

Learner-On-Learner Bullying In Schools, Myth Or Fact

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ABSTRACT : *The article explored the challenges experienced by Life Orientation teachers and learners with regard to the reality of dealing with school bullying. The participants in this article were Life Orientation teachers from public schools in Gauteng West District. The aim was to explore challenges experienced by Grade Nine Life Orientation teachers with regard to learner-on-learner bullying in Gauteng West District. Using Bronfenbrenner's (2008) bio-ecological systems theory we sought to understand the complexity of the influences, interactions and interrelationships between individual learners and multiple other systems connected to them. Due to the nature of the article, a qualitative design was chosen, taking a phenomenological approach because of its relevance to everyday life (Timm & Elkel-Bloklan 2011). The participants targeted for this article were six Life Orientation teachers from three high schools and the themes that emerged were types of bullying they observed; the contribution of the school environment to the vulnerability of learners; lack of adherence to school policies; and inadequate teacher training on bullying. Findings reflect how Life Orientation teachers face problems regarding bullying while they show resilience in dealing with the situation. It is therefore important for the (Life Orientation) teachers to be vigorously trained in counselling victims and perpetrators in order to contain the situation.*

KEYWORDS : *Bullying, Life Orientation, Emotional bullying, Physical bullying, Verbal bullying, Exclusion bullying, Cyber bullying and Indirect bullying.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Bullying in schools is a worldwide problem, which can have a negative impact on learner performance and the school environment. Bullying also interferes with and affects the rights of both learners and teachers because the school environment is dominated by lack of safety and fear. Although the Department of Education encourages safe schools and lifelong learning, bullying can have negative lifelong social, emotional, psychological and educational consequences both for perpetrators and for their victims (Collins, McAleay & Adamson 2004).

Bullying can be defined as intentional and repeated acts that are hurtful, that includes words or behaviour, such as name-calling, threatening others or shunning them. It may be committed by an individual or individuals against another individual or individuals (Neser, Van der Merwe, Morodi Ladikos & Prinsloo 2004). There are different kinds of bullying. Bullying can be of a sexual, physical or verbal nature. Emotional bullying includes terrorising, extorting, humiliating, blackmailing, rating/ranking of personal characteristics such as race, disability, or ethnicity, manipulating friendships, ostracising and peer pressure (Neser et al 2004). Sexual bullying includes many of the above as well as exhibition, sexual positioning, sexual harassment, and abuse involving actual physical contact. Physical bullying includes punching, poking, strangling, hair pulling, beating, tickling and direct vandalism. Verbal bullying includes acts such as hurtful name-calling, persistent teasing, gossiping and racism. Relational bullying occurs when the victim is deliberately excluded from activities (Neser et al 2004). Apart from the physically painful effects of bullying on the victim, bullying can have negative effects, such as exerting long-term and short-term psychological effects on both the bullies and their victims. Bullying behaviour has been linked to other forms of antisocial behaviour, that include vandalism, shoplifting, truancy from school, dropping out of school, fighting, harmful satanic practices and the use of drugs and alcohol in and after school. Garbarino and De Lara (2003) write that victims of bullying experience loneliness and often suffer humiliation, insecurity, loss of self-esteem and thoughts of suicide. Furthermore, bullying can interfere with a student's engagement with learning activities and learner performance in school.

