

Education systems, aspiration and learning in remote rural settings

The research



The findings reported here are based on a 2-year research project that explores connections between education systems and young people's aspirations in remote rural areas of Lesotho, India and Laos. Ethnographic research was conducted in two rural Lesotho communities and their local primary schools over a nine-month period in 2017.



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Lesotho Policy Brief (Draft)

Background

Education in rural Lesotho is shaped by the rural condition

The resources of schools, and of households, are limited (e.g. access to electricity)

Schools are perceived as remote from district offices and the Ministry of Education, and relatively seldom visited by resource teachers or inspectors

Both teacher and student absenteeism is relatively high

Most children have little exposure to many things in the curriculum

The relationship between school/teachers and the community is distinctive

Aspiration concerns orientation to the future

The significance and meaning of aspiration differs between contexts

Aspiration ("litabatabelo" in Sesotho) concerns orientation to the future, a prominent topic when Basotho parents or teachers talk about children

Young people's aspirations are not purely individual but also for their communities and their families

Aspirations are not simply about future careers but also lifestyles, mobility and places of residence, and the type of person one wishes to become (values such as respect)

Aspiration and motivation

There are cultural differences in prevalent beliefs about how far the future can be planned or controlled, related to religious traditions (e.g. Pentecostal vs Catholic church) and the discourse of modernisation and development

There are also different ways of explaining success and failure which might be seen as outcomes of intentional effort, or some other factor (e.g. witchcraft)

In Lesotho "hard work" is valued because it's believed to lead to a "better future", whereas elsewhere it may be viewed primarily as an intrinsic human virtue

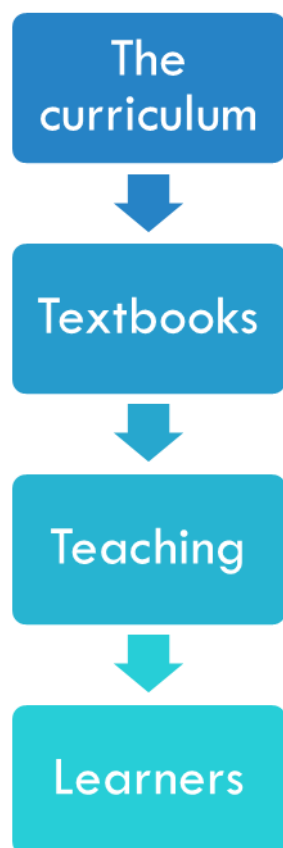
Aspiration and the Lesotho context

Historically, Lesotho's education system was geared to producing government workers (administrators, police, nurses etc)

As educational enrolments expand, the number of learners far exceeds the national economy's capacity to provide formal employment for most

In this context, the education system might usefully encourage young people to aspire to alternative livelihoods and lifestyles

Can education be (seen as) a means to achieve these alternative lifestyles?



The relationship between the education system and learners' aspirations

Young people are oriented to the future through diverse aspects of education, including:

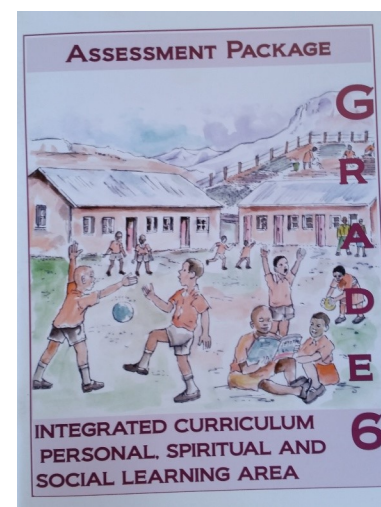
- The curriculum
- Textbooks
- Teaching
- The linear progressive structure of the age-graded system
- The spatial relationships within the education system
- The figure of the rural school teacher
- School uniform policies
- Posters on classroom walls
- Inter-school competitions
- Assessment practices
- Learners themselves

The curriculum

Lesotho's integrated primary curriculum encourages learners to think about and plan for the future in various ways:

- **Values** – are emphasised (and assessed) throughout the curriculum
- **Careers** – are given attention in various subject areas, and are often rather stereotypical
- **Entrepreneurship** – is a subject area in its own right, aimed at enabling young people to generate work for themselves within rural communities
- **Goal setting** – is explicitly presented as an important skill

However, the curriculum is very wide-ranging and not always easy to implement in rural schools.

