



Inclusion as a Strategy for Promoting Social Wellness of Juvenile Offenders in Gauteng Correctional Centre

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ABSTRACT The present research focuses on how inclusion can be used as a strategy to promote social wellness of juvenile offenders in a bid to reduce recidivism and to facilitate smooth social reintegration. The aim of the study was to investigate and explore ways in which inclusion can be used to promote social wellness among juvenile offenders. Ten juveniles and teachers were selected in a Gauteng correctional centre on the basis of availability and willingness. Findings revealed that education at the centre promotes social wellness and had resulted in positive behavioural change among most juveniles. Relationships among juveniles and with stakeholders also improved with education received at the centre. The major challenges faced were that teachers had not received adequate training in inclusion and inadequate psycho-social support was given to juvenile offenders. It was recommended that teachers be given in service training in inclusion and how to deal with learners with behavioural challenges. More psycho-social support should be provided and family involvement to be intensified to prevent recidivism.

INTRODUCTION

The number of juvenile delinquency cases in South Africa in recent years has been alarming. Between April 2010 and March 2011, 75 435 juveniles were charged by police for various crimes which also included aggressive crimes (Muntingh and Ballard 2012). This state of affairs is further fuelled by the tendency of recidivism that has been recorded among youths who get released from correctional centres (Department of Correctional Services 2010). As at 31st March 2013, out of a population of 150 608 inmates in South African correctional centres, it was reported that more than a third of this population were youths (Department of Correctional Services 2013). The report further revealed that even though some of the inmates were over 25 years old, most of them were still in the prime of their lives. This was reiterated by former Minister Sibusiso Ndebele that “during March 2013, nearly a quarter (24.99%) of the sentenced offender population were youth” (South African Government 25 March 2014).

The Department of Correctional Services has shifted its rehabilitation programmes to focus on education and training (Department of Correctional Services 2005). It has further made it compulsory for all inmates of school going age to receive some form of education while serving their sentences. This move is highly applauded from academic circles as it follows the initiatives taken by countries like Turkey, Brazil and the

United states where there is more focus on educating the offender in the rehabilitation process (Ozdemir 2010; Silva 2009). Research has shown a positive correlation between education and recidivism where it has been proved that education reduces the chances of re offending (Prison Studies 2001). In the United States of America, it was reported that prison education reduced long term recidivism by 29 percent (Correctional Education Association 2013). Reducing recidivism has many advantages such as reducing crimes, saving the tax payers’ money and creating safety in the communities.

The South African education system is founded under the principles of inclusion. Inclusion allows all members of society to fulfill their potential by allowing them to participate in educational programmes that are available despite their circumstances (Engelbrecht et al. 2009). Education is considered a constitutional right for all citizens hence the need for it to be inclusive (Landsberg and Gericke 2006). Besides, an inclusive class allows learners to work collaboratively in groups so that they share ideas, listen to each other’s views thereby, acquiring life skills such as peaceful conflict resolution and anger management (Clarke and Breman 2009). By so doing, these learners acquire social wellness. Members of the society, who have attained social wellness, work for the common good of all living there (Schaffer 2000).

It is, therefore, important to promote social wellness among juvenile offenders to prepare

them for social reintegration. Studies have revealed that incarceration usually leads to social exclusion which can have disastrous consequences to juveniles if not addressed (Horst 2005). Social wellness creates a sense of personal identity and a sense of belonging where one is in pursuit of harmony in his immediate environment and wider society (Schaffer 2000).

Research has shown that inclusion gives learners both social and academic support to learners with behavioural challenges (Clark et al. 2009). Offenders who are made aware of how their behaviour has affected other people are in a better position to change and therefore people in society can evaluate the impact and outcomes of inclusion by observing changes in behaviour and personality. The Department of Correctional Services is of the conviction that every human being is capable of change and transformation if the right opportunity and resources are made available (Department of Correctional Services 2005; South African Government 25 March 2014). It further stipulated that rehabilitation aims at correcting behaviour of offenders, to promote social responsibility and positive social values and human development. By promoting social wellness among juvenile offenders, it is the conviction of these researchers that they will be well prepared to re enter the society.

