

TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE FACE OF HIV AND AIDS

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Introduction

- The state of the AIDS epidemic in the Southern African region has been described as serious (UNAIDS, 2000).

Introduction (Continued)

- Reports indicate that, in South Africa:
 - Many teachers are confronted with large numbers of learners made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS;
 - Often-times, these learners need much more than just pedagogical interventions:
 - Most require additional support to cope with discrimination, abuse, rejection and lost childhoods, as they begin to assume the responsibilities of their deceased parents at an ever-increasing younger age

Introduction (Continued)

- Provincial departments of education (responsible for schools in SA) often lack the human resources and other forms of support, such as guidance and counselling to adequately care for learners affected by HIV and AIDS
- Teachers are left with no choice but to inadvertently fill the gap – thereby rendering services that should be given by other professionals

Introduction (Continued)

- These roles include those of
 - Social workers
 - General and grief counsellors
 - School-based guidance and counselling psychologists
 - Healthcare workers and Caregivers – rendering hope, information and comfort.

Introduction (Continued)

- In addition, it is reported that teachers find themselves having got to support these learners with other necessities of life, such as:
 - Food
 - Accommodation
 - School fees – as a way of mitigating the adverse effects of HIV and AIDS, and ameliorating further suffering and unspeakable hardships

Introduction (Continued)

- Without the intervention of teachers, it is believed that the situation would remain hopeless and unmitigated – particularly in rural schools and other under- and poorly-resourced schools.

Statement of the Problem

- The new curriculum in SA is already exerting tremendous pressure on teachers
- TE institutions ought to respond to the requirements on teachers in the field – including bolstering their own capacities to be able to manage the many changes foisted on them as a result of the challenge to produce teachers suited for the era of HIV and AIDS.

Statement of the Problem (Cont'ed)

- Other countries, e.g. Zambia, also require teachers, schools and colleges to participate in home-based care and other forms of response to the AIDS-related needs of their communities.

Research Questions

Two questions arise:

- What is the role that South African teachers ought to play in accordance with the country's legislative requirements?
- What type of relationship ought to be in place between the teachers and other professionals in developing supportive relations with parents, other key persons and organisations with regard to critical community concerns, such as HIV and AIDS?

Research Approach

- This is a conceptual paper, seeking to provide answers to the above research questions
- The first question is addressed through a literature study, examining what the literature says and contrasting this with what obtains on the ground
- The second research question is addressed by way of a conceptual model, developed and proposed also from the literature study

Addressing the Research Questions

Teacher's Role

- The first research question sought to examine the teacher's role as reflected in the legislation.



Teacher's Role

- The Department of Education outlined its response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic by stipulating in the Schools Act (1996) that each School Governing Body, acting within its functions under the Act, shall develop and adopt an HIV/AIDS implementation plan that would reflect the needs, ethos, and values of a specific school or institution and the community within which it was located.

Teacher's Role (Cont'ed)

- Further, the country's legislation has mandated teachers with an obligation to prevent discriminatory practices and the stigmatization of learners and colleagues who might be infected or affected by HIV and AIDS

Teacher's Role (Cont'ed)

- The Norms and Standards for Educators (South Africa) require teachers to **“develop supportive relations with parents, other key persons and organisations based on a critical understanding of community and environmental development issues – paying particular attention to critical community concerns, such as HIV and AIDS”**.

Teacher's Role (Cont'ed)

- There appear to be different interpretations as to precisely what this role ought to be
- An inadvertent extension of the role appears to have resulted from the absence of other professionals on site to render the necessary support to learners affected by HIV and AIDS

Teacher's Role (Cont'ed)

- As stated above under Introduction, the result has been that some teachers have found themselves playing the roles of other professionals – such as social workers, school psychologists, healthcare workers, and counsellors.
- They even pay school fees and provide food, clothing and accommodation to some affected learners.

Teacher's Role (Cont'ed)

- Some HIV and AIDS activists, among them teachers and teacher educators, are pushing for the formalisation of this extended role – which has come about, neither as a legislative nor professional requirement
- The implication of formalising this abnormality would be that TE institutions would have to re-structure their curricula to accommodate it.

