What we are; what we are not

BY ANDREW TAYLOR

Maru-a-Pula School (MaP), located in Gaborone, Botswana, is delighted to be one of Africa’s leading schools, with 94 students currently studying at the world’s top 100 ranked universities.

But we have never held a Speech Day nor created a special ceremony for traditional academic awards.

MaP does not regard itself as an ‘international school’. Rather, we are a Botswana school with an international enrolment. Two thirds of our students are citizens, one third are expatriates from more than 30 different countries, and our teaching staff is predominantly African. We are nurtured by our many partnerships and exchanges with both local and overseas schools and universities.

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At MaP, service is neither optional nor occasional. Service is fundamental to our identity as a school whose central purpose is to serve the nation of Botswana. Service is required of all students and teaching staff each week. Many alumni say that their service work has had a pivotal impact on their lives.

We believe that leadership training should be offered to all students, not just the chosen few. We have no prefects, let alone a head boy or head girl. MaP’s older students are given no power over younger students, beyond that of setting a good example.

Our students are not required to stand every time an adult enters a room, but they will greet in a friendly fashion and respectfully accommodate an elder’s needs. We encourage our students of all ages to ask ‘Why?’ – and, more essentially, Why not? We value assertiveness, especially in the service of curiosity, and humility where appropriate.

We have dress requirements, but no uniforms. Nor do we value uniformity. Our 6th Formers wear civvies and in Forms 1-5 we have a ‘poly-form’, featuring white-collared shirts and black trousers. We believe that offering our students scope for individual expression in dress and appearance is a healthy practice. We do not regulate hair length, hairstyle or facial hair. We accept that innocent and not-so-innocent mistakes will be made, and corrections needed.

At MaP, sport is important, but not pre-eminent. Students are never required to be spectators at a match, let alone wear our ‘poly-form’ while watching. No sport enjoys special status. Our alumni never judge MaP by its sporting results. That said, our current students would rather win and often do.
We are a secular school, keen to find nothing alien except intolerance. We embrace all faiths and cultures. We treasure the shade of our acacia trees and we hope our banded mongooses continue to flourish. We pamper MaP’s feral cats, but we understand they are not universally popular.

MaP has no school flag, no school motto and no school song. What we do have is a soaring school sound – that of our marimbas. MaP staff, students, parents and alumni share an undeniable spirit of hard work, creativity and joyful interaction. And we all love MaP.

Andrew Taylor is principal at Maru-a-Pula School.

Let’s look at Africa

Andrew Taylor says: ‘Too many of our students see their futures outside the [African] continent or they’re focused on top-paying jobs (e.g. actuarial science) at the expense of high-impact leadership careers linked to social entrepreneurship.’

Though many Independent Education readers have probably come across many of these resources, I’d like to recommend a few DVDs for use with our increasingly video-oriented students. These really should be mandatory viewing for all students in the African continent.'

1. Africa’s Great Civilizations: In this six-hour series, Henry Louis Gates Jr takes a new look at the history of Africa, from the birth of humankind to the dawn of the 20th century. This is a breathtaking and personal journey through two hundred thousand years of history, from the origins, on the African continent, of art, writing and civilization itself through the millennia in which Africa and Africans shaped not only their own rich civilizations, but also the wider world. See: https://www.pbs.org/series/africas-great-civilizations/


3. David Attenborough’s Africa series, particularly episode six, ‘The Future’, which focuses on the filmmaker’s emotional appeal to conserve Africa’s amazing wildlife for generations to come. How many of our students have a clear understanding of what’s being done to either preserve or obliterate Africa’s natural heritage? See: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2571774/

4. Two TED talks by the eloquent Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. See: ‘The danger of a single story’ at: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story_language=en and ‘We should all be feminists’ at: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda Ngozi_adichie_we_should_all_be_feminists_language=en

References:


2. See: https://aamf.fas.harvard.edu/people/henry-louis-gates-jr


4. See: https://www.ted.com/#/recommendation