

“Masilingane”

Gender Sensitivity Project

**Action Research to address
HIV through a gender lens**

Participant Reports



Project Leader: **Prof Lesley Wood**

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Preface

Lesley Wood

"My thinking around gender has changed dramatically. It has never been something that I was serious about. These days I'm quite sensitive in any issue related to gender ... I go so far as to correct, in a professional way, those who could not care less about it."
(participating teacher, Masilingane project)

Gender, as an area of research, has received increased attention in recent years due to its undisputed link with HIV transmission. We know that gender inequalities are a key driver of the HIV pandemic (Sherr, Hankins, & Bennett, 1996; Brown, Sorrell, & Raffaelli, 2005; Dowsett, 2003; Lesch & Kruger, 2005) and therefore constitute an essential point of intervention for prevention. We also know that education plays a vital role in shaping the lives of future citizens, and that schooling is therefore an ideal opportunity for encouraging young people to think critically about gender. However, education may also unwittingly contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequalities when teachers themselves have been socialized to accept and maintain the gendered status quo, rather than challenge it. Schools can be a centre for education around gender equality, but in truth, most of our schools are perpetuating stereotypes of women as the "weaker" sex: good girls should be submissive, do as they are told, take second place to the needs of men. Boys, on the other hand, are encouraged to be assertive, aggressive and to satisfy their needs without taking into consideration the needs of the females they live with.

Working with the teachers whose stories are contained in this book, I have come to realise that we still have a long road to travel if we want to reduce the vulnerability of women to HIV infection. I have also realised that our schools are spaces where gender stereotypes and myths are reinforced, rather than challenged. Research (Delamont in Youdell, 2005) even suggests that schools enforce unequal gender roles more than the wider society. Another problem is that, up until the advent of the Age of AIDS, sexuality education was seen as something that was not an appropriate part of the curriculum – teachers and students have been constructed as being basically non-sexual (Youdell, 2005). However, we know that average age for children to commence sexual activity has lowered considerably over the past few years – children are engaging in sex in the pre-pubescent years (Coombe, 2002). It is no longer unusual for children as young as 10 to be sexually active – early sexual onset is becoming the norm rather than the



exception. We also know that teachers themselves have been badly affected by and infected with HIV (Education Labour Relations Council, 2005), and that they have been socialised into accepting the unequal gender norms prevailing in our communities, therefore they are facing similar challenges to the learners – education around gender issues is therefore as vital for our teachers as it is for those they are teaching.

Gender as a construct emphasizes the social and cultural differences between men and women that are so deeply embedded in culture and society that they appear “normal” (Dowsett, 2003, p. 22). Potential inequalities in access to resources and power may therefore not be evident to us unless we make an intentional effort to critically analyze how we think and act in relation to gender.

Based on this assumption, it was evident that before I could expect teachers to take action in their schools to raise awareness around gender relations and to promote more gender-sensitive practices and beliefs, I would have to help them to explore their own gender constructs.

The MASILINGANE project (named by the teachers themselves) originated from an HIV leadership initiative of the University of Columbia and the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA). As a fellow on this MACAIDS funded project, my brief was to design and implement an HIV prevention programme with a gender focus. To this end, I designed a series of ten workshops.

Workshops 1-5: The first five were focused on raising awareness around the link between HIV and gender; the teachers interrogating their own “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1977) around gender and how this might influence both their teaching and their leadership potential as ‘gender activists’.

Workshops 6-10: The second five were aimed at supporting the teachers to identify a point of intervention in their schools, to decide on and implement action designed to improve the situation and to evaluate its success, as well as to consider how their learning could be integrated into their future teaching practices.

The reports presented in this publication indicate that the teachers have succeeded in addressing gender issues in their schools. The gender-related topics they have chosen to address tell us what challenges education in the Nelson Mandela Metropole is facing at the current time:



- **Teenage pregnancy** – Ingrid de Monk's account addresses the need to cultivate a climate of respect between the sexes, starting with helping girls to respect themselves. She tells us how she has helped the girls in her school to become aware of the dangers of falling pregnant and how it disadvantages them in later life. Cordelia Mazomba also focussed on helping at risk girls to become aware of the dangers of early sexual activity and how it diminishes their life chances.
- **Bullying and aggressive behaviour by boys** – Ms Jijana and Ms Ncoyo explain how they tried to dispel the myth among boys that the amount of sexual conquests a young man makes defines his masculinity by introducing them to the values of respect and responsibility. Tuks Mcuga and Cindy Tame-Gwaxula, also addressed bullying in the school by exposing the boys to the consequences of behaviour which violates the rights of others. TJ Mahlakahlaka and ML Ntshininda also addressed the lack of responsibility and respect shown by boys by inviting an outside agency to conduct workshops with them around responsible sexual practices and the responsibilities that fatherhood brings.
- **Peer norms of sexual activity as part of dating relationships** – Sindi Somniso led a team of educators to help primary school children explore the real meaning of love, and to realise that sex is not necessarily a part of dating and a loving relationship.
- **Abuse of drugs/alcohol** – David Jauka illustrates how he helped boys to develop positive interests and values, introducing them to alternative ways of spending their free time, rather imitating the behaviour they are exposed to in their environments.
- **Violation of the rights of children, especially girls** – In his report, M Dimbaza explains how he worked with learners to make them aware of their rights, involving outside agencies and introducing fun events to promote positive values and attitudes. M Siguba also tried to address the negative behaviour displayed towards women by promoting the value of UBUNTU in his school.

Although these reports paint a grim picture of the reality faced by our teachers on a daily basis, more importantly, they show us that there is HOPE and that teachers can make a difference. At the beginning of the project, the teachers generally felt incapacitated and hopeless – what could they do to change things? However, after exploring their own gender beliefs and practices, and how these impacted on their teaching, they realised that social norms can and should be challenged, and that as



teachers, they were in a leadership role and thus an ideal position to initiate a change in mindsets. Changing the way people think, is a necessary precursor to helping them to take action.

Having realised that things can change, and that they could be the catalyst for such change, the teachers were facilitated to implement projects in their respective schools, using action research methodology to guide their interventions. The reports speak for themselves – using action research has been an empowering and life-changing experience for the teachers themselves, as well as having a positive influence on the learners, their colleagues and the whole school. Although most of these projects are only starting points, they demonstrate that action can be taken and can be successful. In-depth evaluations of the programme will be published in an upcoming book (Wood, 2009), presented at an international education conference and submitted to a journal for publication. For now, I will let the stories contained herein speak for themselves.



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How can we help amakrwalas and other young boys to be more respectful towards girls?

BF Jijana & NN Ncoyo

Our school context

Our school, Mzontsundu High School, is situated at the heart of Kwazakhele location. Most of our learners come from the nearby squatter camps where parents are often sick (many from HIV-related illnesses), unemployed or abuse alcohol. They live on grandparents' social grants or child support grants. There is no stable income. We have quite a number of orphans and vulnerable children at our school and some of them are heading their households. They struggle to pay school fees and to buy uniform. With such rampant poverty, many come to school on empty stomachs.

There is also a high degree of absenteeism due to the fact that girls are expected to take care of the sick parents and siblings. This sometimes leads to drop-outs and some girls take on sexual partners for financial support. As a result, the risk for HIV infection and teen pregnancy is high. The huge social and economic problems experienced by the learners make them very sensitive and easily angered at school.

In terms of gender equality in the school there are still duties which are specifically performed by male or female teachers, e.g. netball is for female teachers and soccer for male. It is also believed that disciplining learners, especially boys, should only be done by male teachers. The male teachers treat the issue of amakrwala as a cultural issue where females must not interfere. The teachers also expect different behaviour from boys and girls, where girls are expected to "respect" the boys and do the cleaning work around the school.

Our concern

The issue that concerns us most is the behaviour of the boys, particularly when they return from the initiation schools. These amakrwalas or initiates demand a special respect from the girls, but treat these girls badly. They bully the girls, forcing them to have sexual relationships with them and if they do not comply they beat them. They also compete about





having multiple partners in the same school, which, according to them, is done to prove their masculinity.

This behaviour presents an enormous risk for transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as teenage pregnancy. These boys do not use condoms as a rule and the girls are mostly scared to ask them to do so, for fear of being beaten. In addition, this type of behaviour is also damaging to women and sets up the precedent that it is okay to abuse women, a myth that fuels HIV transmission and hinders any attempt at promoting more equitable gender relations.

A number of cases have been reported to the school concerning this issue. In 2007, seven cases of boys bullying girls were reported, and so far this year four cases have been noted. However, since this is such a sensitive issue for the girls and they live in fear of the boys, one could imagine that there are many more unreported incidences. In 2006 a case was reported of a *krwala* who was ill-treating a girl, forcing her to have sex with him. As a result, the girl could not come to school since she was afraid of him. When teachers intervened the boy was called to a disciplinary hearing and warned, but it is unlikely that this would have any real effect on his attitude or behaviour. Bullying of this kind results in high absenteeism and eventually drop-out of girls.

Why we are concerned

Our values concerning gender equality are grounded in mutual respect between the genders. If respect exists, then the boys will treat the girls fairly and the girls will be able to trust the boys. Lack of respect means that most girls grow up thinking that men are abusers, and should not be trusted, and boys grow up thinking that women can be treated in any way they wish.

The current situation in our school is denying our values and we believe that we need to intervene to raise awareness around this issue and to try and improve the situation. We want to try and help to instil a sense of respect in young boys, and particularly in the *amakrwalas* and to change their stereotypes regarding men as being all powerful in relationships. We want to inculcate a sense of gender equality in order to try and change their mindsets so as to lessen the risk of HIV/STI transmission and pregnancy in the short term and help to change the societal norms around gender equality in the long term.



In order to start this process, we asked ourselves the following question, on which our action research was based:

“How can we help amakrwalas and other young boys to be more respectful towards girls?”

What we did to improve the situation

In order to improve gender relations in our school, we would like to attain the following outcomes in the long term:

- For boys to display more respectful attitudes towards girls
- For boys to stop bullying girls and sexually harassing them
- For boys to treat girls fairly and with respect

We realised that we would need to involve all the stakeholders in the school and therefore we invited colleagues and parents to participate. We held a staff meeting and decided on two main interventions to try and address our concerns.

The first intervention involved the five Life Orientation teachers, which included ourselves. We decided as a team to base our lessons for a specific period on outcomes which would foster respect among learners. Over a period of 3 weeks we all based our lessons in the different grades on the following:

- The role of our culture in instilling respect
- Respect of other people's property
- Respect of other people's views and opinions
- Mutual respect in relationships

Lessons were designed which used strategies such as discussion, role play and debate to encourage maximum learner participation.

Our second main intervention was to organise an awareness day which most of our 23 colleagues attended, as well as members of the School Governing Body and about 15 parents. We involved learners from Grades 9-11, since the grade 12s were busy with exam preparation and the Grade 8's were considered a bit young to benefit from the intervention. The main aim of the awareness day was to make boys aware of the importance of mutual respect in relationships.

