

The Storying Project, a Sparkle Stories Workshop

Mashobane Moruthane – Ubuntu: I am because you are.



David:

Oh, that's how you start. Yeah.

Mashobane:

Because we have to work out of the imagination. That's where you meet the child. The only place to meet the child is in the imagination. Then you go to their body. Leave the brain alone. The intellect is not needed in this case.

David:

Hey there, this is David and welcome to The Storying Project, a Sparkle Stories workshop. We are so glad that you've come to visit this podcast where we delve into the process of creating a Sparkle Story. What you are going to hear is a conversation between me, our chief storyteller here at Sparkle, and a special guest. Our guests are people from all walks. Some you may know, and others, you might not, but all are conscious of the stories we tell our children and their impact.

I ask all of our guests, "What do you think children need to hear right now?" And we have a conversation that will ultimately lead to a produced audio story for children. We will share a bit of that story here after the conversation. Today, I will collaborate with Mashobane Moruthane.

Mashobane grew up in Limpopo Province in rural South Africa during the Apartheid regime and studied Waldorf Education first in South Africa and later in the United States.

Mashobane has spent his entire career teaching physical education in Waldorf schools across the US and is currently a movement and games teacher at the Emerson Waldorf School in Chapel Hill North Carolina.

Last year Mashobane founded the Ubuntu Initiative which offers seminars, workshops and training for educators and parents alike. Addressing a variety of themes, from rhythm and balance in childhood, to anti-racism games and diversity training, the Ubuntu Initiative's mission is to build conscious communities through joyful intentional movement.

I am so grateful to have Mashobane, a dear old friend from our teaching days in Vermont, join us today. When he and I get together we tend to talk for a really long time - so what you're going to hear is a highlight of our conversation.

Thank you so much Mashobane - and all of you listening - for joining us - and we hope you enjoy the conversation. And be sure to listen for a message from Lisabeth of Sparkle Stories at the very end. Now here's our conversation.

David:

Hello Mashobane. It's really good to see you.

Mashobane:

Very nice to see you as well David. Very nice to see you.

David:

There's a lot of places where we could start, but what caught my attention was Ubuntu and in particular, the Ubuntu Initiative. And I would love to hear your words around what is Ubuntu? And then what are you doing?

Mashobane:

Thank you. The word Ubuntu its very important word where I come from in South Africa. It's the word that is really describe life to us. And I came to the point where I felt like it is something that needs to be described or at least explained to the culture here in North America, so that people can understand how other people live their life.

The word Ubuntu literally means human, humanity, togetherness, unity. So we also describe it as I am who I am because of who you are. And you are who you are because of who I am. In that sense, if David you're cooking and you realize that you don't have an onion and you're trying to cook for your family, you will walk towards my house and knock at my door and say, "Hey, do you have a spare of onion?"

And at that time I could be cooking. And if I have one piece of onion and I'm cooking for my family, I will cut it in half and you will cook half of it, I'll cook half of it. That is Ubuntu. However, this is something that is not part of this culture here. It doesn't exist within the principles of the Western culture. The reason I brought it up is because, I felt like it is about time now we actually infuse our life with Ubuntu, especially during this changing times we're working with. And this is such a great time we're living in really.

Because as an optimistic person, we are given this opportunity to work on the change. We are on a changing part of life and we need to put our energy so that when it goes to the other side, we have done work on it. Instead of just catching up the wave. But we are now given this opportunity to establish the wave. So that is why I came up with this company named Ubuntu Initiative.

Basically I do movement in games. Now really what we're doing is to try to bring this ideal of Ubuntu through movement, which is really unheard of. And one you'll ask, how are you bringing unity in physical education in school? So we are working on that. We're working on establishing a curriculum that will have this ideal of togetherness in the school.

David:

And especially after this incredible year, movement with each other, what sort of healing can take place? And where are you seeing children coming out of that in terms of the way in which that the social forum, the way in which they're relating to each other, is there a hesitancy, what are you seeing?