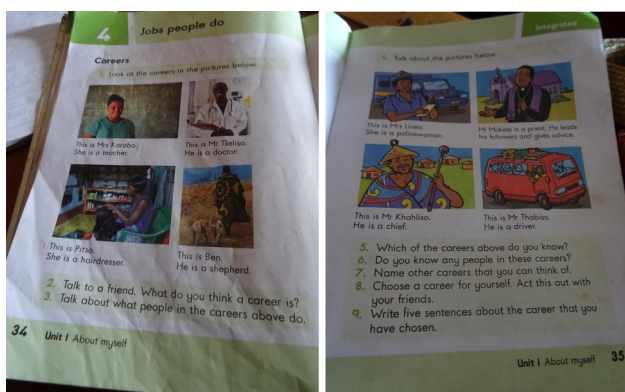


27. describe the advantages and disadvantages of different careers.	<p>Concepts pros and cons of different careers: teaching nursing policing doctor hairdressing</p> <p>Skills Information-finding Decision-making Critical thinking Self-awareness</p> <p>Values and Attitudes Awareness Appreciation Respect Acceptance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners revise different types of careers. • Teacher explains pros and cons of being a teacher. • Learners find information about pros and cons of different careers. • Teacher and learners discuss pros and cons of different careers. • Teacher and learners take excursion to the places of work. • Learners role-play different careers. 	<p>find information on pros and cons of different careers.</p> <p>describe pros and cons of different careers.</p> <p>role-play different careers.</p>	Teacher's Guide
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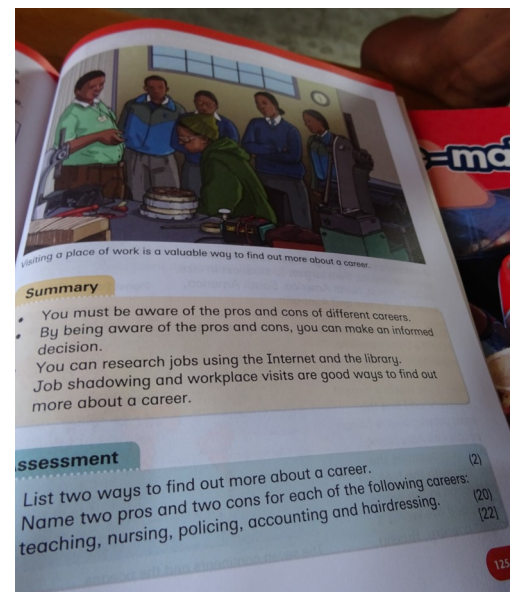
The textbooks

Textbooks emphasise certain elements of the curriculum more than others, including through illustrations. They represent the future to young people, suggesting what they should aim for and what might be attainable

- **Values** – are emphasised in several textbooks
- **Careers** – those discussed and illustrated include both formal and (to a lesser extent) informal employment
- **Entrepreneurship** – mainly features in the Creativity and Entrepreneurship texts
- **Goal setting** – is given less attention



Career education begins early



Tasks may be impractical in a rural setting

The teaching

The integrated curriculum is extremely content-heavy and teachers lack expertise/knowledge in some areas.

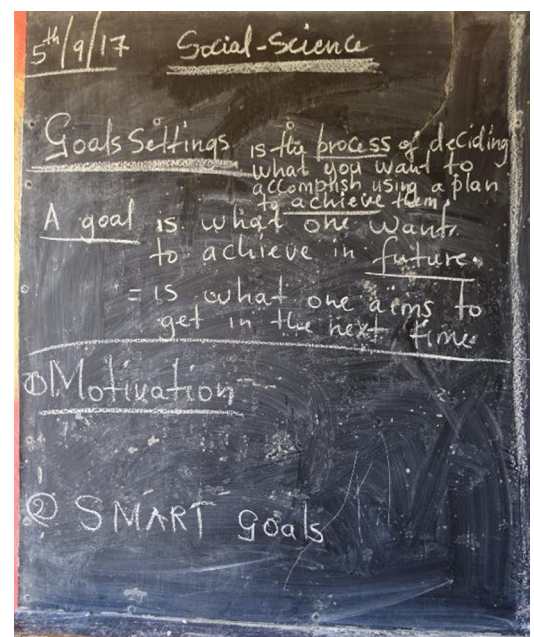
They are forced to select what they will teach (often making pragmatic choices based on what they believe will be assessed).

In class, teachers focus on:

- **Values** – particularly respect (for adults, being worthy of respect)
- **Careers** – both conventional formal sector jobs and (perhaps to a lesser extent) agriculture
- **Entrepreneurship** – in a largely abstract way, with limited opportunity to develop practical skills
- **Goal setting** – a rather abstract focus on planning for the future

Aspiration is shaped not only through lesson content, but also through pedagogy, which does not always align with that expressed in the curriculum documents:

- Didactic teaching persists despite curriculum guidance
- Group work – teachers use this to develop leaders and subordinates



Learners

Learners' perspectives on their futures are some way removed from the notions expressed in the curriculum.

- Values** – respect is important; children also aspire to material things (houses, vehicles) and to assist both their communities and their families
- Careers** – many (perhaps most) learners say they want to be a nurse, policeman, teacher or soldier – but their inconsistency suggests these articulated aspirations are superficial rather than deeply held
- Entrepreneurship** – learners talk about working for themselves, or engaging in agriculture, and can cite countless ways of generating income, but they don't really connect these activities to what they learn in school
- Goal setting** – learners describe plans for the future, but not in the rather abstract way in which this is taught



Addressing the discrepancies

From learners' perspectives, education seems to remain principally about academic studies and a limited range of formal sector careers. They fail to recognise a connection between, for instance, entrepreneurship in the curriculum and engagement in entrepreneurial rural livelihood activities.

Education systems are too complex for curricula to translate directly into learners' orientations. Any intervention to encourage young people to aspire to alternative livelihoods, and to understand education as a means to such futures, must take these complexities into account.

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www.education-aspiration.net

Email nicola.ansell@brunel.ac.uk

 /Education-Systems-and-Aspiration

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Research team

LESOTHO

Prof Nicola Ansell, Brunel University

Dr Claire Dungey, Brunel University

Dr Pulane Lefoka, Centre for Teaching and Learning, National University of Lesotho

Prof Ian Rivers, Strathclyde University

INDIA

Dr Peggy Froerer, Brunel University

Dr Arshima Dost, Brunel University

Mr Muniv Shukla, Gram Mitra Samaj Sevi
Sanstha, Chhattisgarh

LAOS

Dr Roy Huijsmans, ISS, Erasmus University

Mr Syvongsay Changpitikoun, ISS, Erasmus University