We invited a speaker from UBUNTU, an NGO to give a talk on woman abuse and how boys should behave towards girls. This speaker explained the concept of gender-



based violence and how it relates to HIV & AIDS transmission, and the different types of abuse, ranging from verbal abuse to sexual assault and even murder. He outlined how “real men” should behave and how to get help if you are an abuser or know someone who is. He also encouraged the boys to form Boys Clubs, where they can pursue healthy activities together and learn how to interact with others in a respectful way. The questions asked by the boys showed their keen interest in the topic. For example, some of the questions posed were:

“If a man buys alcohol for a woman, does he have the right to sleep with her?”

“What should you do to prevent sexual abuse?”

These questions show that the boys are not sure of how they should behave, and are perhaps just adopting the social norms that they see lived out in their communities.

The learners also chose songs to sing, and composed poems and a drama around the topic. The drama was made up by the learners and told the story of a boy who has multiple partners at school that he treated with little respect. All the girls are afraid of this boy. Then a new girl comes to the school and this boy wants to have sex with her. The new girl talks with the other girls and they team up against him. They ridicule this boy in front of everybody and tell him that what he is doing is totally bad. As a result this boy was embarrassed and runs away. Later on he decided to change his attitude and apologized to the girls.

One of the poems that the learners recited tells the story of a woman who is lamenting the fact that men treat women so badly. She asks God to change the mindsets of men so that they can have compassion towards their loved ones. The boy who chose this poem was aware of the feelings of women and wanted to bring this to the attention of other males. While he was reciting it, some of the other boys shouted “Akhohlakele amanye amadoda” and “Umbetha njani umntu omthandayo?” (Some men are cruel and how do you abuse/ ill-treat somebody you claim you love?). This shows that the boys who were listening were aware that abuse is wrong.

The poem is given below.

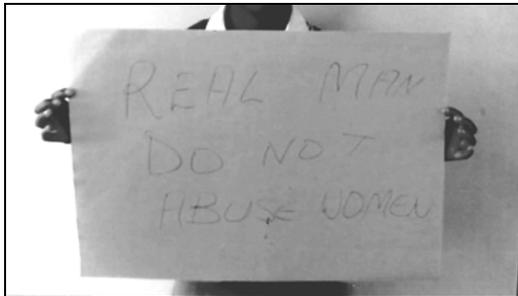


*TSHOTSHO NDINGENDI –ISILILO SOMFAZI
(I am glad I am not married, women cry)
Qamata yiv'isimbonono somfazi
Sus isiqalekiso kumzi wase tyhini
Vul' amehlo ezigebenga zikuqond' ukugxekwa
Vul' iindlebe zababulali baziv' izijwili
Thambis' intliziyo lubuy' usizi novakalelo
Kokwanina oku kutyakatyana kwabathandanayo*

One of the parents gave a vote of thanks and emphasised that respect is the cornerstone of education and that if respect can be maximised, HIV & AIDS can be minimised.

How do we know that we have improved the situation?

The fact that the learners chose poems, songs and made up a drama that had powerful messages shows that they have learnt something from the Life Orientation classes and the awareness day. The learners also made posters, with slogans on them, such as the one shown below. These slogans are evidence that they are now aware of the rights of women and of the concept of gender equality. However, most of these posters were made by girls, not by boys, so we cannot be sure that the boys were as passionate about the message as the girls.



One of the female learners with her poster

However, as teachers, we have noticed a change in the behaviour of the boys in class. They tend to be more respectful now during class discussions and group work.



They seem to respect the ideas of girls more and are able to listen to them, whereas before they tended to ignore or ridicule them, especially the amakrwalas. They even elect girls to be group leaders now.

Also, the girls traditionally cleaned the classrooms, while the boys did nothing. Now they do not object to helping and even do it willingly. We have reports from all teachers that there is less bullying and fewer incidences have been reported.

The evaluation forms that we gave to the boys after the interventions reveal that the majority agree that male dominance is not fair and that if there is mutual respect, their will be trust, love and understanding. One of the boys commented:

“When I get married, I will never treat my wife the way my father is treating my mother, coming home drunk and beating her for no apparent reason.” Other boys made similar comments, indicating that they have started to question behaviour that they had seen as normal before. Perhaps they had never been exposed to alternate ways to behave or considered the real meaning of respect.

What have we learnt from our research intervention?

We have learned that there is no gender that is superior to the other, we are all equal in terms of gender and that we must teach from this perspective. It has also positively influenced our thinking in that we no longer see things with the eyes we used to see them with. Before embarking on this project, we tended to believe that boys were cleverer than girls. Also, we always asked the girls to clean the class etc. – we believe we have broken free of our stereotypes.

We have also learned that whenever there is an issue that is likely to cause conflict in the school, that issue should be tackled immediately and that we can actually do something about it, instead of just complaining. We can influence the ideas and behaviour of our learners to be more positive, and that actually makes everyone happier since there is less bad behaviour and tension in the school.

Lastly, we have learned that educating learners in prosocial values could help in the reduction of the spread of HIV and help the boys to become responsible citizens of the society.



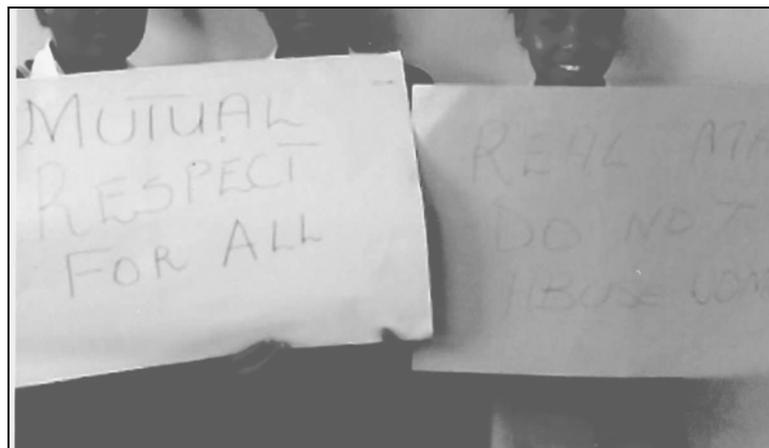
Implications of our learning for our teaching

We are planning to carry on with our intervention so as to sustain what we have started. Together with the Department of Education we have started training learners as Peer Educators. These learners, among other things, are going to educate other learners about values such as respect, integrity, and tolerance.

Representatives from UBUNTU have promised to visit our school on a regular basis and do activities with our learners teaching them about sexuality and HIV related issues, with an emphasis on gender equality.

We are also working with UNICEF, who is working hand in hand with Youth For Christ in improving the wellbeing of the school through the development of positive character in the learners.

We are hoping that by working with these NGO's the school will be able to instil prosocial values which can help the learners to become responsible citizens. We will also continue to raise awareness about gender equality in our lessons, specifically in Life Orientation and to try and make sure we treat both genders equally in terms of academic expectations and opportunities.





Addressing bullying at school

N Mcguca and C Tame-Gwaxula

Our context

We are female educators at Douglas Mbopa Senior Secondary School in Motherwell, an impoverished area. Most parents, especially female parents, are unemployed, resulting in a dependency syndrome where the females depend on their husbands for basically everything. This situation tends to result in the women's human rights being violated as manifested by the high incidence of domestic violence in the community. Women have to accept that their husbands have girlfriends, and they cannot refuse to sleep with their husbands without a condom, therefore HIV is rife. Many children are being raised by their grandparents due to the fact that the parents have either died or just don't take care of their own children. This means that our learners are emotionally and physically deprived and the consequences of this are seen in their behaviour in the classroom. Many of our learners "act out" and display socially unacceptable behaviour.

Our concern

In our school, there is a lot of bullying especially by the male learners. They bully the girls and sometimes make sexual advances towards them. The copies of our school disciplinary committee minutes attest to the fact that bullying is a common occurrence. The boys see this as normal, and part of an act to prove themselves as men. They are also just repeating the kind of behaviour that they see in the community. This renders girls very vulnerable to emotional and physical abuse, a factor that increases their risk of contracting HIV. If girls grow up with this sort of behaviour at school, and witness it in the community, and if boys perpetrate it, then they will accept it as the norm when they are older.

It is not only boys who are violent, some girls are as well, most likely due to the fact that their emotional and material needs are not being met. Although we may not be able to meet all their needs in the short term, we believe that things will improve if we intervene to inculcate the value of *mutual respect* between the genders. This will entail that the learners also learn to respect themselves. If respect can be a guiding value for their future relationships, then there is less chance of them indulging in the kind of



behaviour that will increase their risk for HIV infection – violent sex, rape, multiple partners and docile acceptance of their partner's behaviour.

We would like to be able to influence the following among our learners:

- The constructive management of negative emotions
- Treating others as they would like to be treated
- Dealing with conflict in an acceptable way

Presently, we feel that our values of *mutual respect* and *fairness* are being denied by the behaviour of the learners. We believe that everyone should be treated fairly and equally and that everyone has a right to privacy and nobody is allowed to violate that right. Learners who do not experience this at school and who indulge in bullying behaviour will suffer lasting damage to their self-esteem. Those who are victims of this behaviour will also suffer.

Respect for us means treating others as we wish to be treated; listening to the opinion and ideas of others; caring for others and wanting the best for them; and not doing any intentional emotional or physical harm to them. In order to try to influence our learners in this respect, we have formulated the following question to guide our intervention:

How can we instil a value of self-respect and respect for others in our learners?

If we succeed in this, we believe that we will influence our learners to develop more gender equitable relationships, which may help to decrease the transmission of HIV in their communities.

What we did to address the concern

We brainstormed many strategies with the disciplinary committee and the class teachers and decided that the best place to start would be with exposing the learners to activities where they would learn the meaning of respect and pro-social behaviour and the consequences of anti-social behaviour on their lives. The following strategies were therefore chosen:

- Expose learners to consequences of violating other peoples' rights (e.g. prison life)
- Redirect learners to programmes within the school that can help change their behaviour and attitude towards others



- Engage them in constructive and developmental activities that are school-based to keep them out of mischief

We identified 33 boys and 2 girls who were constantly being reported as bullies at school. Although we did not wish to single out these children and label them, we thought that they would benefit most from learning about the consequences of negative behaviour. During the identification process, we also discovered that many of these children were also using drugs or even dealing in drugs, a fact we were not aware of. This exercise also encouraged us to work together as a team of educators, something that we do not do enough of.

The first intervention we had with these 35 children from Grades 10 and 11 (ages 16-18), was to take them to a Crime Awareness Exhibition at the Motherwell Sports Centre. The Department of Correctional Services, inmates from St Albans prison, social workers and learners from neighbouring schools were all present at the event. A short 2-man play was presented by inmates from the prison with the theme that crime does not pay. It told the story of a young school boy who changes from an innocent child into a criminal by mixing with the wrong crowd and becoming involved in theft and drugs. He is trained to use a gun to rob a bank and ends up being arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison. After the play, which was very powerful, the inmates spoke about prison life and the lack of freedom of space, speech, choice. He spoke about rape in prison and the chance of HIV infection – the play had portrayed a violent rape. He also highlighted the fact that you are cut off from the community and, even when you are released, you remain an “outsider”. You lose out on education and have little choice in life or chance to better yourself.

