Empowering Children with behavioural problems in Educational Institutions

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Abstract

Children of the world should enjoy their rights on an equal basis without discrimination. Children's behavior provides clues to the history of their lives, the pain, fears, and their needs. No one can take them away even if their behaviours are questionable or they commit an offence. Heading to school is an exciting time for any children where they're ready to see all their friends and get back into the swing of things. While this is the case for many, we must also take into consideration children facing homelessness, or living in families where they face problems including poverty, social isolation, substance abuse, mental health problems. Some children have also witnessed violence directed at their mothers or themselves had been victims of child abuse or neglect. Many of the children exhibits chronic health and behavior problems associated with their violent environment and going to school means coping with a unique set of challenges. In addressing and providing ongoing support to these children, educators must also address issues of misbehaviour. The purpose of this article is to provide some elements to evaluate the efforts of educators how they assist children with behavioural problems attending their institutions in Mauritius, how they prevent bullying and give a supportive environment to LGBTQ Youth in their institutions. Their approaches to face the challenges at schools and this jurisdiction will be the focal point of the article.

Keywords: Mauritius, educational institutions, educators, LGBTQ Youth and Bullying.

"As President, my job description in one line will be to ensure that every child and young person grows up with the bonds they need to become their strongest selves."
SOS Children's Villages International President, Dr. Wordofa
Improvements in safeguarding and governance, 2021.

1.Introduction

The main aim of this article is to examine the adequacy as to how in Mauritius educators assist and being helped by protective service agencies advocate for children exhibiting behavioural problems attending their educational institutions.

The premise of this article demonstrates the efforts how educators in their daily duties act responsively, quickly with sensitivity to the deepest needs of the child. Education is a key element to a successful society, and it is proven throughout history that the type of education that is given to a society, will play a role in determining its thinking. Within the system of education at all levels, educators are the ones, who are vested with important job duties and responsibilities. They are vested with numerous responsibilities, which are primarily related to promoting effective growth and development of students, and in doing so, they display acceptance of an ethic of care that builds a sense of agency, belonging, and identity in youngsters. In a new social contract for education, pedagogy should be rooted in cooperation and solidarity, building the capacities of students and teachers to work together in trust to transform the world.[1]

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[1] REIMAGINING OUR FUTURES TOGETHER, "*A new social contract for education*", Available at https://reliefweb.int/report/worldPublished in 2021 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [Accessed on 03.11.2022].

Children from Shelters

Educators do possess the abilities to work under stress and deal with various problems and challenges in an appropriate manner. With these traits, they can perform their duties satisfactorily and incur job satisfaction. When it comes to deal with children from shelters, the roles and responsibilities of the educators are focused upon making provision of knowledge and information to all students, and dedicate particular attention to these children, giving them all the opportunities to integrate and be enriched with overall living standards[2].

Heading back to school is an exciting time for children having enjoyed their holiday fun, where they will meet their friends and get back into the swing of things. While this is the case for many, for children living in shelters and facing homelessness, going back to school means coping with a unique set of challenges. Many children attending educational institutions are from shelters where they are provided with caring, loving, secure family environment and all their needs from food, health, shelter, and education are met. Victims of abuse and being neglected, children living in shelters are impacted by one important consequence, to the extent that being victims, they become offenders themselves. They sometimes show signs of criminal behavior and among them they're increased risk for becoming violent offenders and this childhood maltreatment can lead to and affect criminal career trajectories for youngsters.

Therefore, educators display holistic approach, do think, and talk in such ways to students by not using stereotypical language, damaging labels, and negative mindsets which can lead some other students and even educational staffs to view a student's culture and language as deficits. They display support responsiveness, safe equitable school climate and culture to assist those not being prioritized whilst living in shelters, thus enhancing social and emotional learning and development of the students and in so doing educators help to promote community resilience and well-being of youngsters attending school from shelters.

Educators help in bringing conditions in place to support equitable learning and development, assisting children and youth to thrive in important way by cultivating a sense of purpose, building healthy relationships, and help them in engaging as active citizens within their communities.

There is a fundamental difference in the relations between citizens, on the one hand, and between a parent and a child, on the other, and evidently the parent and child relationship is more intimate and affective. There are emotional bonds that tie family members together that do not correspond to anything in the public sphere. Being at school, students from shelters must be giving the support they deserve, based on individual strengths and weaknesses, bearing in mind that these students rights are relevant merely when relations break down. They do know that they possess their rights but don't know how to claim it.