II. MOTIVATION FOR THE ARTICLE

As authors who are involved with both secondary school learners and university students, we were influenced by various incidents and reports of bullying at schools and universities. In one of the incidents observed, Grade Nine learners were referred to the principal's office and the school safety committee after bullying behaviour had been identified. Both the principal and the school safety committee were criticized as having shown no remorse in dealing with the reported case on bullying. Learners who bully their fellow learners are reprimanded, but within a short time they repeat their act of bullying. Teachers feel helpless and principal cannot find a satisfactory solution to this recurring problem. There are also many other isolated cases of bullying in schools, but schools do not always report on these incidents.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem in this article is that bullying in schools is a serious challenge to both teachers and learners. Incidents reported in the South African media include one in which five teenagers were charged for allegedly smacking another teenager's private parts. The father of the victim said that the school authorities had tried to assist his son as best as they could, but they did not have the resources to make this stop. He laid charges with the police, hoping to end this type of behaviour, but without success (Nyakang, October 20, 2009, Pretoria News). Another incident was reported of a boy slashing a schoolmate's throat with a samurai sword (Seerane, June 15, 2009, Sowetan). These serious incidents of bullying occurred despite all schools having school safety committees and Life Orientation as a compulsory subject in all grades. Bullying is one of the topics which should be addressed in Life Orientation classes and the communities where the schools are. Addressing bullying should be addressed as part of education as a societal priority.

The problem statement of this article is:

- What are the challenges experienced by Life Orientation teachers with regard to learner-on-learner bullying amongst learners.

IV. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ARTICLE

The following aim of the study was formulated:

- The overall aim of this article is to explore challenges that are experienced by Life Orientation teachers with regard to learner-on-learner bullying amongst learners.
From this overall aim, the following research objectives were developed:
- To describe the challenges experienced by Life Orientation teachers with regard to learner-on-learner bullying amongst learners.
- To explain the role of Life Orientation teachers after an incident of bullying has occurred at school.
- To outline safeguards that can be put in place to prevent bullying at school.

V. RESEARCH DESIGN

The article followed a qualitative design, adopting an in-depth exploratory pattern and following a phenomenological approach that involved exploring challenges experienced by teachers with regard to bullying. The focus of this article was to explore experiences of Grade Nine Life Orientation teachers with regard to bullying, based on rich descriptions of their attitudes, feelings and the essence of their expressions. In this article interviews with six teachers were conducted. The six teachers had two and more years' experience in teaching Life Orientation in grade nine. The teachers were purposefully selected on a completely voluntary basis. Sampling was used to find six participants from six schools in Gauteng West District in Gauteng Province in South Africa. These participants were easily accessible (Robson 2003). These teachers came from township schools. We followed what Guba and Lincoln (1988) term "trustworthiness" of a study by proposing four criteria that are considered by qualitative researchers to be promoting trustworthiness in a study or article. Each of these criteria is explained as follows:

- **Credibility** :Guba and Lincoln (1988) define credibility as the adoption of appropriate, well recognised research methods. According to Merriam (1998) the qualitative investigator's equivalent concept, i.e. credibility, deals with the question," how congruent are the findings with reality?
- **Transferability**
Merriam (1998) states that transferability is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. Since the focus of this article is in a Gauteng West setting in South Africa, the schools themselves have their own uniqueness; therefore generalisation would not be applicable.

- **Dependability**
We ensured that the results of the article were dependable by involving someone who was not involved in the research to carry out an audit and check if the procedures we had used were appropriate and properly carried out.
- **Confirmability**
Following Guba and Lincoln's (1988) view on confirmability, diagrams were used to demonstrate the audit trail. All data collected was cross-checked and triangulated through member authors in order to check and minimise any bias of data. Fellow authors were involved in auditing and checking to ensure procedures were appropriate and properly carried out. We looked at how responses from participants were coded and how themes emerged.

VI. ELUCIDATION OF CONCEPTS

Microsystem

Bronfenbrenner (2008) describes the microsystem as the immediate environment in which proximal processes are played out. This system constitutes a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced between individuals and the systems in which they actively participate, such as the family, school or peer group. As will be discussed in later sections, the child's behaviour unfolds in a microsystem in which the development of the child is influenced by parents (Landsberg (2007).

