



SCHOOL-BASED RESPONSES FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND HIV PREVENTION: EDUCATORS' DELIVERY OF THE LIFE ORIENTATION PROGRAMME IN 16 SOUTH AFRICAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

BACKGROUND

The Integrated Strategy on HIV, STIs and TB 2012 – 2016 is the South African education sectors' holistic response to the HIV, STIs and TB crisis in South Africa and its impact on educational outcomes and the delivery of quality basic education. The Strategy sets out to strengthen the implementation of the Life Orientation (LO) programme through enhancing teaching pedagogy, the quality of learning and teacher support materials and training content on sexuality education for educators based on a revised in-service curriculum, as a key outcome. There is a large body of evidence substantiating the effectiveness of school-based HIV education and prevention programmes for changing HIV-related attitudes, knowledge and sexual practices¹⁻⁴.

This poster examines how LO educators are delivering the LO programme to secondary school learners, including the factors that help and hinder them in this regard.

METHODS

- The ecosystems theory of Bronfenbrenner⁵ provided the theoretical framework for analysing important factors at different levels within the school environment as well as the influence of the family and community on educators' delivery of the LO programme, particularly with regards to the delivery of HIV and AIDS and sexuality education topics.

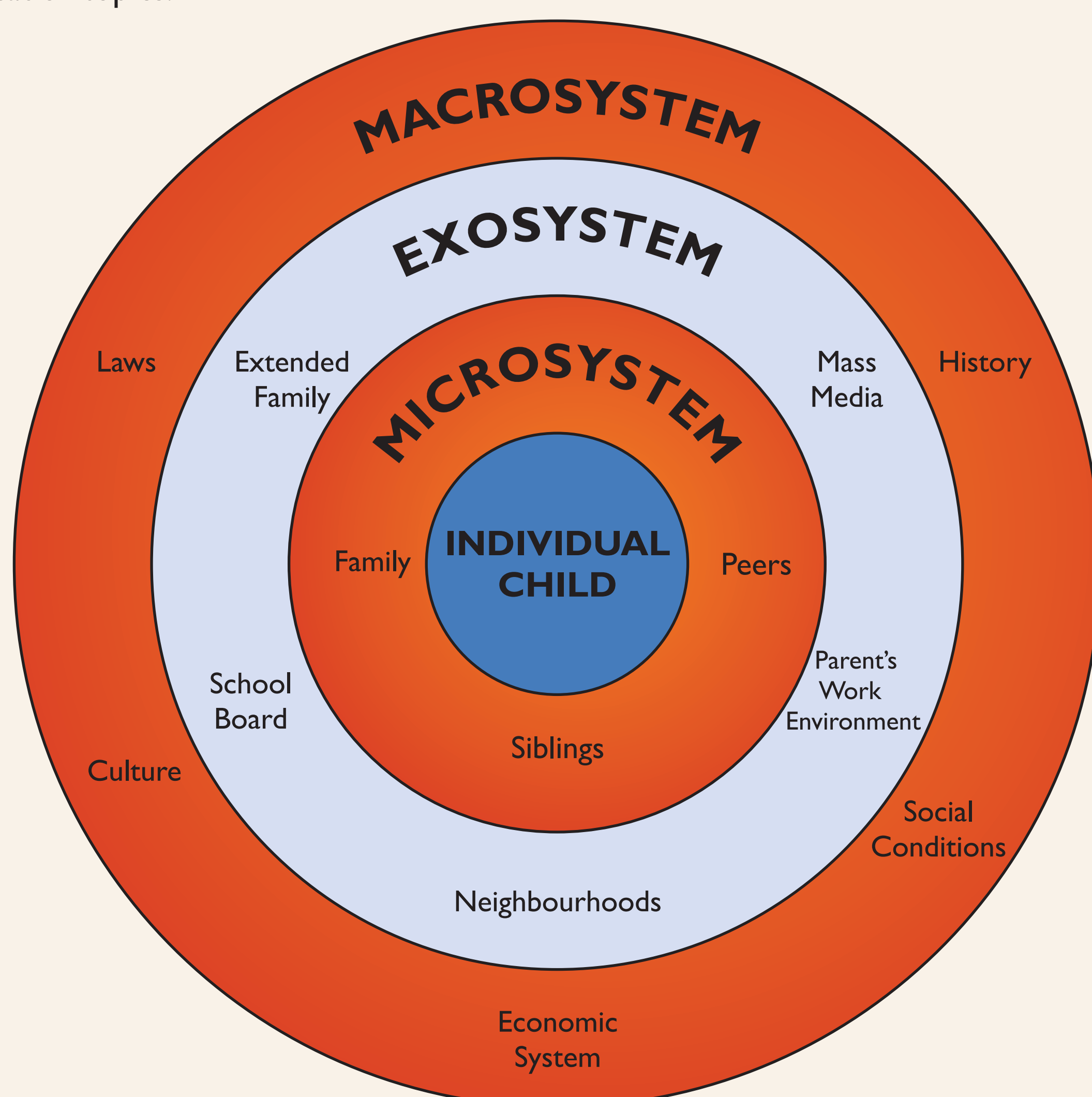
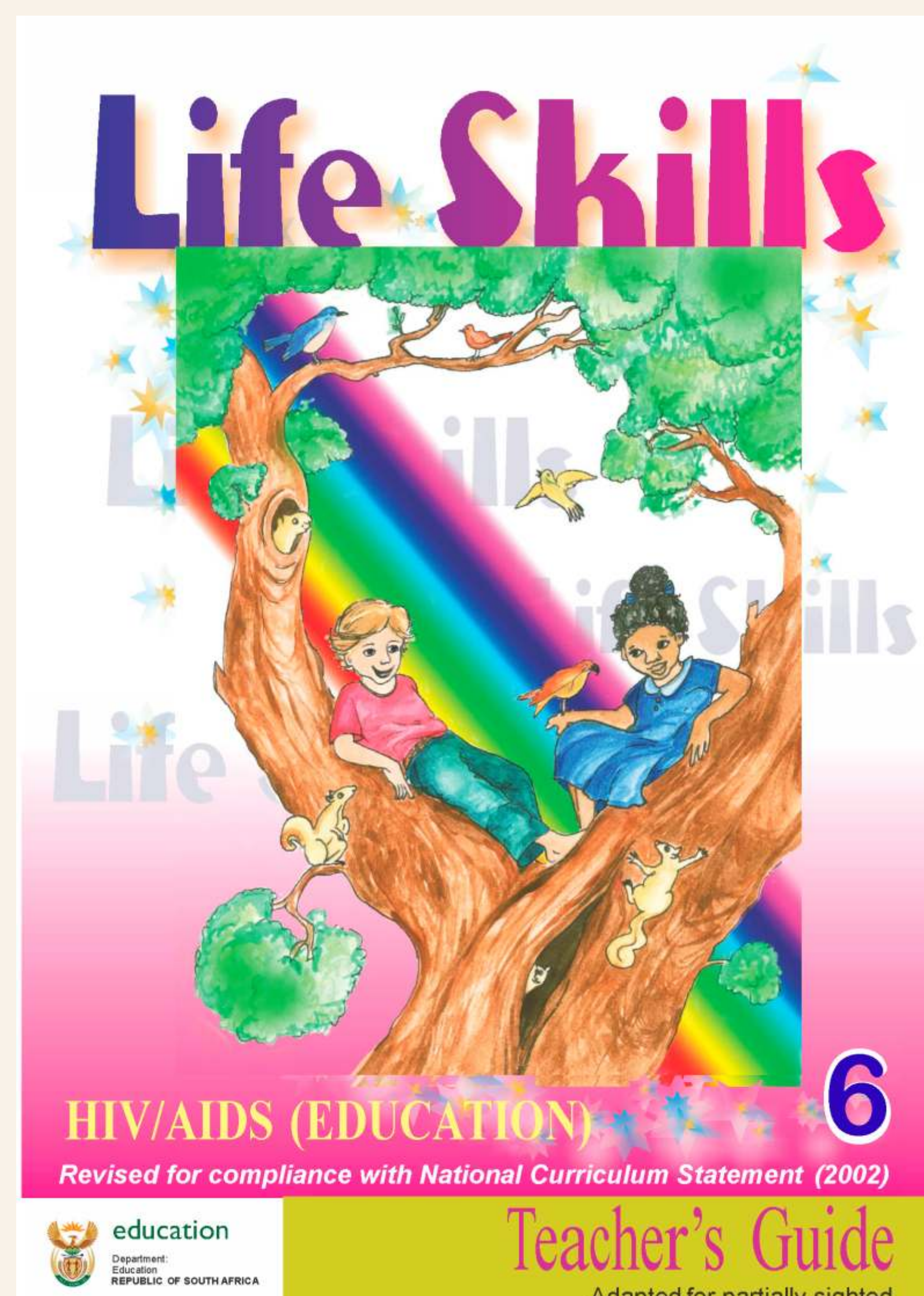


Figure 1: Ecosystems Theory: Bronfenbrenner⁵

- The mixed methods study was conducted in 16 high schools in three districts in South Africa between July and October 2011.
- Stratified random sampling by poverty quintile was used to select 10 high schools from the Umgungundlovu district in KwaZulu-Natal for participation in the study. This was contrasted with three randomly selected schools from poverty quintile (PG) I in Bohlabela district in Mpumalanga and three PG 5 schools from North Tshwane district in Gauteng; the worst and best performing districts in South Africa in the 2010 national senior certificate exams.
- Researchers conducted 32 focus group discussions with Grade 9 and 11 learners, 44 interviews with LO educators and 35 observations of LO lessons.
- Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. Observational data was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19 and was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.



