

The Contribution of the Community in Supporting Schools in Dealing with Selected Community Based Problems

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Abstract: In the South African School Act, the principles of partnership and co-operation are strongly emphasised. The community is given obligation by the Department of Education to support the school. This research is focused on the role of the community in supporting school in dealing with community-based problems such as drug abuse and poverty. The aims of this research were to determine ways and means in which the relationship between the community and the school could be promoted, to investigate how the community supports the school in dealing with community-based problems and to find ways and means by which the school can involve the community. In this research quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to collect the data. Questionnaires were completed by the learners from the four selected schools within Khakhu community, educators from the same four schools and community members. The findings revealed that drug abuse is a problem of both the community and the school. The research indicated that both the community and the school are ready to support each other.

Keywords: Community, community-based problems and schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although the South African Schools Act (Department of Education, 1996) indicates the changes that have been brought about in the education system, the community still seems to be reluctant to help the schools. The schools Act focuses on the transformation and democratisation of education. The democratisation of education implies that stakeholders such as parents, teachers, learners and members of the community near the school should play an important role in supporting the school. Through the School Governing Body (SGB) the community makes decisions on behalf of the school and ensures that it is governed properly. Because corporal punishment at school has been abolished, learners no longer feel constrained by school discipline, and tend to act irresponsibly. Drug abuse among learners, their being late for school and absenteeism are major problems with which school authorities have to contend (Eksteen, 1999). According to the South African Schools Act, the culture of human rights should be established in order to advance the democratic transformation of society and combat racism, sexism and other forms unfair discrimination. As corporal punishment is a serious offence in the new education policy, it may no longer be applied. This has, to a great extent; led to a severe disintegration of discipline in schools (Eksteen, 1999). It has therefore become imperative that communities support schools in dealing with community-based problems.

Besides the afore-mentioned problems, there are other problems experienced by the school which need community support, such as poverty. Elimination of poverty is one of the general purposes of school education. The Schools Act aims at ensuring an education that develops the learners' talents for their benefit as well as for the benefit of the whole society. Community-based support has to be utilised to develop and support education provision through a structured community participation approach (National Committee on Education Support Services, 1997).

Although there are parents who play a central role in their children's education, some parents remain minimally involved. Lack of parent involvement hinders progress at school (Ngwenya, 1999). Most parents have been historically marginalised in the education system. Instead of focusing on their differences, parents and school staff should cooperate and work together in contributing to the learners' education (National Committee on Education Support Services, 1997).

Pillay (2000) emphasises the fact that responsible adults such as parents, teachers, youth leaders and others involved in education play an important role in school in dealing with drug abuse. In addition, in its policy statement every school should address the issue of drugs.

The researcher has used a mixed model research design where both qualitative and quantitative data have been generated. The purposes for conducting mixed method research are to expand understanding of results from different designs looking at the same phenomenon and expand understanding by using different methods for different inquiry components.

According to Marojele (1999) most schools in Western Cape were also affected by drug abuse. Communities tried to prevent drug abuse by organising programmes for the prevention of drug abuse. Parents were encouraged to involve themselves in supporting schools in dealing with such community-based problems.

The situation in schools has not changed for the better. In many areas the problems have in fact increased. The school as societal structure for the accelerated, planned and organised development of the learners by professionally trained educators is unable to play a role of developing the learners because of drug abuse (Stone, 1988). Cotton (1998) points out that drug and alcohol abuse in South African schools have caused the situation to be non-conducive to learning and teaching. He stressed the importance for the addict to realise the problem, and to accept that addiction is a social disease. He provided some important hints on how to identify a person who may be experiencing an addiction problem.

According to Lilla-Chiki (1997) the juvenile drug addicts start out in primary schools and come from the ghettos and suburbs. Bad conduct, skipping school and a definite drop in grades are typical for young adults addicted to drugs. "Programmes addressing education and prevention of drug abuse should include all activities, which are planned to enrich the personal development of the student, including humanistic education, open education and affective education."

Poverty is a major threat to the well-being of both school and community. According to Ngqwala (1998) learners from some high schools in Mdantsane did not complete the school year, but left school prematurely because of poverty. The reason they provided was that they did not see the importance of going to school because they would not be in a position to further their education since their parents were unemployed.