The relationship between inclusion and social wellness is that inclusive strategies such as collaborative learning, cooperative learning, peer learning and group discussion help to facilitate the acquisition of social wellness (Pijil and Meijer 1991). Skills that can be learnt in such learning set up include sharing and respect. These skills are crucial for one to survive in a diverse society. Social skills also empower offenders to be socially re integrated with ease and to be able to abide by rules not only in fear of the threat for sanctions but out of free will (Ozdemir 2010).

Gangsterism is prevalent in most correctional centres in South Africa (Department of Correctional Services 2012). Under these circumstances, offenders may be initiated into values and norms that are in contradiction with societal expectations. For this reason it is imperative for the teacher to impart social skills that are socially acceptable in the society. In the African context, inclusion and social wellness are embedded in the notion of *ubuntu* which entails having the capacity to express compassion, care

and respect for others in order to create harmony and justice in society (Nussbaum 2003). The main aim of *ubuntu* is to enable the individual to have respect for human kind in diversity and to be conscious that a person is viewed as human through how he relates with other people (Mandela 1994).

Juvenile offenders need life skills that promote social wellness so that they can realise that despite their circumstances they can still positively contribute to the good of their communities. This is why it is important to assess each offender upon admission at the correctional centre so as to determine what educational program can be of benefit to each individual as is the case with inclusion. The views of the researchers are that it is important for teachers in correctional centres to promote social wellness among juvenile offenders in order to prepare them for social re integration. The social skills imparted to offenders will serve as a bridge for successful re entry into their communities. Education should also be implemented in line with the needs of the offenders hence the need to apply inclusion. The researchers were curious to know how the school in a correctional centre may promote inclusion, hence the research question that guided the study was: how is inclusion used as a strategy to promote the social wellness of juveniles in a Gauteng correctional centre school?

Theoretical Framework

The bio-ecological theory of Uri Bronfenbrenner was used as a lens to conduct this study. According to this theory, an individual operates within different sub systems that affect his development (Donald et al. 2010). According to these authors, any disturbance in any subsystem affects the development of an individual. These systems are namely, micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono. The micro and meso systems were of great influence of this study. The ecological perspective asserts that a break down in the individual's immediate system namely the micro systems which include the family hinders the child from exploring other parts of his environment (Addison and Eigenmenn 1999). The researchers viewed incarceration of juveniles as a breakdown in the subsystems that facilitates positive development. The separation of juveniles from

their families and normal schooling environment may have a potential disrupting the normal social development of juvenile offenders.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach where research takes place in natural settings (Woods 2006). This research design allowed the researchers to go into the field with an open mind and collect data without any form of preconceived conclusions (McMillan and Schumacher 2006). The interpretive research paradigm was used to help the researchers to get deep understanding of the meanings that participants attached to specific social phenomenon (Henning et al. 2010). These authors view participants in the social setting to be in a better position to explain their behaviour because they have a better interpretation of their situation. The researchers therefore viewed teachers and offender-learners at the correctional centre as ideal spokespersons of their circumstances.

The case study method was used. A case study has a boundary and its aim is to explore an event or a process in depth (Creswell 2009). The correctional centre chosen was viewed as ideal for the study because it represented a fully fledged school in a correctional centre with learners and teachers attending to the teaching and learning process on a full time basis. It offered ABET Level 1-4. Purposive sampling was used to select only learners who were currently attending classes and teachers who were teaching full time at the school. Ten learners and five teachers formed the participant of the study. Eth-

ical clearance was granted by the University Ethics committee and the Department of Correctional Services. The purpose and procedure of the study was explained and participants were told that their participation was purely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study without any penalty should they feel like doing so. They were given consent forms which they signed to allow the research to go ahead. Data was collected by means of semi structured interviews. Owing to the sensitivity of some questions, participants requested to write down their responses and were granted the right to do so. Questions that needed clarity were clarified. Learners were interviewed in their classrooms in the presence of their teachers for security reasons. The profile of offender learners is seen in Table 1.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed in line with Henning et al. (2010) where data collected was organised into codes. Codes with similar meanings were put together as categories. These categories were then developed into themes. The themes from interviews with juvenile offenders and teachers were written separately and used as the basis for discussing the findings. These themes were written as sub headings in discussing findings.