Teacher's Role (Cont'ed)

From studies on teachers' involvement in teaching about HIV and AIDS, there are some concerns that have emerged:

- Reddy, James and McCauley (2005: 3) report that teachers felt “unsure about details of some topics, drawing some learners into classroom discussions, dealing diplomatically with learners' beliefs about HIV/AIDS, and managing those learners that felt HIV/AIDS was not something that affected them”.

Teacher's Role (Cont'ed)

- That the success of the Life Skills Grade 9 curriculum that they were investigating depended on a number of factors – including the following:
 - Trained teachers who were committed to the programme
 - Providing teachers with moral, materials and technical support
 - Dedicated time and teachers for implementation
 - Both life skills and biomedical knowledge must be sufficiently addressed
 - Different needs of individual (and groups of) learners must be identified and addressed.

Teacher's Role (Cont'ed)

- We may deduce from the above results and findings that the route of specialist teachers for this learning area may be more fruitful than putting pressure on every teacher to handle matters of HIV and AIDS beyond what they need to be able to render quality education which takes into account the special circumstances of learners.

Teacher's Role (Cont'ed)

- As Page, Ebersohn and Rogan (2006: 105) observe:
“Teaching about HIV and sexual behaviour requires particular skills, and not all teachers can or want to teach it”.

Teacher's Role (Cont'ed)

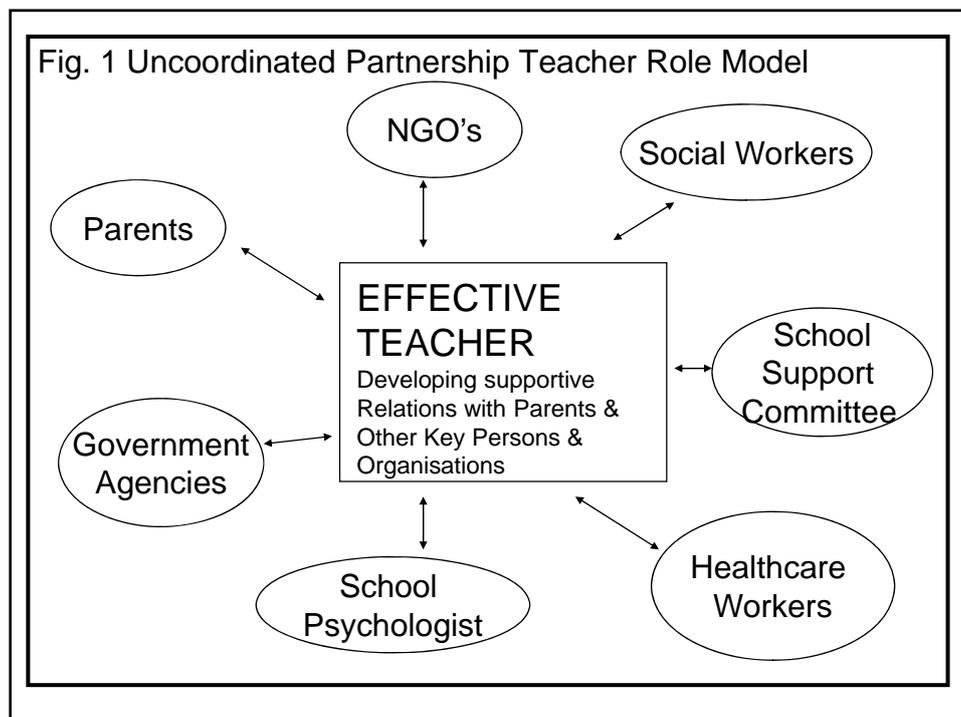
- This paper, therefore, posits that the solution does not lie with teachers taking over the roles of other professionals, but rather, ensuring that the services of the other professionals are made available to complement the education agenda of the teachers.
- That the teaching of HIV and AIDS should be done by specially trained teachers who will be better placed to ensure that the intended learning outcomes (affective, cognitive, and otherwise) are realised.

