



Empowering Educators Who Work with Juveniles in Correctional Centres: A Wellness Perspective

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ABSTRACT The paper focused on how educators in correctional centres may be empowered and how offender learners may be supported in their holistic development. The focus was also on how teachers teach and interact with learners. The researcher used Hettler's wellness theory as a lens. The study took place at a Gauteng Correctional centre as a research site. Five educators were purposely sampled. Interviews and questionnaires were used as instruments for data collection. All ethical considerations were observed. Findings of the study revealed that teachers experienced the following challenges; juvenile offender learners enjoy lessons that have practical life experiences and those that link with the world of work, there are internal and external factors that cause barriers to learning, some learners were illiterate, health related problems that disrupt school attendance, there are difficulties in assessment, teachers use teacher-centred and learner-centred approach, teachers lack resources to carry out practical experiments (due to security reasons) and some educators were not qualified to teach. The findings revealed that there is a need for professional development of educators in some areas in order to address the academic wellness of juvenile offender learners.

INTRODUCTION

The research on prison education is quite limited especially for the South African situation. Most of the research that is cited in this paper is USA based, and a few studies from South Africa. In the strategic plan for 2010/11-2014/15 from the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) education is placed under development and this focuses only on offenders and not on educators. The measurable objective of the plan of DCS is to provide needs-based educational skills and other development-related programmes. There is no mention of how correctional educators will be developed in the plan for 2010-2015. The newly sworn in Minister of Justice and Correctional Services advocate Michael Masutha says offender education will be one of the focal areas that he pays attention to during his tenure (28 May 2014). This gives hope that education will receive more attention at Correctional centres in South Africa.

The number of children below the age of 18 who have committed crimes in South African correctional centres is alarming. The recent statistical record for juveniles was at 0.4 percent of 153 000 of the total population in prison (International Centre for Prison Studies 2012). Former Correctional Service Minister Sbu Ndebele asserts that South Africa has the highest population of offenders in Africa (Mail and

Guardian 11 February 2013). This number is likely to increase because teenage and young adulthood stages are by nature fundamental to crime. In addition, the effects of HIV/AIDS pandemic cannot be overlooked. Schonteich (1999) noted that as the disease continues to claim most of the parents' lives, a lot of orphans will grow up without adequate parental support, supervision and guidance. Such children could develop inappropriate social behaviours, which could ultimately drive them into crime related activities. Role models would be lost, and absence of parents whom children identify with could affect their ability to develop self-control (Schonteich 1999). Other problems which could increase this form of crime could include: low basic literacy skills amongst the youths; education that does not appear to improve economic and social status, role models who do not abide by the law, and growing up accepting the role of the victim (Tshiwula 1998).

In South African correctional centres, juveniles are to receive support that will facilitate their reintegration into the society and prevent recidivism. The programmes in correctional centres are to enhance their well being and to restore their lives holistically (SA Corrections Today 2009). Furthermore, education, training and personal development should be compulsory as former minister Sbu Ndebele announced (Department of Correctional Services, News 24, 18 Oc-

tober 2012). This is in line with [United Nations' Convention on Rights of the Child], which South Africa has ratified in 1999. On a similar note, the European Network for Research, Action and Training in Adult Literacy and Basic Education's (1991) recommended that in teaching offenders, curriculum should be broad and follow a holistic approach. It pointed out that the intervention programme should link offenders with the community. The suggestion is that teachers in correctional centres should be striving for the development of human personality; and education should be relevant to offenders' needs and abilities and facilitate re-socialization into the society. Similarly, the South African former Minister of Correctional Services, Nosiviwe Nqakula's address during Corrections Week (September 2009) also emphasized that education, training and personal development for youth offenders should be compulsory. The Minister reiterated in her budget speech (2010) that she was concerned that there was no provision made with the necessary capacity to provide education facilities to juveniles. In looking at the holistic development of juvenile offenders, it becomes imperative to consider the programmes and professional development of those within the South African context. Intervention programmes for children in conflict with the law began to emerge in the early 1990, notably following the country's transition into a democratic state. The focus of the non-governmental initiatives tends to be on life skills training. Woodward et al. (2002) outline a collaborative effort between the universities of South Florida and Western Cape. The ideas behind this initiative were threefold:

- ♦ to enhance the capacity and skills of young offenders,
- ♦ to facilitate their successful integration into the community,
- ♦ and to provide them with positive personal and social opportunities.