The following themes emerged from interviews with juvenile offenders:

- ♦ various crimes committed
- ♦ change of behavior
- ♦ relationships among juveniles
- ♦ relationships with stakeholders

Table 1: Biographical data of juvenile offender learners

<i>Offender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Crime committed</i>	<i>Frequency of incarceration</i>	<i>Duration in prison</i>	<i>ABET Level</i>
1	19	Hijack Robbery Unlicensed fire arm	Third time	2years	1
2	21	Robbery Possession of fire arm	Not first time	10 months	1
3	20	Motor vehicle theft	First time	Six months	1
4	20	Murder Robbery	First time	One month	1
5	20	House breaking	Not first time	One month	1
6	20	House breaking	First time	23 months	1
7	19	Robbery	First time	One year	1
8	19	Rape	First time	Two years	1
9	19	Robbery	First time	Three years	1
10	20	Robbery	First time	10 months	1

- ♦ education in the centre promotes social wellness.

Themes from interviews with teachers were as follows:

- ♦ teachers promote inclusion through collaborative learning
- ♦ threats to social wellness,
- ♦ network and support structures and challenges in implementing inclusion.

DISCUSSION

Various Crimes Committed

Juveniles who took part in the study had committed various crimes which included aggressive ones like murder. These findings are compatible with reports by the Department of Correctional Services which indicated that the number of juveniles who commit serious crimes is on the rise (Department of Correctional Services 2013; Muntingh and Ballard 2012). Of interest is that all ten participants never attended school, a correctional centre school was of help to them. Due to bad company they found themselves in wrong company of friends because they wanted to socialize, unfortunately they ended up doing crime unaware. Some blamed the unemployed parents and lack of basic things at home and they resorted to crime. This is supported by what former Minister Sibusiso Ndebele said "Children, as young as 17 years of age, have committed serious crimes. The average inmate is a young substance abuser who, has dropped out of school before high school, is functionally illiterate and, more often than not, homeless" (South African Government 2014).

Education in the Correctional Centre Promotes Social Wellness and Change of Behaviour

Most juveniles expressed satisfaction on the impact of education received at the centre. They were convinced that they had experienced change in behaviour as a result of the education they underwent at the centre. Social skills such as positive communication, conflict resolution, sharing and respect for diversity had been imparted to them, thereby, making them ready for reintegration into their communities. Their preference to work in groups was also testimony to the fact that they appreciated diversity and interdependence.

Relationships among Juvenile Offenders

Juveniles indicated that they were sharing cells and the majority of them related well with their cellmates. Although, a few were a bit skeptical about the bad influence that may be brought by groups, the majority of juveniles indicated that they enjoyed working in groups because of the benefits they got from such interactions. Some also expressed that the over indulgence in group activities may be detrimental to one's focus.

Relationships with Stakeholders

The study's findings indicated that juveniles did not receive adequate visits and support from outside as they had expected. To get access to social workers, inmates were supposed to make a special request which they said usually took long. These findings are also confirmed by Muntingh and Ballard (2012) whose research in juvenile correctional centres in South Africa established that most juveniles were required to make requests to get access to social workers.

Religious groups, especially, churches were ranked as the most frequent visitors who had close contact with juveniles at the centre. The relationship between offenders and officials at the centre was considered to be mutual where respect to one led to respect to the other. Generally, the interaction was viewed as positive owing to education received by offenders.

