

UNIT TWO

Schools as centres of care

Introduction

We have acknowledged that schools are, in many respects, a microcosm of society and that socio-economic problems are as much part of the fabric of the school as they are of the community at large. One of the most significant challenges that our society and schools face is the HIV and AIDS epidemic. As we have seen in Unit 1, the many ways in which this epidemic has an impact on learners, their families, communities and schools, is complex. In the context of schooling, HIV and AIDS and the interrelated problems of poverty create barriers that pose great challenges to learning. Faced with this situation, we are pushed to think beyond the immediate and obvious roles and functions that schools have traditionally fulfilled to a conceptualisation of schools as a centre of care and support. While teaching and learning remain the core business of any school, we do, at the same time, need to explore strategies for providing the care and support needed for our learners to succeed. To achieve this we also need to think about the implications for school leadership and about a shift in the school leadership and management paradigm.

Many in leadership positions are already beginning to realise that school management, in the current South African context, can no longer focus narrowly on managing the implementation of national policies and meeting departmental administrative requirements. Even though many principals and management teams may already find these tasks difficult enough as it is, addressing HIV and AIDS and other related barriers to learning is critical. Our research provides clear evidence that unless schools are able to respond to these barriers, educational success will remain an elusive dream for most South African learners.

In acknowledging the multi-dimensional nature of the impact that HIV and AIDS has on health, on education, on employment, on family finances, on morale and so on, it becomes clear that an integrated, multisectoral approach to dealing with HIV and AIDS is necessary. Schools need to become key partners in the national multisectoral response to HIV and AIDS and poverty. To achieve this, school leadership is called upon to take responsibility for making links and managing the process of working in partnership with other role players to create a supportive and caring environment in and around schools. Such role players include provincial education, health and social service departments, district education offices, community-based structures and organisations and learners' families.

In Unit 2 we start off by examining relevant policies and guidelines dealing with education issues relating to HIV and AIDS in the South African context and probe the reasons for the gap between policy and practice. We reflect on three case studies that show what some schools are doing to provide care and support for vulnerable learners. These scenarios act as a stimulus for creating a vision of the school as a centre of care that supports the development of all its learners. A diagrammatic overview of the features of a caring and supportive school is provided, the components of which can be used as the basis for a school management framework. The diagram also serves to highlight the areas that are dealt with in subsequent units of this guide. As you all work

through the next units the principal and school management team will gain good insight into the practical implications of building a caring school. This information will inform the comprehensive care and support plan that you are encouraged to develop at the end of the guide in Unit 8.

Key questions

This unit explores the following questions:

1. How does policy require schools to respond to the effects of HIV and AIDS?
2. Why is there a gap between policy and practice?
3. What are the features of a caring school?
4. What is the role of management in building a caring and supportive school environment?

Outcomes

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Better understand relevant policy and guidelines for schools to respond to the effects of HIV and AIDS, poverty and a range of related socio-economic issues that are barriers to learning.
- Understand the reasons why schools often do not implement policies with regard to HIV and AIDS.
- Identify the features of a caring school in which vulnerable children are supported and where they are enabled to grow and develop.
- Explain what the school management team can do to create a caring and supportive environment in your school.

What does policy say about HIV and AIDS?

Are you aware of the existing policy that guides the school management's response to the effects of HIV and AIDS?



Here are excerpts from several relevant policy documents. What are some common themes?



Every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services.

(The Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa: 1996)

Quality education for all learners of school going age.... The rights of all learners must be upheld... intolerance and discrimination must be combated.

(The South African Schools Act, DoE: 1996)



No learner may be refused admission to a public school.

(The Admissions Policy for Ordinary Schools, DoE: 1996)



The national system of education must serve the needs and interests of all people of South Africa and uphold their fundamental rights.

(The National Education Policy Act, DoE: 1996)

Differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, HIV or other infectious diseases are acknowledged and respected.

(White Paper 6 Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, DoE: 2001)

Many learners will become orphaned and will need emotional help and guidance from educators.

(Policy on HIV and AIDS, DoE: 1999)



These excerpts from policy documents and guidelines are concerned with ‘the right to education for all’, ‘the inclusive nature of education’, ‘non discrimination’, ‘the state’s obligation to translate rights into reality’, and ‘protection and support of children who suffer the effects of HIV and AIDS and experience various barriers to learning’.

A review of HIV and AIDS policy conducted during our research revealed three main themes:

1. HIV and AIDS related policy is rooted in a human rights and inclusive approach to education and training;
2. The role of the School Governing Body and the School Management Team is strongly profiled in the HIV and AIDS policy; and
3. Schools are conceptualised as centres of community life.

Inclusive human rights approach

The White Paper 6 (*Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*, DoE: 2001)¹ encourages an inclusive education and training approach and advises ‘maximising the participation of all learners in the culture and the curriculum of educational institutions and uncovering and minimising barriers to learning.’