Since drugs and poverty are some of the community-based problems that are affecting schools, it is important that the community and community education should support the school in dealing with these problems. The community and community education should remain relevant to the experience and expectations of the school in order to play a meaningful role in the reconstruction and transformation of the learners' lives. Thus, community-based problems should be dealt with collaboratively. There should be a strong relationship between the community and the school. Schools should be encouraged to involve the community in helping/ supporting the school to cope with the problems. The school should be encouraged not to work in isolation, but to forge a mutually beneficial relationship with the community.

This study attempts to determine the role that the community can play in supporting the school in dealing with some community-based problems. Ways and means of promoting the relationship between the community and the school are investigated.

If the community and the school could work together, community-based problems could be minimised. If parents and school come together more often, parents would see that they are part of the school. Moreover, parents should feel free to visit the school irrespective of whether they are invited or not (Department of Education, 1997). The work of the community could improve social functioning in the community and at school. There are many roles assigned to different members of the community in order to deal with community-based problems (Lombard, 1992). Furthermore, community-based problems could be dealt with by the school in support of the community and because community promotes new and more democratic forms of educational access, accountability and control (Martin, 1990).

In conclusion, it is to be emphasised that the community may play an important role in the smooth governance of the school by supporting a school in dealing with community-based problems. The community should introduce as many

projects as possible in order to accommodate everybody in the community. Hence the development of the school relies on the involvement of the community.

2. THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to determine the role of the community in supporting the school in dealing with community-based problems. The aims of the study were:

- To investigate how the community supports the school in dealing with community-based problems;
- To investigate ways and means of maintaining the relationship of support between the community and the school and
- To find ways in which the school can involve the community.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research both the qualitative technique and the quantitative technique were used for generating data. The two techniques were used with three target groups within the community. When using qualitative techniques the data is collected through interviews and with quantitative technique the data is collected through questionnaires.

Interviews:

Interviews with three different target groups were used in this research. The first series of interviews was conducted with twenty (20) members of the community on different days. These members drew on their experiences to answer the questions. The number of questions varies from one group to another. The purpose of the interviews was to determine the ways and means of promoting the relationship between the community and the school. The interviews assisted the researcher in determining whether the community needed help from the school.

The second series of interviews was conducted with members of the teaching staff of the four schools in the community. The number of questions was different from that of the other groups. The purpose of the interviews was to determine whether members of the teaching staff were ready to work with the community. This would help the researcher to know what the teaching staff expected of the community. The formulation of questions was different from those of the community members' questions. Twelve (12) members of the teaching staff were interviewed. The interviews were conducted on different days at different occasions.

The third series of interviews was conducted with a sample of learners from four schools in Khakhu area. The sample was selected randomly and consisted of more than twenty (20) learners per school. The interviews helped the researcher to determine whether community-based problems which affect schools are caused or promoted by parents. Another purpose was to find ways and means by which learners could be seriously involved in dealing with community-based problems in schools.

Questionnaires:

To ensure that the questions were clear and understandable and that the main investigation itself was valid, piloting of questionnaires were undertaken. Questions were constructed to get responses from twenty (20) community members, twelve (12) members and twenty (20) learners per school. This constituted a total of 112 respondents. Through the questionnaires the teaching staff as well as community members and learners had opportunity to give their views. Questionnaires were based on the relationship between the community and the school, community-based problems and the significance of community education.

Data analysis:

The quantitative data was processed using the statistical package for social science. The quantitative data was broken down into consistent parts to obtain answers to the questions. Although the analysis of the data did not state the problem, interpretations were done. Interpretation is the explanation to find the meaning. The data analysis was placed in categories in order to derive answers to research questions. In the qualitative data analysis, data was analysed in a spiral way. The researcher collected and recorded the data and managed, read, described, classified, interpreted and represented the data collected.

4. RESULTS

Learners' responses to interviews:

The learners were interviewed at their own schools. The responses were recorded in writing by the researcher. The responses to each of the interview questions are provided below and are analysed and interpreted.

