teaching as well as development experience, will be taking this forward as Tiger Kloof develops from the resurrection mode to the mode which will be concerned with the growth and empowerment of the community.

The need for training in administrative and management skills is desperate. Another need is the regeneration of teachers and heads of schools along whole-school development lines as well as the training of parent bodies. We have held three education workshops/conferences so far. Tiger Kloof hopes through hosting such events to assist in achieving these ends.

Being involved with the Department of Education in Curriculum Development may also have an impact on the content and the structure of the courses offered in schools in the North West. I have said it before but it bears repeating, it is vital for the Department and us to hunt together.

I believe that the Tiger Kloof experience has a central relevance for the reshaping of the local social fabric as well as a contribution to make to changing S A's education goals. The values which we are seeking to instill are values which may make a contribution even globally: reverence for God, respect for life and human dignity, respect for property, conflict resolution as an alternative to violence, respect for and celebration of individuality and diversity, responsibility for individual accountability and respect of, and concern for, the environment.

We must always be on our guard against what Neil Postman describes as "economic utility" lest it become a false god. The challenge for all who participate in the Tiger Kloof experience is to grow tolerant, principle centred, independent thinkers who know that their purpose in life is to build not to destroy; to serve not to command and above all to know that learning is life-long and that change is implicit in the very air they breathe - and to be ready for it.

I look forward to the discussion which I hope will follow now for I have come here as a learner and as a person who desperately wants to be part of a rekindling, empowering process. Your collective experience, if shared, could take us forward in great leaps and bounds.

Thank you, Peter, thank you all for this opportunity.

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