Mesosystem

This involves a general lack of the correct problem-solving skills in communities, for instance the abuse of substances as a form of an escape from an individual's problems. The authors agree with Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2006), that the South African society no longer has the strong values and norms it used to have. Children do not show respect to authority or to other people, and thus bully other children with impunity. Parents and communities fail to control their children from home and these children commit acts of bullying at schools. Parents and the communities then blame schools as not being safe. Learners are from communities, and because the schools are part of the communities (Donald et al 2006). Many children tend to become unruly at school and the teachers are unable to discipline them effectively due to a lack of applicable disciplinary measures, or understanding of those available. They may also fail to understand the underlying causes of the bullying and so be unable to act to prevent it. One result is that unruly learners make it difficult for fruitful teaching and learning to take place. Parent-child interaction has been proven to be an important aspect of human development (Landsberg 2007). In the South African township and rural situation, the problem is that many parents spend very little time with their children due to work commitments. Quite often the children are alone and in charge of the family chores and matters until parents come back either late or at the end of the month. However, as Bronfenbrenner (2008) suggests, development and the influence a person gets cannot be limited to a single interaction or system. There are other systems that impact on the process development of a child or learner. Interaction with peers and teachers also plays a significant role in the way the child behaves both at home and at school. The mesosystem, as described by Bronfenbrenner (2008), comprises the links and processes taking place between two or more settings that contain the developing person, e.g., the relations between home and school, school and workplace. Bullying can occur in nearly any part in or around the school building, though it may occur more frequently during breaks, in hallways and toilets, on school buses and while waiting for buses, and in unsupervised classes or during after school activities (Petrosino, Guckenbug & De Voe 2010). Bullying in school sometimes consists of a group of learners taking advantage of or isolating one victim in particular and gaining the loyalty of bystanders who want to avoid becoming the next victim (Duke Stein & Zane 2010). These bullies may taunt and tease their target before physically bullying him or her. Bullying can also be perpetrated by teachers and the school system itself. There is an inherent power differential in the system that can easily prompt subtle or undisclosed abuse, humiliation, or exclusion, even while maintaining apparent commitments to a school's anti-bullying policy (Duke et al 2010).

Exosystem

The exosystem encompasses indirect factors that influence the life of a learner. Poverty has escalated in South Africa as a result of unemployment brought about by current uncontrollable strikes that lead to the closure of some mines and big business projects. During visits to schools the authors came to realize that many learners survive through feeding schemes created by the government. Some learners are ashamed to take part in school nutrition programmes because they may be viewed as poor by their peers. As Erickson (2001) maintains, some learners tend to feel inferior because of such experiences, and may resort to bullying as a way of boosting their egos.

Macrosystem

According to Bronfenbrenner (2008), the macrosystem consists of an overarching pattern of micro, meso, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other broader social context, with a particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in these systems. It is described as a societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture or other broader social context. Violent communities where there are constant service delivery strikes will thus contribute greatly to instances of bullying in the school communities because the violent activities of the communities influence learners or children negatively. As Harder and Arlene (2009) indicate, people's task is to discover who they are as individuals separate from family of origin and as members of a wider society. Unfortunately, in communities where there are high levels of crime, violence and drug abuse, learners find themselves surrounded and influenced by negative activities that contribute to learners becoming bullies.

Chronosystem

The last system Bronfenbrenner developed was the chronosystem, which involves the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the life course, as well as socio-historical circumstances. Bronfenbrenner (2005) further states that the chronosystem in a child's life has to do with the timing of events, number of events in a given time, the length of time of events, and perceptions of time over time. Its effects on the child should not be underestimated. The chronosystem has to do with asking the following questions:

- What effect does the timing of a specific event have on development, health and general wellbeing of the child?
- In what ways are the timing of societal events related to a child's behaviour?
- How do we know the effects of time in relation to the duration of bullying or being bullied?
- Why do individuals sharing experiences over time interpret them and respond to them in dramatically opposed ways?

Meaningful questions about the timing of events and the effects on linked lives therefore need to be asked in order to gather evidence to guide the interventions by the school on bullying. The implications of the chronosystem on contextual systems provide a unique way of ascertaining and evaluating functional processes and interactions.

VII. INTERPRETATION OF DATA

This section outlines the interpretation of themes that emerged from interviews held with the Life Orientation teachers. The following themes emerged.