Findings from Teachers

Teachers Promote Social Wellness Through Collaborative Learning

Teachers used collaborative learning in the form of group work, peer teaching, sharing ideas and accommodating diversity to promote social wellness among offenders. Through collaboration learning, teachers accommodated diversity and promoted social wellness because collaboration is part of social wellness (Prilleltensky 2010). All learners were given the opportunity to participate in learning despite their differences. From the findings, group work seemed to be the commonly used method as teachers were trying to ensure that learners understood the value of interdependence in the human race. In group work, learners also learn to respect other peo-

ple's views, make collaborative decisions and to respect diversity. These skills are the tenets of social wellness and are very crucial for living in harmony in the society after release.

Threats to Social Wellness

Through incarceration, the study established that the social wellness of juvenile offenders is put under threat. Teachers indicated that most of the inmates were cut out of the outside world as observed also by Sarkin (2013) who reported that most inmates in African states are cut out of the outside world once they are in custody. The outside world cannot be separated from inmates because it plays a vital role especially in their education (Hawley 2011). Sub systems such as the family are important in supporting a learner even if he is in custody.

The exposure to violence and gangsterism in correctional centres was also viewed as a serious threat to the social wellness of juvenile offenders by teachers. The fear is that exposure to violence and gangsterism can work against the rehabilitation programmes as it may lead to offenders exhibiting more violence and aggression even after release. Gangs may bring their own norms that are in direct contrast with the societal norms (Horst 2005). In this school it was noted that offenders were using broken glasses to stab each other. This was even written on the classroom doors that 'Beware of *lizwezwe*.' On enquiring what *lizwezwe* referred to researchers were told it was that broken glass used for stabbing.

Network and Support Systems

The centre offered courses like anger management, restorative justice and pre release in a bid to transform the offenders. Social workers were also providing social support although their services seemed inadequate. Moral and spiritual support were offered by religious groups especially churches.

Challenges in Implementing Inclusion

Findings revealed that there were challenges faced by teachers in implementing inclusion in a bid to promote social wellness. Some of the challenges included lack of the adequate skills and knowledge to deal with learners with behavioural challenges as highlighted also by

Muntingh and Ballard (2012) who said most of officials working in correctional centres in South Africa were not well trained to deal with such children. Teachers also lacked proper training in implementing inclusion especially to apply it in schools in the correctional centre. Another challenge was the lack of proper resources to implement effective teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

Teachers are doing their best to make teaching and learning worthwhile but they are faced with challenges due to group dynamics amongst learner population. The study, therefore, recommended that teachers be given adequate training in inclusion and on how to deal with learners with serious behavioural challenges after completing their teaching qualifications. Some of the teachers did not train as teachers but due to shortage of the teaching staff at the correctional centre they found themselves assisting. The correctional centre has shortage of social workers to deal with individual problems of all offender learners. If there were more social workers at the centre the social wellness and inclusion could be infused in all programs. The spiritual groups that visit the correctional centre were recommended by most learners as a positive way of promoting their social well-being in the sense that they promote togetherness, acceptance and social cohesion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlighted the key important role that is played by the teachers in promoting the social wellness amongst offender-learners. Subjects such as Life Orientation or Life skills should focus not only on the teaching of content in the text book but also the application of what was taught and learnt. Every teacher is important in facilitating rehabilitation in his or her daily interaction with learners. Subjects that are taught in a correctional centre school should infuse a way of promoting social wellness with the aim of attaining full rehabilitation. Periodic assessment of offender learner behavior should be noted so that one can see whether the school has a positive or negative impact on the social wellness and rehabilitation.

More in service training should be offered from time to time to keep teachers abreast with

issues of pedagogical changes. More teaching resources should be available in correctional centre schools to make teaching and learning more meaningful. Interventions are also necessary in cases where offender learners refuse to socialize or are not in good relationships with other learners.

LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

The study was carried out in a correctional centre that is located close to the city which may give it an advantage over a centre in a rural setup. Only male offenders took part in the study hence, there is a possibility that results could have been different if there were female offenders. Some participants preferred to write down their responses which in some cases made probing further a bit challenging.

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