The DoE 1999 *National Policy on HIV/AIDS for Learners, Students and Educators* gives comprehensive guidelines relating to the rights and treatment of learners and educators who are HIV+. Among others, the policy specifies that:

- The constitutional rights of all learners and educators must be protected equally.
- There should be no compulsory disclosure of HIV/AIDS status (applicable to learners and educators).
- The testing of learners as a prerequisite for attendance at an institution, or of an educator as a prerequisite of service, is prohibited.
- No HIV+ learner or educator may be discriminated against; they must be treated in a just, humane and life-affirming way.
- No learner may be denied admission to or continued attendance at an institution because of his or her actual or perceived HIV status.
- No educator may be denied appointment to a post because of his or her actual or perceived HIV status.
- Learners who are HIV+ should lead as full a life as possible and not be denied the opportunity to receive an education to the maximum of their ability. Likewise HIV+ educators should lead as full a professional life as possible, with the same rights and opportunities as other educators.
- If and when learners with HIV or AIDS become incapacitated through illness, the school should make work available to them for study at home and should support continued learning where possible... or provide older learners with distance education.

(DoE, 1999 pp 9 -13).²

The role of the School Governing Body and the School Management Team

The *National Policy on HIV/AIDS for Learners, Students and Educators* gives a clear directive to school governing bodies.

In order to meet the demands of the wide variety of circumstances posed by the South African community and to acknowledge the importance of school governing bodies, councils and parents in the education partnership, national policy is intended as broad principles only. It is envisaged that the governing body of a school, acting within its functions under the South African Schools Act, 1996, ... should give operational effect to the national policy by developing and advocating an HIV/AIDS implementation plan that would reflect the needs, ethos and values of a specific school or institution and its community within the framework of the national policy.

(DoE 1999: 6).³

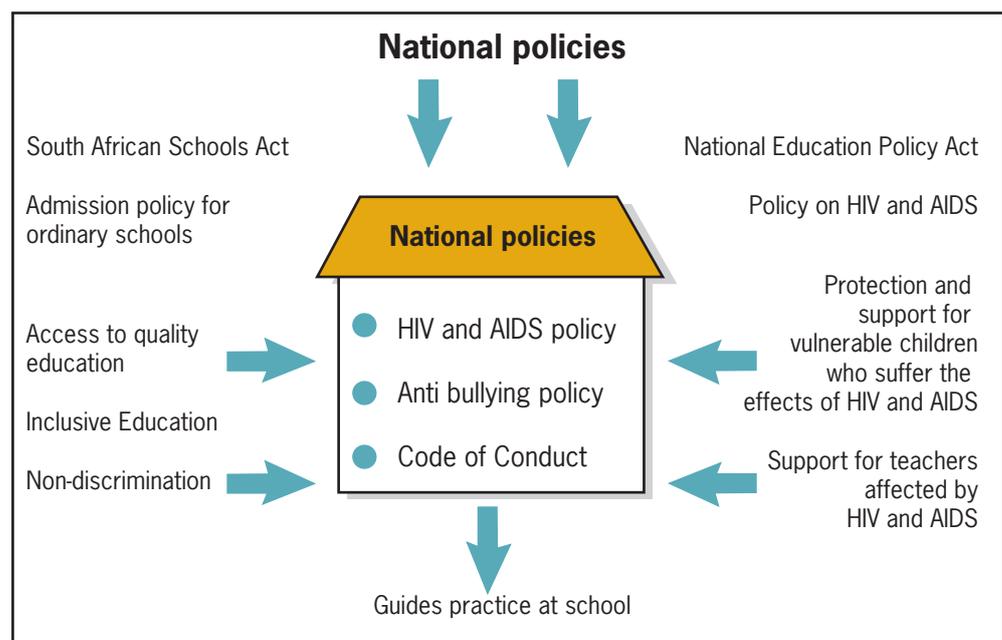
Schools as centres of community life

The *Tirisano plan*⁴ (developed in 2000 for the transformation of education), *The HIV/AIDS Emergency: Guidelines for Educators*⁵ and the *Norms and Standards for Educators policy*⁶ promote the notion of schools as centres of community life. These documents emphasise the idea that the school’s responsibilities stretch beyond the school grounds into the community. This shapes the idea of the school as a centre for care and support.

The HIV/AIDS Emergency: Guidelines for Educators (DoE: 2000 b) is based on the National Policy on HIV/AIDS (1999). It suggests “making the school a centre of hope and care in the community” (DoE 2000 b:) through:

- exemplifying responsible sexual behaviour (by all staff members at the school)
- spreading correct information
- leading discussion among learners and parents
- creating a work environment that does not discriminate against those who are infected or affected by HIV and AIDS and
- supporting those who are ill (learners and teachers).