For the improvement of education at our schools, drugs should be legalised:

Generally, learners appear to be more interested in drugs than in studying at school. The purpose of this question was to find out the learners' views on the use of drugs in schools. The learners indicated that drugs should not be legalised because they promote crime in the community and in schools. Drugs should not be legalised because there would be no discipline in schools. They indicated that drugs damage one's health. The results to this question indicate that according to the views of learners drugs should not be allowed at school.

Drug education should be introduced in our schools:

Learners appeared to be unaware of the effects of drugs and of which are the most dangerous drugs. The purpose of this question was to find out the learners' views on drug education. The learners gave different responses to this question. Some of the learners indicated that drug education should not be introduced in schools because this could disturb the whole school. Another group of learners indicated that drug education should be introduced in schools because learners would know the effects of drugs and they would also know the types of drugs. The results to this question did not indicate if drug education should be introduced in schools or not.

Democracy seems to have promoted drug abuse in schools:

Generally, it seems that learners misunderstand the word democracy because since democracy has been instituted, it seems that learners are no longer selective about good and bad things. The purpose of this question was to find out learners' understanding of the word democracy and to determine whether they know what is expected of them. Learners indicated that they were free to do whatever they liked in a democratic country. They indicated that they thought drug abuse was one of the human rights indicated by the Bill of Rights. Another group of respondents indicated that democracy and drug abuse never influence each other. The results to this question indicated that some learners do not understand the meaning of democracy while other learners do.

Drug taking seems to be serious in secondary schools:

Generally, most of learners in secondary schools seem to be taking drugs. The purpose of this question was to find out the learners' views on whether or not drug taking took place amongst learners in secondary schools. According to the learners' views, most learners in secondary schools abuse drugs because they claim to be adults. They want to do what adults do. Some of them claim to know the effects of drugs. The results to this question indicated that drug taking is serious in secondary schools.

What should learners do to reduce the use of drugs in school?

Learners seem to be the only group of people who could reduce the use of drugs at schools. The purpose of this question was to find out the learners' views on how the use of drugs at school could be reduced. Learners indicated different ways of reducing the use of drugs at school. They indicated that the police should be asked to monitor their schools. They should advise one another on the effects of drugs. They stated that they needed support from both parents and educators. The response to this question indicated that learners' could play a vital role in reducing the use of drugs at schools.

Educators' responses to interviews:

The educators were interviewed at their schools. The educators' responses were recorded in writing by the researcher. The responses are provided to each of the interview questions and are analysed and interpreted.

Is drug abuse a school problem?

It appears as if all schools are experiencing drug abuse. The purpose of this question was to find out educators' views on drug abuse at school. Educators gave different views regarding drugs as a school problem. One group indicated that drug abuse was a school problem. Some educators indicated that drug abuse was a community problem. Most of the educators

were of the opinion that drug abuse was both a school and a community problem. The responses to this question indicated that drug abuse was both a school and a community problem.

Is there any relationship between drug taking and poverty?

It appears as if drug taking is related to family status. Some would say drugs are taken in poor families while others say drugs are taken in rich families. The purpose of this question was to find out educators' views on who takes drugs. Educators said that children from poor families were likely to take drugs. They stated that children used the money they get from temporary jobs to buy drugs. According to educators, children took drugs due to a lack of parental guidance. It was believed that most children from poor families used drugs in order to socialise. The responses to this question indicated that there is no relationship between drugs and poverty. The results confirm the findings of the learners' responses.

What should educators do to counteract the use of drugs?

Educators are working in a situation which is totally affected by drug abuse. Most learners appear to be taking drugs every day. The purpose of this question was to find out educators' views on what educators can do to alleviate the use of drugs.

Educators said that in order to deal with drugs, drug education should be introduced in schools. Educators should keep on advising the learners on the effects of drugs. The need for drug education was stated by all educators. They indicated that they could counteract the use of drugs at school provided they were supported by civic group and other professionals such as social workers and police. The results confirm the findings of the learners' responses.

Is it fair for the community to get involved in school affairs?

Most educators seemed not to need community members at school. Educators seemed to ignore the parents of their learners. The purpose of this question was to find out the educators' views on community involvement in schools affair. The respondents said that members of the community were welcome to visit the school when invited by the principal. The responses to this question showed that educators felt that community members could visit schools only if invited by the principal.

