

Researching our Experience



**A collection of writings by teachers
from:**

**Chitulika School
Kabale Basic School
Mpika Basic School
Musakanya Basic School
Nyanji Middle Basic School**

Mpika, Zambia



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Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Glossary	vi
Foreword	vii
Introduction.....	1
Presence	4
A. Over-enrolment	5
Free education – an overview of issues	5
Over-enrolment – defining the problem and finding solutions	8
Finding solutions to over-enrolment	10
B. Absenteeism.....	13
Children who live apart from their parents	13
Late coming.....	16
Truancy	21
Participation	26
A. Participatory principles and methods	27
The meaning of co-operation.....	27
Teacher co-operation	29
Participatory leadership.....	29
Parents’ involvement.....	32
The home environment and effects on learning difficulties.....	32
Democratisation in the classroom	38
Encouraging participation in class	40
Twinning.....	44

Documenting in schools	46
Localisation	47
B. Addressing barriers to participation	49
Girls' education.....	49
Inclusion and the girl child mother.....	49
Girl child education	52
Disabled children and children with learning difficulties.....	55
Inclusive schooling	55
Communication between hearing and hearing impaired children..	58
Daniel — a case study	59
Precious — a case study	59
HIV/AIDS and orphans	63
Discussion on HIV/AIDS	64
HIV/AIDS: Everyone is either affected or infected.....	66
Absenteeism - orphans	68
Age.....	71
Conclusion.....	73
Contributing teachers and contact addresses	75

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***The Enabling Education Network — EENET
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Glossary

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
DEO	District Education Officer
EENET	The Enabling Education Network – an information sharing network on the issue of inclusive education, based in Manchester, UK
Family Pac	This is the term used to describe an initiative whereby parents and teachers learn from each other. Parents come into class to observe the difficulties faced by pupils and teachers, discuss with teachers and offer suggestions for handling their children. Teachers share ideas for how children could be helped at home by the parents. Family Pac sessions should happen in each class at least once a term, but frequency varies between schools.
GRACE	Grade Teachers Meetings at the Centre. These meetings for in-service training are organised by the Zone In-service Providers
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
INSPRO	Inclusive Schooling Programme
NGO	non-governmental organisation
MIEP	Mpika Inclusive Education Project
NBTL	New Breakthrough Literacy – a programme focussing on literacy in the first two years of basic education, using Bemba as the language of instruction, rather than English.
PAGE	Programme for the Advancement of Girl-child Education
PTA	Parent Teachers Association

Foreword

The government of the republic of Zambia is committed to improving education for all Zambian children. While a lot of effort have been made towards improving the sector, much emphasis now is placed on improving equality and literacy. A number of education initiatives have been introduced to meet the objectives of the policy, such as PAGE, Family PAC, AIDS work and INSPRO¹. Free primary education was introduced in January 2002.

The teachers have really done a lot of work. The stories appearing in this document are impressive and a result of effort aimed at improving the standards in their own schools. They have demonstrated at this stage their writing and practical work through this action research. The stories are analytical, informative and will hopefully be useful to other teachers in Mpika, in Zambia and in other countries. I feel sure that they will inspire others to undertake similar action research and provide ideas for implementing inclusive practice. I hope that these teachers continue their reflection and sharing processes, and that others can undertake similar work to help Zambia learn from its experiences and develop its practices towards achieving education for all.



David Chisanga
District Inspector of Schools
Mpika District
Zambia

¹ See Glossary for definitions of these, and other, terms used in this publication.

Introduction

In this document you will read the story of how, in the district of Mpika, Zambia teachers have been working to improve their schools, by making them more inclusive. We hear about the problems that they have encountered, the solutions they have tried and the results they have achieved. What makes this document different is that the articles contained in this document were developed and written by the teachers.

These stories are one part of a much bigger process, and they are by no means the final stage in that process! Between 2001 and 2003, the Enabling Education Network (EENET) in the UK has been involved in an action research project. The project aims to find out the best ways to help teachers, parents, pupils and other community members to share their valuable experiences of inclusion and exclusion in education with others in the country and around the world. At the same time as sharing, the process aims to help people to learn from their own experiences so that they can improve their practices in future.

The action research built on the existing work of the Mpika Inclusive Education Project (MIEP), supported by the Child-to-Child Trust. This project ran from 1999-2002 and used the Child-to-Child methodology to promote inclusive education.² Since 1986, Child-to-Child activities have been used in Mpika to raise awareness of health issues among the community and in schools, and to promote 'democratic' classrooms. So there was a strong foundation for the MIEP work, and for the EENET action research.

The action research in Mpika was co-ordinated by Paul Mumba, who is a primary teacher, school in-service provider and assistant Zone In-service Provider. Paul and a research team (consisting of local teachers) organised activities which helped other teachers and community members to analyse and write about their experiences of inclusion and exclusion. This action research process is detailed and will be explained in full in EENET's final report and guidelines, due in September 2003. However, you can read a summary of the activities that led to this publication of teachers' stories and of the plans for the future, in the final chapter of this document.

² For more details see "Learning Together in the Mpika Inclusive Education Project", available from Child-to-Child Trust, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H OAL, UK.

The teachers in Mpika have discussed and written a great deal about their experiences. Inevitably we cannot publish all of their articles in full. However, we have edited them as little as possible, and arranged the stories thematically, to illustrate the main issues that the teachers focused on. The stories are presented in two main sections: presence – which includes issues around enrolment levels and absenteeism; and participation – which contains accounts of the approaches and methods used to make the whole school system and the teaching of individual pupils inclusive.

Contact details for the schools which contributed to this publication are provided at the end of the document, should you wish to find out more about the teachers' experiences or share your own story with them.

Presence

Inclusion in education for all learners depends on two important elements:

- presence — for inclusion to happen, learners need to attend school or take part in an informal education programme
- participation — inclusion also only happens when those present in class are able to join in and benefit from the lessons.

In this chapter we look at two aspects of presence identified by the teachers:

- A the difficulties of over-enrolment now that basic education is free
- B the problem of absenteeism by certain pupils.

A. Over-enrolment ---

Several accounts raised the issue of the 2002 free education policy in Zambia and the rise in enrolment when previously excluded children return to school. This influx is creating new challenges for schools – although raising the numbers of children present in school, it is having an impact on attempts to provide quality education and to ensure that children are participating and achieving. At the time of writing these accounts, the free education policy was very new, but the three accounts below illustrate that local discussions and suggestions for managing the situation had already begun.

Free education – an overview of issues

By Raidon Mutale, Mpika Basic School

The Government early this year (2002) announced the re-introduction of free education in basic schools (ie, Grades 1–7) and pledged to continue supporting the sector through provision of teaching and learning aids and school grants. By this the Government was accepting its responsibility of providing education as a social service to its citizens.

Over the years schools, and especially those in rural areas, witnessed a drop in pupil enrolment, mainly because of social and economical factors. A lot of families had difficulties meeting the fees and requisites demanded by schools and especially since most families hardly had a meal per day. Worse were families headed by girls/boys, females or aged people, arising from the fact that bread winners had died of HIV/AIDS. The latter saw the rise in orphans, street kids or simply the death of school children.

The Government had the task of not only caring for these children, but also educating them, hence the re-introduction of free education in basic schools. Education politicians and other stakeholders have since been meeting in different forums to discuss the impact of free education.

“ ... The purpose of free education is to encourage the out-of-school child to go back to school. As teachers, receive every child who comes to school and always see the free education as the positive side. Its main objective is to raise enrolment in schools.”

Ministry Officials

Parents' views on free education

These views were expressed during the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) general meeting.

Parents thanked God for the Government re-introducing free education to basic schools and pledged to bring back their out-of-school children to school.

They hoped the Government extended this to secondary and higher institutions where they had even more problems in paying for their children.

“..the introduction for Grade 1–7 is welcomed but the Government would have done better to make education free at all the levels. I am referring to secondary schools and colleges.”

Parents hoped the Government would increase the school grant given to schools and especially big schools where demand was high.

“I am only pleading the Government to consider increasing the grant to schools and especially Basic Schools because the current grant is very small.”

They appealed to the Government to employ watchmen and other essential workers paid by the PTA, as the PTA would have no money.

Parents failed to agree on fund-raising ventures:

“Fund-raising ventures here in rural areas are not possible. The Government should provide everything. School project money should be given to basic schools unconditionally like in secondary schools.”

They also appealed to the Government to send school grants, pupil requisites, teaching and learning aids to schools on time.

Teachers' views

Teachers:

- agreed to implement the policy of free education
- carried out campaign programmes to advocate the return of the out-of-school children
- hoped the Government would continue with its spirit of cost sharing.

Children's views

Children come to school on their own to look for school places, giving the reason of free education.

"I have come to school. I want Grade 6. It's now free education. I heard this on the radio."

A Grade 6 pupil now at Mpika Basic School

Pupil enrolment

Pupil enrolment has increased making most of the classes over-enrolled. Existing classes could not meet the high demand for school places.

Record of pupils who have returned so far

Grade	Boys	Girls	Total
1	10	20	30
2	6	12	18
3	15	5	20
4	7	8	15
5	6	4	10
6	13	12	25

Parents

Parents have developed a negative attitude towards school projects (ie, they are not taking part in fund-raising ventures and are expecting to be paid for every work they do at the school, including manual work). Most of the projects started by the PTA have stopped despite the constant appeals by the Government for parents to get involved in the implementation of these projects (ie, mobilising resources, eg, for a new 1x3 classroom block at the school).

Challenges

- to construct additional classroom blocks to meet the high demand for school places
- to convince parents to develop a positive attitude towards mobilisation of resources for school projects and the education of the children
- paying for running costs, (ie, telephone, water and electricity)
- parents to raise the standards at the school with or without funds/payment.

The way forward

- the school would use the available resources to improve and develop the school
- seek variable sources for assistance to complete the on-going school projects and for additional classrooms
- continue with advocacy and sensitisation in communities and during PTA meetings for the communities to bring back the out-of-school children, and especially the girls, to school

- continue supporting the Government policy of free education by positively implementing it.
-

Over-enrolment – defining the problem and finding solutions

By Marrien M. Mauluka, Musakanya Basic School

Over-enrolment is a problem faced by most centrally located schools in Mpika District. I took Musakanya as a sample school. This problem was discovered by teachers in lower grades in one teachers' group meeting. It was considered to be an issue because some teachers complained that, despite doing their level best, still they face a lot of difficulties in attending to individual pupils.

One teacher said, "I am failing to teach all the expected subjects in the stipulated time." She was supported by another teacher who said, "I don't finish marking all the books within one period." In our teachers' group we tried to look at the difficulties faced in our classes because of over-enrolment.

Some of the problems were:

- there is no time to attend to individual pupils, hence no time for remedial work
- pupils who need special attention are not attended to, due to lack of time
- exercises which are supposed to be given to pupils are lessened to make it easy for marking
- group work as a method of teaching has proved to be a failure in such classes because there is too much noise
- sitting arrangements are another problem faced in such classes because there are more than 60 pupils in one class, so pupils are made to sit four on one desk, with the rest sitting on the floor.

Class management is a big problem and this makes the teacher concentrate on controlling the noise instead of teaching. One teacher commented that this noise is caused by slow learners who believe it is not easy for the teachers to notice that they are making a noise because there are too many pupils.

As a group we tried to find out the cause of over-enrolment from other teachers, from different schools, and from heads of schools. This was done at Grade Teachers Meetings at the teachers' district resource centre, when all teachers meet from different schools.

One teacher said, "This problem is caused by heads because they don't refuse places to certain pupils, especially those coming on transfers, despite knowing that classes are overcrowded."

In trying to defend the head teachers, one said, “They have no right to refuse any place to any child because the educational policy states that education is for all.” In support another head said, “Mpika is a rural place and a home area for certain people living in Lusaka and Copperbelt who have gone there for employment. So when they become sick they are forced to come back here where their relatives are. Or in times of death their children are brought back to live with their relatives. So there is no need to deny such children some places.”

I personally undertook research to find out if pupils have come back due to the sickness or death of their parents, and I found that about 75 per cent of [returning] pupils have come back here due to these two problems.

Before we started finding solutions to this I asked pupils themselves how they feel about over-enrolment. One pupil said, “I am not happy because we fight over desks with my friends.” Another pupil said, “ I don’t feel good to sit on the dirty floor, my mother is forced to wash my uniform nearly every day.” Another reason which was given was that some pupils, especially faster learners, are disturbed most of the time.

As a member of our teacher group I decided to demonstrate a maths lesson, in the presence of other grade teachers and some parents, in order to find out solutions and see what causes delays in proceeding with other lessons. Also I wanted to find out who is at fault between the pupils and myself as a teacher. The lesson was supposed to take 30 minutes. I spent 15 minutes explaining and giving examples. Pupils were supposed to finish writing after 15 minutes. Some managed (about five pupils) to write, then I went round assisting the slow learners, when others were waiting for me to mark their work. I left those who needed assistance and went to mark and asked those who’d failed to correct their work. I assisted them, again went back to those with difficulties and finally I sat down to mark all the books at once. I marked the books in 20 minutes of the other lesson which was supposed to follow.

It was discovered that during a day I can only afford to teach three subjects instead of six subjects, and I can not attend to all pupils in my class.

In trying to find solutions, some teachers said:

- “for the ministry to implement the policy which says education is for all, they should improve on the school structures by building some more.”
- use suitable methods for all the pupils, eg, twinning the faster learners with slow learners
- increase the streams (eg, A B C D)
- involve more teachers or bring them to schools (that is, by the ministry)
- I also suggested that teachers should not be restricted to time tables, but teach what is expected of them.