It is the school principal, in conjunction with the School Governing Body (SGB) and the School Management Team (SMT), who is responsible for giving practical expression to national policies at school level. The following diagram is a visual depiction of key HIV and AIDS and related school-based policies that seek to guide the behaviours of management, teachers, learners and parents. These policies make up the framework in which a caring environment in the school can be created.





ACTIVITY

Activity 1

Review/develop your school's HIV and AIDS policy

The Department of Education (DoE) has developed a national policy on the management of HIV and AIDS in schools and all public learning institutions. Schools and Governing Bodies are encouraged to develop and adopt their own policy based on the principles reflected in the national policy. If your school *does not* have its own policy, use these guidelines to develop one.

Policy must be evaluated regularly and, if necessary, revised to stay relevant, if your school *does* have an HIV and AIDS policy, this is a good opportunity for you to review it and whether any refinements are necessary.



TOOLKIT

Tool 4

Preparing to develop/review your school's HIV and AIDS policy

This tool provides an overview of the critical areas that should be included in the policy. Work with your management team to develop/review your school's policy and make amendments if necessary.



TOOLKIT

Tool 5

Exemplar: School HIV and AIDS policy

This tool gives more detailed information and guidance on what your school's policy should include. The template is a useful tool to compile a new policy.

You can refer to your amended HIV and AIDS policy or your new policy when you compile a care and support plan for your school in Unit 8.

Comment

Our current policy framework is based on human rights, and specifically supports both the African and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children.

The policy framework defines our responsibilities in surprisingly practical ways. It maps out clear areas of action, to which we are called to respond. For example, if our children have a right to food and they are not getting it, we have an obligation to provide it. That is a very immediate and practical task. Our obligation to the young includes the provision of basic needs (such as food and shelter and safety), as well as emotional and intellectual needs (like love and education). It is interesting to note that we are obliged to respond to individual needs (like supporting maximum development) as well as social needs (like creating a humane society).

It is important to honour parents as primary educators in all these tasks, but if parents are not able to do this adequately, principals and teachers are obligated to help. A vital benefit of a school is that it gives us the opportunity to respond to the needs of children in ongoing and systematic ways. This is a legal and constitutional obligation, not just a personal choice. Teachers have a specific responsibility because they are paid by the state to nurture each new generation of children and prepare them for the role they will play in society one day. In particular, the Norms and Standards for Educators (DoE:2000 c) in which teacher competences are spelt out and associated roles are prescribed, requires teachers to fulfil a Community, citizenship and pastoral role. This role is defined in the document as follows:

The educator will practise and promote a critical, committed and ethical attitude towards developing a sense of respect and responsibility towards others. The educator will uphold the constitution and promote democratic values and practices in schools and society. Within the school, the educator will demonstrate an ability to develop a supportive and empowering environment for the learner and respond to the educational and other needs of learners and fellow educators.

Furthermore, the educator will develop supportive relations with parents and other key persons and organisations based on a critical understanding of community and environmental development issues. One critical dimension of this role is HIV/AIDS education.

(DoE:2000 c)⁷

Gap between policy and practice

Although our educational policies give us a fairly practical framework for nurturing a humane and caring society, we have found that the implementation of this is often difficult. Principals and teachers, especially those who are working in poor communities, struggle to make the policies work. What are the most common challenges that schools face when they try to implement a policy of care and support?

Policy implementation challenges

Have you heard the following types of complaints about making policy work in your school?

“We know about policies, but don't really understand how to make them work in our community.”

“We don't have enough money or other resources to deliver on the promises the policies make.”

“It is hard to fit all these extra demands into the daily tasks at school.”

“The parents don’t attend meetings, they don’t really support the school.”