After this message, a representative from the Dept of Correctional Services talked about respect for yourself and others. He was dressed in an outfit which represented two alternatives – the top of his body was dressed in a white shirt and tie and blazer; the bottom in prison overalls and boots. He said that if you chose the top, then life will reward you. You will have freedom to choose different options and you can make a success of your life by respecting the rights of others to do the same. If you choose the bottom, then your freedom is taken away from you. By disrespecting the rights of others, you imprison yourself to a life that is hard and unrewarding. After his speech, the prison choir presented some songs.



Following on this crime awareness event, the children who attended were asked to present their reflections at assembly. They wrote down personal reflections on what they had seen and heard and what effect it had had on them. Four of these children volunteered to address the whole school and did so with conviction.

However, we were aware that change does not happen overnight and that things may return to normal once the “shock value” wears off, therefore we invited the INGUQU (change) organisation to come to our school to work with all the learners. This organisation is made up of ex-convicts who have changed their lives around. They addressed the reasons for people turning to crime and also portrayed life in prison as something to be avoided at all costs. This presentation was done to the whole school.

What impact did the interventions have?

We noted earlier the changed behaviour that we wished to foster in our learners:

- The constructive management of negative emotions
- Treating others as they would like to be treated
- Dealing with conflict in an acceptable way

From the presentation and the reflections of the learners, we think that the learners have realised that you need to show respect and treat others as you wish to be treated if you want to be happy and have a good life. One boy wrote:

“I was involved in many crimes such as shoplifting. I have pledged to stop this because I know that one day I will regret it.”

Another boy realised that peer pressure was to be avoided:

“Sometimes we don’t just do crime because we want to do it. It is because our peers influence us because they have more power than our parents.”

Most of the learners were shocked by the portrayal of prison life and by the realisation that you completely lose your freedom once you get involved in crime. It was evident from the reflections that most of the learners wanted to stop their anti-social behaviour.

The learners who presented also had an impact on the other learners in the school, judging by the reactions of the audience. Twelve of the learners who had attended the crime awareness event have joined clubs at school, such as the Peace Initiative, Peer



Educators and Friends of Douglas Mpoba. The programmes in these clubs focus on helping learners to develop respect for themselves and others and to develop character and values. On consultation with the Disciplinary Committee and the class teachers, we have found that there have been very few incidents of bullying in the last few weeks, which may indicate that learners are beginning to change their behaviour.

After the Inguqu presentation, many learners came to us to ask for contact numbers, so we eventually put them up in all the classrooms. We think that we have succeeded in raising awareness among learners of the futility of a life of crime; that it is very easy to become a criminal without realising it; and that they have a choice as to which road they follow in life. Their reflections show that they are aware of the difference between choosing respect and choosing to violate the rights of others – in the end you also violate your own rights.

We know that behaviour change takes a long time and has to be sustained, but we believe that we have made a start. We need now to focus on ways to help learners to deal with the negative emotions they are experiencing in a more constructive way than through bullying.

What we have learnt from our action research cycle

From the reactions of our learners to the interventions, we have learnt that children do want to change, they want to do good and they do not always realise the consequences of their behaviour. Most of the learners act badly because their emotional/material needs are not being met at home and they are also surrounded by poor role-models. Their enthusiasm and desire to change was ignited by the little attention they received from us – this makes us think that positive peer pressure will have greater impact on them than negative if they can remain in the clubs at school.

We also learnt that the situation at school is much worse than we thought. Instead of just having to deal with bullying, we now know that the problem of drug abuse/dealing is also very much an issue.

Our greatest learning has been what we discovered about ourselves. We learnt that we can make a difference without too much effort by following a systematic plan of intervention. Action research has been a powerful tool for us to work together to bring about positive change in our school. Because we hold up our values of mutual respect



and fairness as our criteria by which we judge our own behaviour, we make sure that our interventions do not impose change on the learners, but allow them to develop their own potential for change and improvement. We view the learners with a different attitude now – we no longer see them as trouble makers, but as children who are suffering from social injustices and who only need a little bit of positive input to change.

Our long-term hope is to produce learners who respect themselves and others, including respect towards their future partners. When the value of respect is uplifted by everyone, then our concern will have been addressed. If respect becomes a guiding value for our learners, then the chance of contracting HIV will be lessened, as they will be able to discuss sexual choices with their partners.

Implications of our learning for the future

We plan to continue this work and have already begun to negotiate with Teenagers Against Drug Abuse (TADA) to come and work with our learners in 2009. We will work closely with the clubs in our school to promote pro-social activities for the learners and will monitor learner behaviour closely.

We also need to work with the other educators in the school to make sure that they are all on board with the aim of promoting respect and to involve them in developing future plans to change the climate of our classrooms and schools. We have begun integrating the issue of respect into all our lessons and we want this to become a theme in the school.



How can I help young boys to show more responsibility and respect in relationships?

D Jauka

Context

I am the principal at Amanzi Primary, a farm school situated on the outskirts of Uitenhage, in the Eastern Cape. This school is situated in an economically poor area, with most of the parents being farm workers in the region. I have been principal here for 18 years and have had to face many challenges related to the socio-economic problems that pervade the community. One of these issues is HIV & AIDS but prevention education is very difficult since it is considered taboo to speak about sexuality issues to learners or in the community. Yet, sexual abuse is rife in the community, with males being seen to be abusers, and women not having much say in the matter of how, where and who they have sex with.

What is my concern?

I have had various reports from parents that young boys in the community are abusing dagga and alcohol during the weekend. When they are under the influence they lose all respect, which results in them forcing themselves sexually on young girls, particularly those who are living with their “gogos” or grannies who are not in a position to protect them. Often, even when the girls live with their parents, the parents get drunk themselves and neglect the children, making them more vulnerable to abuse.

Another example of this problem is the case of a young 14 year old girl in my school who has mild mental retardation and has been abused several times, but the suspect cannot be charged since there is not enough evidence to convict him and no-one is taking responsibility to look after the girl more carefully. In this instance, the alleged abuser is known to be HIV positive, placing the girl at tremendous risk. In all cases of abuse, it is unlikely that a condom will be used, especially when the boys are drunk, therefore this situation presents a perfect breeding ground for the HIV virus and places young girls particularly at risk. It is known that women are more vulnerable to HIV infection due to their physical make-up, as well as the fact that gender imbalances in our communities place them in an inferior position to men, giving them little or no power to



negotiate their sexuality. In our school in the last three years alone, four girls have died of AIDS related diseases.

In short, my concern is that there is no respect being shown by these boys towards the girls when they are under the influence of alcohol and/or dagga. Even when sober, the prevailing attitude in the community is that men can do what they want and women must just accept it. This situation is placing all at great risk of HIV infection and I think that something has to be done to try to help the boys to think differently about how they should be treating women and to accept responsibility for their own behaviour in terms of their drinking.

Why am I concerned?

One of my guiding values as a person and as an educator is that of respect. I believe that we should treat others as we ourselves would like to be treated. In our community, I do not see much respect between the genders. This is partly because our cultural practices tend to teach that men are superior to women. Young boys are being brought up in a community where they see women being abused and mistreated on a daily basis and they come to believe that this is how a man should act. They have had no exposure to different ways of relating to women and therefore do not question the behaviour that they see. They come to believe that being a real man means getting drunk and taking what you want, when you want it. I would like to help them to start to think about their behaviour and to learn what real respect means and that it has to be earned, not forced on someone.

Another value that I live by is that of responsibility, accepting that we are responsible for our own actions. One of the boys that abused a girl, wrote a letter to apologise to her but in that letter blamed his actions on pressure from his peers to show he was a man. This is evidence that the boys do not accept responsibility for their own behaviour and tend to blame others or the alcohol. Because both these values are denied by this situation, I want to take some action to change the situation and facilitate the boys to learn some respect and responsibility. If this can be done, then it may make them think differently about how to treat women, which will have long-term benefits for the reduction of HIV & AIDS and will make room for more equitable gender practices. My research question therefore became:

"How can I help young boys to show more responsibility and respect in relationships?"



What I did to improve the situation

I decided I would follow an action research cycle to address this question, meaning that I would decide on how to best intervene to improve the identified problem, then evaluate if the situation has improved by gathering evidence to support this claim. My first idea was to call a meeting for the parents and have some experts address them on the issue of sexual violence between school children. The reason for this was that I wanted to caution the parents about what their children are doing in the dark corners out there and try to elicit their support.

It is a big struggle to get hold of the parents of my learners, since they work seasonally in orange orchards, working long hours from 6am until 6pm. However, on 9 August of this year the farm owner had to close down to attend a conference in Johannesburg and the parents were thus free for the day. I took advantage of this and decided to call a meeting and invited a social worker, police official, Treatment Action Campaign representative and a Department of Education official to address and attend the meeting. None of them accepted the invitation, citing various excuses ranging from the state of the road to the school to the fact that it was a Friday. However, many parents did attend and I took the opportunity of explaining to them the dangers that our youth face due to the abuse of liquor and drugs by school boys, and the resultant vulnerability of our young girls. I would have preferred one of the speakers to do this, but had no option but to proceed, since as a leader I had to show the way.

However, I noticed that some of the parents were themselves intoxicated. Many parents also showed a tendency to shift the responsibility for their child-rearing by asking questions such as “Are we the police, or do we think the police are not doing their job?” Other parents became emotional, since their children had been victims of abuse. Luckily, my school governing body members, who also attended, helped to keep the meeting on track and deal with those who tried to derail it. For instance, the political leader who attended was upset and wanted to know why the community should report instances of abuse to the school, rather than to him since it was his job to work with the community. He implied that perhaps the school had called this meeting as a political ploy, since elections were coming. Some parents also wanted to know where the invited guests were. Others were worried that the farm worker would deduct money from their wages if they attended school meetings.



I did distribute information on rape and the effect it has on women to the parents, but in general I cannot say that this meeting really helped me to reach my objective of getting the parents to work together with me on this issue, but at least I did raise the topic with them. I have learnt that perhaps the parents have too many problems of their own to cope with and that it may be better to work directly with the boys at school. I also learnt that working with others is difficult, since some people feel threatened by any attempt to change things.

I decided that the best approach to take now, would be to work with the boys directly. I knew that if they were busy and had something to interest them, their behaviour might improve. The boys at my schools do not have many good male role models and they just copy the behaviour they see around them in the community. If I could introduce them to a different kind of role model, one who is successful and admired but who is also kind and respectful to others, this might give them a different view of how a man should behave.

