

SOUTH AFRICA

Changing of Attitudes and Infusion of CRC in Policies of Mabatho Intermediate School Community

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1. Frame of Reference

Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of November 1989, in which South Africa ratified in subsequent years, the birth of a new country through democratically held election (27 April 1994) brought about the development of a new Constitution in 1996. Chapter 2 of the Constitution Act 108 of 1996 (Bill of Rights) protects the rights of every citizen including the child as a human being. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 gives provision for the protection of learners and the provision of quality in education.

The situation in most South African schools is not in line with the CRC principles on the 3 P: s: participation, provision and protection. The Free State Province with all 5 districts particularly Fezile Dabi District in which Mabatho Intermediate is located has managed to implement the following programs:

- a. Operation Hlasela (overall development of the community)
- b. National Nutrition School Program (free hot meals for every child at school)
- c. Hostel project (accommodation for learners from farm schools that were closed because of many different reasons)
- d. Learner transport (for learners traveling more than 5 km to and from school)

- e. Food parcels for vulnerable children (orphaned children and child headed families)
- f. School beautification (improvement of school buildings and surroundings)

Free State province is the only province in the country which has established a sub-directorate that is responsible for Values in Education. The main responsibility of this sub-directorate (unit) is the promotion and protection of human rights, promotion of all aspects of social cohesion in schools and also to promote and educate learners, parents, educators and officials about the importance of South Africa's national symbols. Our province, Free State has five districts and the district (Fezile Dabi) has two officials responsible for 259 schools that include Mabatho Intermediate School (school from grade 1 to grade 9). Despite the availability of legislation and resources in regards to the promotion of the 3 P: s in schools, the Mabatho school community has shown negative attitudes towards areas of their responsibilities. Educators, parents and departmental officials have in a way compromised on the rights of the children in Mabatho.



Mabatho is an Intermediate school in the township of Tumahole in Parys. The school starts from grade 1 and goes up to grade 9. The school started in 1951 and has gone over a period of changes. In 2006, Mabatho merged with another school (Diopelwa Primary). This caused many challenges: staff having to work together, values and attitudes from two schools had to be adjusted and there was a long period of time without a permanent principal. The new school (merged) had to move to another school (Phehellang Secondary) to share the building. Reasons for this move were firstly, the school was in an old part of the township which led to numbers declining. Secondly, Phehellang is a big school in the center of the township and with unoccupied classes so to avoid vandalism, the Department of Education moved Mabatho to those classes. In 2009 Me Mtimkulu (team member) was appointed as the new principal. In 2010 the school had a roll of 456 learners and 22 educators. The school shares the same building with Phehellang Secondary (the owners of the

building) which is a high school starting from grade 8 to and goes up to grade 12. Learners from this high school have free access to classes occupied by Mabatho because there is no fencing to separate the two schools. It is clear that the new principal had a number of challenges on her hands which also included an ageing staff. Most of them had been there from a long time and were negative to any changes, worse with a young and new principal.



2. Purpose

To promote a conducive teaching and learning environment for the enhancement of educator and learner performance at Mabatho Intermediate and surrounding schools in Fezile Dabi district, Free State Province through changes of attitudes and infusion of CRC in school policies.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The project focused on the changing of attitudes and values. An attitude-centered approach was employed as one strategy in order to attain the main aim of promoting a conducive learning and teaching environment. To achieve some measure of success we felt that we would need meetings and workshops. The situation that prevailed was as a result of individual attitudes of stakeholders towards each other and the schools' functions. The failure or success of our change work was based on four core principles: (1. non-discrimination; 2. the best interest of the child; 3. the right to life, survival and development; 4. respect for the views of the child) as espoused by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The combination of top down and bottom up approaches was expected to create a quality culture that would help to improve working relations of different parties involved with the Mabatho Intermediate School.

3.2 Meetings with Officials

There were two meetings held with the Officials from the department of Education concerning the project for change at Mabatho Intermediate School as from October 2010.

S'fiso presented a report at the strategic planning meeting for the Directorate: Values in Education and SYRAC held at the Aldam Resort in October 2010. At the plenary session, the Child Rights program was therefore infused as part of the Operational Plan for 2011/12 financial and academic year. This would mean that if we were to run a workshop for either learners or educators, we would be able to get funding from the department.