Mashobane:

That's such a beautiful question. I got that question all the time. And I think that is the question that is asked a lot now. And you know children way of living is through movement. Let's just start with that. That's the basic of life. If you're a teacher, everything starts with movement. If you are a parent, everything starts with movement. So at this point where children are not allowed to touch each other

physically, where a parent or another parent or a teacher cannot touch a child or your child, now we have this thing where we say, "A child is raised by a village."

But if you cannot touch another child, how is the village going to be part of the children? That's when we come in. This is where this ideal space come to life. We have lived in this realm of physical in many ways, physical as like physical body, but also materialistic hoarding and gathering of things that we don't necessarily need. Our children have started riding that wave and they passed the mark, meaning our children do not know how to be in physical with each other. That is why I feel personally as Mashobane, feel like we are given this opportunity to reestablish something else. It's like a reset.

Now what we're doing is, we're going to put the physical away. We are not throwing it out. We're going to put it on standby. We're just going to put it outside here. And we're going to work on relating with each other through space. If I am sitting here, I should know how far that bookshelf, that empty bookshelf behind me, how far it is. I should know the walls that are next to me, how far they are from me. Now, that is the concept of space. However, this will take time because our children cannot feel each other if they can't touch them.

Do you have experienced children running into each other, jumping on each other's legs, punching each other, pushing. They really were wishing to have that physical contact, to feel alive, to feel existent, a sense of existence. So that is the sense of touch. The sense of touch is being reserved. We are putting it aside. We are going to the sense of hearing and the sense of sight. So now we're playing games that require you to hear more and to look where are you going and what is coming towards you.

So I established a game and I come up with the rules and these rules that we came with, actually, this Ubuntu Initiative concept. We came with the rules of a cow space and a goat space. And those rules work throughout this-

David:

Cow and goat.

Mashobane:

Yeah, throughout this COVID time that we were supposed to be away from each other. Now a cow space, it just sounds amazing. For first through fourth graders ideal. We work out of the imagination with children. When you say cow space, they know that the cow can come and sit right between us comfortably without being squished. Goat space. A goat can be here, but we're way too close to each other. So if we play and you attack, if I'm in a cow space, I'm still far away from you.

Once I get into goat space, I'm now in your space, David. So now instead of touching you, I'm going to clap. Then I got you. Now, this now establish what? A sense of hearing that I talked about and also the sense of sight. You need to hear the clap. You need to see where the people are coming from. Now, they are up there. They are no longer this close to you. The reason why I said this is an opportunity to us is because now we are reestablishing the sense of each other from the space.

How can I be with you without having to be sitting on your lap in second grade or in fourth grade? Yes. I can feel you right here. And that's the most remarkable thing.

David:

You've given me so many images with the cow and the goat, of course. And so at this moment of time, which for whenever anybody's listening to this, this is toward the tail end of the school year of 2021. So a very pivotal time in a lot of schools, Mashobane, what do you think children need to hear right now?

Mashobane:

Beautiful. There are so many things that children needs to hear, but I feel like we have to start from the top. And everybody has their own different kinds of the top. What I really think is the pinnacle of the whole thing is nature. That is the top. The children needs to know this ideal of beauty, in the world of school or in any child needs to know that the world is beautiful. But when we say the world, we talk about the nature. And then how are they relating to the nature? They're also beautiful and they're erring towards the nature.

Meaning children needs to hear so much about the beauty of nature and how awesome and how great it is if you connect with nature. We live in a society now where nature is preserved so that it doesn't go away. We are not living in the nature, but we're preserving the trees, we're preserving flowers and all that, but what I'm talking about here is a little different than that. I'm saying children needs to hear that climbing trees and jumping down off the big bulldozer is such a great thing to do.