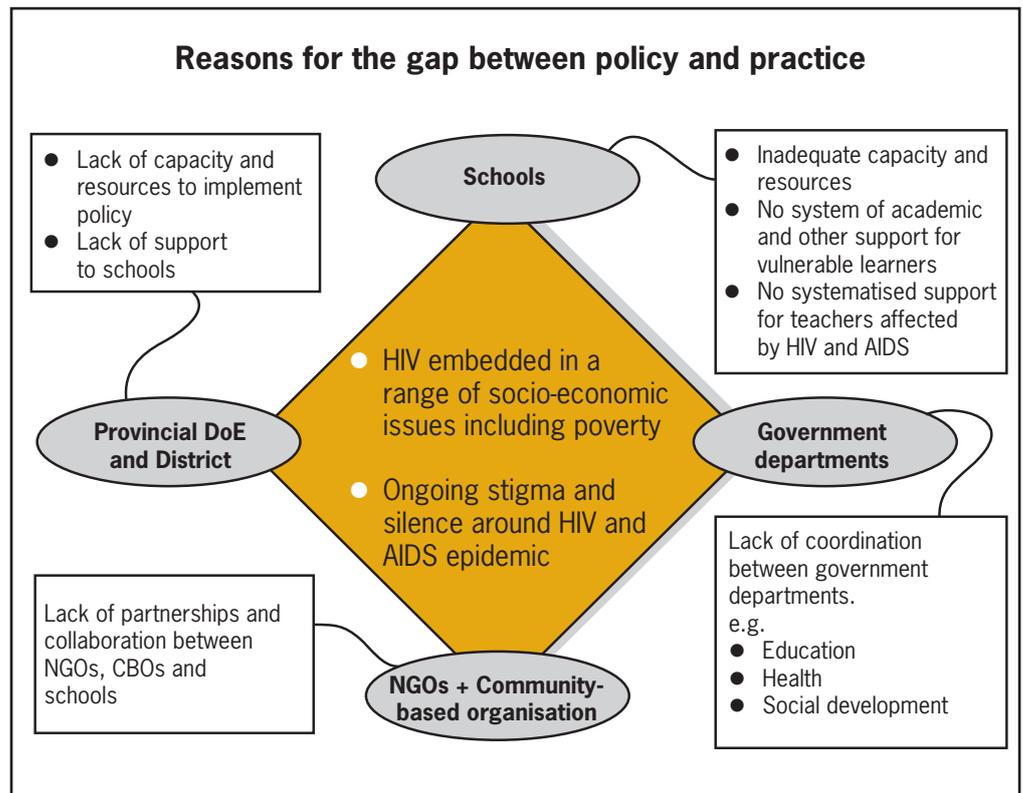
“People don’t care. They will not make an effort to get the policies to work.”

“Absenteeism is a problem. It is hard to make things work when teachers don’t come to school.”

“The SGB exists only in name.”

“The parents are supportive but they don’t have the skills or the resources to help with policy implementation.”

There are many reasons why policies don’t work. In our research we discovered that the gap between policy and implementation as it relates to HIV and AIDS is due to a combination of factors as reflected in the diagram below.



The school is a key role player in the fight against the spread and management of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. It is a fact that the effects of HIV and AIDS on learners and teachers create barriers to learning and the delivery of quality education. This is a critical reason why principals and their management teams must find constructive ways of responding to diminish the effects of the epidemic in their school. Our research shows that in most schools visited there is no coherent plan of action. Instead we found evidence of some informal actions taken by committed teachers to support learners. Commendable as such actions are, there is a need to create a much more systematic and sustainable approach.



ACTIVITY

Activity 2

Review the implementation of your school's HIV and AIDS policy

Making a policy work in the real context is very challenging. What are some of the things that have worked? What are you particularly proud of? What are some of the things that have not worked? Why have they not worked?

Carry out a critical review of the implementation of the HIV and AIDS policy during the past year.



TOOLKIT

Tool 6

Making the HIV and AIDS policy work in your school

This tool has been designed to enable you to record the results of a critical reflection on your current practice.

You can refer to these points when you compile a care and support plan for your school in Unit 8.

Comment

We have visited schools in all provinces and have seen that there are common challenges facing many of them.

One of the biggest challenges is the lack of strong leadership and effective management. There is often a perception that if a school has access to adequate resources, management would be in a better position to implement policies. While resources are important, they are not the most significant factor for making policies work. Money and resources will not bring about a caring and supportive school environment. What is required is leadership. A good leader and strong management team will be able to harness and manage whatever resources are available in the community to give expression to the policies they have developed as part of a coherent response. Take for example the national nutrition programme or feeding scheme. This programme is intended to provide a warm meal for every primary school learner in quintile one, two, and three schools, yet there are very few places where it is managed effectively. As a result there are still hundreds of hungry children in our schools. There are many other support programmes available, which school leaders can tap into. It requires an awareness of what is available in your community and the commitment to establish networks and partnerships with the district and

provincial education department, other government departments and initiatives, as well as non government organisations (NGOs), community based organisations (CBOs), business, community leaders and parents. These networks and partnerships are often complex and trying to make them work can be very difficult and time consuming.

We came across many schools that struggle with demotivated and overloaded teachers. They are already under stress to deliver on their teaching responsibilities and often do not see it as their role to offer extra care and support.

Another huge challenge facing many schools in the country is poverty. Many schools are located in communities that are too poor to support them. Unless schools get money from the outside to fund some of the possible support activities, e.g. paying for short-term replacements for sick teachers, they find it difficult to deliver on the promises the policies make.

A vision of the school as a centre of care

We found principals in the schools we visited in different provinces in the country, who are working in poor communities and who have managed to support vulnerable learners at their school. Here are two scenarios that show what can be done. For the sake of confidentiality we have changed the names of the schools and principals.



ACTIVITY

Activity 3

What are the features of caring schools?

Read the case studies and identify support actions that the principals managed to organise in their schools. Then answer these questions:

1. What kind of support do parents provide in case study 1?
2. Which external agencies did the principals approach in each of the three case studies?
3. What support did these external agencies offer?
4. In your opinion why were the principals able to provide the learners in their schools with the types of support described in the case studies?
5. Which support actions do you think you could organise in your school?