Theme 1: Types of bullying observed by Life Orientation teachers

The teachers cited bossing people around, beating other learners, harming deliberately and pinching as types of physical bullying they observed in schools. Emotional bullying was identified as hurting others, making others feel inferior, stealing and damaging other learner's property, and teasing. Name-calling, which is a form of verbal bullying, and ill-treatment of younger learners by older learners were also cited. In physical bullying the learner tries to show his or her strength over other learners by making them react, and is able to make the victim feel physically inferior by feeling weak and being unable to report. Emotional abuse is used to show who is in command of the situation, and able to make the final demand on reactions from others. It shows no respect and makes the victim feel inferior. Teachers who are lazy, use unionism as a reason for not going to class or to absent themselves from school were also viewed as bullying learners academically and emotionally.

Theme 2: Challenges faced by teachers

The participants reflected challenges relating to bullying from several angles.

- Challenges pertaining to the behaviour of victims
Truancy: Victims stay away from school to avoid harassment and thus humiliation by the bullies. The victims tend to deteriorate in terms of physical, emotional and social attachments, leading to their being truant and dropping out of school. Dropping out of school and school bullying are therefore two endemic problems that learners face. Decline in performance: Participant B indicated that performance of the victims of bullying dropped as victims lost focus on their studies: "Sometimes the learner's work drops and that affects his/her achievement." It is sometimes due to bullying that the victim's performance is affected; they get frightened and become powerless at school.

As stated above poor learner performance can also be caused by teachers who are lazy and use unionism as an excuse from going to class to teach and assess learners. Self-esteem: Participant A stated that “Bullying itself damages self-esteem; it makes bullying victims to be scared to come to school. It makes them feel powerless.” Participant A mentioned the issue of self-esteem as a challenge: “Bullying itself damages self-esteem and that can take a long time to heal.” Participant A further expressed a concern that when the self-esteem is damaged the learners’ areas of specialisation are also affected. Fear of the unknown is then fostered because the victim does not know what will happen next. Self-esteem is broken down to the extent that a learner has no self-confidence regarding ability to cope with everyday learning activities both at school and at home. The victim then develops into a type of person who cannot make decisions or come to conclusions. Suicide: During the interview, Participant C highlighted the issue of suicide as a challenge: “The effect on both is the same. One who is bullied can retaliate and become a bully also.” Fear brings into the picture many negative thoughts towards life as a negative and dangerous effect: “It has a negative impact which may result in a bullied learner being depressed, performing poorly and also developing suicidal tendencies.” Imagination, due to foreshadowing and back-shadowing, harm the physical system and cause imbalances in the body. For instance, cardiac and respiratory illnesses may result. Because of this drop in confidence, suicide could be seen as a means of escape, or as a means of gaining attention to the problem, possibly a means of asking for help.

- Challenges that pertain to bullies:
Participants raised the following challenging issues pertaining to bullies.
- Weapons
Participant F responded to the question on the relationship between bullying and violence as follows: “bullies carry weapons and they get into frequent fights.” These dangerous weapons are used by bullies in conflicts which often result in stabbings and death cases.
- Gangsterism
Gangsterism is also a form of bullying in that often involves violence. The tragic end of gangsterism as a form of bullying is often death or prison. Several cases of school deaths, involved the victim killing the bully.” Bullies at times join gangsters because they feel they need weapons of some type so as to show their power and lack of fear in using them. The bully might feel that the only way is to show violence over the weaker person. Using violence brings out fear in the victim, which in turn is seen by the bully as a source of power.
- Lack of remorse
According to Participant F, “Bullies do not show remorse, even after being warned, bullies keep on hurting others.” Bullies do not show remorse as they cannot ‘stoop low’ due to peer pressure popularity.” Some perpetrators showed indifference, i.e., they did not show any emotions, while in other cases they did. One participant said that” teaching about bullying remains just a lesson, and like any other lesson it is up to the learner to internalise it. A lesson in Life Orientation is different from therapy, which is directed to correct behaviour. Another participant said that “the bullies believe that they are not discovered until their peers point them out.”