As member of the community, children from shelters may plausibly have many rights against those whom he or she loves most, and these children have this relationship affected negatively. Relations are not affected by the existence of moral principles but by the use we make of them. Their rights may be secondary to virtues in two different ways, corresponding to the distinction between having and claiming rights. Children's rights may be seen as secondary in the sense that securing them is less important than securing appropriate virtues and dispositions.

It is at school that these students are explained of their rights, and it follows that these rights should be respected and claimed. Education enables people to use and add to the knowledge heritage of humanity. As a collective act of co-creation, education affirms the dignity and capacity of individuals and communities, builds shared purposes, develops capabilities for collective action, and strengthens our common humanity.[3] Educators plays an important role in helping to bolster their student's self- esteem, giving words of encouragement convincing students they have what it takes to follow their dreams.

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[2] Keiler, L.S. Teachers' roles and identities in student-centered classrooms. IJ STEM Ed 5, 34 (2018). https://doi.org [Accessed on 03.11.2022]

[3] UNESCO 2021, REIMAGINING OUR FUTURES TOGETHER – 'A new social contract for education' unesdoc.unesco.org [Accessed on 04.11.2022].

In assisting students from shelter to learn from their mistakes and develop analytical and problem-solving skills, educators help them to cope with their shortcomings which will make them overcome academic and personal issues effectively and assuring their self-efficacy.

Talk of rights might in some cases be detrimental to the protection of the moral rights that we believe children should have. In addition, sensitiveness to the need for virtues does not compete with a sensitiveness to the need for children's rights. Caring for the virtues of parents should not make us forget about the importance of the integrity, security, and health of children.[4] Children have rights and it is important to promote them for the many children of the world.

The Legal Framework

In Mauritius, year 2022 marked the proclamation of three new laws, highlighting not only the general and specific legislative, institutional, policy and administrative measures adopted in addressing various forms of violence against children but also the short- and long-term strategies to provide care, rehabilitation, and reintegration of child victims namely the Children's Act 2020, the Children's Court Act 2020 and the Child Sex Offender Register Act 2020. These laws and their respective regulations are more harmonised with international treaties, with the CRC (UN, 1989), and brought some important national reforms in the lives of children. Some of the main reforms are that no child can marry before reaching the age of 18 years, the minimum age of criminal responsibility has been set at 14 years, the detention of a child remains a measure of last resort, the operation of a Children's Court that works in the best interests of the child; and that the child has a legal right to participate in matters and decisions that concern him/her.[5]

Accordingly, these statutory provisions provide good practices and innovative approaches to addressing all forms of violence against children and outlines the roles of civil society and government in providing preventive, rehabilitative and reintegrative measures in favor of child whether as a victim or accused party.

Part I, section 2 of the Children's Act 2020 defines a 'place of safety' as "such place as may be specified in an order made under Part IV" and it "includes a foster home, a convent, a residential care institution, a charitable institution, an educational institution and a hospital". This statutory provision also makes it an offence under Part III – Offences Against Children, Sub-Part A – Offences, s 26. Bullying, where "bully" may be any behaviour by whatever means, including information and communication technologies. Part IV – Children in need of assistance and care and protection Sub-Part I – Assistance, and Care and Protection S 33 (7) (c) and (d) provides for the assessment of child in need of care and protection and for that an interview may take place at an educational institution, a hospital, a police station or such other place as may be, in the circumstances, suitable for the child. This section also makes provision that where a child is present at an educational institution, the person in charge of the educational institution shall, upon request of the Police or the authorised officer, allow the Police or the authorised officer, as the case may be, to meet with, and interview, the child.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), Article 11 of the Charter for instance, provides that "Every child has the right to an education,to develop his or her personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. This education also includes the preservation and strengthening of positive African morals, traditional values and cultures.

These legal frameworks encompass core instructions and primary interventions that help to create a supportive atmosphere and build positive relationships between staff and students. Educators core value is justice, being passionate about helping students within the educational systems to identify and counter the mindsets, practices, and policies that perpetuate adverse outcomes and experiences for historically marginalized youth.

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[4] BECKMAN L, '*Rights, Rights-Talk, and Children*' 2001, Available online https://link.springer.com/article/ The Journal of Value Inquiry 35: 509–515, 2001 Kluwer Academic Publishers. Printed in the Netherlands [Accessed on 04.11.2022.

[5] Ombudsperson For children, Mauritius, Annual Report 2021-2022. Available on oco.govmu.org [Accessed on 04.11.2022].