The community members' responses to interviews:

The community members were interviewed individually. The respondents' views were recorded in writing by the researcher. The responses to each interview questions are provided, analysed and interpreted.

What do you think could be done to alleviate poverty in our schools?

Most schools appeared to be running short of essential resources. The purpose of this question was to find out the views of the community members on what could be done to alleviate poverty in our schools. The respondents indicated that poverty could be alleviated by schools asking for donations of money from NGOs. Some indicated that the problem could be alleviated by motivating learners to study hard to improve the school results so that sponsors could be attracted. The response to this question showed that it was felt that the community alone could not alleviate poverty at schools but needed to collaborate with the school.

What should the police do to counteract drug abuse in schools?

Educators alone appeared to be unable to counteract the use of drugs in schools. The police could help the educators. The purpose of this question was to find out the community' views on how the police could counteract the use of drugs in schools. The respondents said that the community policing forum should be introduced in all communities to help schools in dealing with drug abuse. The community policing forum should include the youth. The respondents stated that the police should create a good relationship with schools. The results of this question showed that the community wanted a working relationship to be established between the police and the school.

Responses of learners and educators to questionnaires those were similar for both groups:

Drug abuse is a serious community-based problem:

In general, the schools seemed to have problems which stemmed from the community itself. The purpose of this question was to determine the responses of learners and educators if drug abuse is a serious community based problem. The results are presented in figure 1.

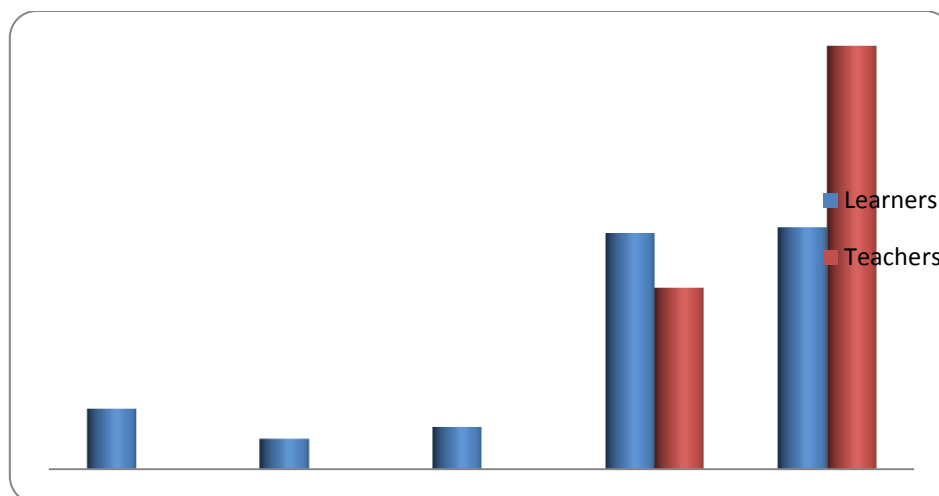


Figure: 1 Responses from educators and learners to the question of drug abuse as one of the serious community-based problems

Ten per cent of the learners strongly disagree that drug abuse was a serious community-based problem. Five per cent of the respondents disagree with the statement. Above 6% of the respondents were not sure of their views. Thirty nine per cent of the respondents agreed that drug abuse was a serious community-based problem. Forty per cent of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. The majority of 79% of learners agreed that drug abuse was a serious community-based problem. The results indicate that learners regarded drug abuse as a serious community-based problem.

According to the educators' responses, 30% of the respondents agreed that drug abuse was a serious community-based problem. Seventy per cent of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. One hundred per cent of the respondents agreed that drug abuse was a serious community-based problem. The results indicate that according to the views of both learners and the educators drug abuse was a serious community-based problem. The responses of 79% agreed of learners and 100% of educators indicate that both groups regarded drug abuse as a serious community-based problem.

It is rare to have drug abuse at school:

It is impossible to know exactly where drug abuse takes place. The purpose of this question was to find out the views of learners and educators on drug abuse at school. The results are presented in table 1.