At the district a meeting was held between Patrick, Me Mabote, the District Director Fezile Dabi and the district management team (on CRC. This meeting was to give a report back from Sweden and to lobby support from the District Management. The meeting was successful because at the end, senior officials in the district were identified and mandated on behalf of the District Director to attend a meeting for the launching of the change project in Mabatho.

3.3 Meeting with Educators

There are three meetings organized with the Educators for the project for change at Mabatho.

- The first meeting was held on the 07th November 2010 with Educators from Mabatho, the district, Team South Africa (Janet, Patrick and S'fiso), the purpose was to launch the change project, to provide feedback from Swedish experiences and background on Child Rights Convention. The meeting agreed on a follow up meeting to be held with the teaching staff of both Mabatho Intermediate and Phehellang Secondary Schools because they share premises (school yard)
- The second meeting (follow up) was then held on the 11 March 2011. At this meeting the following were discussed:
 1. Background on CRC and the implications for South African schools.
 2. How do the 3Ps as espoused by CRC affect what educators should do in classrooms?
 3. How does every educator feature to the aspirations of the Convention, focusing in the best interest of the child?

At the end of this meeting with educators they agreed to do the following tasks that were agreed upon:

1. Take 3 school Policies (Own choice)
2. Discuss the above Policies and whether they address the 3Ps.

3. How can CRC and its 3 P: s be infused in the above chosen policies.

The third meeting held on the 16 May 2011 was to receive a feedback on which policies were studied. At the meeting the team observed that the exercise might not be fruitful because of the tense environment felt. The meeting was therefore changed to accord educators an opportunity to share experiences that were either positive or frustrating. During the meeting the following challenges facing Educators at Mabatho with discipline of learners were heard:

- ✓ Over age learners/ mixing with young learners influence them on bad behaviour such as disrespect and smoking cigarettes and dagga.
 - ✓ Lack of parental involvement especially where there is problem encountered with a learner's bad behaviour at school.
 - ✓ No alternatives to punishment that help to improve learners' conduct (Learners tend to enjoy any form of punishment – such as staying outside, cleaning toilets or detention).
 - ✓ Parents who are of the same age as educators or who went to school together with the educators that teach their children are sometimes ashamed to come to school.
 - ✓ Orphaned learners, child headed families because no one seems to care about what they do or how they behave.
 - ✓ Gangsterism, learners are part of gangs in the township and they bring their practices to the school and other learners
 - ✓ When learners come from initiation schools, they form gangs that are disruptive in the school
- Suggested alternatives by the meeting:
 - Form a committee of 4 educators to do home visits for the truant learners at least 2 times a week.
 - Have an intensive workshop with the RCL of the school
 - Attach the school to a Social Worker and Socio-pedagogue from education (Me Moroe) and SAPS (Sergeant Phera)
 - Constant meetings with learners: At least once a month Workshop with educators on Values in Education including Alternatives to Corporal Punishment
 - Involve learners in more activities particularly sports
 - Role modeling by educators

3.4. Meeting with the School Governing Body (SGB)

On the 3rd May a meeting between S'fiso and the SGB members did not take place because of non attendance on the part of SGB except that only two parents who were present for the meeting. As a result this meeting was postponed. The SGB is a committee elected by parents, educators and non-teaching staff. Their main responsibility is to deal with issues of governance. These include among others, drafting and adopting school policies, management of finances and making sure that the environment is conducive to teaching and learning. It was important to make sure that we meet with them because without them our change work would not succeed.

3.5. Workshop with Learning Facilitators

On 6 December 2010 the team organized a Child Rights Workshop for Learning Facilitators (LFs) from the Fezile Dabi District. This workshop did not go on because there was a strategic planning meeting for the District. Some learning facilitators had to attend that meeting. It was also important to meet with them because issues of CRC are covered by some subjects like Life Orientation and Social Sciences.

3.6 Workshop with Learners

Learners are the main target group within the school community as such the article 12 of the CRC is taken into cognizance, to respect the views of the child. It is therefore critical to ensure we also talk to them about CRC and also to make them aware that in most things that are happening in their school, they also need to be involved. We requested the two principals to give us learners from Grades 7-10 and we were given 31 learners i.e. 12 from Phehellang and 19 from Mabatho.