Loving and caring family is crucial for a child's physical, psycho-emotional and social development. Every child needs family environment which will support the child's healthy development. Every child has a right to grow up in a caring family environment.[6] However, if it is impossible for a child to grow up in a biological family, it is necessary to provide children and young people deprived of care with alternative care services. It is at this particular point where educators offer students from shelters a loving, caring and safe environment.

LGBTQ Youth and Bullying: the approaches and challenges educators face at Schools.
LGBTQ Students

Educators are seen as role model to encourage inclusive, positive, and supportive environment accessible and friendly to all students. Educational institutions are expanding their protective empowerment program for their students and this approach strengthens the incident management system. In updating and embedding their code of conduct into everything they do, educators have to fully implement the policy on the prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse on the students particularly those from shelters.

In many communities, it is dangerous to be gender nonconforming or to be known as transgender. Because transgender youth are so hidden, it would be easy to believe that these students are extremely rare and extremely difficult to estimate the prevalence of transgender students in schools. Gender diverse children are at higher risk of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, about a third accounted for being abused as a child and which impacts negatively on their adulthood.[7]

Educational staffs do sporadic intervention at schools to stop homoprejudice language thus sending a message to students and personnel that this type of discrimination and bias are not tolerated. By demonstrating that anti-gay verbal harassment is unacceptable, we try to send a strong message to the student body and create an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance for all students. This creative approach touches students who are violating school and societal rules and brings to responsibility all school personnel who can help to creating a more positive climate in their schools not only for LGBTQ students but for the entire school population as well.

For some children the beginning of a new school year is marked with anticipation and excitement to see friends and tackle a new year of learning. But if you're a student who is (or is perceived to be) gay or gender nonconforming, that excitement turns to fear and anxiety because of the bullying you will endure day in and day out for the academic year.[8] In the past year or so, media attention rose surrounding the suicides of youth who were or were perceived to be gay or transgender. It is difficult to determine why someone chooses to attempt suicide but many of the youth who died were bullied and harassed in their schools.

The psychological, social, and emotional needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth often go unmet in schools. These students may be "out and proud" or they may be silent and invisible; either way and providing effective services to them creates unique challenges for professional school counselors.

Research studies on the experiences of sexual minority LGBTQ youths are a population in schools at risk for developing academic problems, as well as social psychopathology and maladaptive behaviors. It is annotated that these individuals encompass any youth whose sexual orientation is anything other than exclusively heterosexual, and may include aspects of attraction, behavior, or identity. Many are stoic, barely showing their emotions but are not different because these youths also face many of the same biological, cognitive, and developmental conflicts as their heterosexual counterparts.

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[6] UNICEF, Press Release 19.November 2021, '*Every child has the right to grow up in a safe and nurturing family environment'* Accessible at https://www.unicef.org/ [Accessed on 02.11.2022]

[7] Espelage DL, Aragon SR, Birkett M. Homophobic teasing, psychological outcomes, and sexual orientation among high school students: *What influence do parents and schools have?* School Psychology Review 2008;37: 202–216.

[8] Russell ST, Ryan C, Toomey RB, Diaz RM, Sanchez J. *Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescent school victimization: implications for young adult health and adjustment.* Journal of School Health. 2011;81(5):223-30.

Globally, homosexuality is traditionally viewed as an adult issue and schools have mirrored the beliefs of society, thereby neglecting the concerns and needs of LGBTQ in the curriculum and in student services and planning.[9] There is no simple or absolute answer to state at what age should LGBT youths come out and the risks are different for youths in different circumstances. Some young people live in families where support for their sexual orientation is clear and stable; these youths may encounter less risk, even at a young age; but to the contrary, those who live in less supportive families may face more risks leading to experience bias, discrimination, or even violence at schools, social groups, workplaces and faith communities.

The mainstream culture considers homosexual individuals to have an underlying moral failure or to have a faulty sexual orientation. The impact of homoprejudice is so great that LGBTQ youth are "at risk for suicide, chemical abuse, dropping out of school, verbal and physical abuse, homelessness, prostitution, HIV infection and psychosocial developmental delays.

Developmental experiences of sexual minority youth may also include issues of identity confusion, in which youth experience inner turmoil as they explore same-sex attractions that conflict with societal expectations. Many youths recognize the presence of parental expectations, either explicit or implicit, and struggle with how to respond.