Write down some initial ideas. You will be able to expand on these ideas when you complete your care and support plan in Unit 8.

CASE STUDY 1 – VALUE-BASED, PROACTIVE LEADERSHIP

Oxford Girls' Primary School is situated less than 5 km from Johannesburg's city centre. Established 90 years ago, it is one of the oldest schools in Johannesburg. Over the years, the community that the school serves has changed considerably from the children of what was largely a middle class, Jewish community to the children of a predominantly black African community. This contemporary community is comprised mainly of immigrants and refugees from neighbouring African countries, in particular, French speaking refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Mrs Smit, the principal, has identified that 90% of the 500 learners are vulnerable children (OVC). This means that the majority of children in the school require some kind of socio-economic or psycho-social support. About 200 children (40% of the total enrolment) are from refugee families and, as such, have a range of psycho-socio and economic needs that require special attention. This high percentage of OVC at the school means that there is a great need for care and support in a range of spheres within the school community. As a quintile four school, Oxford Girls' Primary School does not receive food from the provincial nutrition programme, despite serving a predominantly poor community with high rates of unemployment. Applications to the Gauteng Department of Education for learners to be considered for the nutrition programme have been turned down without reasons being provided. Thus the school has taken responsibility for feeding between 100 and 150 learners daily. To do this the school has to rely on monetary and food donations as well as fresh vegetables provided by the successful vegetable garden.

In lieu of fees, parents are asked to volunteer their services to programmes run in the school. The principal assesses the parents' skills and language levels and deploys them in the school accordingly. Parents are required to volunteer for a term at a time. Some parents help with cleaning, some look after the vegetable garden, some work as teachers' assistants in the classrooms and one parent assists with the school's aftercare programme. In addition, Mrs Smit has integrated a schoolwork/homework support system in the daily programme to offer learners academic support and established an aftercare facility that is open during school time and in the holidays. This facility is managed by the Grade R teacher.

The principal has also identified a non government organisation (NGO) that offers counselling, the Johannesburg Parent and Child Counselling Centre (JPCCC), and entered into a contractual agreement. This contract involves identifying vulnerable learners and following through with the necessary support actions. The principal is, however, very hands on in managing this process and is meticulous about keeping records regarding vulnerable learners and home visits. The counsellors also report back to her (in broad terms) so that she is fully informed about which learners may need additional support.

The proactive leadership of the principal has made a huge difference in this school. Through her commitment, insight and values-based leadership she has invested in training and motivating her staff to be part of an integrated and systematised approach to supporting learners and enabling them to access quality education.

While the School Governing Body (SGB) does not have the capacity to provide the strategic direction and oversight envisaged in the SA Schools Act, Mrs Smit draws the SGB into her planning meetings and receives a lot of assistance from the SGB members. Because the school actively supports vulnerable children it enjoys a positive relationship with the community in terms of support and respect. This can be seen through the high level of parental participation in school activities and functions.



CASE STUDY 2 – STRATEGIES FOR SOURCING SUPPORT

Vuwani Lower Primary is a rural school situated in a poor community in Limpopo where unemployment is rife. The few people who do work are employed on the surrounding commercial fruit farms. Subsistence farming supports most people, an activity that is totally dependent on the weather. Vuwani is a quintile three school and every learner is required to pay R50 school fees per year. But the principal, Mrs Ndukwana, states that the annual default rate is in excess of 50%. The school, with a total of 688 children, has a favourable teacher-learner ratio of 1:30. As there is no running water, the school is dependent on a borehole from which water is pumped into tanks. Vuwani School does not have a telephone line or e-mail facilities, and the only way of communicating is through the principal's private cell phone. While the school has three donated computers, limited computer literacy on the part of the staff renders these almost unused. The school is connected to the ESKOM grid with electricity primarily used to run a photocopying machine and computers which are located in the principal's office. The principal's office also has to double up as a library and a storage room for school equipment.

According to school records, 30 learners have formally been identified as orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC), and of these 14 are estimated to be affected and/or infected by HIV and AIDS. The school records do not list learners who are orphaned directly as a result of HIV and AIDS, nor is the problem of HIV and AIDS infection talked about openly in the community. However, the majority of learners are vulnerable because of their poor home backgrounds. Mrs Ndukwana commented that most learners stay with their siblings or with relatives, and as a result, regular food supply is a challenge.

Poverty causes the school to rely heavily on support from government sources and from external donors. After realising the constraints posed by poverty in the community, Mrs Ndukwana looked actively for external support. She has approached and drawn in support from various provincial departments involving them in the school's development. The Education Department has helped with infrastructure development as well as training on record keeping and school administration. The Department of Agriculture helps with the school garden, while Health contributes educational posters and assists learners to go to the local clinic. The Department of Water provides water when the borehole does not work.