Finding solutions to over-enrolment

By Mr Kenny M. Kazungo, Mpika Basic School

Purpose

The purpose of this action exercise was to find solutions to the problem of over-enrolment especially now that Zambia has declared free education in the middle basic section (Grades 1 – 7). The parents have taken it to be a blessing, they are bringing their children in large numbers because they are relieved. Now the problem is on the teacher who has to handle the pupils.

Process

Brainstorm

It was in June 2002 when I introduced a discussion about the problems caused by a rapid population increase. This work was done in a social studies lesson. Pupils gave different problems such as the shortage of:

- school places
- land
- transport, etc.

In relation to the classroom situation, an over-enrolled class has the following problems:

- seating problems
- noise
- unmarked work
- incomplete lessons.

The brainstorm continued. I introduced another discussion on why most of the pupils did not use to come to school (ie, before the state's declaration of free education). Many reasons were given including:

- school fees
- poverty
- orphans
- fear of being beaten by the teacher.

With the declaration of free education, over-enrolment is a common cry in most schools. Education thirsty children are being brought almost every day so that they acquire the skills of reading and writing, moreover so they become self-reliant in the near future.

Survey

One Monday morning I had taken a survey on what challenges teachers from Musakanya and Marushi schools were facing as a result of over-enrolment.

The survey revealed the following challenges:

- noise making
- unmarked work due to limited time
- incomplete lessons due to limited time
- seating problems.

Having looked at the challenges we also looked at the possible solutions to the challenges mentioned. We came up with the following solutions:

- increase the number of classrooms
- increase the (lesson) time from the present 40 minutes to about one hour so that at least every pupil is catered for
- make more desks
- even distribution of teachers in schools.

Reflection

(Between Mr Kazungo and Mrs Miloshi)

My challenges today were:

- How to teach each and every pupil in an over crowded class, marking and correcting them, as these are vital aspects in teaching and learning. Time proved to be inadequate.

My fears

- A teacher, being 'gardener', will be held responsible for the germinating seeds (ie, will be held responsible for the performance of the pupils). My great task is to reach every pupil in order to have an educated Zambia.

What I enjoyed most today

- All the parents countersigned below the pupils' homework, a sign of co-operation. Each and every pupil had taken the homework to his/her parent/guardian to counter check.

What I have learned as a result of today's experience was:

- That learning and teaching can be made more effective if only we work hand-in-hand with the parents/guardians. They must as well be involved, or the pupils spend most of the time with their parents/guardians.

What I hope to change as a result of today's experience

- Parents/guardians must at one time be given the chance to mark and grade their children's work especially on handwriting, that will promote good handwriting.

What I think I should do next to address the challenge/problem is:

- I will make sure I observe time so that at least each and every pupil in the class is marked and corrected accordingly and give remedial work to the slow learners.

Discussion

In order to address the issue of over-enrolment the school administration called a PTA meeting, which was attended by about 40 people. The purpose of this meeting was to find the solutions to the issue of over-enrolment following the circular on free education. The solution, which to some parents was received with mixed feelings, was to construct a 1x3 classroom block so that congestion in classrooms is reduced. To achieve the goals it was agreed that the community must contribute and requests must be made to some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for financial support and to some well-

wishers. Parents agreed to be paying k10,000 per term towards the construction of a 1x3 classroom block.

Evidence of impact of this process

The parents who attended the PTA meeting felt sympathy for their children who were sitting on the floor due to over-enrolment. They called for an urgent solution to the problem.

Lessons learned

Every pupil has the right to education. Parents did not used to send their children to school due to a number of factors, for example poverty. Now that the government has declared free education from Grades 1–7, children are being brought to schools. Parents knew the impact of over-enrolment in schools, hence the need to sit with the teachers of their children and find solutions.

Usually teachers were in isolation. The exercise demonstrated the positive benefits of consulting with fellow teachers and including the parents of their pupils to solve the problem of over-enrolment. Over-enrolment in schools cannot be stopped but instead positive solutions must be reached.

Challenges

- how to reach the figure for the community contribution towards the construction of the 1x3 classroom block and whether the parents are going to honour the agreement on the contribution, because the issue of the community contribution was received with mixed feelings by some parents
 - building of a 1x3 classroom block is a long-term assignment, another question was on the immediate solutions to over enrolment.
-

B. Absenteeism

A key issues that was raised in most of the schools taking part in the action research project was that of children not being present because of absenteeism. This was identified as either truancy (for a whole day or longer) or arriving late for school in the morning, often on a regular basis. As the accounts below illustrate, absenteeism happens for many reasons and can ultimately affect pupils' inclusion, participation and progress in the class. However, the teachers also describe the steps they have taken to find the cause of the problem and to negotiate solutions with children and parents.

Children who live apart from their parents

By Raidon Mutale, Mpika Basic School

Purpose

The purpose of this learning exercise was to encourage pupils fond of absenteeism as a result of them staying by themselves or renting houses, to take education seriously; for them to attend classes regularly despite the hardships they go through; and seek ways of assisting them or finding lasting solutions to the prevailing situations.

Processes

In this action learning activity I listened to teachers, parents and children.

Brainstorm

During the inclusive school meeting last year (October 2001), teachers discussed the problems they face at the school. Among these were:

- late coming
- absenteeism
- disabilities (children with special needs)
- HIV/AIDS.

Since absenteeism as a result of “pupils staying by themselves or renting houses” was new among the reasons for pupils being absent from school I,

(with the help of Joshua, Grade 9C), came up with a list of pupils who were in this category (which contributed to them being absent from school).

Survey

I had a chance to visit New Kamwanya and Chitulika village to verify the claims that some pupils stay by themselves (ie, renting houses or parents build them houses). Parents I talked to confirmed that some pupils were staying by themselves and this affects them at school, as sometimes they don't go to school. Reasons given (by parents and later by pupils) for absenteeism were:

- household chores
- accommodation (ie, when money paid for rent finishes)
- when food stuff or school requisites finish.

Discussion

I had discussions with some of the parents and pupils to address the issue of absenteeism as a result of pupils staying by themselves. The reasons given for allowing pupils to stay by themselves:

Parents

- financial
- lack of good schools within their communities (ie, Grade 1-9)
- no school offering Grade 10-12 in their communities
- poor staffing in schools in their communities
- the need to have their children educated.

Pupils

- parents cannot afford to pay for school fees
- no relatives to stay with near the school
- being chased away by relatives or mistreatment by relatives
- no people to give them education support (they educate themselves by doing piece work).

The following were things parents and pupils do to help solve some of the problems pupils face while staying by themselves.

Parents

- on a weekly or monthly basis send either food or money to their children
- some parents buy or build a house to avoid paying rent or having to look for a house to rent every new term.

Pupils

- on a weekly basis go back home to collect food stuff and other needs from parents
- do piece work to raise money for these daily needs
- others, especially girls, engage themselves in pre-marital activities (which result in early marriage, pregnancies, abortion), while boys go into theft, beer, etc.

The following were recommendations made by pupils for the role teachers and the school can play to help ease some of the problems the pupils face.

Teachers

- make constant checks whether these children were in school
- give these children extra tuition or homework to cover period of absence.

Schools

- give these children a time to study
- have lenience to these children when they report late or leave early
- help them to get bursaries, especially for those coming from poor families and girls.

Evidence of impact of this process

- pupils we talked to are free to discuss their problems with their friends in similar situations
- pupils we talked to are free to share their problems with their class teachers and school administration (ie, Joshua last year while in Grade 8 explained to the grade teacher and the school authorities his reasons for wanting to go home two weeks before closing schools)
- pupils who had problems with paying both school and examination fees, with the help of school administration had these fees paid for them.

Participation and achievements

It is a continued learning process and it may take some time to have a well evaluated result. Pupils have pledged to continue coming to school despite the situation, while the school is committed to helping these children, especially those coming from very poor families and who are educating themselves.

Lessons learned

Usually teachers and different forums discuss reasons for pupils' absenteeism and come up with remedies — among these are punishment, discussing work with parents, etc. None of these forums have discussed “staying by themselves” as a reason for absenteeism, hence no solutions for this have previously been found.

Both parents and children appreciate the value of education and this is evident by children accepting to stay by themselves and going to school despite the hardships they go through. Parents are eager to help their children throughout their school life. Children are ready to endure hardships including doing piece work to meet their education and home needs. However the children need a lot of guidance and counselling during their school life.

In case of persistence of problems or absenteeism parents of these children should be contacted and where possible they should be called to the school to

come up with positive ways of helping and supporting these children. Parents we talked to pledge to support their children fully and to constantly visit them.

Challenges

- how to identify pupils staying by themselves or renting houses
 - how to reach the houses of these pupils
 - how to reach parents of these pupils who usually live very far away (ie, Lusaka, Chiundaponde, Nabwalya, Kopa, etc)
 - how to help these children financially or materially and especially those from very poor families/vulnerable groups
 - how to involve all stakeholders to consider:
 - raising standards in schools within the reach of these children including staffing and equipping of these schools (ie, rehabilitation and construction of school infrastructure and staff houses)
 - up-grading schools to full basic schools (ie Grade 1-9)
 - constructing high schools within the reach of every chief's area (ie, Kopa, Mpumba, Kabinga, Chiundaponde, Nabwalya, Luchembe, Mukangule, etc)
 - assisting these children, especially the vulnerable (girls) with bursaries
 - providing boarding facilities even in basic schools.
-

Late coming

By Edwina M. Mumba, Kabale Basic School

Purpose

The major purpose of this action learning exercise was to come up with the best solutions which can be discussed in class so that the pupils with the habit of coming late to school can change for the better.

Pupils fond of coming late to school were listed by fellow class pupils and the list was confirmed by me, the teacher, as I had been observing these children. Later on, parents of pupils in my class were called and we had a discussion on how we can improve pupils' late coming to school

Processes

In this action learning activity we heard the voices of the teacher, parents and pupils. The table below attempts to identify whose voices were heard and whose voices were left out.

Observation

At times, I used to get so disturbed in my process of teaching by pupils who were fond of coming late. Not even a single day passed without having one to three pupils reporting late for classes. When their friends are already in class — settled, doing the given exercise or listening to the teacher's instructions — I would just hear a knock, or upon saying "come in", I would just see a pupil or two coming in. At first, because I did not want to waste time asking about their late coming, I would just let them in and ask them to sit down.

To my surprise this was becoming too much as I began to experience the same nearly every day. I began writing down the names of those coming late without telling them. After a week I realised that they were the same pupils coming late.

Interview

On a daily basis, whoever comes late, I would find a suitable time to talk to him before knocking off. I did this in order to get some of the reasons for their late coming. Despite interviewing children separately and on different days, the reasons given were just the same. These are as follows;

- I went to the market.
- I was fetching water.
- I was washing plates.
- I was sweeping the surrounding.
- I was looking after my young brother/sister.
- I was waiting for food.
- I did not find my books in time.
- I overslept.
- I went to pick up my friend.

Brainstorming

Having seen that some pupils were perpetual latecomers, and having been given reasons for late coming, I decided to involve the whole class so as to learn of some other reasons and see what can be done. The following were additional reasons as to why some pupils come late.

1. oversleeping
2. sleeping late due to watching last films (the previous night)
3. not doing house chores in advance or before time
4. not putting school requirements like shoes, books and uniforms in proper places
5. parents not preparing food in good time
6. playing on the way
7. not doing homework in good time.

I got concerned on all the points mentioned, especially on the third point, because I felt that pupils can go and do some of the house chores after school. When I mentioned this to the class, pupils murmured saying if you don't work before coming to school, you cannot be given food after school.

For point number 5, for sure, there won't be proper learning if pupils are always left to report to school on empty stomachs. Deep down in my heart I felt the need to find time and meet parents to address some of these issues.

Discussion: Part 1

Looking at a list of reasons for coming late to school, I asked pupils in their groups to discuss and come up with solutions.

Solutions

- come a bit early
- whoever comes late should be punished
- to go and pick up your friend nearby or on the way
- not playing on the way
- put school things in proper places
- sleep early, don't watch last films
- do house chores in advance
- wake up early
- parents to prepare food in time
- parents to wake up children if they oversleep.

Having gone through all the solutions, the whole class agreed that if they were followed late coming will be reduced.

Discussion: Part 2

I then asked pupils to discuss and give reasons why they think late coming is bad. Reasons are listed below.

- you miss some areas as you find that your friends are already learning
- takes time to get settled
- may affect your class performance
- with some written exercises you may find part of it is rubbed off the board before you see it
- no proper learning
- eventually you become a slow learner and fail some tests.

Discussion: part 3

In groups again pupils were asked to discuss how they feel when they come late.

Answers

- feel bad
- feel shy
- feel afraid
- fear to be punished
- fear to be laughed at
- you look a fool among others
- fear to enter the class and may just go home and say I have been chased
- fail to knock, hence hide somewhere or play around till friends knock off, they join them and go home.

Family Pac meeting with parents

When I sat back alone to reflect on the reasons why pupils come late, I realised truly that a child has two environments — that is the home and the school. It was at this point that I thought of involving parents since some of the problems faced by my pupils were home-based.

On 12/7/02 parents were invited. They came and observed me teaching a reading lesson in Bemba. After my presentation, pupils were given work according to ability groups, this was done in four categories.

1. spellings to fast learners
2. copying words and reading by slow learners
3. handwriting – two boys with special educational needs
4. writing the number '4' by one girl with special education needs.

Parents were given the chance to go round checking how pupils were writing and asking some to read for them.

Thereafter pupils presented a traditional game which helps them improve eye-hand co-ordination — according to the pupils, they improve their writing skill, they start writing fast, pain stops in the arm or fingers if any and it also stretches fingers and arms.

Lastly they presented a sketch on late coming. After this sketch, pupils left the room and the discussion with parents and other teachers commenced.