Issues which were discussed with learners were as follows;

1. Children's rights
2. School policies
3. Responsibilities

Questions posed to them were:

- Do you feel accepted in your school? If not why?
- Is your name /identity respected by others at school? Why?
- Are you as learners consulted when decisions are taken at school? Why? How?
- Are you also given enough time to play at school?
- Is corporal punishment still practiced at your school? By who? Why? How?

These learners were divided into 5 groups to discuss openly their responses to the questions. These are their responses clustered:

- Majority of them felt accepted at their schools and felt home.
- Few felt that they were not accepted because they were called names they did not feel comfortable with (Toti,dogs etc.).They strongly disliked the fact that their surnames were being made fun of.
- No consultation on decisions and they were not even aware of some policies.
- Not enough time to play because educators do not have time for them.
- Corporal punishment is still rife.
- Slapping, using a belt, stick on hands and bums, individuals responsible for choir and drama are the culprits.
- Reasons for being punished were among others - noise, late coming (even those staying far), no homework.

After this session, the facilitators stressed the importance of taking responsibility for their own learning. The Bill of responsibilities will be availed for each learner and there will be frequent consultations between educators and learners. They understood that this meeting was just a starting point and there is still a lot to do in order to improve the situation.

The team also had session with learners from Mabatho alone. We only took grade 7 to 9. The main aim was to establish if there had been any change since our last meeting. It was very clear that little had been done by learners themselves and educators to try and deal with challenges raised in our first meeting. My colleague (Mr Denga: Assistant Director, Values in Education) was also present to offer some assistance. We then divided the learners according to classes, each grade separately. What come out from these discussions with learners was that even if there is an RCL(Representative Council of Learners) elected by learners, it was not helping in any way. Instead some members of the RCL are also culprits of ill-discipline. Because we wanted everyone to feel that they are making a positive contribution, we then promised the RCL that we will assist them through workshops to be able to do what they have been elected to do. The duties and responsibilities of an RCL are among others, to assist with discipline, to form a communication link between learners and educators and also to be part of the SGB. It was clear that all these were not happening therefore our workshop and constant interaction was going to be vital.

3.7. Meeting with stakeholders

On the 12th October 2011 the team had a meeting with all stakeholders to discuss the admission policy of Mabatho Intermediate. The stakeholders present were the SGB (School Governing Body), Principals of other schools, Cosatu (Trade Union), Cosas (Learner Representative), Sadtu (Teacher's Union) SAPS and District Officials. The purpose of the meeting was to give all stakeholders the report of our training in Sweden as per our plan which did not materialize earlier and to ask for their inputs in the development of the school's admission policy. In this meeting a brief background on the project was outlined and unions had reservation about the pro-

ject. Unions were very skeptical about giving inputs on the school's policy as this is the competency of the SGB (School Governing Body) and according to the SASA (South African Schools Act), issues of policy development are the responsibility of the SGB.

The team explained that as much as the policy development was the competency of the SGB, this was in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and also as part of the project for change which we had initiated after our training in Sweden and also as per the request of the school principal as she was part of the team. The team had a lot of questions from the participants but mostly from the unions. The questions were in relation to the following:

1. The Schools' Act (SASA) put the responsibility of drafting and adopting the school policies!
2. What is the actual role of participants- is it to do the work of Mabatho SGB? What are the legal implications because a policy is legal document?
3. South African constitution does not address certain issues because (according to unions) it was a compromise constitution which does not clearly represent the issues of the majority.

It was then very clear that the team had to thoroughly explain the role of all participants;

- Participants will not be taking the functions of the SGB.
- Because South Africa has ratified the CRC, it then translates to say that our Constitution is in line with international law and therefore the participants will not be contravening any law. The project is part of a bigger team of participants who from batch 11 have gone to Sweden to learn and implement a Change Project (Work) in their respective countries.
- The role of participants in the meeting was to go through Mabatho admission policy and only make inputs. The team together with the school SGB will do the rest. This will include taking the inputs from the participants and then sit with the SGB to assist them to finalize the policy and finally the SGB will take it to the parents for adoption.