I therefore invited a well known cricket player, Nantie Hayward, to come to our school to address the boys. I spoke with him beforehand and briefed him on my aims to try and increase respect among the boys. I obtained Nantie's name from Cricket South Africa at St. Georges' Park. They wanted to invite the boys to their summer cricket clinics, but for our boys transport to the clinics is a problem.



Nantie came and talked to the boys who were very excited. He brought cricket bats and balls with him to give to the children. The boys were mostly in grades 6 and 7, but ranged in age from 9 to 18 – the fact that physically mature boys are at a primary school is in itself a problem. Nantie also delivered a motivational speech on how the boys should behave if they want to be successful in life and touched on the values of respect and accepting responsibility for their actions. He also motivated the boys to keep a daily journal and to write in it everything they did that was “good” that day, their feelings, etc.

Nantie was accompanied by 3 other cricket coaches and they held a clinic at the school on 19 September, since we could not travel to St Georges. Following this, I set up a series of matches with other schools in the neighbourhood. We have played 2 matches so far, and will play another one in the near future. We have a junior, intermediate and open team at our school, consisting of both boys and girls.



Were my actions successful in improving the situation?

As I said, my intervention with parents was not very successful. I have since had other meetings with the parents, but each time they come intoxicated and become belligerent. They mostly come to the meetings to meet with the Department of Education officials, or the Police, because they want them to address the social problems they have.

However, I do notice that the behaviour of the boys has improved a great deal. The girls are reporting to me that there is less violence in the community and that they feel safer. In fact, they can now ask some of the boys to act as bodyguards for them, rather than being afraid of them. These boys are taking pride in their role of “protecting” the girls – this is one of the roles that was suggested in the motivational speech.

The boys have started carrying journals, and once a week on a Friday, they come to my office and show me their journals. I make a great fuss of them and discuss their improved behaviour with them and help them to set goals for the future. Many of these boys are also drawing and making pictures that show their change of attitude.

Some of the quotes from the journals included (translated from Xhosa):

“Today I helped Mrs Dyeli to fetch water since I could see that she was struggling to cope on her own.”

“We enjoyed helping to rebuild the huts – I learnt a lot about how to do it and it was good to help others.”

Since I started my intervention, there have been no reports of sexual violence at school. The girls are also playing cricket and I can see that all the learners are benefiting from the discipline, teamwork and cooperation that playing sports develops.

The educators in my school and the few parents who do take an interest in their children are all saying that they also notice a difference and are glad that I have started the cricket initiative.

The significance of my learning for the future

This cycle of action research has taught me many things to help improve my leadership at this school. It has made me more aware that the reason most of our



learners are badly behaved is that they have little love and encouragement from home. They see how adults in the community behave and merely copy them. The boys therefore have no alternative view of what constitutes a real man. They rarely see any respectful behaviour between the sexes in their community – on the contrary, they see drunkenness, violence and abuse. By exposing them to someone they admire who can offer them an alternative view of masculinity, I think that I have been able to influence their behaviour in a positive way and increase the likelihood that they will act with respect and responsibility.

I have also learnt that the parents in my community will not be able to develop similar values in their own lives until their basic needs are met. I know understand better that it is no use getting angry with them, since they are struggling to survive from day to day and they do not know any better. I will have to think of ways to help them to receive better housing, food and employment if possible.

As far as my teaching and leadership go, I have learnt that I am a resourceful and powerful leader and that I can make a difference if I systematically plan my interventions and base them on the values that I have identified. It is now my mission to carry on with the work I have begun and make this school into something much better than it is today, farm school or not. I am the first principal of a farm school to take such an initiative and I want to involve other similar schools and help their principals to take action. In my own school, gender equality will be fully integrated into the curriculum and practised by both teachers and learners alike.

I intend to invite NGOs such as Men as Partners to come to the school and work with the boys. The cricket teams will carry on and I want to invite more schools to join. We have a cluster of schools in Kirkwood, Uitenhage and Motherwell and I will contact them to try and figure out our next cycle of action research.



Promoting Gender Equality through Ubuntu

MA Siguba

My context

My school is situated basically in an informal settlement. The society is composed of people coming from different backgrounds, forced by different situations to live in this unhealthy manner. Many were forced to leave their homes on farms in rural areas, since work was scarce. Some came from rural areas to seek jobs as they were retrenched from mining industries, others left townships because of overcrowding.

Since about 90% of these families have no jobs, they have to do their best to survive. Life is tough and survival is not easy, therefore the law of “survival of the fittest” comes into play. This means that the strongest, i.e. the men, take control over the lives of the more vulnerable women and children. Violence and force often become normative and accepted, particularly violence against women. The men are brought up to think that women should be subservient and do exactly as they say, and the women do not realize that things could be any different. Therefore, gender inequalities exist that lead to the quality of life for women and children being diminished.

My concern

My concern is that the context described above leads to a diminishing of prosocial values, particularly the value of UBUNTU. Ubuntu can be described as an ancient African code of ethics that seeks to define what it means to be human. Emphasis is placed upon hospitality; generosity; respect for all; the view that we all belong to one family – the human race.

The Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, defines *ubuntu* as follows,

I am human because I belong, I participate, I share. A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened by the ability and goodness of others; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes with knowing that he or she belongs and is part of a greater whole. In fact, an “ubuntian” is diminished when others are humiliated, diminished, tortured, oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.’ (Murithi, 2005:342)



The loss of Ubuntu in a community reemphasizes the disunity of humanity and values that hold up human rights and endorses bad attitudes. Rather than caring for others and realizing that if one suffers, all suffer, the attitude of “survival of the fittest” prevails and this discourages sharing of resources and co-operation in resolving community problems. This means that there may be less support for community members infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Umntu ngumntu ngomnye umntu (every child is my child) will not be recognized anymore in such a society.

Why am I concerned?

If Ubuntu is applied to the concept of gender equality, it would imply that there would have to be authentic caring, sharing and acceptance in relationships between the sexes. This is not the case since many women are victims of rape and other kinds of abuse. Women who become HIV positive are abandoned by their partners and stigmatized. They are denied dignity, generosity, hospitality and respect.

The learners in our school grow up thinking that the way women are treated in our community is “normal” and they do not know that things could be different. The following story highlights some of the issues facing women and girls in our community.

In 2002 a mother of four girls who were learners at my school wrote a letter to me asking to see me at her shack as she was too sick to come to school. On arriving at the shack the following day, I could not believe what I saw. She was in bed and because she thought I would be the only one to help she was not shy to show me how thin and bony she was.

Apparently her supposed husband had left her for another woman when he saw he could not do anything about the situation. The community also treated her unkindly, since they tend to label HIV positive women as prostitutes. This shows that most men and maybe women care about their partners only when they can benefit from them.

It was then that I found out that some homes in that area are headed by children, the parents either having died or left them. I also discovered that some other learners had dropped out of school due to the consequences of HIV infection or because they had been affected by the illness/death of their parents. Stigmatisation of these learners also leads to them dropping out of school and isolating themselves from society in general.



I knew I could not do anything alone but I can try to influence the mind set of learners exposed to these challenges through my teaching. My concerns were that communities were losing the culture of Ubuntu. If I could be instrumental in helping to restore this value through my teaching, then I think that the learners would be more respectful in their treatment of each other, particularly in the field of relationships. My research question therefore was as follows:

“How can I help to restore the value of Ubuntu among my learners?”

What I did to improve the situation

The first thing I did was to invite my colleagues to a meeting to discuss my concern. As a team, we decided we needed to do something and they selected two other teachers to work together with me to get things going.

We then called a meeting with the other stakeholders to discuss this. We discussed the issue of promoting Ubuntu and decided to organise an awareness day and it was attended by twelve parents, three NGOs, a social worker, a nurse, a policeman and two business men from the area around the school. A ward councillor and a representative from the Department of Education: Heritage also attended. All the learners and teachers from the school were present. The programme was as follows:

- The nurse spoke about how people used to care for each other when they were sick, and how the community all made sure that people were not isolated or left to suffer
- The police spoke about the need to have forums so that people could cooperate to help each other
- The social worker gave input on the need to care for orphans and vulnerable children
- The DoE representative spoke about our cultural heritage of Ubuntu and what it was like to live in a time when Ubuntu was practised by everyone
- The learners performed poems and songs which had Ubuntu as a theme



REACH OUT TOUCH

Out there, there's a cry,
Somewhere there, there's a moun.
Why don't you give it a try?
For would have saved a soul!
Reach out and touch.

Giving may never be subtraction,
It may always be addition.
Why don't you try an action?
As you'll be rich with addiction!
Reach out and touch.

The touch of sacred world,
Endless as the universe's reach.
Touch of neither physic nor word,
For love is above each!
The touch of heart to heart.

Rousing the weakened to life,
Away from hopelessness darkness.
Life force and love tenderness in rife,
The heart instilled with resoluteness.
Let's all reach out and touch.

Example of a poem performed by learners

As a result of the awareness day, more learners wanted to join a club which had existed at school, but which had not been well attended. This club is called the *Health and Environment Club* and it is run by the learners to educate their peers on various issues related to peer pressure, drug and alcohol abuse, gender issues, pregnancy etc. through the medium of debates, drama, poems, traditional dancing and other peer-driven activities. We now have 58 learners in this club, as opposed to just over 20 before. The club meets fortnightly and my job is just to facilitate the organisation.

As a staff we also decided to integrate the value of Ubuntu into all of our lessons and make it a theme in the school.



Impact of the intervention

Change does not happen overnight but I think we are making a difference. There are less incidents of bullying reported now; learners are even telling their peers not to use vulgar language; more learners are taking part in extra mural activities; the learners are reaching out to the community – the Health and Environment club members have taken part in projects which aim to help the sick people in the community by cleaning their houses, taking them food, planting vegetables for them and just helping where they need help.

Learners are also more open now and more teachers are being told of injustices that are taking place in their community, showing that their awareness has been raised. Boys are now also offering to clean the classrooms and to cut the bread for the feeding schemes, something that they never did before.

Implications of my learning for my practice

Learning is an ongoing process for an educator and I found this to be true when I conducted this intervention with my learners. I learnt so much from being involved with them and was gratified by the eager response the learners showed towards our efforts to help them learn about Ubuntu. I think that they are just not used to adults showing much interest in them and when you do, they are so keen to reciprocate.

Doing this action research has really helped me to gain a sense of purpose in my teaching again – and I have noticed that my colleagues also feel the same. We are not so money oriented now – working only for pay day! – but have are feeling motivated to come to school. We have become passionate about our jobs again.

This intervention has also showed me that the school and learners can help improve the community, which in turn will help improve the school, since the parents need help as much as the learners do. I also learnt that learners are capable of helping themselves and that peer-led activities work best – the more the learners participate, the more interested and excited they are.

For the future, I need to ensure we continue to work on creating caring, sharing and authentic relationships between the sexes and between the school and the community and I am very excited at this prospect – now I cannot wait to try out new ideas towards promoting Ubuntu at my school.