Reporting

Discussions were done in groups and each group had a representative to report.

On the sketch concerning late coming (children had portrayed reasons for coming late as stated earlier), parents agreed saying “most of the things mentioned are true, we are responsible”. They promised to improve so as to help a child learn better with a free mind.

Evidence of impact of this process

Before I could even conduct a Family Pac meeting, I already noticed some change in some individuals. Those that were still coming late, it was less than ten minutes late, unlike before. Now that parents have come and discussed with them, I hope to see the great impact of our discussion since parents promised to play their roles.

The daily attendance has improved because pupils no longer go back home or hide somewhere when they come a bit late.

Lesson learned

Surely, for a child to learn better, parents should work together with teachers. Parents should feel free to visit class teachers and teachers should be open

and create an atmosphere which can accommodate the parents' contributions in their children's learning. Whatever problem challenges the teacher, he/she should sit down, reflect and re-plan then find solutions to whatever problem. The teacher should have a heart for the child and the child should be the teacher's centre of interest. Children are instruments of change too.

Challenges

- to find time to call parents of those children who did not come and are still coming a bit late
- how to make sure that late coming completely stops
- how to plan and find time to keep on meeting parents not only when there is a problem.
- how to make more parents attend the next meeting when called, since only 28 came though it was a pay day.

Another teacher Miss Rhoda Kasanda, carried out a piece of research into late coming. Many of her findings reflect those of Mrs Mumba. However, there are some interesting additional points. For example, her pupils gave additional reasons for being absent from school

- *the distance they have to walk is very long*
- *they are left alone at home with no-one to remind them to go to school.*

The parents she spoke with made commitments to encourage children to attend school and to help them with their school work, in addition to reducing the amount of household chores. The parents also stressed that some children like being absent from school, and felt Miss Kasanda has an additional role in sensitising children in the importance of education.

In reflecting on the process of her research, Miss Kasanda noted that during the discussions "even those pupils who are silent in class could talk with confidence, (stating) that they should not be deprived of their right to learn."

Truancy

An individual case study

By Cephas Mwanza, Chitulika School

Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to identify a pupil from my class with a severe truancy behaviour, find out what really causes truancy behaviour in her, discuss with her parents what they think about this problem and finally discuss with them ways and means of dealing with this problem so as to make her (and other pupils with the same problem), better.

Processes

The following table illustrates voices that were heard and voices that were not.

	Whose voices were heard?	Whose voices were not heard?
Brainstorming	Pupils present in my class	Pupils who were absent
Interview	Pupils identified with truancy behaviour Their peers	Pupils who were not identified
Home visits	Parents Family members	Parents who were not visited
Discussion	Three teachers including myself 60 pupils: 33 girls and 27 boys from my class	Pupils who were absent Two parents invited did not turn up
Teacher Reflection	Mr Mubanza and Ms Kasanda	

Brainstorming

On Friday 2 August 2002, I introduced my class to a discussion on why some pupils are frequently absent from school. The following reasons were given by the class:

- lack of materials (eg, books)
- sickness
- funerals
- lack of washing soap
- laziness
- lack of parental support
- negative attitudes by some parents
- disease
- beatings by teachers.

The class was further asked to identify pupils with truancy behaviour. They listed five. The class was finally asked to identify from the list, one pupil who is frequently absent from school. Almost everybody voted for Rebecca who stays with her parents in Cassanova compound.

Home visit

On 6 August 2002, I paid Rebecca's parents a home visit in Cassanova compound. I received a warm welcome from the parents. I learned that Rebecca's parents are Tonga from the Southern Province and that she was born at Mpika General Hospital. She is number four in the family of four girls and three boys. Both her mother and father are alive and staying with her. When I got to her home she looked surprised as she was busy selling at the roadside.

We discussed at length with the father, where I also learned that Rebecca socialises well with her family members. I also discussed that Rebecca was initially at Mpika Basic School. She was later on transferred to Chitulika because, according to her father, she used to have a bad academic performance.

"The only problem with my children is that, at home they have total freedom with their mother and not with me. They usually criticise her most especially where school going is concerned."

From this I discovered that the father is usually out fetching charcoal from the bush and doing other business. Therefore, the children are left in the hands of the mother.

"As far as I am concerned, my children are not a problem to me, particularly Rebecca."

Upon producing the school register, it was revealed that so far this term Rebecca was missed classes for almost 30 days. The father was surprised.

"Every morning, the mother wakes her up. She never does any serious work in the morning. Where does she go?"

When I asked him about any problem Rebecca might be facing with her school work, the father complained about never receiving any reports:

"Because we are Tonga, and my children never receive any report forms, I thought they were being discriminated against as there may be tribalism going on at your place of work."

This prompted me to research from the mark sheets where I discovered that Rebecca does not even attempt tests. If she does, she only manages one or two subjects, and since report forms are given directly to the pupils, sometimes she never takes them home. The parents were promised that this time reports would be physically brought to them by the teacher and there would be a discussion on them.

Discussion

I discussed the issue of truancy with a number of parents from the village and finally arranged to meet pupils in my class with other members of staff. This was done to find out the effects truancy can have on a child and to find out possible solutions that can be taken to eradicate it.

The following were the results of the discussion:

1. Effects of truancy

- a child cannot know how to read and write
- a child can become ignorant about many things
- quite difficult to find good employment in future
- a child lacks intelligence
- a child lacks good manners and therefore becomes rude.

2. How to stop truancy

- educating parents on the disadvantages of truancy
- children should educate one another on the same
- because affected pupils may not realise the effect of truancy, there is a need to educate and mostly motivate them so that they like learning.

Teacher reflection

Towards the end of my study, I was prompted to reflect on my work through an interview with one of my colleagues. The following format was used:

Analysis Form for Reflection

Problem/challenge: Truancy.

My challenges were to identify and help children with truancy behaviour.

My fears were that I would not get full support from Rebecca's parents.

What I enjoyed most was having an open discussion with the child's parents about her performance.

What I learnt as a result of the experience was any child can respond positively when right measures are put in to place.

What I hope to change as a result of this experience is to start knowing individual pupils through home visits to find out more about them.

What I think I should do next time to address the challenge/problem is I wish to involve more parents.

The process of reflection has revealed to me that lack of parental guidance to education contributed a lot to Rebecca's truancy behaviour in school. It has also revealed that lack of communication between parents and children over education is yet another factor. After learning about Rebecca's problem, I will be able to identify other children with similar problems in my class so as to reduce truancy in my pupils.

Evidence of impact of this process

Presence: As a result of meeting Rebecca's parents, I was promised that Rebecca would now be a regular figure in the class. All the necessary support required will be given to me by her parents especially over communication. I also promised to be visiting them at certain times and give them all the required support.

Participation and achievement: I can now see evidence that Rebecca likes learning. Since the day I met her parents, she has only missed classes once of course with a good reason. It is good to see her parents are taking positive steps as per our discussion.

Lessons learned

Traditionally, education of children has always been left in the hands of teachers. This study has revealed to me that a teacher cannot educate a child alone, without the involvement of parents. It's high time parents realised that their total guidance and support are greatly needed if their children are to excel in education. From this study, it has come to my knowledge that since Rebecca's father had always been out, the spouse had not been taking keen interest in making sure Rebecca gets to school. It is quite obvious that she had been hiding on the way. As a responsible parent, it is quite easy to find out whether a child has been in class or not. Communication between Rebecca's parents as they were advised will help solve her problem. I will therefore make sure that I frequently pay home visits to Rebecca's home to monitor my findings, more especially when she is absent for some days. In class, she will be given special attention and I will monitor her progress.

Challenges

- how to help other children with similar problems in my class
- how to identify these children
- how to acquire better ways of getting information from their parents
- how to give total motivation to Rebecca so that she enjoys learning.

Participation

This chapter looks at the issue of participation. It is divided into two sections:

- A participatory principles and methods used by teachers, school administrators, etc
- B examples of how these methods have been used to promote the inclusion of specific groups of marginalised children.

A. Participatory principles and methods

The previous chapter, in discussing the problem of over-enrolment, touched on the issue of working with parents and fellow teachers to try to devise ways of tackling this new challenge. In fact, all of the accounts highlight in some way the importance of good leadership from the school administration and the essential role that participation and co-operation between teachers, parents and pupils can play in creating a more inclusive school environment. The following accounts illustrate how the schools are developing and implementing approaches based on the principle of co-operation and participation.

The meaning of co-operation

By Kenny M. Kazungo, Mpika Basic School

Co-operation is derived from the word co-operate, which means working together in oneness.

In the teaching fraternity co-operation must prevail in order for learning and teaching to be effective, and for the developmental strategies in schools to be implemented. A place where co-operation is lacking is like fitting a square peg in a round hole.

At our school co-operation has been taken to be our focal point. It is reflected in every activity in the school arena. One might wonder how co-operation is prevailing. Well, to achieve our goals at our school we have formed what are known as teachers' groups which comprise five to six teachers and which meet once a week. It's in these group meetings where we review and discuss the individual challenges that each one of us faces in his/her everyday classroom presentation and some extra-curricular activities. We try to find possible solutions to the challenges in order for our school to move forward. Moreover it's from these meetings where we assist one another in making apparatus to use in teaching and learning, as you are aware teaching and learning can be effective only if apparatus/aids are in place. In our teacher

groups we don't believe in criticising one another, we believe there is nothing like a good teacher or a bad teacher. The only distinction lies in the approach and the methodology used in delivering the material content.

We believe a problem is not a problem, but a challenge to be solved.

The idea of the formation of teachers' groups has been appreciated by all members of staff. Each and every member of our teaching staff belongs to a teachers' group and participates fully. A group leader and the group secretary are chosen from among the members in the group. The group leader spearheads the group. The secretary takes down the minutes of every meeting held and hands the minutes to the school In-service Provider at the end of the day. There is no permanent chairperson, the position fluctuates.

The same co-operation has been extended to our pupils. Each pupil in our school has been twinned to another pupil. Actually the pupils are allowed the chance of choosing themselves through the guidance of the teacher. The slow learners are twinned to the gifted ones or the quick achievers. The pupils are encouraged to develop in them the spirit of sharing if they are to achieve their intended goals. In addition to that, even the sitting arrangement is made in such a way that pupils are free to discuss and share problems. Pupils sit in groups facing each other. The system makes the teacher's work easier, for he/she can just leave the pupils with a task to solve in their respective groups. There is free participation among the pupils due to the development of the spirit of sharing which has come about as a result of co-operation.

The community is not left out in ensuring that co-operation prevails in our school, as that is where the pupils we teach come from. We have what is known as the PTA. This is a link between the teachers and the parents. We hold meetings when the need arises. The PTA has an executive of which the chairperson, his vice and the treasurer are elected members from the community (ie, the parents). The secretary is the head of the school and there are two teacher representatives. There are another two member representatives from the community.

Issues discussed at our meetings pertain to the development of our school for the betterment of our children. When need for community contributions towards any proposed project arises, contributions are done in good faith. The core source of all that is co-operation.

To sum up, my appeal to the other schools out there is that they should emulate us in enhancing co-operation in their schools. Moving together in co-operation we will build mother Zambia.

Teacher co-operation

An extract from a document compiled by J.Katongo Mbaale, Marrien M. Mauluka, Bernad K. Sinzumwa, Joseph Zulu, Musakanya Basic School

At our school, teacher group meetings play an essential role. In these groups, teachers discuss matters affecting their work. Topics or areas of discussion are not dictated to the groups. Groups brainstorm and thereafter classify and prioritise their topics.

After discussions, the resolutions are shared with other members of staff. This finally becomes part of the agenda in our professional or staff meetings. For instance, recently we had one problem in our school. The group which raised this issue created a case study from it and found the solution. It had been found that the main reason for latecomers was that most of the latecomers were from Malashi. It was therefore agreed that the pupils be transferred to a nearby school in Malashi. This was done and it yielded more positive results. Using a check on the 'Teacher on Duty' book, it was stated that, "There is an improvement in punctuality." However not all of the pupils agreed to be transferred.

Lesson demonstrations are also carried out in teacher groups. "Such meetings are very beneficial," pointed out one teacher. Pupils have also been involved in these teacher groups especially in lesson demonstrations.

All the strategies that have been put into place in improving our schools are as a result of co-operation among teachers and the co-operation between teachers and the school administration. All in all the school sums up its strategies as centring on the school, that is teachers and pupils and the community. Lack of community involvement in school activities means a negative attitude toward the school, which is full of their children and their teachers. The school has therefore brought the three parts together through the PTA and the introduction of Family Pac, which incorporates parents into helping their children with the schoolwork.

Participatory leadership

A specific example: addressing poor exam performance

By Raidon Mutale, Mpika Basic School

There are different styles of leadership exercised in different learning institutions and this has different effects on these institutions. Our school has adopted a participatory leadership style. This promotes the participation of

teachers, pupils, parents and other stakeholders in the running of the school. One of the features of this style is being democratic.

We realise that every member of the school community's contribution is important. Pupils in their classes and through their pupil representatives voice their contributions to the school affairs. Accordingly teachers and parents at different forums contribute to the running of the school. During these forums both parents and teachers discuss freely issues of great help to the school. One such example is the recent discussion on the general performance of pupils in the end of second term examinations. During these meetings the voices of teachers and parents were heard — 75 per cent of parents attended, with 25 teachers (nine were absent).

The head teacher introduced a discussion into two separate meetings (ie, PTA executive members and grade teachers).

The following reasons were given as contributing factors for the bad performance:

- absenteeism
- over-enrolment
- household chores, especially for girls and those who stay by themselves
- poverty
- lack of preparations and commitment by teachers
- parents not giving the much needed support to their children
- discipline
- bad background of most pupils
- teachers not giving enough to their pupils
- teachers allowing pupils to write notes on the board for their friends on behalf of teachers
- marital affairs.