Any thought of the repercussion of violence does not enter the minds of the bullies. They feel they will not be caught and think the victim is too frightened to report to anyone in authority. Therefore, in acting according to their judgement, they need show no remorse. According to the assumption, the acts have been intended to show power and superiority over the victim. This could also be a means by which they show they are leaders and that it is up to all the others to follow their lead. If this is not done satisfactorily then repercussions will follow.

Theme 3: School Environment contributing to the vulnerability of learners.

Emerging from the interviews with the participants were the following issues related to the school environment: “I think playground duty is a good idea at both Primary and Secondary levels, especially now that learners are prone and vulnerable to increased bullying.” The importance of playground duty lies in its laying down duties for all teachers during learners’ playtime. It allows the teachers to supervise learners while they play and thus be in a position to prevent any untoward behaviour, such as bullying, stabbings and drug abuse at school. “Playground duties grant the teachers the opportunity to detect outside the classroom the behaviour of bullies or the bullied.” Teachers sometimes make good suggestions on playground duties, but when a timetable is drawn up they argue about their rights and they do not adhere to it. Some have to be pushed to go out of their ‘comfort zones’ (staffrooms) by the principals or senior teachers who are in the management: there are also those principals

who are bullied and are afraid of their teachers “Strict monitoring of learners can prevent bullies from bullying other learners because of teacher presence.” The problem is that, not all teachers are interested, and in most cases principals and their School Management Teams (SMT) are quiet about it. As Participant F said: “Playground duty is relevant and important to learners, and they see educators as their salvation.” In schools in which the timetable is effective, learners are able to report and relevant steps are taken: “They will report if the teacher is nearby and the bullies will not act in front of teachers.” Learners also report to a teacher whom they trust, that is someone they think will take relevant steps to address their being bullied: “One of the participants indicated that teachers on playground duty should do their work. Bullying will be reduced only if all the teachers are involved because most learners are bullied during break times”. Based on the above discussion, monitoring and supervision by teachers during break times and by parents and community structures after school is important. Their presence as figures of authority might have a positive effect on the learners and on the bullies. Playground duty should therefore be seen as an important role of the teacher, with each teacher allocated a time and taking it seriously.

Theme 4: Adherence to school policies

The following key aspects were highlighted by four teachers:

Participant B indicated that the “Code of Conduct is implemented but many times the parents do not want to accept it when their children violated any of the rules.” Most parents do not attend school meetings, which poses a problem for the school to discuss and implement Codes of Conduct effectively. However, the participant said “Ours is very effective. Our learners are aware and they have copies of the code of conduct; the code of conduct is also emphasized in the Life Orientation books”. Most township schools do very little to implement the Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct becomes a good document but gathers dust in offices as implementation is a challenge. In township and rural schools parents are generally not well informed about the Code of Conduct and they do not attend meetings in which such information could be shared with them. There is still a lack of knowledge on the part of teachers regarding the Code of Conduct as stipulated by the South African School’s Act. They indicated that the Code of Conduct was not working, therefore it need not be followed: “Codes of Conduct are there but they are not effectively utilized in our schools. In some schools the Code of Conduct has certainly not succeeded in protecting both learners and teachers. Bullies most often target new learners at school especially during the first term. Cases such as teasing, stealing, hiding things away and threatening are reported on daily basis that nothing is done because victims cannot identify the perpetrators.” The Code of Conduct was not seen as an effective intervention tool for dealing with bullying in schools. The implication is that teachers are not part of South African Schools Act because they are unfamiliar with it and do not know the content of their own school’s Codes of Conduct. Some schools are also seen as not preventative or responsive to bullying by the participants: “The Codes of Conduct of some schools do not help to see or hear the hardship suffered by the bully. In this case, the Code of Conduct is as good as non-existent”. In cases in which it is effective it does not necessarily mean that the pain incurred by the victim will fade away. Bullies also suffer because sometimes it is not of their making.