It is rare to have drug abuse at school:

Respondents responses	Learners (%)	Educators (%)
Strongly disagree	17	10
Disagree	38	90
Not sure	17	0
Agree	15	0
Strongly agree	13	0
TOTAL	100	100

Seventeen per cent of learners strongly disagreed that it was rare to have drugs in schools. Thirty eight per cent of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Seventeen per cent of the respondents were not sure of their views. Fifteen per cent agreed with the statement. Thirteen per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that it was rare to have drug abuse at school. The majority of 55% of the respondents disagreed that it was rare to have drug abuse at school. The results indicate that according to the views of the learners, drug abuse took place at school. Ten per cent of the educators strongly disagreed with the statement. Ninety per cent of the respondents disagreed that it was rare to have drug abuse at school. One hundred per cent of the respondents disagreed with the statement. The results indicate that according to the views of educators drug abuse occurred even in schools. The responses of 55% disagreed of learners and 100% disagreed of educators indicate that according to the views of both groups, drug abuse occurred even at schools.

Community members are drug dealers:

Since drug dealers do not operate overtly, they generally remain anonymous. Innocent learners and educators usually do not know who the drug dealers in the community are. The purpose of this question was to find out from both learners and educators who they thought the drug dealers were. The results are presented in table 2.

Some of the community members are drug dealers:

Respondents responses	Learners (%)	Educators (%)
Strongly disagree	6	0
Disagree	18	20
Not sure	18	10
Agree	34	70
Strongly agree	24	0
TOTAL	100	100

Of the learners, 6% strongly disagreed that some community members were drug dealers. Eighteen per cent of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Eighteen per cent of the respondents were not sure of their views. Thirty four per cent of the respondents agreed that some community members were drug dealers. Twenty four per cent of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. The majority (55%) of the respondents agreed that some community members were drug dealers. The results indicate that according to the views of the learners, some community members were drug dealers. Of the educators, 20% disagreed that some community members were drug dealers. Ten per cent of the respondents were not sure of their views. Seventy per cent of the respondents agreed that some community members were drug dealers. The majority (70%) of the respondents agreed with the statement. The results indicate that according to the views of the educators, some community members were drug dealers. The responses of 58% agreed of learners and 70% agreed of educators indicate that according to both groups, some community members were drug dealers.

Both responses of the interviews and questionnaires indicated that drug abuse was a community-based problem which was impossible to be dealt with by the school alone. All responses to questions supported the involvement of the community members, educators and learners in supporting schools in dealing with community-based problem.

5. DISCUSSIONS

It is indeed true that schools are seriously affected by community-based problems such as drug abuse and poverty. These problems could be decisively dealt with if the community and schools worked together for the quality of education in schools. The community should devise strategies to deal with community-based problems. The prevalence of drug abuse in schools, particularly in high schools, has caused the environment to become hostile to learning and teaching. The use of cannabis (dagga) and cocaine, for example, has made it very difficult for educators to work with delinquent learners. Drug abuse and poverty interact detrimentally, because learners from poor families use drugs to forget their poverty problem, causing a vicious cycle (Ngqwala, 1998). Most of the impoverished people use drugs such as narcotics, depressants, stimulants, hallucinogens and cannabis because it is available even to learners.

Yet the South African Schools Act (1996) does not make provision for appropriate action that can be taken against learners who use drugs at school or who under the influence of drugs during school time. The SASA (1996) abolished corporal punishment, which was used to deal with learners who demonstrated this kind of aberrant behaviour, but could not replace it with any other effective kind of disciplinary action to deal with drug abuse in schools. Community-based problem can not be dealt with by the school alone but the community has a fundamental part to play in the alleviation of the problem of drug abuse in schools. If drug education could be introduced in schools, it could also contribute much to the alleviation of the drug abuse problem (Pillay, 2000).

Pillay (2000) recommends that every school policy should include the issue of drug abuse and how to deal with it. In formulating the policy, the SGB should consult as many people as possible including learners themselves. It should be stated in the school policy that any learner found using drugs would be dealt with in a constructive and therapeutic manner. Drug detection courses for teachers and a teaching curriculum that includes drug education should be introduced.