Members of the PTA made a programme to discuss with the parents of children in all grades in order to come up with solutions to help their children to improve their performance.

In these meetings they eventually came up with the following conclusion:

Parents should

- monitor their children's school progress
- ensure that their children write homework and sign against these
- support their children financially and materially
- visit the school always to discuss the progress of their children
- give their children time to study and write homework at home
- check their children's books always
- find teachers to teach their children extra tuition to supplement the teacher's effort
- change their attitude towards the education of their children.

Teachers should

- prepare adequately for their classes
- give their pupils homework, exercises and notes which they should mark/check
- give remedial work to their pupils
- always ensure that their pupils are occupied
- counsel their pupils on spiritual, academic and career matters
- discuss with pupils' parents on the performance of the children — Family Pac
- maintain a good account on every child in their teacher's files
- improvise teaching and learning aids
- make use of the Teachers Group meetings.

The school should

- support teachers with the teaching and learning aids teachers need in their teaching
- organise open days/prize-giving days, during which deserving pupils would receive rewards
- reward hard working teachers at such times as labour and teachers' days
- allocate teachers to classes/subjects according to their ability
- monitor and supervise teachers both in class and outside
- invite role models to the school to speak to pupils and especially females to speak to the girls
- organise more academic meetings for stakeholders
- promote, encourage and fund in-service activities at the school
- guard against malpractice and test pupils the first time they come in Grade 8
- establish a resource bank.

Evidence of impact of this process

Parents who attended the meeting pledged to work with teachers and to support the school. A few paid the K10,000 project fund per household meant to construct the 1x3 classroom block to decongest the overcrowded classes.

Lessons learned

The school should provide leadership that would allow stakeholders to participate in discussing freely the issues affecting the school (such as those linked to exam performance). Equally important is to take issues raised seriously and to come up with a participatory programme of action to implement decisions made. Pupils should also be involved in finding out solutions to the problems affecting them. Most parents need to be educated on the importance and value of the education of their children. There is need for them to change their attitudes on their role in the education of their children, the school and the work of teachers. Teachers too should be professional in their work and regard every child as the reason for their existence. Family Pac meetings (an intervention as part of the Programme for

the Advancement of Girl Child Education, PAGE) should be encouraged at the school.

Challenges

- how to decongest the over-enrolled classes
 - how to convince feeder schools at Grade 8 to guard against malpractice during Grade 7 examinations
 - how to equip classes with necessary teaching and learning aids
 - how to reach the parents of pupils who fail to attend educative meetings
 - how to make teachers efficient and effective in their teaching
 - how to develop better ways of consulting parents and more positive ways of presenting issues of exclusion.
-

Parents' involvement

All of the teachers' accounts mention the importance of working with parents and community members in creating an education environment that welcomes and encourages all children.

The home environment and effects on learning difficulties

By Monica Mwenegamba Munyenembe, Nyanji Middle Basic School

Purpose

The purpose of this action research was to encourage learners in my class and parents to think and find the reasons why some learners perform badly in some subjects. Learners were consulted, then the parents for the learners with poor performance were involved so as to assist the teacher in finding interventions.

Processes

Different voices of teachers, children and parents were heard. Below is a table showing whose voices were heard and whose were not heard.

	Whose voices were heard	Whose voices were not heard
Brainstorm	learners present in Ms. Munyenyembe's class	Learners who were absent
Survey	8 parents who were at home	2 were not found at home
Teacher reflection	Ms. Munyenyembe M. and Mrs. Mabo	
Family Pac meeting	parents who attended the meeting	Parents who were absent
Discussion	2 teachers Munyenyembe and Mrs. Mabo, learners in my class, parents	Parents who didn't attend

Brainstorm

My Grade 6B class has 50 learners, 20 of them perform badly in different subjects. Due to this reason, I have decided to carry out an action research. I started my research by introducing a debate in my class. The topic was "Parents and teachers contribute a lot to the poor performance of learners in school." This debate was done in English lesson. Below were the reasons learners gave:

- lack of learning materials, eg, books, etc
- poverty
- working at home
- lack of confidence by learners
- fear of being beaten by teachers
- sickness
- disabilities.

Having seen that the home environment was the most contributing factor of poor performance of learners, I asked them to mention their duties at home. The following were the answers:

- cooking
- charcoal making
- cleaning the houses and the surroundings
- looking after their sisters and brothers
- fetching water
- selling at the market and at the railway station at night
- farming.

After that I had to check on the progress chart and identified ten learners who usually perform badly in all subjects. Thereafter I decided to interview the ten learners one by one. These learners gave different reasons concerning their parents, this made me visit their parents.

Survey

I visited the homes of the ten learners twice. At first I didn't tell the parents anything concerning learning. I did this deliberately as I wanted to find out if

the children were right, so I just kept on observing. During my second visit, that was when I consulted the parents over the same. (Unfortunately two parents were not found.) The following were the reasons presented why their children perform badly at school:

- not having money to buy learning materials
- children need to do business to earn money
- working on a farm
- homework to be avoided as learners don't work at home, they concentrate on their school work.

I was very surprised and disappointed to hear from parents that children waste time doing school work, also to hear that children are the ones who work in the farm and sell goods at the market instead of the adults.

Reflection

After the two days of my survey I had consulted Mrs Mabo as she had been teaching this class since Grade 1. She said that she had been facing that problem, this made her separate the classes, 6A was for the fast learners and 6B was for the slow learners.

Thereafter I had to reflect on my work done showing the challenges and successes.

Having reflected on my survey, I concluded that the main reason for the poor performance of learners was due to negative attitude towards education by parents. For this reason, I started to find the interventions to solve the problem. Moreover, I asked the learners in my class to list the work they are expected to carry out every day at home. The list produced was as follows:

- selling goods
- fetching water
- cooking food
- washing clothes
- working in a farm
- cleaning the house and the surroundings.

Thereafter I decided to invite the parents for the learners to attend the Family Pac meeting/lesson. That was the time I decided to sensitise the parents about the importance [of education] to their children and themselves.

Family Pac meeting/discussion

I arranged the Family Pac meeting with the head teacher, parents, learners and teachers. The main aim of the meeting was to discuss with the parents about negative impact parents have towards education and see how I can work with them to reduce the poor performance of their children. The meeting was opened by the drama group who dramatised a sketch which demonstrated different ways parents

In our school parents are regularly called to either Family Pac sessions or development meetings. This enables teachers to explain exactly what and how they are there to help a child...It is [on this] platform where the relationship between the teacher and the parent gets better.

Loveness Chonga Igambo, Mpika Basic School

mistreat their children which hinder their good performance. After the sketch parents were quiet for a short period of time, then they started debating. The questions of the parents showed that they were deeply affected. Some parents said that the poor performance of learners was due to the teachers. Others disagreed and said, parents overuse their children (child abuse). This resulted to absenteeism, late coming, etc. All these contribute to the learning difficulties of children.

Moreover, some parents said that they don't have money to buy learning materials so the government should provide for the learners. Others were against, and said parents should work hard to provide learning materials and money for their children to pay to school.

After a long discussion, I talked to the parents telling them the importance of education and how they should assist their children. Finally, parents came up with the following conclusion.

Teachers should

- give remedial work to learners
- check if all learners are in class and participate fully
- praise the children often to build their confidence
- teach effectively (using recommendable methods using teaching aids)
- give homework to encourage learners to study hard
- use learner-centred method for the lessons to be more active, interesting etc
- make sure that the instructions are short and simple for easy understanding
- break tasks down in to small steps for learners to understand it easily.

Parents should

- be punished by the people concerned if the child has missed classes
- give chance to children to study hard
- positive attitude towards education
- provide all learning materials for their children.

The school should

- reduce the amount of manual work expected of pupils
- organise more Family Pac meetings
- have different clubs, debates, etc, to promote confidence in the children, keep the children busy and many more.

Evidence of impact of this process

Presence

Learners have been given learning materials including uniforms.

Participation and achievement

Learners have started improving academically starting from the time we had a Family Pac meeting. Parents have developed a positive attitude towards education.

Challenges

- how to reach the parents for the learners
- how to develop better ways of consulting parents.

Lesson learned

In this action research I have learnt that it is essential to carry out research when you have seen a problem in order to come up with reasonable interventions. In this case poor performance of learners has been reduced due to the processes taken during the research period. Parents are now providing the learning materials needed by their children and they have now developed a positive attitude towards education. Hence the performance of learners has changed.

Other teachers wrote about parental and community involvement issues. For example, Rosemary Bowa and Rhoda Kasunda, Chitulika Middle Basic School, looked at the involvement of the community in solving the problem of inadequate classrooms at the school, as a result of free education and increased enrolment.

The school has been undergoing a lot of development, hence facing numerous barriers to effective learning and teaching, eg, inadequate classrooms and poverty just to mention a few. Despite all these, our key challenge is to ensure that the broad vision of education for all is reflected at our school, in our district and the nation at large.

Sharing

The above problem became so severe that it prompted the school administration to call for urgent meetings with parents in the community. Response by the community was so overwhelming such that during the gathering, parents themselves suggested ways and means of solving the problem. One male parent suggested that, "To lessen expenses on the expenditure, we should all work together by collecting building sand, moulding bricks and collecting stones." This was agreed upon, by all members. Through sharing knowledge and free participation in decision-making, this made us teachers and the community meet our objective.

Barriers/problems encountered

During our transition period some parents had negative attitudes towards communal work. Others uttered irritated remarks, such as, “We have been working on the same projects, since the birth of Chitulika School, enough is enough,” and they never turned up for work.

Ever since this free education was introduced, parents do not want to participate in school projects.

Rhoda Kasunda, Chitulika School

We had the third group of parents who knew the importance of having a good learning environment, good infrastructure. These came to do the work, every day.

They even supported the school administration and urged them to forge ahead. Good leadership!

Because of good leadership and co-operation, (both parents and teachers), through sharing, knowledge and participation, the new Chitulika Middle Basic School has been built.

Resources

Through sharing our problems with other schools and NGOs, Irish Aid (through the District Education Officer’s office) came to our aid by buying all building materials for the new school.

My opinion is that teachers should work hand-in-hand with parents so as to achieve goals for the school.

Rhoda Kasunda, Chitulika School

Despite all the challenges, the school community and the community in the village accomplished its mission. The school is now offering good service to the pupils. Teachers work tirelessly to see that

effective and efficient work is done at all levels. Teachers and the community meet to discuss future plans in a good environment.

In our struggle for a better future, there is a great need for the community and the school to collaborate in the provision of both financial and human resources to bring much needed development to the school... As a school we are aiming for an inclusive learning environment to provide good learning opportunity to every member of our community and the nation at large.

Cephas Mwanza, Chitulika Middle Basic School

Democratisation in the classroom

By Theresa M. Milandile, Kabale Basic School

Democratisation is a strategy used to solve some problems in my class. The following are some of the strategies I am currently using in class. There is co-operative learning, where children are free to share ideas within the class. There is also twinning, where faster learners have been twinned with the slower learners. This has been done to help them with class work. More importantly, children are also free to express themselves about me. This really helps me to plan for their interests and needs. It also helps me to improve in areas of weakness. The following are some of the things that children have said about me:

- You are too friendly with us.
- You're too fast in explaining things that we have not understood.
- You have improved in punctuality.
- You should start beating us.
- You should teach all subjects on the timetable.
- You're helpful to us.
- You have started teaching us many subjects.

There was a day when I sent two girls to collect books. They came back after a long time. When I asked them why they had taken so long, they said, "Teacher wanted us to find out what other teachers and pupils have to say about your class." This is what was said about my class:

- eager to learn
- they are confident
- they have become assertive
- they are noisy
- they are talkative
- they are rude.

Because some of the teachers complained that my class was rude I demonstrated with one girl the way that they were supposed to answer when talking to elderly people. I did this because "*to every right there is a limit*" (ie, responsibilities accompany rights). The emphasis of the role-play was to be polite when answering and talking to all elderly people. I also gave them a topic in Bemba, the local language. The topic was 'Umucinshi' — in English, literally meaning 'respect'. I asked them to say what it was. They said that respect is the way you talk, answer and behave towards other people. The following were some of the things they came up with, that they should have been doing:

- respect all elderly people
- answer politely when we are called
- we should stop quarrelling.

On noise making, we agreed that there would be four girls to write down the names of noise makers. The following is one of the classroom rules: If you appear on all four pieces of paper, then you should be punished. This is working effectively and unnecessary noise making has since lessened. This has also lessened the quarrelling of girls with the class monitor.

Generally, the girls are changing slowly. This was seen at the way they behaved one day when one teacher entered the class. No one answered unnecessarily, as they sometimes did. Only one girl who was absent on the day when we were talking about respect, answered back. It was surprising that other girls were just looking at her. When the teacher left they started telling her what we had talked about.

Another teacher at Kabale, Sr Maria Patela, introduced democracy and responsibility to her class through the issue of maintenance of the classroom and its surrounding areas. Here is an extract from her account.

As a class teacher I am convinced that a democratic approach brings about responsibility.

I decided to deliberately have lessons in a dirty classroom, and not ask the pupils to sweep. The surrounding area was dirty as well. The pupils were amazed because I did not ask them to sweep. It was during Production Unit period when I asked pupils to suggest ways of making our surroundings clean. They came up with wonderful suggestions such as: mopping the classroom everyday, sweeping the surrounding area and planting flowers. They further suggested that they be given a portion of ground where they could work. This was done.

I have noticed that pupils work well when they are consulted in this way. I observed that they co-operate and become very responsible and exercise their leadership skills. Almost everyone is trying to plant some flowers. They are responsible; I have seen this in the lessons, after classes, before classes and during the weekends. They know that they have a part to play. This has helped me to capitalise on their interest.