In this way they could develop abilities to make music and be tolerant and be respectful for diversity along racial lines. The program was successful in improving life skills and reduced the likelihood of the association with delinquent peers and of becoming involved in activities which are in conflict with the law. Van Selin (2007) points out that there are Khulisa programmes which run in Gauteng, North West, Northern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Limpopo prisons. The programme focuses largely on life skills and has

proven to be a success. The restorative justice are attempts to repair the damage, re-establish dignity and reintegrate those who were harmed or alienated by the offense, with the purpose to restore and to heal relationships (Anderson 2003). This method is not punitive but aims to prevent harm and to make the offender take responsibility for his behaviour.

Programmes which have a focus on academic matters are limited. Adult Basic Education is offered at various levels. However challenges were noted. Gast's (2001) study at four youth centres in the Western Cape revealed challenges such as lack of study space, study material such as text books, lack of control over attendance, medium-security offenders being allowed to attend classes with juveniles. Furthermore, he noted that there are limitations in South Africa for correctional services in realizing the goals of promoting a child's reintegration and assuming a constructive role in society (Gast 2001). The challenge is that the current teachers in correctional schools have not received training which has equipped them with the necessary skills and knowledge to work with offender learners. More often, they are unsure about their roles (Rider-Hankins 1992). They often lack the "street-smart" know how suitable to approach students in a correctional setting. Those who have a qualification in inclusive education or special needs education, the focus thereof was still on the disability (narrow focus), not on the offender-learner. Those who studied Life Orientation, the subject, focus more on a learner in a mainstream school and do not touch learners in correctional centres. For example, the inclusive education, special needs, and Life Orientation do not address the offender-learner's needs. The focus of White paper 6 (2001) and curriculum documents outlined by the Department of Education (2002-2003) address the learner's needs in mainstream education and special schools only. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 is silent on the issue of offender-learner in correctional centres (Republic of South Africa 1996). Within the South African context, inclusive education is conceptualised narrowly as an agenda for people with disability. Life Orientation programs focuses on the learners in the mainstream education schools. It is a mockery to the ideals of inclusive education-slogan for addressing barriers to learning. Current teacher training in institutions of Higher learning address the learn-

ing needs of learners in mainstream schools, special schools and full service schools.

Also, a similar finding was revealed in a survey conducted in USA on education and related services offered to students in correctional facilities with disabilities by (Quin et al. 2001). The study indicated that teachers' credentials varied a lot and only 17 percent were fully certified to teach special needs education in prison setting. This indicates that there is shortage of trained personnel to teach the offenders in an adequate manner especially those with disabilities.

Miesel et al. (1998) discovered that school programmes in correctional facilities often fall short of minimum professional standards associated with the operation of public schools. They further highlighted that conditions in many juvenile facilities impair the ability of staff to implement effective special educational services. Such impairments include amongst others overcrowding, understaffing, difference in age and academic performance, and no prior school record for juveniles. Furthermore Meisel et al. (1998) recommended that an education and special education programme was necessary. A recommendation was given that correctional educators should attend in-service training workshops. Clearly, the South African justice system does not provide effective educational programmes for preventing recidivism and enhancing the wellness. Current programs are not comprehensive, they operate in isolation. It is imperative that educators be armed with appropriate skills to adequately address the well being of the juveniles. Travis (2011) in his speech pointed out that the prison population has low levels of educational attainment and a high level of educational challenges. Nearly 39 percent fall below the literacy level, and 17 percent of incarcerated individuals report a learning disability (Travis 2011). In South Africa as former Minister Sbu Ndebele outlined in his speech on 23 March 2014 that from 2012 to 2013, 559 inmates wrote Grade 9 to 11 examinations with an average pass rate of 73 percent in 2013 (Polity 25 march 2014). Though there are attempts by the department of Correctional services to encourage juveniles to go to school while in incarceration there are those who do not attend classes. Due to shortage of teachers in correctional centres some who are warders are requested to teach though not having any qualification in teaching. In one correctional centre in Gauteng the educator learner ratio

was one to 18, 38 and 62 and there was a shortage of educators (Parliament report 7 February 2013). It is in the light of the above that this study attempt to develop a model for the professional development of educators to be able to enhance the wellness dimensions in the life of juvenile offenders.