Children needs to hear that walking barefoot, and we all know that too as parents. I grew up barefooted. My first pair of shoes, I was 13 years David, 13 years old. If you see my foot and you compare to yours, there's a huge difference. Because my foot grew naturally. The shoes molded the foot to the way they want to be. So what I'm saying is children do need to know it's okay to take off your shoes. It's okay to climb up, learn how to climb the tree and go down. Understand the kind of things that nature gives us to eat and what can we give to the nature to eat. So that's one.

And then two is how can we feed ourselves, and how can we care for the earth? Which is farming and gardening, planting your own food and working at the farm. This will really alleviates so much problems, but our job here Ubuntu Initiative and Sparkle Stories, when we tell stories, stories have purpose. Stories are to teach. Sometimes to give advice to parents, sometimes it's to give advice to the kids, is to give them an idea. Like for example, in Sparkle Stories, obviously there is always a super objective of a vast story.

When you talk about. You can say, "In this story, I want at the end of this story, the children to admire water." Every time they pass a big body of water, they said, wow, that's an accomplishment to what we need to be doing. Otherwise, then why are we doing this? But in a nutshell, I will say our children needs to hear stories about nature. Our children needs to hear about how to preserve the earth, how to plant your own food, how to care for others. That's important. That's the third one. The third one will be caring for others.

David:

You made a distinction between this tendency of preserving nature, as opposed to living in it as a part of it. And then the other two answers to the questions seem like they're related to that verb, living in. Living in nature as a person would involve meaningful work, work with context.

Mashobane:

There is a thing called tit for tat. Is that right? Did I say that right?

David:

That is. But I'm very curious how you're going to bring that into it.

Mashobane:

Yeah. I think that it's always a confusion. When one talks about Ubuntu, the theory of Ubuntu and with tit for tat. So if, for example, let's say one of the person in your family passed, your grandfather passed.

In my village, I'm giving you a very clear picture of how my village operated and how I was raised. We know that an elder passed in that house, there's no phone calls, letters or anybody going around telling everyone that there is a funeral in that house. One person will find out, somehow the whole village is going to know.

Now in that house, you will be in your room and you'll woke up in the morning. I will be in your yard, mowing your lawn. Someone else will be washing windows, some people are bringing food. Others are actually doing your laundry. Like things that will be considered invading my space in this culture here. But that when you are there, you're in a vulnerable stage. That is the time where everybody feels welcome to that bubble.

And others, you will see elders just sitting under the tree the whole day, doing nothing. And can you guess why? Why will someone just come to your house and sit under the tree the whole day because your grandma died? Is that idea of energy. That doesn't live in this world. Like energy. I am here to support. David, I don't have to knock at your bedroom and say, "Hey, by the way I was here. Okay. You should notice this."

No. It doesn't matter. Even you not being outside or not anywhere being very mourning upstairs, you will know that everybody came. You don't have to see everyone's faces. That's what I'm talking about. If you said to me, "Mashobane, what are you doing next Saturday?" I said, "I don't know. Probably do some work." Then they're like, "I'm moving and I was wondering if you can actually come and help me move." Every time when someone asks you for help, that person puts you in the light.

They see you as this upright human in this light. Therefore, that is an opportunity. I come, serve. But when I help you move, it's not like, "All right, I'm helping David move here one day. I'm putting this in the check box because then I'm going to need him to do something for me." That's where tit for tat come.

David:

Tit for tat. Right, there it is.

Mashobane:

Right. So you'll be surprised if I tell you how many times in my life, in the United States of America, where I have served in that form we just mentioned it. It doesn't have to be moving a house for someone else. It doesn't have to be, "Hey, I'm going to run late for my doctor's appointment. Can you hold on my class?" It doesn't have to be any of that. But just imagine you give a call to someone say, "Hey, I am flying to dah, dah, dah to go see my daughter. Unfortunately, my flight is at six o'clock. Any chance he can drop me at the airport?" "Oh, no. That is too early. I need to have my coffee first."

David:

Sure.