I think I am successful in my democratic approach; at least four fellow teachers have appreciated the work that is going on and the class next door has started the same project. I am convinced that by the end of the year more teachers will be doing the same.

Already some pupils have seen that our classroom surroundings are improving; so they are also doing the same thing at home. However, there are complaints coming from the parents that the water containers are missing at home because pupils are keeping them at school so that they do not forget to water the flowers! On this one I have no immediate solution, but will find one.

Encouraging participation in class

By Edwina M. Mumba, Kabale Basic School

Purpose

The purpose of the exercise in this action learning was to find ways and means of helping those pupils who do not participate fully by not writing the given exercises because of not coming with pencils to school despite being regular attendees. The class was asked to discuss and find solutions of how this problem can be stopped. The class came up with the idea of having small containers per group and a box where the containers can be stored with pencils.

Processes

The table below shows each process used and voices heard and those not heard in the process.

Processes	Whose voices were Heard	Whose voices were not heard
Observation	The class teacher Mrs Mumba	Pupils in class
Interview	Wilson (pupil under study) Mrs Mumba	The rest of pupils in class
Discussion	Mrs Mumba (class teacher) All pupils present on this day	4 pupils absent, 1 girl and 3 boys
Pairing/twinning	Wilson Maria Mrs Mumba	The rest of the class apart from the two

Observation

Each time I gave work to pupils to write I observed that a boy named Wilson was not writing. I got concerned and wondered what could be the reasons and what could be done to make the boy start participating by writing the given exercises. At times when the boy attempted to do the exercises, the performance was below average.

Interview

Having seen that the boy's habit of not writing without being monitored and reminded (despite having a pencil) was getting out of hand, I decided to have a talk with the boy.

- Teacher: Wilson, why do you come to school without a pencil?
 Wilson: When I lost the first pencil my grandmother bought for me, I reported and she just shouted at me saying, "I won't buy you another one, your friend who is in Grade 2 is very responsible, he doesn't lose pencils the way you do, so you will know what to do."
 Teacher: What did you say when she said that?
 Wilson: Nothing. I just left and went to play. The following day I did not even come to school.
 Teacher: Why is it that when your friends lend you a pencil again you don't write?
 Wilson: Sometimes I fear to get the work wrong because my friends laugh at me, sometimes I don't just feel like writing. At times I even hide the pencil and say I don't have a pencil to write with.

From the interview I then realised the importance of having a discussion with the entire class. The essence of the discussion was to try and see how those that don't come with pencils and fear to write can be helped. I thought of a class discussion because it was not only Wilson, the boy under study, who was not coming with a pencil and not writing.

Discussion

I opened the discussion by saying "I have seen some of you coming to school without pencils and some of you just hide the pencil for fear of writing." Then I said "Is what I have said correct or not?" Pupils without putting up their hands said "Yes it is true." They even mentioned some of their friends. I observed that those that were mentioned were mainly from slow learners groups. I was happy that Wilson was mentioned.

In groups, I told pupils to discuss why they think their friends don't come with pencils.

Answers

- They fear to report to their parents when they lose one.
- They don't like writing.
- They fear to get the work wrong.
- They are lazy.
- They are slow learners.

I then said, "Since this is a problem in our class what can we do as a class to help our friends?"

Most pupils present on this day suggested that the pencils be left at school. I agreed to the suggestion but asked pupils again how they can be stored since there are no lockers or cupboards in our classes.

To my surprise pupils came up with a very good idea of each group having an empty container where they can store the pencils. This was considered and pupils brought the container per group and the teacher labelled according to the group names. The problem again came of where to leave the containers. Again pupils responded saying each group will be responsible for its

container. There will be individuals taking containers from each group and there will be rotation. This was adopted and the exercise began.

Problems

The pupils' suggestion worked, but not 100 per cent, because of the following:

- at times those who took the containers feel sick (and do not come to school), meaning no pencils for that group on that day
- when the containers were brought back, some pencils were missing.

Fortunately when the two above occurred, pupils got pencils from other groups, since every group was having more than enough for members of the group.

Finally, I volunteered to carry the container of pencils in small boxes to my home and bring them the following day. To date this is what is taking place in my classes, this has improved participation of learners since now everybody is writing.

Pairing/twinning

The boy under study has begun participating fully. With my close monitoring his performance has really improved, especially in Bemba as I very much wants pupils to improve the reading and writing of our local language.

I called Wilson and praised him for the improvement. I then told the boy that if you really want to improve even more find someone you will be assisting. The boy agreed and picked on a girl called Maria from his group.

I found time and talked to the girl about how she will be working with Wilson, she too agreed. The pair is from the same group of slow learners.

Evidence of Impact

Participation

The boy is now participating fully and is showing some self-confidence especially when he's explaining work to his twin. He is always writing since pencils are always available and the fear of getting work wrong is no longer there because at times, especially in Bemba, he is among the first six who completes the work.

Achievement

Since my target is the reading of our local language, Wilson has tremendously improved, he's able to read most of the new words in Bemba. Recently I conducted a test - he got 18/20. If it's time for Bemba, you would see how quickly the boy gets a pencil ready to write!

Now that he is able to read, he has been given the responsibility of distributing containers of pencils to respective groups — since the group names are written in Bemba the boy enjoys doing it.

Lesson learned

Close monitoring of individuals can help the teacher learn the individual's problem which may even be affecting others. As the teacher tries to find the solution to help that individual, in the process others are helped.

Pupils are not blank in their heads as we sometimes take them to be. If fully involved by sharing the problem with them, they come up with very good suggestions and solutions hence lifting the teacher's burden. Children really feel happy and ready to contribute more if their voices are heard and considered.

Pupils don't only learn in class but also observe some of the problems other fellow pupils are facing and are ready to assist if consulted. Teachers should be ready to develop the life skill of problem solving in pupils by involving them and giving them certain tasks.

Challenges

- how to come up with some teaching strategies to improve those pupils still not performing well in terms of achievement
- to always find time to meet the special pair, that is Wilson and Maria
- improve individual pupil-teacher relationship so as to create more room for individual pupils' learning and participation together with achievement.

Conclusion

Recently I asked the class if the idea of leaving pencils is good and really helping. Pupils said it was very good and has really helped. I asked the reasons for their answer. The following were reasons given:

- Everyone is now writing.
 - No one can give an excuse of not having a pencil.
 - We are free to use each other's pencils in a group.
 - It has brought unity and co-operation
 - Each group is fighting to have more pencils in their container and long ones.
 - When it comes to asking for a rubber, noise is no longer there as nearly every group has a rubber or rubbers.
-

Twinning

In Mpika, Child-to-Child methodologies (such as twinning pupils) have been used for many years. Initially it was a way of developing health education in schools and communities, but more recently has also been used to assist with the process of inclusive education. In this instance the method has been used to improve the inclusion of certain children in mainstream classes, mainly by twinning a disabled child with a non-disabled child, or a 'slow learner' with a 'fast learner'.

By Theresa M Milandile, Kabale Basic School

Twinning is one of the strategies used in my (all girls) class in order to strengthen co-operative group learning amongst the pupils. I decided to do this because faster learners refused to explain things to their friends who were not able to read. So this twinning was done in order to help them in reading and writing. When I introduced twinning, girls refused entirely. They said the following things:

- Where are they when you are teaching?
- They won't be concentrating when you are teaching.

So I decided to revise a topic in RE on co-operation. I asked them to discuss in their groups the importance of co-operation. They gave the following answers from groups:

- helps us to work together
- if you help your friend you may be helped also
- helps to help each other in class
- we cannot have problems
- when your friend has no pen you can help her
- if you're sick your friend can help you at home
- if you fall down and have a cut your friend can help you
- if your friend doesn't know the subject you are writing you can tell her how to do it.

When the group leaders were reporting to the class we discussed on each and every item. When I again talked about twinning it was not difficult for me to pair the faster learners with the slower learners. This was because the girls understood the importance of working together.

When I grouped them and gave them books to read it was not easy. The slow learners felt shy and they refused to be taught how to read by their friends. When I asked them why they were doing so the slower learners said

- They shout at us when we fail to read.
- They beat us when we fail to read.
- They laugh and tease us when we fail to read.

So I asked the girls to tell me why they were doing this to the slower learners. They said

- If you tell them to read 'mother' and she says 'other' we beat.
- It's too much work.
- It's tiresome.
- The work is difficult.

I again proceeded with the lesson, in Bemba, on co-operation. What can we do to help our friends read.

The girls discussed the following and wrote in their Bemba books.

- Encourage them in a good way.
- Give them simple words that they can read.
- Group leader to check that all have written.
- We should love each other.
- We should play together in class.
- We should read together in class.

When the group leaders were asked why they have liked twinning they said not only were they helping their friends but they were also learning from their friends. Since the establishment of twinning the following four girls are able to read some words. These are:-

- Susan
- Rachel
- Monica
- Edith

Susan is a group leader for slower learners. When a concept has been explained it is her duty to explain to her fellow friends who have not understood. Monica is one of the most improved girls. She is the most helpful girl in class and more especially in mathematics where she is doing very well.

I also asked them if we could continue with twinning. They all accepted.

When I asked them why the group leaders said:

- Because if you're sick they cannot fail to write and report to the class.
- Because they are able to tell us also on what to do.
- We feel happy when we see them reading.

However there is need to work on the following challenges:

- how to help three other girls read and write a few words and sentences
- how to encourage pupils to meet after classes in their groups at their homes (it's difficult to meet at home due to household chores).

Extract from an account by J. Katongo Mbaale, Marrien M. Mauluka, Bernad K. Sinzumwa and Joseph Zulu, Musakanya Basic School

Many children have individual needs. To meet some of those needs, twinning was introduced in the school. This is where slow learners are paired with a fast learner. It may be within the class or outside the class (inter-class). Pupils who are under inclusive learning are also twinned. This has resulted in the disabled pupils adapting to the school environment easily.

For instance, James, who is mentally disabled, is now able to communicate with others. He also has some English words, which he has learned from friends, eg, if asked, "how are you", he is able to reply, "I'm okay." He likes supervising the class in sweeping and controlling the class from making noise.

He picks up words easily from his friends. They once reported him, saying that James was insulting them. The teacher defended him saying it was they who had made the insult and that he had picked these words up from them. He used to be shy, but he has undergone a great change. He's able to pray and conduct parades. He commands his friends, "tention," (attention). His twin has greatly helped him in all of this and twinning has been found to be an effective way of teaching.

Documenting in schools

By Doris Malwa Shibumba, Mpika Basic School

Documentation is a very demanding piece of work, which needs people to be dedicated. In spite of its nature our school is managing. This has all been because of the kind of teachers and the environment in which this is done. Our school has a rather free atmosphere to work in.

We have a good number of records which we keep in the school. This has been prompted by the number of activities which go on in the school. This is an important issue in the developmental aspect of the school. The documents are used in many different ways. One of the ways is that they are used as referrals.

Registers

These are a source of information for pupils attendance and enrolment.

Preparation/teaching files

These contain the actual preparations of lessons for a day, a week and for the whole term. In this a teacher evaluates work done and individual pupil performance. It also determines the way forward.

PAGE programme records

These records are basically for the advancement of the girl child. It is very particular about the girls' performance. Workshop and executive meetings reports and minutes are also kept.

Twinning records

These are records of how children have been paired and activities which are being done in the school.

MIEP Programme

Records for all children with special needs are kept and also the research work done is recorded.

Diaries

These are the records of daily occurrences by both the pupils and the teachers.

Log book

Records of visitors are kept and they also leave their observations and comments.

Our school keeps a lot of written information. This has helped our school to move forward and to succeed in many endeavours.

Localisation

This case study shows that lessons and curricula which are adapted in line with local situations and needs are a useful way of engaging children and making their education seem more useful and relevant to their lives beyond school. Localising the curriculum in this way is part of Zambia's national education policy.

By Kaoma Mulenga, Kabale Basic School

In the effort to dynamise our school, we have tried to provide an opportunity for a child to be made aware of what exists in his environment. This is so that the behaviour of the children and survival skills between the school and the community will make the socialisation process complete.

Last year (2001), during my Family Pac lesson, my Grade 7 class as well as the parents and I were carrying out a discussion, when one parent said; *“...This was a very good lesson and the teacher was smartly dressed but some of his pupils are so badly dressed, wearing double clothes so that the inside one is scruffily seen.”* This is known as Ukubombasa.

As I reflected on that comment I wondered — for I could understand their opinion — “Why doesn’t the teacher teach them about good dressing?” I had always thought that my task was to teach only science, mathematics, English and not about dressing. Thus, I began to realise that if my teaching was to be meaningful to the learner, I was to meet the community’s expectations.

But first, I had to find out from the pupils why they liked Ukubombasa and this is what they told me:

We wear this...

- due to the coldness, so that we are warm
- in order to appear fat
- sometimes when we are wearing transparent material
- when we are not wearing any pants – even if we are not wearing any pants, when it is windy or you fall down (as a girl) and your dress is blown up your body, no one will see anything if you wear Ukubombasa
- when putting on clothes which are too loose
- to show off what I am wearing.

Based on what they had said, I realised that I had to localise the lesson from subjects like Zambian language on the topic ‘Wedding,’ and in social studies on ‘Development.’ On such topics we discussed what type of clothes are worn and why they put on such clothes. Traditional proverbs were looked at: “Imiti ikula; empanga,” meaning, “Growing trees make a forest.” We also discussed leadership, where they realised:

- they needed to inspire others to follow by example
- they might want to follow new ways of doing things, but tradition must also be taken into account.