The research questions for this paper were:

- ♦ How can educators working with juvenile offenders in correctional centres be empowered?
- ♦ How can the wellness of juveniles be attained in correctional centres?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this study is within the wellness model of David Hettler (Hettler 1980). Wellness is a continuous, lifelong process of striving towards realizing one's full potential or enhancing one's quality life (Van Lingen 2005). The USA- based National Institute Wellness (2009) describes wellness as an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices towards a more successful existence. For the purposes of this study Hettler's (1980) definition of wellness will be considered which was operationalized in terms of six dimensions that is emotional, intellectual, physical, social occupational and spiritual. For the purposes of this study intellectual wellness was used as a lens. In view of the fact that intellectual wellness model developed by Hettler (1980), encourages creative and stimulates mental activities. It represents a commitment to lifelong learning, an effort to share knowledge with others, and development of skills and abilities to achieve a more rewarding life (Hettler 1980). In addressing the intellectual wellness for juvenile learners, the juvenile learners uses the resources available to expand their knowledge in improving skills along with expanding their potential for sharing with others and beyond the classroom, as well as the human and learning resources available within the prison community and the larger community. The paper addresses the intellectual wellness of juvenile learners via the expertise of educators that are found in correctional centres. The educator is employed to see to it that learners who are taught by him or her receive the best and outcomes are reached which will enhance the intellectual wellness.

METHODOLOGY

Action research is an approach to be followed in investigating the questions posed by this study. The study is within a praxis research paradigm. The choice is appropriate for the following reasons: practicality and applicability- a concern with a practical-real life issue (Enhancement of the well-being of child crime offenders); the transformative motive (alter current educational practices to respond to the well being of child crime offenders); active participation of those whose practice has to change; and reflections and feedback to generate change, implement and evaluate for further investigation (Denscombe 2008). In short, the researcher's intention is to involve the concerned in developing appropriate educational approach for promoting the well-being of juveniles. In other words, the researcher is driven by the belief and the perspectives of those who are involved are excluded and their participation is passive. The researcher therefore acknowledge that educators with whom the research is being done know the context and issues better than the researcher; and they are also aware of the specific and immediate needs of the community. The researcher calls for engagement in collaborative relationship whereby new communicative spaces can be opened. Thus, there was a dual commitment to study the role of correctional educators and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what was regarded as a desirable direction. The process of action research which the researcher followed as Reason and Bradbury (2009) outlined requires cycles of action and reflection. The primary purpose of using action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to educators in a correctional centre towards the well-being of juveniles. The researcher was the participant observer and there was interaction and note taking.

Ethical clearance was sought and granted from the University of South Africa, the Department of Correctional Services and the research site which is a correctional centre school in Gauteng province. The gatekeepers were fully consulted as Wagner et al. (2012) say that these are the people who enable researchers to gain entry into a research site. For this study gatekeepers were the Department of Correctional Services and the correctional school. Furthermore the principal and educators were met and

the study's aims and objectives were outlined to them. The participants were assured anonymity and that their rights were respected at all times. It was also explained that their participation in the study was on voluntary basis.

Sampling

Sampling was purposive since only educators of the correctional centre who teach juveniles participated in the study. These were educators teaching ABET level 1-4 Grade 10-12. Wagner et al. (2012) defines purposive sampling as choosing participants who may be considered to be representative of the population and usually uses specific selection criteria. Participants were correctional centre educators who were suitable for the purposes of the research.

Instruments

The researcher developed an interview guide as a research instrument which was used for data collection. The questions covered by the interview guide covered aspects such as their qualifications in teaching, their experience of teaching a particular subject and grade, the challenges that they experience in a correctional centre school, their role as educators, how they teach and methodologies used, how they assess and what the juvenile offender learners say. All these questions were open-ended and required that the participants should really elaborate on their answers. Questionnaires were also provided for those educators who preferred to write and not to participate in interviews.