As youth begin to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender they may experience one of three initial responses: 1) a sense of bewilderment or shame, 2) minimization of the impact of awareness of sexual orientation, or 3) denial. The wider social condemnation of homosexuality contributes to identity confusion in LGBTQ youth and often influences them to keep their orientation secret. The tendency to hide non-heterosexual feelings and the negative emotions associated with them such as guilt, fear of stigmatization, and fear of rejection may affect the youth's relationships at home and school. LGBTQ youth often respond by disengaging, an action that strains the natural developmental phase of separation-individuation that is characteristic of early adolescence. This coming out process is a complex phenomenon that begins with initial consciousness of sexual orientation and moves through to the next phase of exploration of same sex attraction. The types of personal and social support available to LGBTQ youth affect their movement through this phase. LGBTQ youth often experience the coming out process and the transition from childhood to young adulthood simultaneously. This is an additional factor that strains the sexual minority youth's psychological resources to a greater degree than his/her heterosexual peers. This transition from a presumed heterosexual identity to an LGBT identity is often a solitary journey. LGBT individuals are the only cultural minority to typically grow up in families and communities that are outside of their cultural group.

There are often few, if any, visible LGBT men or women available to help these youth learn how to cope with the societal realities of being a sexual minority. This creates a situation where the LGBTQ youth are not developmentally capable of dealing effectively with the pressures to conform. This is most clearly seen in the schools. LGBTQ youth who have been verbally or physically harassed may naturally attempt to protect themselves by avoiding situations where they have been victimized.[10]

Feeling unsafe in school has a direct negative impact on their ability to learn. Many gay youths spend every day in survival mode just trying to complete the school day without being injured. Whether it is due to academic problems, developmental difficulties, emotional distress, fear of violence, or substance abuse, LGBTQ youth frequently come to the attention of the educators and working in collaboration with the Brigades pour La protection Des Mineurs, educational social workers and educational psychologist proper sensitization and counselling sessions at schools are carried to ensuring, they make wise decisions, which may prove to be beneficial to the students.

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[9] IMPACT. (2010). Mental health disorders, psychological distress, and suicidality in a diverse sample of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youths. Available at https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov American Journal of Public Health. 100(12), 2426-32 [Accessed on 05.11.2022].

[10] Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Bartkiewicz, M. J., Boesen, M. J., & Palmer, N. A. (2012). The 2011 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN.

However, educators and police officers in tackling these behaviours and do counselling are usurping the role of professional qualified school counselors and psychologists as those officers are not entirely at fault, as few graduate programs provide any significant formal training to help neophyte counselors understand sexual minorities.

Despite these challenges, many transgender youths are resilient, and there are several factors that may help them guard against the worst outcomes. Resilience in children and youth appears to depend on personal characteristics like being outgoing, resourceful, and having a positive self-concept. Families rated high in acceptance who discuss their child's gender identity or sexual orientation openly, integrate their child's LGBT friends into family activities, express appreciation for their child's clothing choices even if the clothing was gender nonconforming are reported better self-esteem, better health, lower levels of depression, lower rates of substance abuse, lower rates of suicide attempts, and lower rates of risky sexual behavior.[11] Research suggests that these findings of similar acceptance in school environments are highly recommended to help in comprehensive antiharassment policies that include protections for transgender and gender diverse students.

So, at schools, educators are committed to equality and safety for all students and strive to turn their school environment into a safe place. Through their approach and with the help of other stake holders, who are police officers and providing evidence-based information about transgender issues it is very likely that word of mouth will spread the news that there is an ally and a space place for LGBTQ youth and serve as a protective factor against negative psychosocial outcomes for these youth.

BULLYING

Section 26, under Sub Part A of the Children's Act 2020, makes it a criminal offence that no person shall bully a child and "bully" means any behaviour by whatever means, including information and communication technologies.

It is no secret, no fallacy that bullying is well present and alive in our educational institutions, but still, it is a scourge that nobody wants to talk. This century- old phenomenon, often considered as taboo has for long been the headache and nightmare of administrators. We are all actors in the big comedy of human error and even become accomplices by way of our silence in tackling bullying. It is a toxic behaviour, reprehensible enough to cause havoc and pollute the school environment. It taints and undermines the sanctity, integrity and reputations of our educational institutions.

Initially known as mobbing or ragging, bullying is a group phenomenon of collective aggression, anger driven committed for psychosocial motives and rewards. It is the quest of power and control through an aggressive behaviour with intent to cause harm, by use of threat, humiliation and intimidation. It provokes a situation where victims feel threatened and powerless with long lasting physical, emotional and psychological trauma.

With progress in science and technology, the methods of bullying have evolved. The perpetrator may not necessarily be in direct interaction confronting his victims. Cyber bullying in its different forms, has brought touch of sophistication in the modus operandi of perpetrators. They operate from far, masquerading their on-line persona. They also hack others account, post humiliating videos or simply stalking by watching on-line the actions or moves of other students.