3.8 Mentor's visit

On the 27th October 2011 our mentor, Dr Bodil Rasmusson visited our country as part of a support and follow up visit. The four batches i.e. batches 12, 13 (our team), 14 and 15 were scheduled to meet with her in Bloemfontein on 29 and 30 October to give progress reports and to exchange ideas. Only batch 15 was not represented. This was a good exchange of ideas as our change projects are different but have a common denominator, children! So we could find some common ground as to how other teams went on with their work and we could learn from them. Dr Bodil was to stay in Bloemfontein until the 31st October 2011 and then travel to Parys in Fezile Dabi District to meet us from the 1st November to 04th November 2011.



From the 1st to the 3rd of November our mentor met with the District Management Team and other stakeholders. She was also taken on a tour to other schools to introduce the CRC and see the extent to which the country has moved in terms of child rights in education.

The reaction from the District Management Team, school principals, learners, educators and other stakeholders was positive. The educators of Mabatho were skeptical in the beginning of the week but because our mentor is a people's person, it was easy for some educators to speak to her. The mood was tense at the beginning of the meeting with all educators, but became better later. It was a bit relaxed during the cultural celebration held on the last day of her visit. The older educators (Me Nkoe and Me Sephapho)at the school approached the mentor and disclosed their appreciation for her visit. They also thanked her for the visit which has made it possible for the district management team to visit their school as this had never happened before.

As for learners, they were excited throughout the week. They were excited to learn that much of what their educators are doing on daily basis with them was in fact in the spirit of CRC. Their educators teach them, they also get meals and they get an opportunity to play as they showed during the cultural festival which was part of our mentor's farewell celebration. Even through the excitement of the mentor's visit, learners still told her that there were still challenges. They were still being punished using corporal punishment, they were still name called and they still had issues of consultation during decision making. It was clear that we still had a long way to go

as a school, team, district, province and the entire country in trying to instill the spirit of CRC.

Older learners (Mabatho) doing a traditional Tswana Dance during the Cultural festival



4. Results

The Child Rights program is now an integral part of the Operational Plan for 2011/2012 financial and academic year. This we believe will mean that whenever we meet as a sub-directorate, funds will be made available for work on child rights. Dates for workshops and meetings will form part of our year plan. Participation by both learners and educators was so impressive because they were both able to ventilate their frustrations. Some showed keen interest in their school policies even though it is evident that they never participated in the development of such. Given the success of these meetings, we are convinced that we are on the right track. We initially expected resistance but were humbled by the response and cooperation received. We did not expect to meet with vocal children and union leaders given the circumstances of the school. But their passion and eagerness to have their frustrations was emotionally moving. The CRC in our view is minimally understood. It just that educator, learners, parents and officials are not aware that much of what they are contributing is actually 16 in accordance with CRC. We feel that we need to make the convention as simple and livable/understandable as we can. We saw this when our mentor was here.

But in all this positive spirit articulated above, there are still some serious challenges with regard to understanding of CRC by everybody. If we look at our historical background and our patriarchal system, children were not allowed to actively take part in making decisions. So this generation of adults still need a lot of change of attitudes and accept that we are part of a global movement for the protection of children. When we discussed with educators, parents and stakeholders, it was also clear that they somehow felt that it is because of these rights that our children are

misbehaving and also why we are having these societal challenges. Lack of discipline, crime, teenage pregnancy and gangsterism are (according to this generation of adults) a result of talking about rights. Our challenge as a team was also to make them understand what human rights are and also in relation to CRC. Everyone is born with these rights.

We still feel that we have achieved some level of participation from all stakeholders and we have met some of our medium term goals. We still have to work on other policies in the school and also to intensify discussions on the concept of CRC in those schools that we met with our mentor. But our main challenge is still in Mabatho and we plan to continue with this change work.

5. Discussion and Reflections

The results of the success meetings and workshops held are a testimony that the project has achieved some level of awareness.. The team has also learnt that lack of communication between the **educators, learners** and **parents** contributes to the unfavorable environmental conditions of the school. We acknowledge that inadequate participation by parents (as with our first meeting with the SGB) affects both the learners and educators perceptions and attitudes.