From all of this, they understood the complaints of parents of their dressing; for they realised, if they are to be responsible citizens in future, they were to act as a team now. I am quite happy that one boy, who used to double his clothes came to me and said:

“I did not like wearing clothes (minus Ukubombasa), but now I am getting used to it, and what is more, my mother and father have come to appreciate my dressing and cleanliness. Father always praises me for that.”

B. Addressing barriers to participation

Girls' education

The issue of girls' education is on each school's agenda and is also being tackled as a national initiative by the government, through PAGE – the Programme for the Advancement of Girl-child Education. The stories below focus mainly on the impact that early pregnancy and marriage have on girls' education, and on what can be done to ensure these girls are not excluded.

Inclusion and the girl child mother

Combined from two papers by Joseph Zulu, Musakanya Basic School

I am a grade teacher for a Grade 9 girls' class at Musakanya Basic School in Mpika District of Zambia. I've been in the teaching profession for five years now.

Under the education policy for our nation, girls who stop school due to pregnancies have a right to come back to school. Despite having such a good policy in place, some girls come back to school but they stop on the way. Others stop school immediately they discover that they are pregnant. How can these children be maintained in school to ensure good progress in their academic work?

Purpose

- to find out why few girls are retained in school after delivery of babies
- to find out why most of those who are retained still do not complete their education
- to find solutions that can enable more girls to be retained and enable girl child mothers to adapt easily to the school environment.

Methods

- I interviewed some girl child mothers
- Some pupils who are non-mothers were interviewed
- I interviewed parents for the girl child mothers

- Class discussion — I used my class, Grade 9 girls.

Findings

- Some girls are not supported by their relations or parents in caring for the babies to allow the girl to go back to school.
- Girls who have been retained in school are made pregnant once more by their husbands or men responsible for the first pregnancy. The men fear to lose them in case they advance in education and therefore the only solution is to impregnate them again.
- Girl mothers who are retained and still in the same relationships have little say over their bodies and education due to the support they get from their boyfriends or husbands.
- Some just feel shy and lose self confidence in academic work and this finally leads to their dropping out of school. Those who fail to get any financial support to continue with their education just stay at home.
- Some parents prefer marrying their daughters than sending them back to school.

There are two girls in my class who are mothers. Naomi was retained in school after delivering and Joyce is on maternity leave. Commenting on their experiences, as a mother who is in school (in the case of Naomi) and as a pregnant girl who is in school (in the case of Joyce), they said,

“Our classmates always laugh at us. They also pass very bad comments saying that we are mothers and school is not our right place but home. Due to such comments at times we feel out of place and therefore feel like stopping school. Had it not been for you, sir, we would have stopped school. You encourage us a lot”.

The parents of the two girls have been very co-operative in the education of their children. Commenting on the issue, the uncle of Joyce said,

“I want her to complete her education for her mother stopped school in the same way despite being intelligent.”

The time when I talked to him over the buying of larger skirt for her niece to act as a maternity dress, he didn't hesitate but quickly bought.

Some parents I talked to concerning the education of girl child mothers said:

“It is a wastage of resources to send them to school for many of the girls do not complete due to pressures they encounter in caring for the babies. Relationships between the girl and the responsible man or boy doesn't end and therefore she is expected to become pregnant again. Where the girl is bright in class and the responsible man or boy didn't go far in education, there is fear. The man simply impregnates her again to discourage her progressing in school. She has little say over her body.”

One young woman who is now finally married stated,

“I had no power to deny him what he wanted because he is the one who was providing the material and financial support toward my education.”

According to the traditional beliefs of the Zambian society, it is believed that women are for childbearing and marriage. However, such attitudes are changing at a faster rate due to the coming of PAGE.

Solutions

- Girls who are retained in school need psycho-social counselling and also spiritual counselling to build their self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Classes which have girl child mothers need to be counselled so as to help their friends rather than discourage them.
- Parents need to be talked to on the importance of sending their children back to school and its advantages.
- Classmates who try to infringe the rights of the girl child mother should be dealt with (ie, punished and counselled).
- Girl child mothers need to be disciplined equally with the fellow pupils.
- Teachers must be sensitive to their needs (eg, emotional) and avoid language that can injure the child's emotions. They must also be encouraged to participate actively in school co-curriculum activities.

Achievements

I am very happy as a grade teacher of two girl child mothers. Due to continuous counsel, the girls have been very free to share their experiences. The academic performance for both girls is good and I hope they will not change. Joyce came to school till the last two days before delivering. She was never a regular absentee despite being in this situation. This has been my first time to encounter such an event. One would think the girl never cried when friends hurled bad comments during her pregnancy period. She even came to write her mock examination before the maternity leave ended. Parents have been talked to and they are very co-operative.

Impact

Classmates have also come to the realisation of their friends situations. Two girls who were punished for laughing at their friends even wrote letters of apology.

The girl child mothers also participate freely in class activities and co-curriculum activities, eg, Naomi likes poetry and Joyce is in the school Red Cross Society.

Challenges

Work that remains is to see to it that the girls write their Grade 9 exam this December and excel in their education. Girl child mothers must be identified

and be retained in school. In case of the lack of financial support, sponsorship needs to be looked for.

Conclusion

I learned a lot from this study. To ensure that girls receive good education there is need for enough material, financial, emotional and also spiritual counsel. To maintain these girls in school and to ensure positive results, teachers, parents, pupils and other members of the society must be talked to on the importance of the girls' education and on how to treat them. The way we relate to them can discourage or encourage them. Those who impregnate schoolgirls must be dealt with severely by the law. Teachers are fired from employment when found with such cases, why shouldn't this be extended to the members of the community.

Despite all the counselling done in the girls' class, there are still cases of girls involved in sexual relationships. One girl just aborted in July 2002 and she happened to be one of those who were laughing at Naomi and Joyce.

I was born innocent
Growing for me is not a blessing but a curse
When it comes to education, I am the last priority
I am told, "Educating you is wasting resources.
You were meant for child bearing."
Culture has also put me into a confinement.
Few don'ts for men, many don'ts for me.
Was my being female a mistake?
God protect me.
I can also be a nurse, a doctor, a lawyer, a scientist
A president, just to mention but a few.
Verse from a poem by Joseph Zulu, Musakanya Basic School

Girl child education

By Raidon Mutale, Mpika Basic School

The education of the girl child in Zambia and many parts of the world has been discussed at different forums. In these, reasons why girls stop school or perform less than the boys have been discussed and attempts to correct the situations have been made.

Girls spoken to (in my study) gave the following reasons why many stopped school .

- I stopped because both parents passed away and there was nobody to take care the family. I had no choice but to stop in order to care for the family.
- Lack of financial and material support was the reason for my stopping.
- Traditionally people in our village value marriage more than education of the girls. I stopped because I got married at 14 years (early marriage).
- When I became of age, teachers and toilet facilities at the school contributed greatly to my stoppage. Teachers words on big girls and especially in the presence of young ones was embarrassing, while toilet facilities were not girl friendly.
- I just stopped because my performance was below the expected standards.
- I was pregnant when I was in Grade 9 and I got married. (Ruth)

Attempts have been made by the Government to promote and encourage the girl child's education, for example:

- advocacy and sensitisation of all stakeholders including communities
- re-admitting out-of-school girls into schools, including girls who are out of school because of pregnancies or early marriage, divorced or not.

Ruth is such a pupil at Mpika Basic School. She is 18 years old and a mother of one, once married, re-admitted to our school in Grade 8. Ruth admitted that school life is not always easy if admitted back to school after going through marriage or being with a child because:

- fellow pupils mock and discuss you at any time
- teachers when talking always give you as an example
- teachers' words are in most cases disturbing
- one is forced to weep especially when one is embarrassed in the class by the teacher
- male teachers and boys take advantage of the situation and always propose love to you
- mistakes committed are a way of scolding and punishing you
- people always remind you of the past and this makes you think of stopping again
- when your child is sick, as a mother you are disturbed with your studies.

Josephine got pregnant whilst in Grade 7. The school allowed her to sit for her examination and she did well and qualified for Grade 8. She had given birth but the baby died due to illness. She was brought to school by her parents and re-admitted. Now her friend started to intimidate her. She called her a woman and said "Schools are not meant for women like you. Your child died of malnutrition due to your carelessness".

Rosemary Kawimbe Katongo, Mpika Basic School

Ruth also admits that performance in class depends on an individual girl. Some do better than those without children.

Teachers who were present during the head teacher's discussion with Ruth in the staff room, in the effort of encouraging her to continue pursuing her school told her:

- Concentrate on your studies and take whatever people say about you as a motivating factor to work hard at school.
- Accept to be used as a role model and an educator to other girls, to discourage other girls from falling prey of the same trap and to encourage girls who stopped school to go back to school
- Your child should be the motivating factor for you to work hard as you are responsible for his life and his future.
- Accept that you have a child and that people in communities and at school would continue to discuss you in the effort of discouraging or encouraging you from continuing with your education.
- You must be positive about your life.

Challenges

- discover some more girls with children admitted back to school
- keep a comprehensive progressive school report of Ruth and other girls
- how to help these girls progress in their education financially and materially, especially those from vulnerable families
- how to convince parents with daughters with similar problems and also husbands to allow their wives to pursue their education.

Way forward

- continue with advocacy and sensitisation to communities on the need to have girls with children retained in school
- keep a comprehensive school report of these girls at school
- continue offering counselling and guidance to these girls and their families on a regular basis
- keep a chart of their photos [with girls' permission] and their achievements for all stakeholders to help in promoting girls' education.

The school gives a chance of a platform where women are encouraged to be assertive and to put their foot down and be counted in the professional advancement. Programmes are put in place to help the girls do well in their studies. With sensitisation of both parents and girl children the girls are encouraged to study hard, especially in subjects like maths and science... With sensitisation the fruits can easily be seen in the school.

Loveness Chonya Zgambo, Mpika Basic School

Disabled children and children with learning difficulties

The Mpika Inclusive Education Project has been particularly important in encouraging the inclusion of disabled children. Using Child-to-Child methodology the project has promoted 'democratic' classrooms and disabled children's right to education. The Zambian policy document of 1996 — 'Educating our Future' — also emphasised the right of access to, and participation in, the education system for every individual child. The following accounts illustrate some of the work that has been done towards the goal of including disabled children and children with learning difficulties in the schools.

Inclusive schooling

By Priscilla C. Liwakala, Kabale Basic School

Introduction

Inclusive schooling is teaching able children and learners with special needs or learning difficulties. At Kabale Basic School, we have dynamised our school by practising inclusive schooling very seriously for some years now.

Purpose

To identify those children with learning difficulties and find ways of acquiring knowledge and life skills to sustain their lives in future.

Problem

Patience aged seven was not able to write properly.

Reasons

She had bent bones both in her legs and hands. This resulted in stunted growth, she is very quiet, cannot work properly and she's short.

Child's experience in the unit

When Patience was at the special unit that had existed within Kabale Basic School she said that she never used to learn mathematics. Most of the times when the teacher was outside the class, she witnessed the deaf pupils

fighting. Despite her physical problem, she was writing from the desk just like others

Teacher's experiences

Upon receiving Patience in my class I had the following fear: I had a strong feeling that Patience's problem cannot be handled by me for a simple reason that I am not trained in special education hence the problem seemed to be a bit complicated for me.

Secondly, other members of staff who felt that they cannot teach children with special needs believed that I was overloading my work in order for Patience's work to be prepared.

Thirdly, I also had some reactions from a pupil in my class. She asked me, "Why should we learn with Patience in the mainstream and yet there is a unit?" Well, this was really a challenging question I could not completely answer there and then. However I had an opportunity of explaining to my pupils about disability.

Process

In order to solve some problems Patience was facing, the following steps were taken:

I created a friendly environment with Patience such that I used to spend some time every day with her discussing various issues concerning her personal experiences due to her disability. This included how she eats at home, plays with friends, if she can dance and sing.

Having identified Patience's problems, my main target was how to improve her handwriting. Firstly I improvised two infant chairs specifically for her to be using whenever there are activities of drawing or writing in her exercise books. I did so because due to her disability, normal desks are too high for her. As a result, she used to stretch her hands and used a lot of energy to scribble something readable.

I also ensured that I prepared some RE and story telling lessons to discuss with pupils the importance of having friends, loving one another and helping each other in a community. Also what we learn from our churches.

Being a New Breakthrough Literacy (NBTL) teacher, I was very much challenged to go through this process because I was determined to do so. Having in mind those four NBTL ability groups, Patience belonged to Group 3 being assessed. Because of her disability I did not exclude her during discussions and 'teaching corner' only during writing and drawing. I made it a point that she must always sit in front since she's short and cannot fold her legs when sitting in the 'teaching corner'.

Personal experience from Patience

After teaching Patience for two terms now, she was able to say that “I like your class because we learn mathematics, draw animals and people, sing songs in English, go for PE and are assessed by reading words”. The words or comments I heard from Patience clearly showed me that the learning process has taken place for Patience.

Evidence of impact

Having gone through a process mentioned, I observed the following fruits:-

Patience is able to associate with other friends in class freely. Her handwriting has improved a bit in that it is more visible than before. She is able to copy certain words correctly, and she is able to write numerals from 1–10 with less difficulties.

Way forward

In most cases, teachers lack self-confidence in themselves on how to try and implement other people’s ideas that they share. But as teachers we must be dynamic in order to solve some problem that hinders our progress in our classroom.

The school should improve the infrastructure in the school to assist the special children and adequate materials to enhance their learning life skills. Teachers should have self-confidence when handling pupils with special needs. Also parents should play a pivotal role of being positive towards their children with special needs.