Data Collection

Data collection was done through the processing method by analysing situations and learning environments (Tomal 2003). The interviews were like conversations with correctional centre educators in a naturalistic setting; Field notes were taken. Some educators preferred to complete questionnaires since they were not comfortable with interviews. No names were written on the questionnaires in order to protect the educators' identity. The process of data collection occurred on a number of days since data was collected during free periods or during break.

Data Analysis

The researcher followed the steps suggested by Creswell (2009) of analysing data. Interviews and questionnaires were transcribed manually and field notes were consulted. The researcher read through the data and tried to make sense of the data. The researcher wrote notes on the margins and got sense of what participants said. The colour coding process began as outlined by Henning et al. (2004) the process involves organising data into chunks of meaning and grouping them together. Thereafter the researcher categorised all the meanings which were similar into a pattern of categories. Thereafter categories were further collapsed into segments of similar meanings and the following themes emerged:

Themes from teachers' interviews and questionnaires

- ♦ Juvenile offender learners enjoy lessons that have practical life experiences and those that link with the world of work
- ♦ Illiterate offender learners
- ♦ There are internal and external factors that cause barriers to learning
- ♦ Health related problems that disrupt school attendance
- ♦ There are difficulties in assessment
- ♦ Teachers use teacher-centred and learner-centred approach to an extent
- ♦ Teachers lack resources to carry out practical experiments (due to security reasons)
- ♦ Some educators were not qualified to teach

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Juvenile offender learners enjoy lessons that have practical life experiences and those that link with the world of work. From the findings of this study the educators at a correctional centre school indicated that they have observed that offender learners enjoy lessons that have practical life experiences like case studies. The practical part of lessons interest learners and some that link with the world of work make sense to offender learners. This is in line with what former Minister of Corrections Sibusiso Ndebele said that "We are impacting the hearts, heads and hands of offenders so that, upon release, they are in possession of, at least, a certificate in one hand and a skill in the other." (South African Government 25 March 2014). Educators

who could not link what they teach with the world of work find it difficult in class and to get the attention of learners. Some educators pointed out that some offender learners were not interested in being taught academic subjects but wanted subjects like welding, plumbing and computer skills. They wanted subjects or skills that will make them employable upon release. This confirms what January (2007) pointed out that youth should be taught skills that will help them to adjust in the community after their release.

Illiterate Offender Learners

The findings revealed that some learners who are incarcerated were not able to read and write. This makes it difficult for placement as some do not tell the truth regarding the grade in which they are. This requires some screening and identification of the real grade wherein the offender learner can be placed. This resonates well with what the former minister of corrections highlighted that 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. Furthermore, at least, 95 percent of those incarcerated will return to society after serving their sentence being better citizens (Polity, Sbu Ndebele 25 March 2014).

There are Internal and External Factors that Cause Barriers to Learning

Educators indicated that the correctional centre school experiences a lot of disturbances regarding teaching and learning. Factors such as parole or fights that may erupt; normally cause barriers to teaching and learning. There are those that do not want to attend classes even though the minister of corrections announced that there will be compulsory schooling for all juvenile offenders (Department of Correctional Services, News 24 18 October 2012). Those who are not interested in attending classes may influence others not to go to school and discourage them especially the age and the grade in which they are in.

Health Related Problems that Disrupt School Attendance

There are days when offender-learners start at the clinic for consultation and to get medica-

tion. These learners will be late for classes and will lag behind regarding their learning. These are unavoidable since health is a basic right for all as stated in the Constitution of the country (Republic of South Africa 1996). Educators indicated that it is crucial that they get medication and they also encourage them to take the necessary precautions regarding their health.

There are Difficulties in Assessment

Educators at the correctional centre highlighted that assessment is a difficult thing to conduct since some learners serve short sentences and during the course of the year they are released. Those who come in the middle of the year do not have the record of marks from January and it becomes difficult to assess them. It is a challenge especially for the grades that require portfolios to be submitted to Department of Basic education for moderation. That is ABET level 4 and Grade 12. The shortage of marks or absence of portfolios may affect the final mark for the learners.

