A CASE STUDY EXPLORING LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES OF HIV/AIDS PROGRAMMES

Thesis presented by

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In fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR (PhD)

in

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

of the

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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PRETORIA

OCTOBER 2004

ABSTRACT

This study set out to explore and describe adolescent learners' experiences of HIV/AIDS programmes presented at their schools. The rationale was that an understanding of how learners experience HIV/AIDS programmes might afford insight into the ways in which adolescents manage HIV/AIDS-related issues every day. Subsequent understanding could perhaps contribute to the body of knowledge on HIV/AIDS education, and possibly inform future HIV/AIDS education curriculum development.

The conceptual framework constituted the impact of HIV/AIDS on society, education and adolescents; theories on experiences and adolescent development; relevant Department of Education policies and curriculum plans; as well as national and international research concerning HIV/AIDS education programmes. A qualitative research approach was followed from an interpretivist epistemology, with sensitivity given to criteria of credibility, transferability and dependability. An instrumental case study was conducted at three secondary schools (cases), using focus groups and written essays as the methods for data collection from 90 diverse participants, Grade 11 learners. Responses were audio-taped, transcribed and analysed from a constructivist grounded theory perspective. Results were interpreted by means of literature control. Six prominent themes emerged.

Learners experienced that they were changed positively by knowledge on HIV/AIDS. In this regard they were more open and motivated to communicate, their views and perceptions altered and they were motivated to behave responsibly. However, **learners also experienced HIV/AIDS knowledge negatively.** They felt bombarded with HIV/AIDS information and they experienced some HIV/AIDS information as upsetting. **Learners' experiences still reflected some stereotyping and persisting misconceptions**. Learners associated poverty and lack of education with higher HIV infection rates, as well as a lack of support from parents and/or family. Learners' experiences reflected that they would **appreciate their parents' participation in HIV/AIDS programmes**. Learners voiced a need for improved communication with their parents regarding HIV/AIDS, and experienced their parents as ignorant, shy, stubborn or scared in this regard. Learners' accounts reflected that parents' initial negativity towards the programme later changed into positive support. The learners also had **positive and negative experiences regarding their friends and the HIV/AIDS programmes**. They expressed that their peer-relationships improved in terms of ability to communicate and render support. In addition they expressed that their friends still had a great influence in their lives. Some issues, such as risk behaviour and the HIV-status of their peers, shocked learners. The learners indicated that they thought HIV/AIDS education was

necessary, but **recommended certain amendments for future HIV/AIDS programmes**. Their experiences suggested smaller gender-specific groups; an outsider-presenter; parent/caregiver involvement; variety in programme format; long-term HIV/AIDS education; HIV/AIDS care, support and treatment information in addition to that of prevention; addressing values and life skills content in HIV/AIDS education; as well as fear-provoking real-life contexts.

Several recommendations were made in terms of HIV/AIDS education and programme development. Integration between HIV/AIDS education, life skills education and values education in the formal curriculum is supported by findings and recommended for curriculum development and educational practice. Correspondingly, it is recommended that multiple views on poverty be incorporated into HIV/AIDS education to address persisting stereotypes and misconceptions. Furthermore, cognisance of learners' suggestions in terms of format and content regarding future HIV/AIDS programme development is recommended.

Findings queried existing premises regarding adolescents and (ir-)responsibility in developmental theory, establishing a foundation for further research. Existing silences in the data relating to gender, orphans, violence, non-governmental organisations, condom-use in the context of HIV/AIDS also requires further research.

Establishing that the use of open-ended methods with adolescents resulted in access to rich and descriptive data signified a methodological contribution. Theoretically this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge related to HIV/AIDS education by giving voice to adolescent learners' experiences of HIV/AIDS programmes. Contributions in the realm of HIV/AIDS educational practice and curriculum development include learners' views of what they found beneficial and lacking in existing programmes, as well as their recommendations regarding format and content for future HIV/AIDS programmes directed at adolescents.

<u>Keywords</u>

Adolescents / adolescent development

Learners / schools

Experiences

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS programmes / education

Curriculum

Poverty

Life skills

HIV/AIDS support and care information

Peer influence

Sex education

Values education

Adolescent responsibility

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MY SINCERE THANKS TO:

- Liesel: for giving me the opportunity to grow as a researcher under her patient and loving guidance
- Brigitte: for challenging me to think at a different level
- Irma: for her time and guidance
- Clarisse: for finding the near impossible with a smile
- Lambert: for his love, acceptance and for being the inspiration in my life
- Mom and Dad: for their unconditional love and encouragement
- Nicola: for her patience with mom's "book"
- My in-laws: for their interest and loving support

TO GOD BE THE GLORY

To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream;
not only plan, but also believe.

Anatole France