Challenges

- how to reach the other pupils who have learning difficulties and are still in their homes
 - how to meet parents who are so negative towards their children with special needs
 - how to find ways and means of finding materials like crayons and plain papers and colours to help children sustain their lives.
-

Communication between hearing and hearing impaired children

By Bernad K. Sinzumuna, Musakanya Basic School

First and foremost, it is the government's policy that each school must have a production unit, where practical skills, arts/crafts, etc, are taught. However, having time to observe and study the behaviour of children with hearing impairments and the hearing ones has awarded me an opportunity to give facts about their working relationship, in terms of social, communication (language) and indeed knowing each other well.

The hearing impaired children naturally keep away from the hearing ones because they are always suspicious that the hearing children are gossiping about them. So if someone wants to get them closer then they have to perform their best social factors; learn their language with much interest, and involve them in various activities, like the production unit. Whilst doing such activities there will be communication going on. And this was the best approach when observing the hearing impaired children working together with the hearing children.

I interviewed both the deaf and the hearing impaired pupils about how they felt about one another, when they were in the production unit. Bernard, who is hearing impaired, confirmed that at first he did not like to mix with the hearing pupils but then he said that he was free with all those he was working with. Judith, who is a hearing child and prefect, confirmed that she was very comfortable with the deaf children and that she has learnt a good amount of sign language. She has found out that supervising the hearing impaired children was as easy as anything.

Two hearing impaired girls, Victoria and Anne, have made friends with the hearing girls and they sometimes visit these friends at their homes. Hearing pupils (girls) also visit them on weekends, which is a very new and special development that has taken place.

Martin is one boy who has worked with the deaf children during production unit lessons and he had this to say, "The deaf children are very friendly people as opposed to my earlier attitude. I have even made friends and I have even known how to call them by name. They have taught me some names of colours like green, brown, blue and a few others."

The teacher in charge of the production unit for the hearing impaired and the hearing pupils had this to say, "I am very impressed with the manner the two groups have come to work together and communicate so easily. At first, I thought that this could not work since there may be resistance from the hearing impaired children who did not like the presence of their learning counterparts. Eventually, I started to see conversations going on smoothly, using sign language. Where a hearing pupil could not get something, the deaf

pupils would write down his opinion for the hearing person to see and understand. The blossoming of vegetables (in the garden) ever intensified the relationship between the pupils. They could come over on weekends to do the watering. The hearing impaired pupils could even escort the others. So this seems to be a wonderful development.”

Other teachers did not know what was going on at first. They started to find out. One teacher had this to say after being on duty and observing what was going on. “I thought the vegetable garden near the deaf hostel was being managed by the deaf themselves, but to my surprise I even found the hearing children working there. Communication was also going on smoothly with less difficulty. This is a very encouraging situation and I hope this be extended to other school activities.”

The relationship between the hearing and hearing impaired pupils has improved tremendously in the last few years. This has been created by making the two groups of people work together in areas like the production unit. As a school, we would like to include all our children (disabled or not disabled) in most of our school activities. This time, if anyone came into the school they would not notice the different groups of children that there are, because they all look like one and the same people.

Daniel — a case study

By Bernad K. Sinzumwa, Musakanya Basic School

What are my challenges?

I begin this case study by a question looking at what challenges Daniel has in life. Daniel is physically disabled and he is unable to move without the use of callipers and crutches. His disability was a result of suffering from poliomyelitis. Daniel is about 15 years old and he is mentally well.

During the year 2000, the school had initiated outreach programmes (under MIEP), identifying all the children who had various problems which make them not attend school. The school had targeted children with disabilities so that they could be included in school. So Daniel’s name surfaced in the teachers’ minds and they made a visit to Daniel’s home. “We have come to see you, parents of Daniel, because we want him at school,” the leader of the visiting group began.

Both parents upon hearing this showed a grin on their faces and the father cleared his voice and said, “Well, I think ladies and gentlemen we as parents shall be very grateful because the boy has been here doing nothing since we as parents failed to send him back to the school for the physically disabled children. Since we could not afford to send him we thought that was the end

for the boy's education." The father of the boy said quite a lot of things concerning the boy and therefore on his request he did not even waste any more time but simply agreed to the idea. Everything went on well and the boy was included in school.

At the time when the BBC crew came to film the activities of MIEP, something was noticed in the life of the boy. They wanted to interview him but when I went to inform him about the programme I found the boy crawling. Why crawl? He did not have callipers — the callipers were taken for repair by his father — and he was told that his father would not come back until the sun sets, because he had other things to do where he went.

I asked him if he could not just use crutches and he told me, "I cannot move without callipers, I need both the callipers and crutches there." I asked him if this was a common problem and he said, "Sir, my parents are poor and therefore even welding these callipers is not easy. Sometimes it takes days for them to be repaired due to lack of money and this means that all these days I should not report to school." The mother came and found us still discussing. I decided to go and look for the bicycle so that I could come and collect him to attend the interview and that's what I did for the two days the BBC crew was at our school.

After a few days I saw Daniel coming to school as usual and I thought things were again back to normal. Days went by until the time we had a visitor for the evaluation programme for MIEP. I went to Daniel's home to invite him together with his parents. Daniel had gone to play with friends at the neighbourhood. His young brother ran to go and tell him that I had come. Before he came his mother had this to say, "This boy has problems when going to the toilet and moving about in the surrounding where people urinate anyhow." The reason was that the boy cannot get into the toilet with crutches and therefore his mother gives him her plastic shoes for him to wear on his hands since he crawls. I was very sad to hear this and I asked the boy what he does when going to the toilet at school and he had this to say, "I have never used toilets that are there at school because there is nothing that I can wear on my hands there." His mother also told me that, "The father does not want to dine with him since he crawls all over the place with bare hands." This was another issue and when leaving I asked Daniel's mother to tell her husband to come to school so that we discuss.

Fortunately enough he came to meet our visitors and before that I had the discussion with him about Daniel's problems and why he does not want to dine with him. The father said, "Well, on the issue of mobility of my son, it's true that the boy's moving equipment is not in good order most of the time and in most cases he just crawls." On the question of him refusing to eat with Daniel he said it was not true. At one time he told him if he does not use crutches to move around in the compound then it's better for the boy to stop dining with him for there is a lot of dirt around. And, according to what I gathered, the boy sometimes refuses to use crutches and callipers. He prefers to crawl than to use crutches.

Hence, this case study still continues especially on the question of making suitable conditions for easy movement in the toilet both at school and at home. What should be the best way to treat this situation?

Precious — a case study

By Joseph Kasitu Silupya, Nyanji Middle Basic School

Purpose

The purpose of this action research was to encourage parents who have disabled children to have better attitudes towards them, and explore reasons why these children are being neglected. This action research is aimed to involve the parents of Precious to participate fully in order to solve the problem.

Process

In the action research, the following activities were carried out and I listened to parents, Precious, teachers and Precious's friends

Discussion with Precious/friends

Before I could meet the parents, I used to hold discussions with Precious. One day I asked her why she had no uniform and books. She simply told me that the parents hate her that is why they don't even buy her all these school requirements. I got concerned and tried to ask her friends what they know about Precious and her parents. To my surprise, they told me that the parents are not free to talk about Precious. The parents used to say that they felt shy talking about her. These are some of the sentiments that prompted me to make sure I meet the parents.

Discussion with the parents

The first discussion I had with Precious's mother was at school. I asked her why Precious is so backward and why they had not paid school fees for her up to that time.

The mother explained why she was backward. At the age of four months she fell off the bed and sustained a very serious head injury. At the age of one year, other children seriously burned her while the mother was away. At the age of two and a half years, she was attacked by serious pneumonia. She was in hospital for at least three weeks. The mother further explained that after all these events her memory and speech had been affected greatly.

Why they had not paid school fees for her: the mother simply said it was due to economic pressure. She promised to pay at the end of the month.

Next I paid them a visit. At home I had a discussion with both parents. The mother introduced me to the father and went through the discussion we had at school in a brief form. The father concurred with all that the wife had narrated to me at school. He also added that, though her academic performance had not been that good, Precious was so good at routine work such as washing plates and sweeping the house.

After this, I asked them what they were thinking would improve her academic performance. The father answered "First we are going to buy her a uniform so that she becomes free to mingle with her friends. Secondly, we are going to encourage her in some private studies (private tuition)".

In a nutshell this is what came out of the visits/discussion:

The parents promised to:

- buy her uniform, including all the other school requirements
- monitor her school work
- engage her in private studies.

Teacher (class) and teachers (others) should:

- protect her from mockery
- help her in her school work.

Precious's friends should:

- accept her as one of them, just like any other
- not make fun of her
- help her in school work.

Teacher reflection through discussion

Towards the end of the study, I was encouraged to reflect on my work through a discussion with the head teacher. She started by commenting on the appearance of the girl as opposed to how she used to appear previously. She also commended me for having called the parents to school saying if I had not done so, the child was may even stop school. As a result of this process of reflection, I have been encouraged not to loose touch with Precious's parents as this keeps me informed about everything affecting Precious.

Evidence of impact

School requirements: the parents have brought her a uniform. At least now she comes with enough school requirements, ie, books, pens and pencils. As for private tuition, she has not started yet.

Lessons learned

Good communication leads to good and improved relationships. Teachers have to be friendly to parents and children. Parents should make it a habit to be visiting the school. This gives them the latest behaviour and academic performance of their child rather than relying on past failures or successes or

behaviours. Teachers also should regularly be visiting parents. Only when the rapport with the teachers is improved will the parents be able to open up and give out reliable information and implement what they promise.

Challenges

- how to reach the parents of the child for the first time
 - how to bring Precious close to me so that she could open up
 - how to approach the parents in a more friendly and professional manner.
-

HIV/AIDS³ and orphans

The accounts presented below have begun to look at the issues around HIV/AIDS, which can have a significant impact on children's education. The first two accounts detail pieces of research carried out with pupils to identify knowledge of HIV and to identify children who are absent from school, due to HIV-related reasons. These are useful first steps towards finding out how HIV/AIDS is affecting the pupils and their education or school attendance. Action could then be taken to make sure that affected pupils are not excluded from education or that infected pupils and their families are receiving appropriate information and support. The third account, although primarily about absenteeism, also highlights the particular situation of orphans who have lost their parents due to HIV/AIDS.

³ Not all of the comments captured in these accounts present accurate information about HIV/AIDS. Readers should verify facts using other sources of information. Please contact EENET if you need help finding this information.

Discussion on HIV/AIDS

By D.C. Mumbo, Kabale Basic School

What are the main issues the world is worried about?

This is the question I asked Grades 3 and 4 classes in my journey of exploring children's experience on HIV/AIDS. Children discussed this question in groups of five, three and two. Their answers were:

- poverty – lack of food
- diseases
- witchcraft
- death
- poor clothing.

After brainstorming, ranking and voting, the children voted for death as the biggest worry, seconded by diseases, from which HIV/AIDS came out amongst diseases. Children discussed how to tell that someone is suffering from HIV/AIDS. They thought one can get HIV/AIDS through:

- razor blade sharing
- food sharing
- promiscuity (sex)
- one girl said, "I cannot share food or bed with one having HIV/AIDS".

I undertook research to find out pupils that have come back to Mpika [from Lusaka and the Copperbelt] due to sickness or death of their parents. I found that in most classes about 75% of pupils returned due to these two problems.
*Marrien M. Mauluka,
Musakanya Basic School*

Who discusses HIV/AIDS with parents and what do you discuss?

Grade 4 class said, "We do not talk about AIDS with parents. Our parents switch off TVs when AIDS related issues come on" they lamented with disappointment.

In a Grade 3 class of 75 children, only one boy and four girls said they have talked about HIV/AIDS with parents. The boy said, "my parents tell us to avoid girls who may be HIV positive." A girl said, "Daddy and Mummy ask us questions about AIDS in the evening."

Assignments

Children from Grades 3 and 4 — who number 165 — will go and request their parents and guardians to help them formulate five questions for each child on HIV/AIDS to come and discuss at school the following week.

Teachers' task

Sr Patela, Mrs M. Bwalya and I, have to prepare the conference for the Big Sharing, to take note of children's feelings, parents' reactions and comments for an action plan to be developed.

Kabale Basic School rises to HIV/AIDS challenges

Now the whole world is sick of one disease – HIV/AIDS. Zambia is not an exception. Of its population, about 21 per cent is HIV/AIDS infected. So the Minister of Education has written to all educational institutions to take a step in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Of the 40 classes in the school, I have been to 12 classes to discuss and share with learners on their experiences of HIV/AIDS. I have also been to 20 classes to listen to learners on how they feel about life issues happening around them at school and at home.

My experience for this sharing is coming from my active involvement in Child-to-Child programmes, psycho-social life skills and behaviour change education.

Lower grades have one way of looking at HIV/AIDS, while upper grades have a different view of HIV/AIDS. Young boys and girls had this to say:

- AIDS is a disease for adults. (Grade 1 pupil)
- AIDS has killed my brother. (Grade 2 pupil)
- AIDS makes many people sick. (Grade 2 pupil)
- Many said that HIV/AIDS is a disease for prostitutes. They are concerned with the razor blades they share at school, the food they share. AIDS is seen to be far away from them.

While discussing and sharing on HIV/AIDS (modes of infection, its incubation period and its complications) with big boys and girls in Grades 7 – 9, their views were:

- AIDS is preventable as long as we control our sexual feelings. (Grade 9 pupil)
- Boys persuade us into sex with their sweet words. (Grade 8 pupil)
- Boys propose sex to us and it is difficult for us to refuse especially they even give us some gifts. (most Grade 6 girls)
- HIV/AIDS will just kill us, if no one helps us on how to deal with our sexual sensations when we see girls' thighs, or beautiful girls smile at us. (most Grade 8 boys)
- Condoms are difficult to use because we have sex at night, we do not read instructions, we have sex in the grass. (boys)
- We feel shy to negotiate for safer sex. Some adult men do not want to use condoms, they prefer 'live' sex. (girls)
- You cannot ask your parents questions about sex, it is a taboo. (Grade 8 boy)
- We are wasting our time sitting on hard desks if we will die of AIDS. (Grade 9 girl).