Janet has also observed some improvements such as educators and learners are now able to approach her. There is visible support by educators to each other although it is still not satisfactory, but there is confidence enhanced by the new development.

The school does not provide sufficient **protection** for learners because older learners from Phehellang and non-learners have free access to the school premises and thereby bully the little ones from Mabatho. The school yard is a very big one with areas that are not well taken care of. Even if Janet has managed to build netball and basketball courts, it is still not enough. They also have to share those sport fields with learners from Phehellang. We have also suggested that the empty house in the school be occupied for security reasons. The other challenge is that this huge yard has many access points so it is easy for anyone to move from one end to another. Maltreatment and calling of learners names that are degrading and the use of corporal punishment are a testimony that they are not protected from abuse and non-law abiding educators because corporal punishment is illegal in South Africa and it is punishable offence (dismissal). Learners argued that they are not consulted on decisions that were taken about them, they felt excluded and would like to be involved and this indicated that non-participation in decision making such as school's code of conduct for learners accounts to some problems identified by educators The 3Ps of the convention are not satisfactorily adhered to although considered to a particular extent.

When we worked on the project, it was not easy to meet with everyone because either they were at work or unavailable for some reason. This was also applicable to us as a team because S'fiso is in Bloemfontein which is about 400 km from Patrick and Janet. Because S'fiso and Patrick are at the office, whenever they are supposed to travel, somebody must first approve their travelling and sometimes it was a serious challenge. So we could not meet as often as we wanted. Janet as the principal also had so much work to do. The officials from the department would always impose principals with issues ranging from staff allocation, admission of learners, workshops on a variety of management aspects, meetings and not to mention the challenges of running a school on a daily basis. The team has received some inputs from all the stakeholders whom we held meetings or workshops with. We must also say that it was not what we expected. Some were off the mark and others were constructive and helpful. The unions and educators from the school have positively contributed particularly on issues of orphaned learners. The school has a problem of children who want to be admitted without proper documents i.e birth certificates, clinic card and ID photos. So some contributions were in a way giving reprieve to those learners who do not have those documents. All of these inputs will be tabled at the SGB meeting to be held with new SGB for adoption by parents. This has been a serious challenge because as we are now in a phase where all SGB's are out of their term and therefore we are going to be working with new members. We hope that this will not be a problem if some parents from the old SGB are re-elected.

Looking back, we feel that our project was the correct one. Even if we have not achieved all our set objectives, we feel that we have created some level of awareness on CRC. This in our view is great achievement because all schools have an idea what CRC is. The learners from Mabatho were heard, educators also raised their frustration and parents were made aware that their lack of involvement is detrimental to their children. We could have maybe improved on our communication with regard to parents but we believe with this project the situation will improve. We are aware that in any change work, there will always be some form resistance. This may be due to number of reasons: lack of knowledge, fear of change and lack of correct information. We are also aware that we need the simplest method of making the community understand CRC in Mabatho, all Parys schools, all Free State schools and finally all schools in South Africa.

6. Way Forward

Because Mabatho is in Fezile Dabi, Patrick is the one who will have a close and regular contact with Mabatho. The work of the team will continue until all policies have been looked into and everyone has contributed to their review. It is also important to make sure that throughout this process, CRC is carried through. As part of our operational plan, workshops on a variety of issues have been scheduled. These will cover issues like alternatives to corporal punishment, an ideal school, human and child rights and values in education and the society. All these are targeting learners and educators in Fezile Dabi. Even if S'fiso will be involved most of the workshops will be run by Patrick and his colleague Denga. S'fiso will mostly be responsible for the Provincial ones. This shows that the relationship between the different administrative levels in the province is very important and it should be kept. During our sub-directorate meeting we all meet for our work but we also get a chance to share ideas about our projects. The network, which is very good, will achieve a lot of good work only if there are regular formal meetings to update and share with each other. As a province, we really feel that this global network and our own network as a country is a very good support and we will continue the work of CRC. With us as teams, it will be very difficult to say, we are done with the project and we stop: CRC is part of our job description so it means that even 'when the project is finished' we will still have to continue with the change work.

