

Chapter 10 pathway notes

Ubunye: providing pathways for youth development through the community school

Designing inclusive pathways with young adults: A pathway from South Africa

Purpose

These pathway notes support chapter 10 of the book: *Designing inclusive pathways with young adults: Learning and development for a better world*. The chapter focuses on the partnership established by Bruce Damons the principal of a school situated in a socio-economically disadvantaged community in South Africa and members of the local community with support from the Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL). In the past, local youth have engaged in vandalism, gangsterism and other anti-social behaviour. Bruce has realized the value of inviting youth to participate in improving the quality of education in the community, not only that of the school children, but also their own. He focused on the social potential of such youth, rather than labeling them as deviant and a threat to social stability. The chapter outlines how the school is extending its reach and serving as a learning hub for its wider community in conjunction with GULL.

GULL welcomes affiliation with any organization working with marginalized young people and the purpose of these pathway notes is to assist those who are using or developing a similar approach. For more details about how to affiliate with GULL please see: www.gullonline.org/affiliate

Background

Sapphire Road Primary is located in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropole in South Africa. The school offers classes from grade R (kindergarten) to grade seven. The learner enrolment for 2014 is 1198. Seventy-six of these learners are in grade R, and are being taught in an informal, four roomed metal zinc structure located in the community, about 3 km from the main school building. There are thirty-one educators in the school, three grade R practitioners, one secretary, and one general assistant whose salaries are paid by the Department of Basic Education. For the past twelve years, the school has been using community volunteers in various areas of the school to support the learning and teaching processes at the school. Over the past few years, Bruce has built up these teams of volunteers who work in the school on a daily basis, learning valuable technical and personal skills that help them to improve their employability and develop as responsible, engaged citizens. Currently, there are over 45 volunteers at the school, of which more than a third are between the ages of 19 and 30. They are employed as teacher assistants, vegetable gardeners, clinic volunteers, caregivers, general handymen, security guards, toilet cleaners, office administrators, with one librarian and a volunteer project manager. Members of these focus areas have each elected a leader and together these leaders comprise the leadership team of the volunteers. The school is committed to assisting these volunteers in reaching their own dreams of creating a better life for themselves and their communities.

The school has become a beacon of hope for the community, and in particular the volunteers, many of whom have no formal qualifications. The school not only represents the educational aspirations of the community for their children but also seeks to make a meaningful contribution to the development of the community through the various programmes it offers, including volunteerism. All of the volunteers are unemployed, and feeding their families is a daily struggle. The involvement of the school volunteer is something that is closely connected to improving the effectiveness of the school and is supported by the wider community who help to train the volunteers. The school has been recognized as the best health-promoting school in the country. This led to the school Governing Body to award volunteers with the status of staff, albeit unpaid. The volunteers have made contributions on various levels: Much learning has taken place among both paid staff and volunteers as they critically engage with the challenging socio-economic conditions that confront them in their endeavour to provide quality education for learners. The volunteers have now requested help to form a non-governmental agency (NGO), called *Seeds of Peace, Health and Wellness (Sphaw)*, so that they can take more responsibility for community development outside of the school context. To aid them in this endeavour, Bruce and the team leaders of the volunteers decided to adopt GULL's approach to the creation of alternative educational pathways for the volunteers.

Pathway design and implementation

Many of the youth volunteers are parents, mostly single parents, who are struggling to support children on little or no income. Thus, the pathway design aims to help them to develop on a personal level, as well as professionally. They could also use this learning to access funding for training in early childhood education, which is something that the South African government is pushing at the moment through provision of free courses. This primary learning will help to motivate them to enrol on such courses. Thus the training might open up career opportunities for some; others could use the learning to establish day-care or after-school centres under the auspices of *Ubunye*. The school will benefit in that learners will receive more support from their caregivers. The very fact that the youth are involved in creating these learning paths is a learning experience in itself. They are excited by the exercise and the prospects it will offer them and the initial GULL professional Bachelor pathway has been developed by Bruce and a team of his school volunteers.

The GULL project is still in its initial phase but fourteen of the volunteers are participating in the pathway design and implementation work. So far, they have come up with an idea for helping community members to learn how to assist with their child's education. *Sphaw* members will use their own learning in the volunteer programme, undergo personal and professional skills development in this area and then educate parents in the wider community. This is an important issue, since parental involvement in schools in South Africa is difficult for various reasons. Often children are bussed to schools far from where their parents live. The school no longer serves the immediate community and it is difficult for parents to travel to the school or to interact electronically, given their lack of financial resources. Few schools in South Africa have actually been able to attain meaningful collaboration with parents.