Theme 5: Inadequate teacher training on bullying

It was evident that not all teachers talk about the issue of bullying in class. According to Participant F, bullying has not been taught as one of the topics in Life Orientation: “Never taught the topic bullying.” Teachers feel that they are inadequately trained to deal with it: “Educators are not trained to deal with emotional and psychological consequences of bullying.” Participant A indicated that “the educator may not be fully equipped,” and made the following statement: “As a Life Orientation teacher I am not trained to deal with the emotional and psychological consequences of bullying but what I know for sure is that a bully in most cases has a lot of hurt inside and wants to give that pain away.” The unavailability of intensive training creates many problems for Life Orientation teachers as they are the ones who ultimately carry the burden. Change of Life Orientation teachers also poses a challenge: “The bullies as well as the victims need counseling as an intervention”. There is a need to compel the bully to think about what he or she is doing. Teachers also mentioned the frustration of disciplining those who commit bullying as departmental procedures for disciplining learners were cumbersome. This encourages schools to adopt a carefree attitude to disciplining learners. As a confirmation, teachers did not have the insight regarding procedures of handling bullying. There are also those schools where there are no proper channels to follow when assistance is needed to address bullying. There was also a feeling that, “Proper training for equipping teachers should be embarked on”. Teachers A, B, C and E indicated the following:

- A) "Anti-bullying programmes should be establishing to empower teachers to deal with bullying effectively."
- B) "All educators need training in the areas of identifying and dealing with bullying as bullying can take place in any class."
- C) "Make open debates and discussions in class on the Code of Conduct."
- D) "Create after school activities such as sports and clubs with an anti-bullying theme. Teachers should be sympathetic and understand the pain learners are going through. Teachers can organise a visit to the local police station or ask the local police to come to the school to give a talk about the problem of bullying."

Other issues teachers elaborated on were that they could equip themselves with specialist knowledge and skills to deal with bullying. Many of these teachers were not trained. Van Deventer (2009) also found that principals did not assist in creating a conducive environment for the teaching of Life Orientation. "Life Orientation teachers should have life skills in different aspects as bullying is not just a violent act but usually caused by some circumstances. Teachers need counseling skills, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and debriefing skills in order to deal with bullying at schools." It is evident that the teacher plays a key role in terms of transferring skills, knowledge, values and qualifications to learners. It is therefore important for teachers to have the required skills. Furthermore, teachers provide punishment and counselling to bullies but are unsure as to the effectiveness of either. There is no guarantee that corrective measures work but this does not prevent one from trying them. The result of counselling may not be immediate but may have long-term significance. The challenges associated with counselling of the aggressor and the victim in bullying is that it is their decision to accept it. It becomes very difficult to change the behaviour of a perpetrator of bullying while at the same time normalising the situation for the victim. The training of Life Orientation teachers would not only offer in-depth knowledge but also be of assistance to clinical psychologists when reports are needed from a school.

VIII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Types of bullying observed by teachers in a school

The findings of this article have revealed that bullying occurs in many forms, as described by participants. Learners use different weapons, such as pens, scissors and knives, and may force victims to give them money or do their homework.