When Mrs Ndukwana arrived at Vuwani in 1997 there were not enough classrooms and many classes were held under trees. The school grounds were not fenced and accessing water was extremely challenging. But the principal had learnt about accessing donor funds from her experiences at another school. Today the school has five classroom blocks that accommodate all learners and sufficient space to plan for the extension of the school to include Grade 5 in 2009. Three of these blocks are relatively new; one was built through the assistance of the Department of Education while the others were constructed through funds from the Japanese Embassy. The Centre for Community Development (CCD) started a Women's Project aimed at raising funds for school fees through building and sewing. This led to the involvement of the National Development Agency (NDA) which began by supporting salaries for the men and women who worked in the Women's Project. The NDA's involvement soon spread to capacity building training for teachers, school managers and the school governors. Mrs Ndukwana has also secured the help of local businesses, and one bus company supplies free transport as well as food and dishes for special occasions like HIV and AIDS days.

The principal has organised her staff into teams to work on various aspects of school development and learner support. Apart from the School Management Team (SMT) that implement policies, committees have been established for orphans and vulnerable learners, health and hygiene, nutritional diet and the school garden, and psycho-social counselling for learners. These committees are answerable to the principal and to the SMT. Thus the principal remains constantly aware of what is happening in the committees. She also plays a pivotal role in supporting the committees through mobilising resources.

Mrs Ndukwana says that the School Governing Body (SGB) is too weak to make meaningful contributions towards school development. The School Management Team (SMT) reportedly has problems in getting members of the SGB to attend meetings, since the latter are usually busy tending for their families on the surrounding commercial farms. Most activities in the school are therefore driven by the principal and her SMT. Although there is no active SGB, the principal has been able to mobilise a tremendous number of resources from external agencies.

CASE STUDY 3 – MANAGING INTERVENTIONS

Zama Intermediate School is located in a semi-urban area with the atmosphere of both rural village and urban township. The school is neat and well maintained with a good fence. Two large gardens dominate the grounds at both ends of the school. The school has running water, electricity and a number of computers for administration, but no e-mail. While the school has a library, it does not have a computer laboratory. Extra mural activities like soccer, netball and volley ball are offered on the fairly good sports grounds. The principal describes the School Governing Body (SGB) as being 'very good and active'. They run the school finances with a vigilant eye and oversee the maintenance of the school buildings.

The school has a total of 34 teachers with two of them being paid for by the SGB. Zama is a Quintile 1 no fee school with 1 223 learners; Of these, 192 learners are officially considered to be orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) however, there are in fact many more learners at the school who are at risk and therefore in need of additional support. The principal, Mr Molefe estimates that there are about 72 learners who are affected or infected by HIV AND AIDS. A School Based Support Team⁸ including learner representatives - looks after the interests of OVC in the school. By conducting home visits, the team is able to identify problems that learners face outside the classroom.

When Mr Molefe became principal ten years ago he immediately recognised the challenges faced by the community and his learners. For example, many learners came to school hungry, many were unhealthy and quite a number demonstrated behavioural problems consistent with abusive home environments. In addition, a great number of learners lived in child-headed households. The principal felt that he needed to assist the learners by offering them medical and nutritional support. He tried to source assistance from government departments, but this was not sufficient. Mr Molefe soon realised that he would have to look outside the school and the Department for help.

With the support of the School Based Support Team (SBST) Mr Molefe approached several external individuals and organisations for assistance. His efforts in this regard were extremely successful and today a number of organisations and local businesses work with the school, offering a range of different support services to the learners. Save the Children (UK) implements its 'Caring Schools' programme at Zama. As part of the Save the Children programme, READ (another NGO) also became involved at Zama. The READ programme provides literacy resources as well as science and sports equipment. READ also offers some teacher training, particularly in the field of literacy. Mr Molefe also initiated contact with Thusanang, an NGO that did some training at the school in the field of rights and responsibilities. The Roman Catholic church working in that region was also approached. They offered financial support for food, training for the kitchen staff and support with maintaining the school food garden. Their contribution effectively supplements the nutrition programme provided by the Department of Education which is insufficient to meet the needs of the learners at Zama. The school also made links with Soul City and runs the Soul Buddies programme as part of its aftercare initiative.

The principal's role in setting up and maintaining this network of support for his school has been both in making the initial contacts and in maintaining contact and liaising with these organisations on an ongoing basis. Where specific contracts have been set up between the school and an external organisation (like Save the Children) Mr Molefe monitors the school's adherence to the terms of the contract. In short, his role in managing the external support is crucial.

Of significance is the fact that Zama Intermediate School is one of the few schools in our study in which the impact of HIV and AIDS was fairly openly acknowledged. The principal also spoke about the need to address stigma and discrimination and suggested that the Life Skills programme could play an important role in tackling this problem.