RESULTS

- ✗ Educators strongly believed they had a responsibility to “tell learners the truth” about life and about sensitive topics like HIV and AIDS and sex. This stemmed in large part from parents' failure to communicate with learners about sensitive topics like HIV and AIDS and sex.
- ✗ Educators across poverty quintiles had learners confide in them about serious problems they were experiencing from rape, family problems, hunger, HIV infection, peer suicide, self-mutilation and depression.
- ✗ LO educators adopted a number of roles in addition to their role as an academic teacher. These included the role of a (1) social worker, (2) a guide or mentor to learners, and (3) a counsellor and confidant. In the following quote an educator describes how her role forces her to look after more than the academic needs of her learners:

“You find that a child stops you crying and you ask, “What is wrong with you?” Sometimes she will tell you that, ‘it’s the second week that I didn’t eat anything’. So you can’t only be an educator if you are teaching LO in this school, you are also even a social worker. Sometimes I even take from my pocket to give to them, because you can’t teach a hungry learner. If a child is raped you need to go to the hospital, maybe to the police station.” (LO educator/HoD, PQ 3 school, Umgungundlovu district).

- ✗ Educators agreed that encouraging learner participation and sharing of views and opinions in lessons was of paramount importance, yet these efforts and intentions conflicted with what was observed in lessons where non-participatory, ‘talk and chalk’ method was the most common teaching method seen (48.6%. n=17), followed by facilitation of group work (25.7%. n=9) and class discussions on LO topics (14.3%. n=5). Challenges to using participatory activities included learner shyness in doing role plays and class discussions, overcrowded classrooms, disruptive learners and short lesson times.
- ✗ The majority of LO educators reported feeling comfortable teaching learners about topics like HIV and AIDS and sex and sexuality. Most of the teaching was designed to promote awareness and enhance knowledge about these topics, rather than skills acquisition.
- ✗ Specialist educators who were trained to teach LO were more proficient in speaking about HIV and AIDS in a way that normalised and de-stigmatised the disease. Overall though, the way in which most educators in PQ 1 – 4 schools spoke about HIV and AIDS was in the form of over simplistic warnings closely aligned with the ‘sex as dangerous’ discourse. In the following quote an educator describes a typical conversation she would have with her learners about sex.

“You must just ask them, ‘Do you know what sex is?’ Then some they’ll say ‘We know’, some will say ‘We don’t know’. I said ‘It’s good for you if you don’t know because sex is very dangerous, because you are going to fall pregnant, you’re going to get HIV, you’re going to have babies with no fathers.’” (LO educator, PQ 1 school, Bohlabela district).

- ✗ The factors found to influence educators' delivery of LO are listed in **Table 1**. Educators believed that personal factors were the most significant enablers or hindrances, followed by interpersonal factors and aspects of school-level and district level support for LO.

Table 1: Factors influencing educators' delivery of LO

Personal factors

- Formal training
- Age
- Desire to teach LO
- Personal characteristics (e.g. openness and compassion)

Interpersonal factors

- Support received from other educators, senior staff and parents
- Educators' relationship with learners, including learners' behaviour and interactions in the classroom

School and district level factors

- Resource constraints
- Support from LO subject advisors

CONCLUSION

The majority of LO educators recognised the importance of their role and responsibility in teaching learners LO. The nature of their role in teaching LO in the school environment makes them a primary contact for learners experiencing emotional and social difficulties.

However, there was an apparent disjuncture between what educators set out to achieve in LO lessons and the actual delivery of it in the classroom. Ensuring LO educators have appropriate and sufficient teaching resources as well as access to supportive relationships, particularly at a supervisory level, would go a long way to enhancing their delivery of LO.

Pre-service and in-service teacher training must focus on broadening their teaching repertoire and discourse around HIV prevention beyond the rudimentary ABC discourse. Our findings suggest that LO educators would benefit from training to:

1. enhance their knowledge about HIV and AIDS, sex and sexuality and increase their proficiency and skill in teaching this content;
2. provide them with the skills and knowledge to deliver participatory approaches and implement classroom management strategies that will channel learner interest and energies into productive forms of engagement;
3. assist them in teaching and managing learners personally affected by sensitive topics to minimise trauma and emotional distress; and
4. enhance their personal development by interrogating and creating awareness of personal belief systems and attitudes that have a bearing on the way they deliver LO and position themselves and learners in that process.

References

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