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www.humiliationstudies.org/images/ubuntu.jpg





Addressing teenage pregnancy to protect the schooling of girls

I de Monk

My context

My school is situated in Helenvale, also known as “Katanga”. Most of the learners at our school come from this poor community, although some come from better-off areas. Most people in Helenvale are unemployed, therefore people are poor and they can hardly afford the basic necessities of life. Most parents cannot afford to pay school fees.

Sometimes, up to five families share one small house. Gangs thrive in Helenvale and drug abuse is common, with children as young as eight or nine using or even selling them. They use the money to buy brand-name clothing and cellphones. Young girls get the money for this by using sex as a means of barter to get the things that their parents cannot afford. Alcohol abuse is also common amongst adults and the parents often use what little money they have to buy drink, rather than food for the family. Most children are not fed properly and come to school hungry. As a result of all these problems, girls tend to be sexually active from a young age, with the result that there is a high teen pregnancy rate.

My concern

I am concerned about the high rate of teenage pregnancy at our school. When these girls fall pregnant they must leave school and only return the next year, according to national policy. However, if the father is a schoolboy, he is allowed to stay on and continue his schooling, meaning that he does not suffer any consequences of the pregnancy, a fact which does not bode well for teaching responsibility.

For the past three years, our teenage pregnancy rate at school as been high:

- 14 girls pregnant from grades 8-12
- 12 girls
- 15 girls to date (September 2008)



The actual figures are actually higher since some girls just hide their pregnancy, have the baby and return to school a few days later, meaning that they don't have to miss out on school.

Why I am concerned

I am concerned about this situation for several reasons, as detailed below:

1. If girls are falling pregnant, they are obviously not practicing safer sex and run a high risk of being infected with HIV and/or other sexually transmitted infections, which in turn renders them more vulnerable to HIV infection.
2. If they have to leave school and return the next year, they may in fact not return and drop out. Even if they do return, they find it hard to fit in again and become a "school girl." It is also hard to cope with the school work and take care of a baby and many of these girls fail the year in any case and drop out.
3. Pregnancy and/or dropping out affects their future life chances. Many of these girls have no life goals or hope of a better life and have to depend on a man to look after them. They just add to the already high unemployment rate in Helenvale.
4. The boys do not learn responsibility, since they just stay on at school and do not suffer any consequences.
5. The self-esteem and confidence of the girls are affected, since they have little hope for the future.

This situation denies my values of *social justice, responsibility and accountability*. Social justice is denied because the life chances of the girls are impaired by teen pregnancy. This contributes to the maintenance of gender inequalities in the community, which in turn fuels the girls' vulnerability to HIV infection. The young men do not learn responsibility and are not held accountable for their actions. The girls also need to learn to be responsible and accountable.

This situation has compelled me to try and find the answer to the following question:

"How can we reduce the number of teenage pregnancies in school in order to try and keep the girls in school?"



My actions to improve the situation

Based on my identification of the problem, I devised the following outcomes that I wanted to attain through my intervention:

1. To raise awareness about the consequences of teenage pregnancies among the vulnerable girls.
2. To raise awareness about existing gender inequalities in terms of the acceptance of responsibility for the pregnancy and its consequences.
3. To raise awareness about the added dangers of having unprotected sex in terms of HIV and STI infection.

In order to attain the above aims I decided to involve all the Life Orientation (LO) teachers in the school, in order to make this a team event. It would also help the other teachers to be involved and become aware of the problems so that they could continue to address these issues in their teaching. Active involvement of all the LO teachers would also help to motivate us as a team and alert us to very serious issues that affect our learners. We would also reach all learners in the school, since they all have to take LO. There are approximately 1300 learners at school. We included all the Grade 8's and Grade 10's, and part of the Grade 11's. We did not work with the Grade 12's because they were busy finishing off their school careers and the Grade 9's were busy with their CTA's.

As a team, we had a meeting and decided to organize several events to raise awareness. The theme chosen for the lessons for the awareness raising week was *"Teenage pregnancies, HIV and AIDS and gender inequalities."* The programme ran from 13 October 2008 until 17 October 2008. We decided to invite guest speakers to address the learners as we thought that, not only would they have expert information, but the learners may be more likely to listen to someone with whom they were not familiar and who was not assessing them.

The first event organized took place on the Monday. Nurses from the local clinics were invited to speak to the learners about teenage pregnancies and the gender inequalities in terms of responsibility, as well as the link with HIV AND AIDS. These nurses spent one hour with each class in Grade 8. They gave a lecture where they explained to the learners the facts of teenage pregnancies and how to avoid falling pregnant, and also how teenage pregnancies can negatively



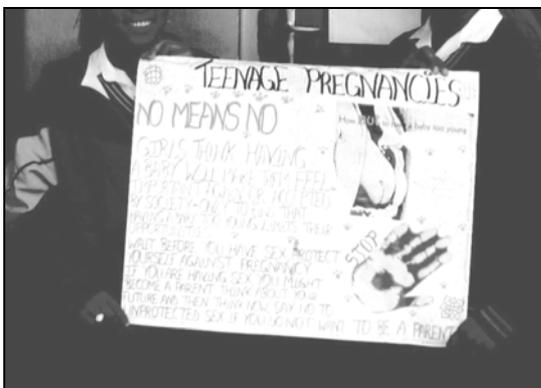


influence your future. They also covered the dangers of HIV and AIDS and they distributed pamphlets and booklets. From my observations, the learners seemed to enjoy the talk and asked lots of questions. To accommodate the shy learners, they were told that there would be a special question and answer session during the break in my classroom.

I really enjoyed the session you had with us. Now I know what the consequences are when I'm in a situation like that. I also know now what boys think about girls. I respect my body more now. I really really learnt alot. I hope to see them again.

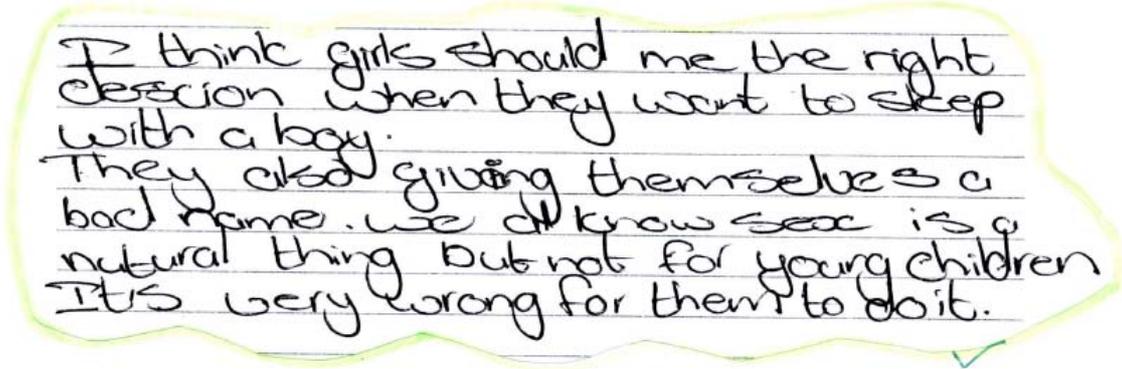
The next intervention was for the LO teachers to teach lessons on teenage pregnancy and how it is linked with HIV and AIDS. We all taught the same lessons that covered the link between gender inequality and HIV as well as teenage pregnancy in more depth. We organised Grade 9 and 10 Life Orientation textbooks and also extra material supplied by the clinics.

In our lessons we had group discussions and at the end of the week the learners had to design some posters on the topic. Some of the posters are shown in the photographs below. These posters were displayed in the school for all the learners to see and a few of them were presented to the whole school at assembly by the learners who made them.





I also asked some learners to write a short paragraph on what they had learnt during the awareness week and the talk by the nurses.



The next day, the nurses returned to address some of the Grade 9 classes and one Grade 10. The LO teachers continued with the lessons describe above. On the last day of the awareness raising week, the learners wrote down what they learnt during the week and what they enjoyed.

What impact have my actions had?

I have gathered some evidence to show that this awareness raising week has had some impact on the learners' awareness of teenage pregnancy, gender inequalities and HIV and AIDS. The evidence I offer comes from the evaluation forms completed by the learners, from their posters and from things I have heard them say.

Learners do understand the consequences of teenage pregnancy

The quotations from the learners' paragraphs below indicate that they now have a good understanding of the consequences of teenage pregnancy:

"The nurses told us not to have sex before the time. Having children at such a young age messes up your future and education. I hope that some girls really open their eyes, because it really opened mine. Girls must stop having sex because it will make our lives much better and it will prevent HIV and AIDS."

"I think the people from the clinic gave some of the girls a wake-up call about lots of things in life and that we must think about a better future for us."

"The nurses told the girls not to have sex at an early age and they also told us that our bodies are the most important thing we have."



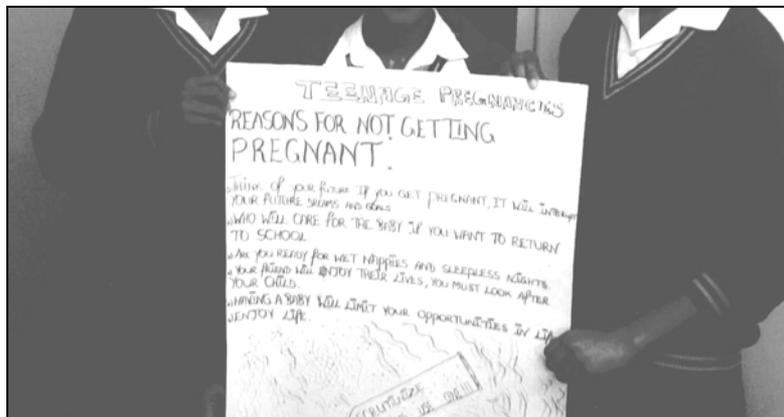
Learners understand the dangers of having unprotected sex

The learners also seem to better understand the dangers of unprotected sex:

"We have learned a lot about teenage pregnancies and the dangers of having unprotected sex because you can get HIV and AIDS."

"If you are having unprotected sex, you will most likely get HIV."

"Because of unprotected sex, many girls fall pregnant. It has a negative effect on your schoolwork, because these pregnant girls drop out of school and cannot fulfill their dreams."



Learners are aware that gender inequalities exist in terms of who is affected the most by teenage pregnancy

The learners learnt that gender inequalities contribute to teenage pregnancy and exacerbate the consequences of it for girls:

"The boys are devils when they go to the girls, because they destroy the lives of the girls. If a boy gets a girl pregnant, the boy will disappear and the girl will be on her own and she will suffer."

"Most teenage girls fall pregnant and suffer alone with no help from the boy who gets off with it all."

"Being a male, nothing happens to you because some of the males just want to have sex, while the girl on the other hand falls pregnant and must leave school."



How can I justify my claim to have had a positive impact in the school?

The information that I have gathered from the evaluation forms shows that the learners are in fact more aware of the danger of teenage pregnancies to their future. Most of them also said that they had learnt at least one new fact about teenage pregnancy. They also realized that they must take responsibility for their own actions and that they can learn from past mistakes. Some of the learners had the following to say:

"I think girls should think and make the right decision when they want to sleep with a boy. They are also giving themselves a bad name."