Mashobane:

Now, that just showed you how much work we do need to do. But this work is not an intellectual work. It's not even a feeling work, we need to work on intuition.

David:

We want it. We want Ubuntu. We naturally do it. That's the nature that we live in. We want it. And yet how is it that we get in our way?

Mashobane:

Yeah. So we are forgetting, we are forgetting the real message, the deeper knowing. What we really know it's in our intuition. Yes. So if I say, any chance you can drop me to the airport, you know you're my last person and I mean. And you're saying, "Oh no, that's too early. And I will have not taken my coffee." So what I'm trying to show here David is that, for the listeners out there, there is a disconnect of what I call the soul.

I don't have to say, "But David, two weeks ago, I was at your house helping you clean. How are you not able to just do this one thing? It's only 20 minutes, right?" I don't have to go that far. Because once I go that far, it's no longer Ubuntu.

David:

Tit for tat.

Mashobane:

I'm reminding you. You know what I mean? I'm reminding you and I don't have to get to that far. So for me, when that happens it's always just sad. This is where I see sadness in us, in this society, to not recognizing each others needs. So what happened is, we're talking right now about Ubuntu. Ubuntu can be archetype. We are talking about patience. Patience can be an archetype.

David:

And now, we can talk more about the archetype that Ubuntu gives.

Mashobane:

Yes.

David:

With this idea of the whole child.

Mashobane:

Where do we harvest our instinct and how do we preserve it? And how do we nourish that instinct that comes from nature? When you play in the stream, when you're jumping on rocks and climbing trees and chasing stuff, feeding animals and shearing sheep, picking eggs and doing all this work of limbs, that's what cultivate instinct. And that instinct really encourage a thing called intuition. Now, the other example is that you understand that our children are not allowed to be doing things in nature, especially in schools, but our school has playgrounds that mimic nature.

Every structure you have in school looks like rock, could be like a tree, could be... like they just mimic. So your child cannot play in nature, but they can climb a monkey bar. Now you see a child upside down on a monkey bar stuck, not knowing what to do. The only thing they think of is to let go. That's why we have broken legs, broken arms, all sorts of injuries because there is no what I call instinct. Did that make sense? That wisdom.

David:

I'm sure you experienced this every time. And all they want to do is move.

Mashobane:

Yes. That's exactly why I bring the stories through movements and I will have my drum and I'll be right in the middle of the circle. If you can imagine me in the middle of the circle, surrounded by 26 first graders, telling the story and right in the middle of story I say, "Then there is this animal." Is that like that? "Then there is this animal."

David:

That's how you start, yeah.

Mashobane:

Because we have to work out of the imagination. That's where you meet the child. The only place to meet the child is in the imagination. Then you go to their body, leave the brain alone. The intellect is not needed in this case, it will come later. It'll always be there. So you'll say, "Then there was this animal. This animal reminds me of a little boy carrying a backpack to school. This animal it has no rush what so ever. It is cool, calm and connected. And every step this animal takes it's meaningful." And then you see the hands going up. Well, what'd you think I was talking about David, this animal?

David:

For me, every step that was meaningful for me was a spotted leopard. I was just taking time, very deliberate steps, but that doesn't have the backpack. So I'm thinking maybe a turtle.

Mashobane:

That's correct. That's very correct. But right, you get to think. We need our children to think. Do you know that right now our children of today, their imagination as being robbed so much by the screen. There is a place we go in our school is called the dragon tree. Is tree lying down, is an old mama tree, but it just has so many lanes. And we call it the dragon tree. And I came to first grade I said, "All right. So today we went to the dragon tree and I drew the tree lying down." And one child says, "That is not a dragon. That is a tree."

And as parents and as teachers in this society, we need to encourage the imagination, like what you are doing. What Sparkle Stories is doing is to revive the imagination of the child.