No student should feel unsafe in school and the entire educational community works together to promote safety at school, starting with educators who are an invaluable resource to combat bullying, especially when they're passionate about their jobs.[12]

Educational institutions staffs in their everyday encounter are confronted with undisciplined youth, on the verge of anarchy, demonstrating deviancy under all its forms. It is an illustration of a societal dysfunction or it is our inability to change and by the same way, in a period of crisis sending a message that need to be captured.

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[11] LGBTQ and Youth, www.stopbullying.gov/ September 2021 [Accessed on 01.11.2022]
[12] Public School Review, October 2022, *How Does Bullying Affect a Student's Academic Performance?* Available on https://www.publicschoolreview.com/ [Accessed on 02.11.2022].

Educators embark on a new approach in teaching the social skills needed for success at school, laying emphasis on teaching and learning within a positive school and classroom culture and monitor students learning and behaviour through continuous active supervision.[13] This concept of positive behaviour for learning is a framework which uses a multi-tiered system of support aimed at proactively supporting all students.

In carrying their daily tasks, educators identify and explain to the students what bullying looks like, what to do before and when bullying behaviour is seen how to teach others what to do, thus helping to reduce the effectiveness of bullying through establishment of a positive educational environment.

CONCLUSION

Educators are vested with the authority to promote personnel management, primarily concerning students; hence, it is vital for educators to put into operation, the methods and approaches and form the system of education in such a manner that would enable them to develop motivation towards learning and enhance professionalism. The student management is an aspect that is of utmost significance that educators pay attention to the implementation of this function. They give particular attention to some aspects that need to be taken into consideration, and when bullying is identified, they impart adequate knowledge in terms of relevant legal concepts, the implications of such behaviours, ensuring they are disciplined, providing guidance and inculcating among them the traits of morality, diligence and conscientiousness. These aspects would enable them to emerge to be effectual citizens of the country. When the educators can carry out the function of student management appropriately in combatting bullying practice and supporting the LGBTQ students, thus helping them to achieve professional goals, have a clean character certificate and incur job satisfaction.

As an integral part of their duties, educators do take actions and have a duty to report when in identifying behavioural problems within the educational institutions and it is vital for the educators to ensure they act diligently and take appropriate actions. They constantly assist those students who are experiencing problems and put into place some pedagogical practices which include, organization of workshops and seminars, attending meetings, working on policies and procedures and initiation of modern and innovative methods in implementation of tasks and activities. When the educators are taking actions, they need to work in co-ordination and integration with each other.[14] Working in seclusion would not lead to desired outcomes. Furthermore, when they have taken actions, they need to ensure they prove to be advantageous and worthwhile to the educational institutions, its members and above all to the students.

Students experience problems and challenges with regards to a number of aspects such as; problems in understanding academic concepts, home environmental conditions, financial problems, family issues and psychological problems. These problems prove to be impediments within the course of achievement of academic goals. Educators, committed to their duties, formulate solutions to these problems, they also seek assistance and guidance from professional counsellors and Youth Brigades officers where a number of issues that arises are provided with solutions in respect to the students learning disabilities, psychological problems, career counselling, providing them guidance regarding employment opportunities, solutions to financial problems and so forth. All these are done in a holistic approach after an analysis of the alternatives have been reached and selection of the most appropriate ones. Educators constantly value the leadership skills among students, enhancing their focus on various opportunities and by the same way assign the responsibilities of monitoring and supervision of their students. This helps in promoting equal rights and opportunities to all and treating everyone with respect and courtesy.[15]

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[13] Bullying and Cyberbullying/ Education and Training, Available at https://behaviour.education.qld.gov.au/ '*Bullying behaviour and Positive Behaviour for Learning*' March 2022 [Accessed on 05.11.2022]

[14] Pushkar, P. (2015). Role of Teacher in Higher Education. International Journal of Education and Information Studies, 5(1), 25-30. Retrieved October 07, 2019 from https://www.ripublication.com

[15] R Kapur. '*Roles and Responsibilities of the Educators*' (October 2019) Available at https://www.researchgate.net/ [accessed on 04.11.2022]

Educators in educational institutions are required to undergo number of challenges within the course of implementation of their job duties, vital points for them are to form constructive viewpoints, always improving, learn to cope with difficulties and problems appropriately and develop interest and enthusiasm in implementing their day to day duties.

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(ii)   Children's Court Act 2020
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