"I think it is not right for the teenagers to have sex at an early age, because they might fall pregnant and the boy is going to run and leave the girl to suffer the consequences."

"I have learned that sex is not for teenagers, it is only for adults. Always wear a condom and you must put it on right. If you are a boy, please don't make a girl pregnant."

The LO teachers also commented on the awareness week:

"I think that the nurses' visit was very significant. It really made an impact on the learners since everybody was moved by what they heard. I think we can continue this sort of awareness raising and work with topics such as alcohol and drug abuse, TB and gangsterism/crime, which are also high risk behaviours for HIV and which are also related to gender inequalities."

"The whole awareness raising week was great, especially the nurses' visit. Our learners learnt a lot, seeing that their parents don't talk about these things. I have learnt that I have to talk more about them in class as well."

Although this was a short term intervention, and I cannot really judge the long-term impact on teenage pregnancies, the immediate impact on learners and teachers seems to have been positive. It had motivated us to continue to take action to address issues that impact negatively on the learning of the children and on our teaching and for me, this is the most important impact – as teachers we have realized that we can do something to improve the situation.



What have I learnt from this experience and how will it influence me in the future?

For me, this was a learning curve. I realized that learners need information about teenage pregnancy and how it influences their lives. Parents do not talk to their children about these things and they get information from friends. Learners were eager to listen to the nurses and to ask them questions. They preferred to be alone with the nurse, which tells me that perhaps we as teachers need to start concentrating on being more open with learners about sexuality issues, since they seem to be rather reserved with us. This is something that I will discuss with the other teachers and work on.

The other problem was that this programme was too late in the year, when teachers were busy with revision and it was difficult to find time to allocate to it. In future, we will plan our year in advance and make sure it can fit in with the school calendar.

For the future, I plan on doing a year-long programme. We have already begun to plan this and in January 2009 the nurses and myself will collaborate on a programme, including other topics that were highlighted in this cycle as problematic. We also plan to train some learners as peer educators since I have learnt from this intervention that peer pressure is very powerful in influencing the behaviour of learners. If we can introduce some positive peer pressure, this should help to reduce the high-risk behaviour of our learners. We also worked mainly with girls in this cycle, and we need also to include the boys more in the future. I will also try and include some of my male colleagues in this.

We also need to get a support system in place for the pregnant girls. This will help them with homework and extra work to catch up, so that hopefully they will not fall behind and will be able to stay in school. If we involve peer educators here also, it will also give emotional and social support to the girls.

In conclusion, this has been a very short intervention, but it appears to have had some impact on both learners and teachers and it has inspired us to continue to work to address problematic social issue in our school. I have learnt how to conduct an action research cycle and this has been extremely helpful, as I know am in a position to deal with problems, rather than run away from them. I hope to be able to involve more colleagues and school management in following this approach in future.



Helping young men to accept responsibility for their behaviour

TJ Mahlakahlaka & ML Ntshininda

Our context

Our school is situated in New Brighton, one of the original townships of Port Elizabeth. The learners who are schooling here come from disadvantaged families, since their parents are unemployed (about 60%); ill or deceased. Many children come to school without having something to eat and few of them can pay their school fees. Absenteeism is also a problem due to lack of parental care and/or high poverty (cannot pay fees, have no transport money, no uniforms). This leads to dropping out and more girls than boys drop out.

Our concern

We are concerned about the number of girls who drop out of school, many of which are due to teen pregnancy. From 2005-2008 to date, the statistics of teen pregnancies are as follows:

- 2005 4
- 2006 8
- 2007 8; two boys fathering
- 2008 7; 2 STI cases

We currently have 5 mothers who returned to school after delivering their babies. One grade 12 learner did not complete her June exams since she had to stay home and look after her baby. The girls who become pregnant also get teased by the other learners and become social outcasts and tend not to be involved in school activities.

The boys who father the babies are not discriminated against and they continue to attend school and have unprotected sex with other girls. They are not ashamed of their deed, in fact they tend to be proud of it and gain status among the other boys. Even the educators tend to blame the girls for falling pregnant, and not the boys.



Why we are concerned

This situation is very dangerous in terms of the possibility for these young people to become HIV positive. Sexually transmitted diseases, which are common when one has various sexual partners, make it easier for the HI virus to penetrate into the bloodstream, especially in the case of young girls. Also, the life chances of the young girls tend to diminish with each pregnancy, since they have to abandon their goals to look after their children. They also tend to depend on men to look after them and their children since they have no income themselves. There is no opportunity for them to emerge from the cycle of poverty that they were born into. Becoming involved with older men who can supply their material needs increases their chances of contracting HIV as well. This is not to mention the effect such experiences have on their self-esteem and sense of self-respect.

This situation is also denying the values of respect, responsibility and accountability. Little respect is being shown on the part of the boys for the girls; the girls do not respect themselves; boys (and girls) are not taking responsibility for their own sexual protection and the boys are not being held accountable for their actions. Since many of these girls either cannot stand up to the boys for fear of violence, or just do not realise that they have a choice, it may be more beneficial to work with the boys to help them to define values for themselves and investigate ways they could work towards living them out.

For this reason, we chose the following question to guide our intervention in the school:

"How can we help boys to accept responsibility in their relationships?"

What we did to improve the situation

Based on our research question, we set the following aims for our action research:

- Boys will act more responsibly in terms of their interaction with the opposite sex
- Boys will be more respectful in their relationships with girls
- Boys will realise the importance of being faithful in a relationship

We decided that we needed to involve the rest of the staff, since this was a problem that would need input at all levels and would be a long term project. We asked the principal for a slot to address our colleagues and had a meeting with the 23 educators in our school. We introduced them to the Masilingane Project and what we had been



doing and discussed what our preliminary research had unearthed: that teenage pregnancy was an important issue in our school that has to be addressed. They agreed and we discussed the matter in depth. We were supported by the Deputy Principal, since she had come to the initial Masilingane meeting. We shared our opinion that perhaps we needed to do an intervention with the boys and help them to respect the girls more, since up to now we had only worked with the girls. The fact that the boys had not been included seemed to underline the fact that teenage pregnancy was a girls' problem – it thus relieved them of any responsibility for their part in the issue.

With the backing of the staff, we decided to target 25 boys in our school. Three teachers chose to work directly with us. We decided to work with only 25 since our experience had taught us that working with a bigger group could lead to problems since the boys tended to become unruly and did not participate well. The boys were selected at random from the Grade 10 class lists.

We also thought that it would be best if an external agency were to take the lead in this intervention, since the boys might not open up to us as their teachers. We therefore decided to invite the National Association of People Living with HIV & AIDS (NAPLWHA). They first conducted a baseline survey of what the boys thought about sexual relationships and their responsibility. This survey was done orally by discussion.

The results were as given below:

Fathering:

Although some of the boys said they were not ready to become fathers since they could not afford to look after a child, few of them indicated they took precautions in their relationships. About 90% of the boys said they had sexual relationships. Some boys even said it would not be a problem if they got a girl pregnant, since their parents could look after the baby.

Condom use:

The boys were negative about condom use and said it spoiled their excitement and that they often had problems with condoms breaking. Condom use was not prevalent among the boys and they had little knowledge on how to use them.



Love in relationships:

The boys could not differentiate between love and sex and thought that you had to have sex if you were in a relationship.

Based on what they had learnt, the presenters from NAPLWHA then conducted three workshops with the themes indicated above. They encouraged discussion among the boys and gave them exercises to do to elicit their responses. They mainly posed questions to the boys that were then discussed in small groups and feedback given. They also did a practical demonstration on how to use a condom. They promoted the view that a relationship should be based on communication, respect, caring and mutual responsibility.



NAPLWHA Presenters at work

The impact of our intervention

The presenters asked the boys to fill out questionnaires to determine what they had learnt. Their responses indicate that they have started to think about what it means to



be responsible in a relationship and what a healthy relationship entails. In terms of our aims, the following could be claimed:

Boys will act more responsibly in terms of their interaction with the opposite sex

It appears that the workshops have made the boys more aware of how their actions affect the girls they associate with.

“The lack of knowledge in our minds as boys ruined the lives of girl students. It is about time that we do what we have to, to protect our fellow students who are girls and right our wrongs.”

The boys said that they had learnt how to use a condom properly and that they now realised that it was very easy to become infected with STIs as well as making a girl pregnant. They also did not realise how STIs made them more vulnerable to HIV infection. The fact that they are now more likely to think about using a condom and know how to use it correctly, will increase their chance of taking responsibility for safer sex in future.

Boys will be more respectful in their relationships with girls

Another boy indicated that it was now easier for him to differentiate between sex, lust and love. The boys said the fact that the presenters were all HIV positive because they had not taken precautions when having sex, had a big impact on them. They were talking from experience, and not just telling them what to do. One boy summed up the impact of the workshops:

“The information helped us a lot, made us more aware and alert. We realised the damage we’ve done and we are willing to change.”

This indicates that boys took responsibility for their actions and their willingness to change their behaviour.

“They made us aware that we ruin their (girls) futures. This information helps us with the choices we make.”

It appears that, for the first time, the boys have been made aware of the fact that they have a choice on how to behave. The pre-test had indicated that boys felt very pressurised to have sex, both by other boys and by girls, to prove that they were men.



Hopefully, they will now start to realise that they do not always have to give into peer pressure.

Boys will realise the importance of being faithful in a relationship

This last aim was not as well reached as the other two. The workshops did cover the importance of fatherhood but the feedback from the boys who attended does not seem to focus on the importance of fidelity in a relationship. However, the questionnaire that was used and the questions asked by the presenters also did not place emphasis on this, therefore this aim needs to be worked on further.

How can we justify our claim to have had a positive impact in the school?

The data provided in the evaluation forms are evidence that the boys have started to think about their role in teenage pregnancy and their responsibility as partners. This is now a basis for us to continue our work, and to include more boys in the programme. Our colleagues also thought we had positively influenced the boys. One of the teachers who attended the workshop said that the atmosphere was very open which led to fruitful discussion. However, this is just the beginning, since real behavioural change can only be measured over time.

The first step in changing one's behaviour is to accept responsibility for one's actions, but it is unlikely that these few workshops will have lasting effect unless we follow up with other interventions. We do think that we have made a start towards fostering more responsibility, respect and accountability between the genders but we will have to find ways to help the learners to define these values for themselves and discover how to live them out.

What have we learnt from this experience and how will it influence us in the future?

This experience helped us to see that we can make changes to positively influence our learners and the climate and culture of the school. This has been a motivating experience for us and we have grown from it in terms of our own self-esteem and feelings of self-efficacy. The more involved we become in issues like this, the more we enjoy our job, therefore we plan to continue with further cycles of action research to address gender equity.