However, discussions are challenging school pupils to open up, to explore their feelings, convictions and realities. They are bringing realisations they have to be assertive as one faces situations of life and death. A need for children to discuss sexuality with their parents and teachers is there now. The long term impact of HIV/AIDS is being felt by pupils, hence, the need to learn more about HIV/AIDS and do more positive activities to help others. Five of the Grade 8 pupils cried during the sharing session, as they said two have already lost their parents and three have parents who are bedridden.

HIV/AIDS: Everyone is either affected or infected

By Loveness Chonya Zgambo, Mpika Basic School

Purpose

To identify boys and girls who are either infected or affected with HIV. In the society we are living in today every family has these cases within them. This was also a way of finding out how we could help society accept these issues.

The boys in Grade 8B were asked to look at why boys in Grade 3B were constantly absent. This class went flat out looking at problems that were causing this. Finally we came to a conclusion that some boys were sick either because of poverty or infection like HIV/AIDS.

Process

The boys in 8B were twinned with the boys in 3B.

After the twinning, evaluations were made that some boys were usually absent from school. The reasons were as follows:

- sickness
- hunger
- financial problems
- laziness
- funerals
- school fees.

After these evaluations we realised that usually pupils were sick, hungry or attending a funeral. We went on together to see what was top on the list and was affecting a lot of the pupils. It was at this time that the boys who were sick most of the time were identified, this is where we are now at.

During the next session we made contact with one boy who was in Grade 3B as at the year 2001. He started school in 1997 at Mpika Basic school. He has repeated three times. He comes from a family of three. His father had married three wives but later divorced the mother to the boy. The lady later travelled to

Lusaka and got married to another gentleman. Unfortunately this lady died in 1999. The boy started living with his grandmother. He was constantly ill.

I visited the home where this boy was staying. His father who at this time was living with his third wife was also not very healthy. He had worked for the district council. The situation was so bad for the boy who was always sick. The grandmother, who sells tobacco at our local market, explained a lot of things. The old woman said the boy was always having a cough and the hospital had put him on TB treatment and he had constant diarrhoea.

I took the trouble to help this boy although it was very difficult for me because this child was in very bad shape. I made an effort to talk to the health personnel who were of help to me. The boy has been on and off with his illness. I tried to give him extra lessons so that he could make it with the others in the class. This child has been living in misery. I have tried to counsel him at least to help him understand his position. The child needs a high protein diet. I do sometimes assist in a very little way.

Evidence of impact

The boy's parents (after being talked to) accepted the state of the child and realised the importance of healthy living towards a positive change.

The boy was also counselled to know his status and he knows exactly what it means. His friends were not sometimes helpful to him. But the members of staff stood up for him. After these discussions with both parents they promised to do the best for their child.

Lessons learned

There are a lot of times when teachers misinterpret situations. This study demonstrates how some children are troubled with other eventualities which make them sometimes neglected by society. This is also made a platform for teachers to teach a child as an individual and not a group of children.

Teachers must take the situation seriously as nearly all of us will either be infected or affected. Some parents need constant counselling so that they open up and share problems about this situation, because once a problem is shared, it's half way solved. Children are eager to help their friends who may be found in this predicament and give them moral support, at least make their friends feel welcome in the school. However, some children still feel they must not associate with such children.

Challenges

- How do we relate with the children who are sick? The task is big because some elements in society still feel uncomfortable living with sick people. How do we make children realise the importance of this, so that we use them to even educate the adults over this syndrome?

- How do we teach the parents of the sick children so that we help each other in making life easier for these children? Some situations are so bad that may be outsiders can be of help to such families.
- How do we develop ways of consulting guardians and parents to develop more positive ways of addressing this issue so that we all take it up as our responsibility to try and help each other?
- To formulate a club within the school and look at ways of educating people so that they really know what is going on and what should be done next. If children get the facts it will be easier to help the families and pupils who are sick.

On a sad note, the boy depicted in the study unfortunately passed away in June 2002. He was put to rest at our local grave yard. May his soul rest in peace.

Absenteeism - orphans

By Doris Malwa Shibumba, Mpika Basic School

Purpose

The purpose for this lesson was to encourage orphaned children, needy children and others to learn and use their right to education and use their responsibility towards the same.

Processes

In these action learning activities we heard from teachers, parents and children. The following table attempts to identify whose ideas were heard and whose were left out.

	Whose voices were heard	Whose voices were not heard
Brainstorm	Girls and boys in my class	Those boys and girls who were absent
Survey	Three girls who were at home	
Teacher reflection	myself	
Discussion	Five teachers including myself, 45 pupils in my class	Only five parents did not attend

Brainstorm

In August 2001 I introduced a discussion about children's rights as human rights. In particular I dealt very much on the education right (not as a privilege). This was done in a social studies lesson by brainstorming.

The rights identified were as follows in order of priority:

- the right to education
- the right to health
- the right to shelter
- the right to good food
- the right to life.

The children then identified the pupils who were usually absent from school. The list had about ten names. The class figured out one girl in particular with more days of absence.

Survey

In the next lesson I prepared my class for a home survey to follow up the girls and boys who had the highest number of absent days. To start with we arranged a home visit to one particular girl by the name of Violet. Her group members visited her but could not be accepted. The next time I sent her class twin to find out about her absenteeism from her guardian. This did not work out. I sent for her parents who did not come on two occasions until I made an effort to go to their home. I was dumbfounded when I reached the place because I only found the actual girl with two other smaller girls. They were busy sweeping and washing up. When I came face to face with them they all ran away but I managed to call them back after a good five minutes of waiting.

When they came back I tried to talk to them amicably until they felt free to at least say a word to me. The girls offered me a chair. I started probing. The girl told me that her grandmother keeps her and they are separated with the grandfather. Her father died in 1992. They went to live with the elder brother of her mother, since her mother was also sick suffering from HIV/AIDS and died in the same year.

The uncle to Violet could not go on keeping her with her two sisters because of financial problems. The grandmother who just sells at the market decided to take the girls into her house. They moved to her place in Chitulika village. Up to this time the girl stays with her grandmother.

At the time of the interview the grandmother was at the market selling fish. Asked as to why the girl is usually absent from school, she said her grandmother in most cases gives her a lot of household chores. She sometimes tells her that the girl has to work for her food. No work, no food. When she comes to school it means she will not have enough food to eat or simply won't have anything. She usually stays away from school in order to work for her food. I tried to suggest that she should wake up very early in the morning in order to finish up all the chores. She said if this is done some more work is given to her. So her grandmother does not simply want her to go to school. She beats her up and lets her sleep outside.

One day after the home visit I decided to visit the grandmother at her working place (the market). When she saw me she tried to show me that she was busy by tidying up her market stand, rearranging things and sweeping. I waited for her patiently and tried to help her with whatever she was doing.

She was not happy about it. Finally she settled down and we started our discussion. I tried to find out what makes Violet absent from school. She simply told me that Violet is quite big enough to know what is good or bad for herself. She said she also encourages her but to no avail. She said she was not happy about her absenteeism and said that if this continues she was going to send her original home. She pretended to be so good and responsible over her grandchild.

I decided that the only way to help this child academically was to send her work home any time she is absent. This was to be done through her twin and her group members. At times as a teacher I made follow ups.

There are quite many cases of this nature in my class so much so that it gives me as a teacher a big workload. Instead of progressing you regress. As you teach the children you make a way forward but when some absent themselves from school, they cannot be on the same level with the rest of the class. So as a teacher you make strategies for everyone to be covered. This is where you try to teach individual pupils at their pace. You give them extra work to do at home. Their group members and their twins help them. This way you try to make up for the lost periods. Sometimes this works well to some pupils and to some it doesn't.

Reflection

My challenges

As a teacher I should make it a point that I take registration every day, find out the background of each pupil and try by all means to visit each pupil's home and interact with the parents.

My fears

Most of the children who have lost a parent or parents are usually left out in our education system because they are often absent.

What I enjoyed most

The experience of interacting with guardians of some pupils and finding out what problems the children face.

What I have learnt as a result of this experience

To try by all means to handle each child as an individual and not collectively.

Participation and achievement

Most of the pupils who were away from school are not free to participate. They have started coming to school and in particular Violet has started coming to school and her grandmother at least is trying to come and check whether the girl is in school or not.

Lessons learned

I have learnt that a problem shared is a problem halved. Talking with parents/guardians makes the workload lighter. The main causes of absenteeism are,

negligence by parents/guardians, not knowing the importance of education and so many responsibilities pressed upon the children.

Challenges

- How to encourage pupils to come to school.
 - How to talk to parents of pupils with who we are going through very difficult conditions.
 - How to find better ways of approaching guardians/parents and finding more ways of including all the children in the school curriculum.
-

Age

This account highlights the issue of including children who have missed out on education early in life and begin attending school when they are older than most pupils in their class.

By Joyce Makasa, Kabale Basic School

Purpose

To carry out a documentation on a girl child named Charity who was very passive in class when she came to join my class in 2001.

Background

The girl was 19 years old when she joined Grade 6E. She was born in 1982. She is the first born in a family of four, but because of her father's death in 1991, when she had just entered her Grade 6, she could not continue her education. The mother could not afford to support her. For ten years she was just at home with her mother. Through a relative she was taken back to school in 2001 for Grade 6 here at Kabale Basic School.

Process

Upon her arrival to my class I took a keen interest in her. Reading activities she could not do. Handwriting was also not very good. Understanding of instruction was also a problem. Therefore I started with changing the sitting arrangement or grouping.

I asked Charity to choose where she could sit and feel free. By then all the pupils were brought in front. The bright pupils sat first one in each group. Then the average, and lastly the below average. This I did occasionally when

I noticed some slow backs. While I was doing this I asked Charity to choose someone she felt comfortable with, who can assist her, even at home. She chose Harriet who is among the bright ones. This also helped so much because she did not feel shy to ask. With some difficulties she could also come to my home where I tried to help in reading. More homework was given and the family also helped so that eventually she could do class reading practice and could write a passage on the board for the whole class to read through. After that the non-readers would go in front and be helped by a bright pupil with the teacher's guidance. Each pupil could try to read a sentence or more.

Lesson learned

Because Charity was very eager to learn she tried so much. Sometimes she could even write that passage in her book and read at home. From this term Charity is able to read from the board and lead other slow learners. She is also able to participate and interact with others freely.

Since she has started to read, by the end of this term she should be among the average pupils in performance. She should also score at least 50 per cent in her tests. Because she could even say that at least I can understand what you say in English and some of the words written for the exercises.

Having talked to Charity about her intention in life, she says that, if only she could finish her education despite her age, she could be the happiest in life. I encourage her that education has no age as long as you have a determination. "Education is more than once."

Conclusion

In order to come up with the stories in this document, teachers first identified challenges in their own schools. This was so because they wanted to improve presence, participation and achievement in their pupils. Some did this by focusing on an individual child while others were also interested in a group of children. They then searched for ways to help such children by sharing with other teachers the experiences they were going through. The sharing revealed better practices done by other teachers in the same environment. Most of them had even gone further to visit and consult the parents of the children under their care. Parents from the community also added value by contributing to the alternatives, which they felt were workable in their own ways. In some cases children contributed as well on what they felt could be ways of teaching them better.

Creating informal discussions where ideas could be shared easily was part of the support given to teachers. I tape-recorded some of their conversation and when played back a number of ideas arose. Interviews were held to discuss some of the best practices identified among them. The video documentation was another excitement, as this was revealing the uniqueness of individual teachers as they tried to demonstrate the best practice in their classes, and often this sparked debates to discuss further practice and alternatives. Some of the practice viewed on video was later developed by a group of teachers during GRACE meetings, demonstrating the skill of moving the practice forward.

The ideas in this document are not the end of the process. When teachers especially read their stories they continue reflecting, analysing and documenting their work. This is an ongoing process — some of the teachers have continued to write for sharing, and for others it has become part of the way of working in Mpika.

What has been of very much interest is that some of the teachers have taken these ideas forward by contributing to the teachers education department, using the ideas of reflecting and analysing, as learnt from this project. In the process they are becoming experts in their own local communities with their attempts at creating a change in the way they work. Others have started working actively within their local communities by engaging in programmes that support the development of children in their communities, the area which they had neglected before. The idea now is to involve more and more teachers and other people, especially children and parents.

The action research is now being incorporated into other areas of work such as the development of documentation work by school in-service providers. Teachers are trying to listen more to the voices of the children and parents in order to bring meaningful change in their schools. A workshop will be held, bringing all the teachers together to analyse and learn more from everything they have written so far. They will work together to identify more ways of listening to parents and children and to plan how to take forward the action research activities over the long term.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'PM', written in a cursive style.

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Researching our Experience

A collection of writings by teachers from

Chitulika School
Kabale Basic School
Mpika Basic School
Musakanya Basic School
Nyanji Middle Basic School

Mpika, Zambia

This publication contains almost 30 accounts written by ordinary teachers in Mpika Zambia. The teachers have participated in a two-year action research project, aimed at helping teachers, parents, pupils and other community members to analyse, reflect on and document their experiences of inclusion and exclusion in education, in order to work together to develop more inclusive practices in the future.

The accounts cover a range of issues, from the challenges posed by free primary education, to the participatory leadership and teaching methods used to implement inclusion for a range of marginalised children.

The accounts have undergone minimal editing and so offer a unique collection of writings through which the reader can experience the voices of ordinary teachers striving to bring about inclusion in their schools and communities.

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