Teacher Role (Cont'ed)

- That the role to be played by teachers in the face of HIV and AIDS ought to be educational.
- Other school-based professional services, e.g. guidance and counseling psychology must be rendered by duly trained and registered educational psychologists
- Extending the role of teachers beyond the education agenda will seriously compromise and jeopardise the quality of the educational process.

Relationships with Other Professionals

- The second research question concerns the role of the teacher in mitigating the adverse effects of HIV and AIDS amongst learners, colleagues and community members, in relation to other professionals.
- Figure 1 shows one possible interactive profile of the teacher with other key stakeholders and role players

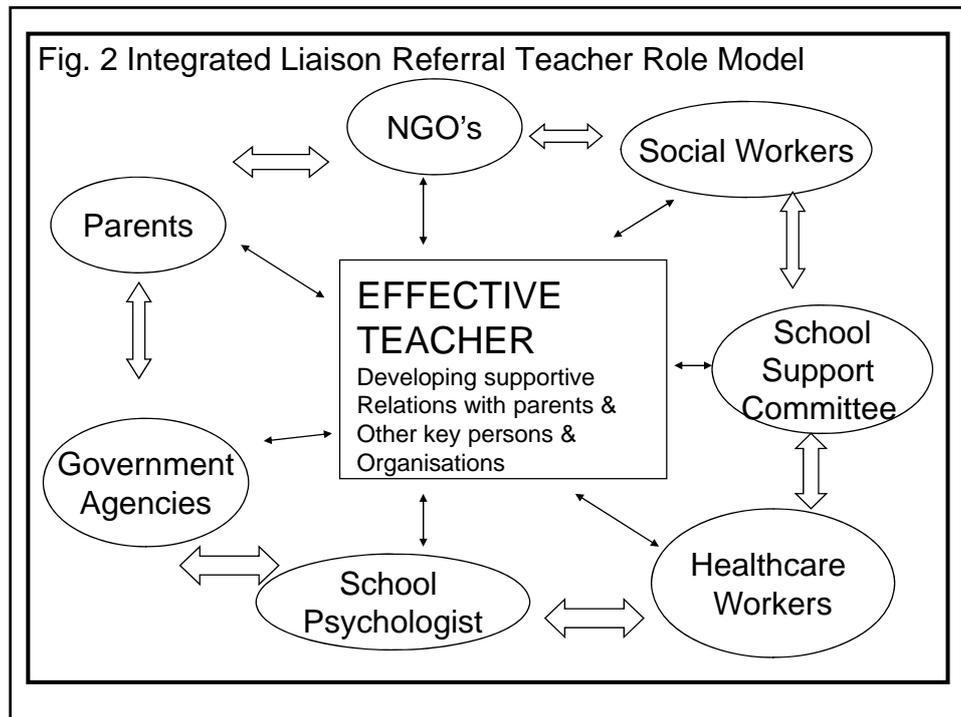


Relationships (Cont'ed)

- Figure 2 is presented as the one recommended for consideration and discussion.
- Taken from the point of view of the school environment, where the teacher occupies the position of the professional who makes the first with affected (infected) learners, s/he initiates the necessary liaison with other role players

Relationships (Cont'ed)

- Figure 1 illustrates a possible mode of interaction between the teacher and other role players
- This model has the limitation of a lack of inter-connectiveness amongst all role players



Relationships (Cont'ed)

- All role players are connected to work as members of a concerted team
- The two main roles played by the teacher are those of liaison and referral
- The specialised roles are played by the relevant specialist professionals

Conclusion

- ⊙ This paper has looked at the role of the teacher in relation to the pressures exerted by legislation, activists and the coalface.
- ⊙ The paper argues that the primary role of the teacher NOT be compromised by additional roles related to the mitigation of HIV and AIDS, beyond the awareness needed for quality teaching and learning.
- ⊙ Other specialised roles must be performed by other professionals.

Many thanks