Comment

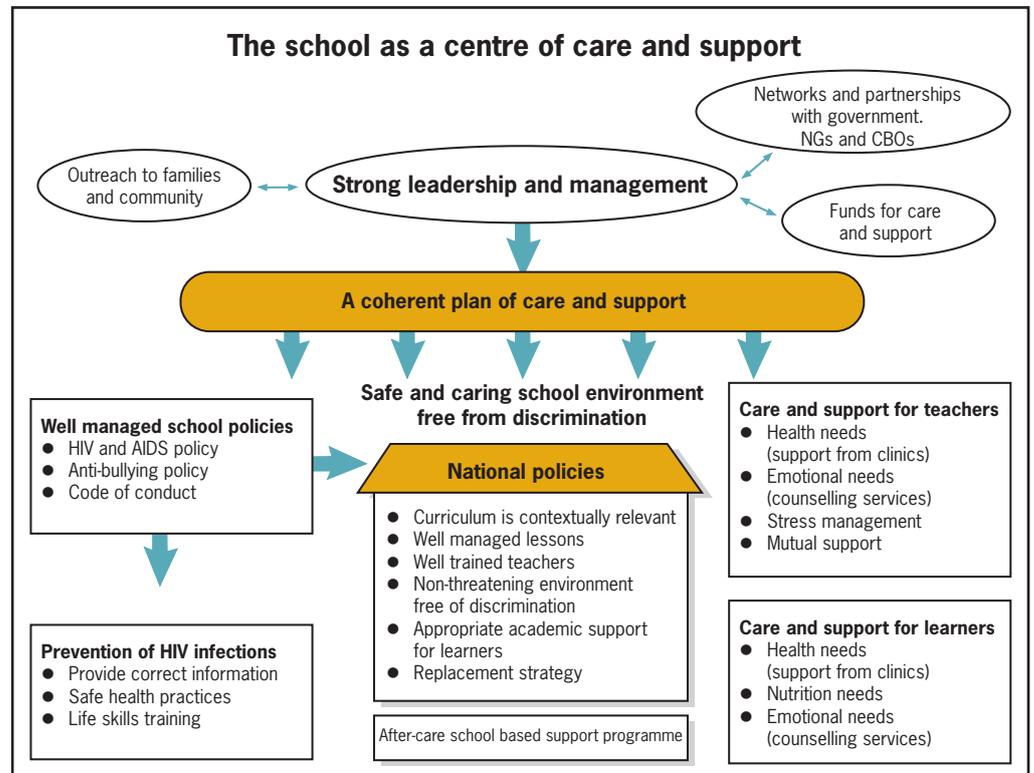
All three schools are determined to offer the best possible education, even if their situation is bleak. Their caring is practical and this makes a huge difference in the lives of the learners concerned. The principal in the first school came up with an innovative way of involving poor parents. In lieu of monetary support, she gets parents to volunteer their services in different ways, e.g. cleaning, looking after the vegetable garden, helping teachers in the classroom and in the aftercare programme.

In one case caring involved building more classrooms, and making the school clean and safe. For all of them caring involved taking action that resulted in appropriate activities to support learners.

All three schools have networked with NGOs, CBOs, church organisations, government departments and business. The principals have involved them in various ways to provide support and funding which enables the schools to offer support to learners that contributes to overcoming barriers to learning. The services offered by external agencies include support for nutrition and after care programmes, setting up and maintaining school gardens, health services, counseling services, and funding. It is impressive that even schools with very limited resources could find extra support through networking.

In the course of our site visits we noticed that in schools which offered care and support to learners, the SMT responded to their obligation to care with action. They (1) identified the problem and (2) did something practical to help solve the problem. The caring initiatives of one person often resulted in others becoming involved and helping with the care. In many cases the caring activities became part of the daily running of the school, monitored and supported by the SMT.

The above three case studies give us an idea of what a caring school could look like. But we know that not all schools will think about and provide care in the same way. There will be different needs in different communities and different resources. There are also many different ways in which each school can respond. So what are the essential ingredients of a caring school? In the diagram below we sketch some of the key elements that are part of a caring school.



When caring becomes part of the shared vision of a school, it is easier to make it part of the core business of schooling, and create the climate in which learning takes place. But is it that simple? Let’s reflect on your leadership and management role in translating the vision for your school as a centre of care.

The role of management in creating a caring and supportive school environment

The principals depicted in the three case studies were the drivers for change in each school. They all wanted a school in which learning was possible, and so they translated this vision into actions to meet identified challenges.



ACTIVITY

Activity 4 What are the practical implications of creating a caring school environment?

Take another look at the three case studies and the diagram above. Discuss with your management team what the practical implications are of creating a caring school environment.





Tool 7

Creating a caring school environment: What is involved?

This tool is intended to guide your thinking and discussion on possible start-up actions. You are encouraged to record your ideas.

You can refer to this information when you compile your care and support plan in Unit 8.