Teachers Use Teacher-centred and Learner-centred Approach to an Extent

Teaching methods or approaches are a challenge for most educators. Some educators who were trained some twenty years ago still use traditional approaches of teaching which are mostly teacher-centred. Others try the learner-centred approach but do mix it with traditional approaches. Lack of teaching aids was another challenge raised by educators. They indicated that due to security reasons they are always careful not to compromise security.

Teachers Lack Resources to Carry Out Practical Experiments (Due to Security Reasons)

Educators who taught science subjects raised a concern about conducting experiments that they have a serious challenge of bringing test tubes glass beakers and other utensils which may be of help during their Physical Science and natural subjects. These subjects were taught theoretically and learners imagined how the experiments would turn out. From these findings it is clear that those learners who were doing science subjects and were used to working

in the laboratories would be disadvantaged in learning the process of experiments. Some learners are forced to leave the science subjects and do subjects like commerce due to the challenge that they face. This is a drawback for the country regarding scarce subjects.

Some Educators Were Not Qualified

The findings of this study revealed that teachers qualifications varied from those having diplomas, BA degrees, Honours degrees in Education and some were studying their Master's degrees whereas some were security personnel without teacher's qualification though they were passionate about teaching. The challenge that the teaching personnel faced was the teacher pupil ratio and also lack of teachers in some subjects and security personnel found themselves teaching. Those who were qualified focused on the skills that they have learned at the university or colleges whereas those who were not trained as teachers relied on their own initiative and creativity or they taught the subjects as they were taught while they were still at school.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the data that was analysed reveal that there is a need for professional development of teachers in some areas in order to address the intellectual wellness of juvenile offender learners. The educators try their level best and are doing an excellent work though lack of resources in other subjects limits their expertise in their pedagogic interventions. Findings reveal that juvenile offender learners enjoy lessons that link with practical life experiences, this is a clear indication that learning takes place from what the person already knows and then one can move to the unknown. From the educator's side there are factors that cause barriers to learning on the side of learners which are beyond their control. Health related issues on the side of learners disrupt the smooth process of class attendance and this affects their intellectual wellness. Assessment processes are also disturbed by factors beyond the control of teachers because learners are summoned to court or there are other obligations at the sections or cells which must be fulfilled. Findings reveal that teachers grapple with academic well-

ness issues though some can receive attention and communicated to senior officials and there can be an improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study revealed that the academic wellness of juvenile offender learners needs some attention from the authorities of Department of Correctional Services and the Department of Basic Education. The type of learner that is found in correctional centres is a learner who had some challenges in life that is why he landed in prison. Sadly there is nowhere in policies of inclusion where learners in correctional centres are addressed. Therefore it is important for policy makers to take cognisance of this that learners who were incarcerated also need to be addressed in policies of inclusion. The study also indicated that the teacher need to have some specialised way of training to be able to cope with circumstances in a correctional schooling system, hence professional development is necessary for teachers in the form of in-service training. In promoting all wellness dimensions collaboration is necessary from a number of stakeholders in forming partnerships and a network system that will try to build a holistic juvenile learner. Educators indicated that Learners need subjects that will provide skills promotion which may lead to their employability when they leave correctional centres. This calls for FET colleges as the Minister of Higher Education Dr Blade Nzimande has been putting emphasis on skills education. A network should be established with FET's for juvenile learners in correctional centres. Support from Psychologists and Social workers should be increased. The services are availed but it seems there is a serious shortage of these specialists. The problem may be alleviated by Universities which train Masters Students in Psychology or Educational Psychology to send their interns for a period of a year to assist in correctional centres. This is another support network that correctional centres may establish with Universities or HPCSA (Health Professions Council of South Africa). Non-Governmental organisations may also be contacted that auxiliary social workers may on regular basis have sessions with juvenile offender learners so that their mental and emotional wellness is addressed. The difficult one is the link with the family members since some of these juvenile

do not reveal their true identity, though they may be encouraged on the importance of families and a healthy relationship. This should be part of therapeutic intervention either from the teaching personnel or psychological or social workers. When juvenile network with their families it is important that families also receive some help not to worsen the situation but to assist the juvenile. Educators should also be equipped with lay counselling skills and assist where they can since they spent more time with these learners.

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