David:

You lived in Ubuntu in South Africa, in where you grew up. So this was what you knew. And do you recall if that was described or taught to you in particular stories as well? You mentioned before about how stories, it's almost like they bypass the brain and they go right to the feelings. And I even think that sometimes they can go right into the limbs. You can respond with your body to a story before you even make sense of it.

So I'm wondering like in your childhood, if you can recall things that you read, things that you were told, things that you saw, films or something like that, that really meant a lot to you as a child and have helped you get to where you are right now. And your picture of the world?

Mashobane:

One simple story that I can think of is the story of the animals. It always goes to that point of nature. My grandma always told us stories and we will sit around the fire and hear her stories. And of course, most

stories, she made it up. You are able to make up stories if you lived in nature that much. And we had a story about animals, how animals finally got their own colors.

"So once upon a time, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, all the animals were same color. They were white in color. All of them. This was sometimes very confusing for king lion to know who is who among his kingdom. And therefore one day he took his big, giant drum and he went up this big mountain and he started beating his drum to call the meeting." What did you think he said, Mr. Sewell McCann.

David:

"Today we are all white. There's no color."

Mashobane:

"But I have message for you." And there was a drum roll, boom boom boom. "We are, as from today, we will get colors and everyone will get to choose their own color." This is where the fun begins. So you can imagine when you have a group of children, they get to choose any kind of animal that they feel related to. So the message in this story.

David:

Right. I'd be curious to hear what you say because I'm already hearing how things you said earlier are factoring into this. But tell me, tell me what the message is.

Mashobane:

What's the message in this story? Obviously, the main message is patience. Is patience. That's the main message. But also, even though we are all animals, we can have different colors. Even though we have different colors, we are all animals vice versa. Even though we're all animals, we can still have different colors. Having different colors, we are still animals. It doesn't change us anyway.

So that's the message of the story. This is where now the world is suffering through this simple thing. Where you and I are not the same because your skin color is a certain color and my skin color is a certain color. Therefore, you are different than I am. This story helps. This story hopefully could help the children understand that color in your skin is just the color of your skin. You are still being. B-E-I-N-G, a being.

David:

I feel that the story really delivers what your answer to the question. And it also weaves in so much of what you were talking about with the gifts of your childhood and what you're meeting in children now. And their unique struggles in this time at the peak of the wave, where we have such an opportunity. And I really would love for that story to be told and to be recorded. And so that it can be heard and children can be inspired to immediately begin to move. And I can hear your voice telling it, of course.

Mashobane:

Absolutely. I will be happy to tell this, to retell the story again some point, and we'll get out of that every animal, if you think about it, every animal in that story has a story as well.

David:

Exactly. Yes. And maybe we can unpack. Yeah.

Mashobane:

Absolutely.

David:

Right. Oh, that would be such fun. I'm glad you're open to that. Okay.

Mashobane:

Yes.

David:

Mashobane, so I know for sure there will be a lot of people who want to know more about Ubuntu, and want to know about the Ubuntu Initiative. I know that there are educators that listen, and I know that there are parents who are going to want this for their... We all want this Mashobane. Of course, we do. Do you know of a resource or do you know how people can learn more about how you are doing this? Is there a place that you're comfortable sending people?

Mashobane:

Absolutely, as of now, our website is actually in the development stage, it should be up and running very soon, but we're on social media at That African Waldorf Teacher.

David:

That African Waldorf Teacher. Okay.

Mashobane:

Yeah. You check him out That African Waldorf Teacher, and I think you can also look at our Facebook Mashobane Ubuntu Initiative. That's where you can find us and our service, but really what we are doing here is bringing this change, but also this awareness of each other. Mentoring teachers, giving workshops about movement and also giving talks about why movement is necessary in our children.

We definitely will be telling stories if you can put up the article about Ubuntu, because I feel like that is actually, a very powerful article. Every time I read it, and I read it to just check if this is what still resonate with how I feel. And it really, it is. And it will be great for the listeners to look in that article, how to create a community, a conscious community through Ubuntu.