We learnt that most of the boys had never been asked to think about their role in relationships and that they had been socialised by parents and peers to think that men were in control in relationships. They also thought that if they had a girlfriend, they had to have sex. We have introduced new ideas to them and we need to follow up on this. The information we learnt about how the boys think and behave will help us to develop aims to address the needs we highlighted.

We would like to involve more boys and invite NAPLWHA or another similar NGO to return for more workshops. Although we targeted the boys in this intervention, we cannot forget the girls and also need to find ways to help them explore the values of respect, responsibility and accountability.

We also learnt that most of the learners do not use condoms, therefore more information about STIs and how to prevent them would be useful. The Life Orientation teachers should take the lead in this, but we also need to involve more teachers so as to really make an impact on the climate of the school.



“How can I help young girls become aware of their human rights so as to help them protect themselves against HIV?”

MA Dimbaza

My context

I am a teacher at Mdengentonga PPS which is situated in Motherwell. The socio-economic conditions which prevail in the surroundings of the school are characterised by poverty, due to the high rate of unemployment. Most of the women are housewives and men are the only breadwinners, but many of them are unemployed also. Most of these families are from rural areas or homelands and they live in shacks and poorly constructed RDP houses which have no room divisions or privacy.

Since poverty is an important driver of HIV, there is a high rate of HIV and AIDS in the community. For example, I received a letter from a learner who is living with her 7 sisters in one house where the mother has died of AIDS, leaving them in need of help. These children are being neglected and abused by their aunt who is drinking and using their money to buy liquor. I know that this is the exception - children in these circumstances often do not ask for help for fear of discrimination and stigmatisation from others.

My concern

The letter I received from this learner highlights the problems that many children in our community are facing, especially girls. Because these girls are neglected, they are vulnerable to sexual abuse by men in the community. Alternatively, because their material and emotional needs are not being met at home by their caregiver, they may be attracted to a relationship with an older man who can meet them. These factors place them at high risk for HIV infection. However, there is no one in their family who is helping them to be aware of the risk of HIV and how to prevent infection. There is also no one who is standing up for their human rights, which are being violated. I know that this situation is not unique, because the literature and statistics on orphans and vulnerable children tell us that this is a widespread problem.



Why I am concerned?

I am concerned about the situation facing these girls and others like them on two levels. Firstly, the *human rights* of the children are being denied. Our constitution says that we all have rights that should be upheld. If we cannot uphold our own rights, as in the case of children, then others should make sure that they not violated.

As a teacher, I have a special responsibility to make sure the rights of the children are upheld, and as a teacher concerned about HIV, I am especially worried about the situation that affected children find themselves in. As a teacher I am legally obliged to protect the human rights of children. If I fail to report suspected abuse, for example, criminal charges could be laid against me, or I could be disciplined by my professional association. And apart from this legal obligation, I have a moral and ethical obligation to protect my learners. These girls and others like them have the following rights that are being violated, aggravated by the fact that their mother has died of AIDS.

- The basic right to live a life of quality: which means that they should be treated with dignity and respect – the fact that the aunt calls them prostitutes violates this for example. They also suffer from stigmatisation and are rendered vulnerable due to their age and gender.
- The right to security and freedom: these children do not have much security, they are left to fend for themselves in a community in which there is a lot of violence against women and children, due in part to alcohol abuse. They also do not have much privacy – their situation is “broadcast” by the aunt in the community.
- Right to earn a living in a healthy environment and to hold assets: the assets of these children are being squandered by the aunt, who sells their food for drink. Also, their social grants are not being used to care for them. The living conditions are not very healthy.
- Right to have basic needs met: these children do not have adequate housing, food or protection. They do have access to education, but their performance will be severely hampered by their home circumstances. The risk that they may drop out of school or be forced to leave is high.

Secondly, my *values* around gender are mutual respect, sincerity and integrity. This situation is violating all my values, since these children are not being treated with respect, therefore they are not learning to respect others; if I wish to be sincere, then I



must do something to help these girls and others like them; and if I fail to respond to the plea in this letter, then I will not be acting with integrity.

For these reasons, I feel compelled to intervene in some way. The following question will be used as a guide for my actions:

"How can I help young girls become aware of their human rights so as to help them to protect themselves against HIV?"

What I did to address my concern

The first action was to deal with the specific case that came to our attention and together with the school management team and the class teachers of the learners concerned; we set up a meeting with the foster parent of these learners. We shared the letter with her and the upshot was that she signed an agreement saying she would desist from this behaviour. However, apart from making her aware that we know about how the girls are being treated, I am not sure how much effect this intervention will have, and, I suspect that it could even cause some resentment on her part.

We therefore also contacted the Social Welfare department to get social workers involved to monitor the situation. The social worker is working with the foster parent and visiting the home once per week, and communicating on a regular basis with us as teachers.

To widen this intervention to the school in general, we called a meeting with the rest of the staff, together with the social worker and discussed our concern about the violation of the human rights of our learners, specifically those of our female children. This was also an educational session for the teachers since we discussed and gave input on the link between the violation of human rights and HIV transmission, the vulnerability of females to HIV and child abuse in general.

The next intervention was conducted by the Life Orientation teachers, including myself. We organised a series of lessons designed to increase the assertiveness of our learners, especially the girls. We involved an outside agency in helping us to increase the assertiveness of our learners. Grass Roots is an agency which helps learners to form peer groups to address issues related to HIV. Their programmes are designed to help learners to speak out when their rights are violated and teach learners to respect themselves and others. They also help learners to identify and cope with the feelings



associated with peer pressure and to reflect on their communication skills, their values and their attitudes in general. They do this via organising street soccer leagues, which keeps the children occupied, lets them have fun and at the same time provides a vehicle for the transmission of positive values, attitudes and life skills. For example, the coach taught them about the importance of encouraging teams and other people and how to cooperate with others. They also learnt how to have fun with the opposite sex and how to play with respect (the girls teams played the boys).



These sessions were held after school, with each grade being allocated a specific day. They were therefore not compulsory, but many learners attended. They ran from April to November and the sessions lasted for two and a half hours.

Finally, we realised that we need to set up an HIV & AIDS policy for our school, and we have begun this process and are looking into how we can improve our school as a centre of care and support for affected learners.

I believe that all these actions have helped to increase the awareness of our learners, and specifically our girls, of their rights and how to stand up for them.

The impact of my interventions

It is very difficult to ascertain the real impact of our interventions, since any improvement will only be evident over a longer period of time. However, the following is offered as evidence of some positive change:

- Teachers are reporting that since our interventions have started, more learners have approached them and have started to open up about their situations at



home. The teachers report that learners are talking about things like the unemployment and the impact of the illness of their parents and siblings etc.

- A list has been drawn up of families who are eligible for social welfare and we are trying to contact these families to help them to make applications, with the help of the social workers.
- The Grass Roots programme was well attended by learners and their evaluations indicate that they have enjoyed it and that they are learning from it. Many children also wanted to have more such activities in the afternoons and weekends to give them something fun to do.

What have I learnt as a result of this action research intervention?

It is evident that if children receive positive input and are taught positive values, they will be less likely to accept the situation when others impinge on their rights. I personally have learnt that action research can help us to work together as a team to improve the situation at our schools regarding the violation of children's rights. In spite of the fact that I have never taught Life Orientation before and was very nervous to do so, I have found it to be enjoyable.

Taking leadership in the school around gender and human rights issues has been a great experience for me and I have been supported by my fellow teachers who now seem to regard me as a leader. It has also helped to dispel the misconceptions I held about the unsuitability of men to teach Life Orientation, therefore I can say that my gender perceptions have also changed for the better. Therefore, this action research has helped me to develop on a personal level and has helped me to find renewed purpose in my teaching. As my colleagues work with me, I can also see the same enthusiasm displayed by them; therefore the whole climate of the school has potential to improve.

How will we change our ideas and practices in light of what we have learnt?

As a result of what we have learnt through this intervention, we are planning to make sure that HIV education is integrated throughout the curriculum next year. We also intend to introduce more workshops around HIV education, using outside resources. As Life Orientation teachers, we also want to help educate our colleagues and intend setting up a resource centre in the staffroom, where teachers can access articles,



teaching resources and information regarding HIV. Our plans for our teaching include accessing training for ourselves so that we feel comfortable in using drama, poetry, dancing and other participative methodologies in our class. This is based on the assumption that if learners enjoy their learning and participate, they will learn so much more. We will also contact the Department of Education to ask them to send specially trained health promoters to conduct workshops for our learners and staff.

Conclusion

This action research intervention has helped us to move nearer to our goal of helping learners, especially girls, to protect their own rights. It has also helped to improve my passion for teaching and helped me to realise that perhaps my own gender constructs need to change. The renewed passion I experience has also influenced my colleagues and together we are working to improve the whole climate of the school. This is an ongoing process that we will continue to work on in the year to come.



Helping learners to understand healthy relationships

S Somniso

My context

I am a teacher in a primary school in Motherwell, situated in an area where HIV is rife. Unemployment is a problem among parents and therefore poverty is a serious social problem. Many of the parents are HIV positive and some are sick, and this impacts very negatively on the learners who come to school traumatised.



My concern

Since HIV is a serious issue in this community, we as teachers, have to make sure that children are educated about prevention. Sexuality education is therefore very important. Sexuality education aims to teach learners about love and relationships, and the importance of respect and caring within relationships. However, every time we speak about love, the learners think we are talking about sex. An example to illustrate this was when one of our teachers conducted prayers during assembly. She said that as learners, they should all love each other. The learners started to laugh and said, "you want us to be boyfriends and girlfriends." Another example comes from a Grade 7 Life Orientation teacher who was teaching about relationships in her class. The learners



kept looking at each other and laughing. These examples indicate that learners link relationships primarily with sex, rather than with love, care and respect.

Why I am concerned

This situation is worrying for me, since I know that HIV is spread primarily by sexual contact and one of the main prevention tools available to us, is to help learners to be able to form relationships without necessarily having to have sex. This is also connected to gender constructs, since there is a common perception among our older primary school learners and high school learners, that if you are girlfriend and boyfriend you should have sex, and that boys can demand sex from their girlfriends. Boys also seem to prove their manhood by having sex with many different partners, and all these things are known to fuel HIV transmission. Girls are not expected to say “no” and there is generally a lack of respect in relationships between boys and girls. Love and respect are important values to me, and I would like to try and help our learners to learn that love and respect are the basis for all relationships, and not just sex. I know that at home they see many things in the relationships of their parents and family that deny these values – men tend to have more than one partner; there is a high degree of domestic violence in homes; and women are generally not allowed much say in the relationship.

Although I am working at a primary school, it can be assumed that many of the learners are sexually active, since we have had cases of abuse, STI infection and pregnancy, and this is a serious problem in most township schools. I therefore believe that it is vitally important that learners are taught about forming relationships based on love and respect from an early age, rather than just accepting that what they see in the community is the norm. They need to be helped to imagine different kinds of relationships, where partners love and support each other and have equal responsibilities and opportunities within the relationship. The question that will guide my intervention to accomplish this is:

“How can I help learners to understand that relationships are based on love, respect and equality and not just sex?”