Challenges faced by teachers in respect of the bully and the victim

This article showed that without the school intervention, family intervention and one on one intervention by the communities, the level of truancy will rise from the part of the bullies and victims. From the article, it has emerged that teachers lack required skills to deal with learners who bully others. This reflects challenges in the behaviour of learners at schools. It has also emerged that there is a growing concern from teachers that lack of parental involvement and dysfunctional family background put pressure on the success which teachers make in addressing instances of bullying. The article highlights that learner bullying is aggravated by poor parental involvement and dysfunctional family units. This confirms the findings of Timm and Eskell-Blokland (2007), that the ecology of bullying would better be addressed on different levels, such as school intervention, family intervention and community intervention levels. Findings revealed again that poor school management and lack of support from the School Management Team and poor implementation of school policies led to the difficulty in getting teachers to effectively supervise learners in school grounds, thus creating an opportunity for bullies to explore opportunities for attack on the victims. The findings of this article, once more revealed that the majority of bullying incidents happen on school grounds. Therefore, it is important that playground duties be implemented at schools because this is relevant and important for the safety of learners. Teacher presence is important. However, in dysfunctional township schools where teachers see playground duties as moving them away from their comfort zones, learners become vulnerable to gangsterism and dangerous weapons which are carried to school by bullies.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of our article are based on the findings above, and the themes derived from interview responses with teachers in schools. The recommendations will thus be directed to teachers and district officials (SBST and DBST) learners (victims and perpetrators) and the school management teams; as well as parents/guardian school children. Life Orientation teachers must be exposed to rigorous developmental training workshops that deal with the skills and techniques of conflict management and classroom management and, most importantly, counselling skills. Quality training for Life Orientation teachers should be done whilst student teachers are still being trained at colleges to become good teachers. The current short quick workshops, with too much information,

only result in teachers being confused and feeling frustrated. Utilisation of experts in the training of teachers will be of utmost importance, because teachers will then understand what is expected from them.

- b) Life Orientation teachers need to take responsibility for all topics found in the Life Orientation curriculum, in other words, they need to start focusing on personal development as one of the concepts in Life Orientation seriously, thereby instilling in the learner an appreciation of Life Orientation as a subject with value.
- c) Life Orientation teachers should come up with awareness programmes by interacting with outside relevant stakeholders who are invited to speak about issues such as bullying. Awareness can be created by creatively implementing activities such as role plays, drama, songs and dances, as these can play an important role in imparting knowledge about bullying to the learners, thus creatively reducing the risk of learners bullying other learners.
- d) Inclusive education should be taken more seriously by schools and Life Orientation should be written as a compulsory examination subject, and should not consist of class tasks and projects only.
- e) Parental involvement is of utmost importance. Although some parents from rural and poor communities might be illiterate, they can still make a useful contribution in schools by supporting teachers through communicating with teachers at meetings.
- f) Parents can also be involved as co-policy-makers by providing some input on school policy and programmes, such as availing themselves to be elicited on safety and security committees and/or environmental committees.
- g) The creation of a Code of Conduct for learners, as prescribed in Section 8 of the South African Schools Act, is the most obvious preventative measure.
- h) Rules should be clearly communicated, consistently enforced, and fairly applied to all learners.
- i) In dealing with bullying as a challenge to Life Orientation teachers it is important for the schools to establish functional School Based Support Teams (SBST) for the purposes of referral procedures. These structures will differ from school to school. Life Orientation teachers should be able to identify and refer learners with the help of the SMT.
- j) The introduction of a bullying box can play a vital role in terms of many learners who are bullied or who witness someone else being bullied to put their complaints in the boxes. This will help learners who are afraid to report bullying to the teachers.
- k) With awareness training and the required skills to cope with bullying situations, the Life Orientation teacher can play a prominent role to address the phenomena in their teaching to identify and eradicate bullying in schools. This can also provide support to victims and perpetrators of bullying in schools and assist in creating a positive school environment that is free of the detrimental effect of violence and bullying.

X. CONCLUSION

This article managed to identify serious challenges faced by Life Orientation Teachers when dealing with learners on learner bullying. The article also pin pointed the aspect of personal development teaching in Life Orientation, as a vehicle to focus on and create an awareness of bullying and how to deal with it. The Life Orientation teacher can effectively employ the topic of personal development in the curriculum as a platform from which to launch bullying awareness in a school. However, under qualified Life Orientation Teachers and those who teach without the passion of the urge to personally know and develop every learner that is entrusted to them, will continue to hamper progress in the education of poor rural and township learners. There are possibly also schools with similar challenges in other parts of the country and the world.

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