David:

Perfect. Yes, that will be on the website for The Storying Project and we'll put links so that they can find you, to find out more. And we'll put the article up as well. Oh, I'm just very excited to continue working with you. Mashobane, this has been a joy.

Mashobane:

This has been a joy. I really loved talking to you as well. And this was, just listening to you talk. And it just remind me of our olden days at the Lake Champlain Waldorf school in Vermont, the teaching time. Yeah. So it's good that we are reconnecting again in a different platform. It's just beautiful to like seeing how well Sparkle Stories embody this whole idea of nourishing the soul through stories. I really appreciate it.

I wanted to say that. I forgot to say that at the beginning, but I needed you to know that I hear your voice and I've been hearing it forever. Yeah. And that's beautiful. It's beautiful.

David:

Oh, Mashobane thank you for saying that. That really means a lot to me. Yeah. It's a real privilege, it's good to see you friend.

Mashobane:

All right, brother. Thank you so much. Yes. Bye.

David:

Hello again. So we decided to take the story Mashobane told me in the conversation, the story that came from his grandmother. And we worked on it together before landing on this final version, which included more about Ubuntu. This was a wonderful adventure to be sure and truly something new for Sparkle Stories. Having another storyteller actually tell the story, and you will hear why Mashobane clearly needed to tell this one. So here is a snippet of How The Animals Got Their Colors. Enjoy.

Mashobane:

The story about how the animals got their colors. My grandmother was a wonderful storyteller, and this is the story I heard from her. This story has changed since I heard it, because now I tell the story. Now the story is little bit my story, but this is an important story to me about how the animal of the world got their colors. "You see once upon a time animals did not have colors, no colors. They went about their days, grazing and climbing and swimming and flying. But it was very confusing which animals was which."

"They knew what color was, because they could see that the natural world had color. They could see that flowers had colors, the trees had colors, the rocks had colors and the sky and the water had colors. They could tell the difference between an apple and an avocado, because all of the color of the fruit. There was no confusion between dandelion and Zinnia because of the color of the bloom. The cherry tree and the hazelnut tree were easy to identify because of the color of the leaves."

"Everything had colors, except the animals, and now they wanted colors as well. At first, it was just the crow and the parrot who discussed the matter, their voices attracted the baboon and the raccoon and then the wolf and the elephant, and eventually the wolf called out that they must all go to the big rock and consult with grandmother lion. "She will know what to do." The Wolf howled. And they all gathered around the great rock and brought their concern to her. Grandmother lion lived high on the great rock and heard their cries."

"She was consulted not because she was greater or more important than other animals. She was not the fastest animal, or the smartest, or the best climber, or the strongest. She was ruler because of her heart connection to the ancestors. Her heart was very big. And this gave her a deep understanding of Ubuntu, or what it is to be a community, a family connected and supported."

Lisabeth:

Hi, this is Elisabeth of Sparkle Stories. What you just heard was a snippet of the full collaborative story, David and Mashobane created together. If you want to hear the entire story, as well as over 1300 other original stories, visit us at sparklestories.com. The stories from the podcast are all free to listen to, and can be found on the browse page at sparklestories.com. And while you're there, won't you consider

subscribing? You can start an extended free trial when you use the code [storying](#), that's [storying S-T-O-R-Y-I-N-G](#).

The Storying Project, a Sparkle Stories workshop was produced by Marjorie Shik. The audio editor is Nate Gwatney, theme music composed by Angus Sewell McCann. If you'd like to know more about Mashobane and the Ubuntu Initiative, be sure to head over to thestoryingproject.com for many useful links related to this episode.

We are so grateful to Mashobane for joining us and sharing his warmth and wisdom with us. I've had the pleasure of working with Mashobane in person as my boys' teacher. So I loved hearing in words, the gifts that I saw him offer day-to-day in the school setting. We hope you enjoyed it.

If you enjoyed this podcast, please consider following us, and then leave us a review and let us know what you think. Thanks for listening.

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