If I can help them to imagine such relationships, the likelihood that they will try and strive to attain one will be greater and this may mean that they will be less likely to engage in promiscuous behaviour and early age sex. Girls, especially, will benefit from



a more equal relationship, based on the value of respect, since forced sex and domestic violence will then be less likely to occur.

What I did to improve the situation

I devised the following outcomes to guide my interventions:

1. Learners will have a heightened awareness about the difference between love and sex
2. Learners will be more aware of the danger of having unprotected sex for their health and for their future life.

I decided to involve grade 7 teachers to work with me. If all the teachers in the final grade of the school can be aware of this problem, then they will be more able to integrate education around this issue into their classes. The learners will therefore be better prepared for moving onto high school, where the pressures to have sex are so much more. There were 160 Grade 7 learners in our school this year.

We then had a meeting to discuss what we need to do in order to meet the outcomes. We decided to invite Love Life on the 23 September 2008 to come and facilitate our Grade 7 learners to be able to differentiate between love and sex. We decided to invite an outside agency, since the learners would be more likely to listen to them than to us, and be less likely to laugh and joke. Also, we as teachers, needed to learn how to teach sexuality education, since only a couple of us had had any training in this area. We hoped to learn from the Love Life facilitators.

The facilitators from Love Life presented their workshop in a very interesting way. They began with an activity where, learners were asked to take off their shoes and put them in



the middle of a circle. Each learner then had to choose another pair of shoes to wear that do not belong to them. They were asked how they felt in those shoes that are not theirs. One learner said *"the shoes were too big for me"*, the other learner said *"the shoes were too small, they couldn't even fit me and hurt my feet"* and the other said *"the shoes were uncomfortable"*.

In that activity they learnt that they must not do things that they feel uncomfortable doing. They also learnt how it feels to be literally in other person's shoes. They learnt that they must not do things that older people are doing whilst they are still young. It was



a very provoking ice breaker. After that they were led in a discussion about peer pressure and how it makes one feel to do things that are not appropriate for them to do.

My Head of Department and the Life Orientation teacher for the Senior Phase were also present during the presentation. We are fortunate to have boys and girls who can speak out. They were not intimidated by our presence and joined freely in the discussions.

The subject of the ensuing workshop was relationships. They were facilitated to discuss the needs that relationships fill in our lives and how the different relationships should be conducted. The main thing they learnt was that love and respect is the basis for all relationships. They also learnt that sex is only appropriate between adults in a very caring and long-term relationship and that love is more about caring for each other than about taking what one person wants. Even when sex is part of a relationship, it is only the outward expression of a deep, respectful love. They were engaged in both written and practical activities.

What impact has my action had?

I collected some of the worksheets that the learners completed in the workshop, which offer evidence that the outcome has been reached, or not. The quotations are taken directly from the worksheets.

Learners understand that if they are able to differentiate between love and sex, they can prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS

Friendship love is between people who are friends or family members. We think about love and respect, who are trustworthy and who think about other people's feelings. Sexual love should only be between people who are female and male and have sex often. They are people who think about sex and who like to have sex.

It appears that, although this learner has understood the basis for loving relationships, she is still not clear about sexual relationships, and that they should also be based on love and respect.

Another Grade 7 learner wrote:

Sexual love is about sex most of the times, friendship love is about honesty, trusting and respect.



From these answers, I think that we need to work more on helping learners understand that the two types of relationships are not mutually exclusive – that people in a sexual relationship also need to show respect and care for each other. The facilitators wanted to show that having sex outside of a caring relationship is not good, but the learners seem to have picked up that you either have a sexual relationship or a loving and caring friendship relationship. This could be seen as evidence that they really have not been exposed to sex as something good within a committed relationship.

They seem to understand that sex, especially unprotected sex, is not a good thing for young people and that it can lead to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections

One learner wrote that sexual love is about “*heartbreaking*”, indicating that she associates it with bad feelings. Another learner wrote that sex “*is not good for me, it can make me sick.*”

The information that I gathered from the evaluation forms indicates that the learners are in fact more aware of the difference between being loved by someone and someone who just wants to have sex. Most of them also said that they learned at least one new factor about love and sex. They are also more aware of the dangers of sex without love and respect and how it can influence your future plans negatively. They also realized that they must take responsibility for their own actions and also learn from past mistakes,

I do not think that enough emphasis was placed on the dangers of sex and the inappropriateness of sex for learners in this workshop, but time was limited and this is something that we have to address in the future.

What have I learnt from this cycle of action research?

After reflecting on this workshop, I think we need to continue to talk about this in our classrooms and perhaps have a series of workshops, since change does not happen overnight. I need to discuss the evaluations of this workshop with the Love Life people and sit down with them and my colleagues and work out a sustained and systematic plan for next years Grade 7 learners. Some comments from my colleagues support this:

I believe that the Love Life visit was very significant. It really made an impact on the learners as everybody was moved by what they heard.



What I would like to see is that more visits like these are organised and it should also cover topics like drug and alcohol abuse.

I also think that we as teachers need to be trained/educated in how to facilitate learners in this regard and we have to make enquiries about what training is available in this regard. I have completed a sexuality education module in my studies and perhaps I can use this as a basis for educating my colleagues.

What I have learnt about myself from this action research is that I cannot take things for granted and assume that learners know these things. By being observant and listening, I will be able to identify many areas where we can take action to improve the understandings of our learners and ourselves. Action research gives us a very practical and doable tool to solve the problems in our schools and it also helps me, as a teacher, to realise that I can take action myself and do not need to wait for someone else to solve the problem. Working together with my colleagues also increases our teamwork skills and improves our relationships.





Helping young girls to protect themselves against abuse

C Mazomba

My context

I am an educator at Melisizwe Primary School in NU10 in Motherwell. I serve the most impoverished community where about 80% of our learners depend on their children's government grants and some depend on their grand mother's old age grant. Unemployment is very high and there is consequently a high rate of sexual abuse, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy and similar social problems that usually accompany poverty.

My concern

Many of the young girls in this primary school are sexually active and are therefore vulnerable to HIV and AIDS infection. Even those who are not yet sexually active may become so at an early age, due to the environment they live in and the things that they live in and the things they are exposed to. At such a young age, that are not equipped to practice safer and since some of them have been abused, they have no choice in the matter. They are not only exposed to HIV infection, but also to sexually transmitted diseases which in turn will render them to more vulnerable to HIV and will also severely affect their sexual health and future fertility. They are also more likely to fall pregnant and have children they are not able to take care of. This would also negatively affect their life chances and so continue to keep them in an inferior position in society, and therefore promote gender inequality, which in turn would heighten HIV vulnerability...

Why I am concerned?

I believe that true gender equality is based on mutual respect between the genders, but one can only respect others if one first respects one self. My value of self respect is violated because young girls are deprived their value of self-respect and denied life chances. They are not able to develop a high self-esteem that would lead to a greater chance of success in their lives. In spite of the fact that the Constitution of South Africa protects all children against all forms of abuse, these young girls are in reality of being abused since their rights to be protected is being violated. At such a young age, they are not really in a position to choose to have sex, the environment they live in and the



circumstances have narrowed their options around this issue and negatively impacted on their ability to make a rational choice for themselves.

There are very few recreational facilities available to them and many young girls end up in shebeens where they drink and end up being raped by men who take advantage of them. Also, they are subjected to tremendous peer pressure. On Mondays, the talks about who was cool during the weekend put pressure on young girls to boast of their sexual exploits since they want to be the centre of attraction. These young girls engage in inter-generational sex where an older man takes care of their clothing or other material needs in exchange for sex. In some cases, young girls are even sent by their mothers to go *panda* (go and have sex for money) because as parents they cannot afford expensive labels.

I know this is a problem in my school because we have several reported cases of young girls who are absent from school, due to being kept at home for sex by older men. One teacher went for a home visit and found a 12 year old with her boyfriend in bed. Another young girl could not walk properly at school and, after an interview by her teacher, it was found that she was being abused by a high school boy. All the teachers at my school agree that sexual abuse is a problem, even with children in the foundation phase. Community police reports also support the fact that many young girls are being raped during weekends.

I want to break the cycle of young girls who become sexually active because they are vulnerable to HIV and AIDS infection and are being deprived life chances of becoming successful young women that can contribute in the upliftment of their community.

As an educator I also want to conscientise other educators of our community, citizenship and pastoral role that is a critical aspect of HIV and AIDS prevention education. Educators need to develop supportive relationships with parents and other organizations based on critical understanding of community and environment issues.

I therefore constructed the following question to guide my interventions to address this problem:

How can I help young primary school girls to delay sexual activity and become less vulnerable to abuse?



What I did to address the problem

I addressed the problem on several fronts as described below:

1. I approached the principal of the school and explained to him my concern that young girls are sexually active and are thus vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. He then convened a staff meeting and reported this matter to the staff. The staff decided that each and every teacher should teach life skills and integrate into their lessons information about the dangers of being sexually active at an early age.
2. The health and welfare committee of the school decided to contact LoveLife peer facilitators to come and present workshops with some of our learners that we suspected were at high risk. Through the use of drama and poetry, the following topics were explored:

- a. Know your values
- b. Believe in yourself
- c. Take control
- d. Goal setting
- e. Body wise

They had 10 sessions in all, after which the learners received certificates of attendance.



3. The school also held an awareness programme on HIV & AIDS where a group of learners staged drama for other learners.





4. We invited the police to come and address our learners on the rate of reported cases of child abuse, to raise their awareness about the dangers and how to protect themselves. We wanted the learners to see the police service as a helping resource that they could turn to if needed.



What impact have my actions had?

From discussions with my colleagues, I know that they are now integrating sexuality education into their teaching. They have taken ownership of educating girls about the risks of being sexually active such as cervical cancer, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV & AIDS infection.

Learners that were involved in the LoveLife programme are now in a position to teach other learners and have shared their knowledge by staging dramas, etc.

The school decided to form a traditional dance group to keep learners busy after school, under supervision of a community volunteer parent. This group meets every week, at least twice per week, and are involved in community projects to spread what they have learnt, e.g. at the Ikamva Community Project youth awareness day.



Some parents of the children involved in the LoveLife programme showed appreciation of the programmes as they say these assisted the learners in staying away from negative activities. About 10 parents have come to report a positive change in their children's behaviour.



Learners now understand the dangers of being involved in sexual activities at an early age and are involved in educating their peers about the dangers of sexual involvement at a young age.

What have I learnt?

I have learnt so much from this project that will enable me to adapt my teaching to improve relationships between myself and the learners. By involving learners and working closely with them on a specific project, we can narrow the gap between learners and parents as we come to understand each other better.

I have also seen how learners grow in confidence once they start participating and taking an interest. Action research is a good way to involve others in school improvement, since it leads to action rather than just talking and complaining about things. It also helps to improve teamwork and get people to work together.