Comment

The diagram - the school as a centre of care – above, shows that management has to take an overarching responsibility to manage, monitor and maintain all aspects of a caring school. A comprehensive, coherent and well-developed plan guides the implementation of clearly defined policies and actions.

This is the time for courageous leaders to embrace ‘deep change’ that will make their schools part of the solution by responding proactively to the social challenges of HIV and AIDS, poverty and violence. In an article in The Times, Jonathan Jansen refers to the crisis in education and emphasises that:

- The dismal performance of so many of our schools is not the result of a lack of resources, but the inability of schools to turn resources into results.
- Even in dismal circumstances, the single most important factor influencing educational outcomes is the quality of the school leadership.
- In schools where there is structure, discipline and predictability, the pupils are more likely to achieve educational success.

(Jonathan Jansen: 2009)⁹

Management holds the key to turning the current crisis into new opportunities for schools to respond. Daunting though the task is, management does not need to go it alone. The principals in the case studies did not try to change things on their own. They managed to share their vision and enlist others to help them, be it the school staff, the community, government departments or outside organisations. We will deal with setting up these types of partnerships and networks in more detail in Unit 4.

It is interesting to note that the majority of principals who managed to create a caring school environment are women. Is there something about the way women are raised to be ‘carers’ that makes them more sensitive to the needs of others? Though caring and compassion is not the preserve of women, it is an important value and attitude that can be a driving force for taking actions that result in building a caring school environment.

In reflecting on the important role of leadership and management in creating a caring and supportive school environment as seen in the three case studies above, we identified some leadership tips which we believe may be useful.

- A vision for a caring school must be rooted in an accurate understanding of the context so that it can be translated into smaller practical and doable steps.
- The principal and the SMT must demonstrate leadership by taking the initiative to prioritise areas for development and then develop a strategy to get wider support.
- It is important to work as a team and set achievable goals for the school. Principals must be careful not to overburden the staff, but find ways to support them.
- Networking is a critical part of the school's action plan. Few schools can manage to do everything on their own without outside help. Setting up networks of support is therefore a key competence which principals and SMTS should strive to develop. But it remains the responsibility of the principal and SMT to manage the services and support that has been elicited from outside of the school. This is where clear contracts that specify what will be done by whom, where and when, are crucial.
- The principal and SMT take full responsibility for ensuring that outside assistance is relevant and supports the school's vision of a caring environment and does not interfere with the core business of the school.



Caring attitudes start with practical actions.

Comment

Unfortunately, schools with a shared vision for caring are still the exception rather than the rule. Many principals have reported that they struggle to get parents and teachers to buy into their vision, because they do not seem to care. This raises a critical leadership question. Can people be taught to care? Let us reflect for a moment on some practical examples. If the teachers in a school have a good understanding of the rights of a child, and they understand how hunger and abuse undermine these rights, no real caring has taken place yet. Caring begins when the principal and teachers act on this insight. It begins, for example, when they identify and feed the hungry children in their school. If we want to turn a shared set of values (vision) into practical caring responses, we need to do specific management tasks. For example, does the school have a good system to identify vulnerable children? How does the school manage the nutritional programme? These management tasks make it possible for a school to integrate its caring intentions (like feeding the hungry) into its day-to-day business. This includes defining, monitoring and supporting the care responsibilities of teachers, which should be part of their daily work. It is important to keep in mind that if teachers are given clearly defined roles in the school-wide care programmes the school can maintain a caring climate, regardless of the personal beliefs of the teachers involved. Caring attitudes start with practical actions.

Key points

Against the backdrop of the broader policy framework we have attempted to create a vision of what a caring school might look like.

In Unit 2 we explored:

- How policy requires schools to respond to the effects of HIV and AIDS.
- Why there is a gap between policy and implementation.
- What your vision of a caring school is.
- What role management plays in creating a caring school environment.

Some important insights we gained are:

1. The national policy framework supports the idea of a caring and supportive school environment in which the effects of HIV and AIDS and associated social issues such as poverty are mitigated through carefully planned actions. HIV and AIDS is one among many socio-economic issues that create barriers for children to develop and grow. School management need to view this social challenge within the wider context of social issues like poverty, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and sexual abuse that make children vulnerable.
2. The school is a critical role player in the national multi-sectoral strategy to combat the effects of HIV and AIDS. Other role players include district and provincial education departments, relevant government departments such as health and social development, NGOs and community based organisations.
3. All role players have to take responsibility for the gap that exists between policy and practice.
4. School leadership is encouraged to forge partnerships and collaboration with relevant role players in their efforts to establish and maintain relevant care and support programmes that cater for the needs of vulnerable learners.
5. While informal actions of support for learners are commendable, a coherent plan that takes care of key aspects in priority areas and that is driven by committed and strong leadership has the best chance of resulting in a caring school environment in which there is a systematic and sustainable programme of support.