The researcher agrees with Pillay that the community plays a significant role in minimising drug abuse in schools. The

community must be encouraged to visit school at any time in order to be well informed about the progress of their children. Learners must be involved in problem solving in order to be successful in dealing with the drug abuse problem.

In some Soweto high schools teachers, parents and members of the community see learners smoking dagga every day (Ngwenya, 1999). Dagga is used more often in high schools than in primary schools. Boys prefer to smoke dagga instead of going to class and more girls are seemed to be taking drugs as well. It is indeed a growing problem in our schools, yet few people seem to care (Ngwenya, 1999).

Although parents are not always at school, the school should work with them in dealing with the problem. Some parents might not know that their children are drug abusers, so if they are invited, they can keep a watchful eye at home. If parents are drug providers, they could be encouraged to stop providing drugs to learners (Levin, 1998).

In 1998, a new programme was developed in Cape Town to help schools to deal with community-based problems. The programme comprised a teachers' training course for teachers to meet drug education needs. Learners' workshops were also planned for life skills training. The session themes were drugs, self worth, values, feelings, relationships and peer pressure, sexuality, conflict, change and the future. A parents' introductory workshop introduced the programme to the parents of the children involved (Van Rooyen, 1998).

Eksteen (1999) indicates that if parents are the drug providers, the school cannot deal with the problem alone. It is clear that the community should be involved in supporting school. The community and community education should deal with this problem, as it is community-based. The community leaders should deal with those parents who provide drugs to school children. It is advisable that within the community there should be a committee to deal with community-based problems.

Lazarus (1995) indicates that personal reconstruction is an urgent need for many youth, both those in and out of school. He states that youth development programmes should be introduced in communities in order to help the school in dealing with community-based problem. There are pupils who want to give up taking drugs, but who do not know how. Moreover, many learners go astray as a result of peer pressure, and not necessarily of their own volition.

According to Lombard (1992), the community should act as social workers in order to help the school in dealing with community-based problems. The work of the community could improve social functioning both in the community and at school. Lombard's (1992) view is that community work is an alternative case of work. There are numerous roles assigned to different members of the community in order to deal with community-based problems. The roles include those of organiser, facilitator, booker, encourager, coordinator and educator.

The community has to decide on its own whether or not it wants its quality of life to be enhanced and if it wants that to happen, it must also decide upon the nature and scope of the enhancement. If the community and schools could work together, the general welfare of learners would improve. According to the report of the National Committee on Education Support Services (Department of Education, 1997) the principle of involving key stakeholders in the investigation of all school community-based problems is considered to be crucial. This principle is in line with the democratic ethos of public policy development that is emerging in South Africa.

According to Klesing-Rempel and Encues (2004), poverty can be reduced if community and school are in partnership. The school as the nucleus of the community development is organised in work teams of teachers. They participate in meeting with the community committees and also with parents to discuss school matters and community problems. The school is used as a place that generates knowledge and skills for human development. All people need creativity and competence in order to alleviate poverty, thereby strengthening and protecting human rights. People in the community should promote a culture of peace, encourage active citizenship and strengthen the role of civil society in order to deal with community-based problem (Thenee, 1998).

The processes of community organisation, community development and community action are strategies to encourage community education, which will ultimately support schools. However, if parents do not get motivation from schools, they lose interest. Schools should show recognition towards parents. In a well organised school, a parents' day is accompanied by different activities such as traditional dancing. Learners should also expose their expertise through drama, poems and even traditional dances. If the school and the community could share a common interest, many community-based problems would be solved.

6. CONCLUSION

The researcher's hypothesis was that drug abuse and poverty prevail in the school included in this research. To test this hypothesis questions had to be put to the learners, educators and the community to find out how they viewed the prevalence of drug abuse in schools. The research centred on the role of the community and community education in supporting schools in dealing with community-based problems. The purpose of the research was to investigate how the community and community education can support the schools in dealing with community-based problems. The secondary aim was to investigate ways and means of maintaining the collaboration between the community and the school. The purpose was also to find new ways in which the school could involve the community. The purpose of the research was achieved, as indicated by the findings. The findings also helped in identifying the solution to the problem and in finding ways in which the relationship between the school and community could be promoted.

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