



Challenges facing school sanitation and hygiene education from the perspective of the school teacher

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In helping school children adopt good habits during their formative years, it is vital to first produce a healthy learning environment using the hardware and software resources to hand.

In many countries throughout the world, schools have poor water and sanitation facilities. Consequently, teachers and children are left having to teach and learn in unsafe surroundings with potential health hazard. Within this brief article the role of the school teacher is examined with the point of view that they play a vast number of important and challenging roles in the battle towards better school sanitation and hygiene education. Professionals working at the international or local level and dealing directly or indirectly with school sanitation and hygiene education may find this article of interest to them.

This article starts off by first focusing on what school sanitation and hygiene education entails. The role of the schoolteacher in SSHE is then examined with an overview of some practical steps and items which schoolteachers use towards promoting better SSHE. Finally,

an overview of on-going as well as up-coming challenges which school teachers face is examined.

Places to learn

In many developing countries the most populated institutions are schools which are important places of learning for children. However, in many countries schools have very poor or even lack proper water and sanitation facilities which inevitably means an unhealthy and inconvenient environment for children that may consequently contribute to absenteeism and drop-out rates.

Since schools are important learning places, the promotion of personal hygiene and environmental sanitation within schools helps children to adopt good habits during formative childhood. The provision of safe water and sanitation facilities, as well as good hygiene education, will improve the health and attendance of children and may result in a lower drop-out rate, especially amongst girls.

School sanitation and hygiene education are therefore the combination of hardware and software components that are necessary to produce a healthy school environment. The hardware components are the water and sanitation facilities in and around the school compound. The value of new and improved facilities nevertheless have minimal consequences without the support of hygiene education programmes helping schoolchildren make deliberate choices with regards to water and sanitation related behavior. In essence, it is the combination of hard and software components that prevent water and sanitation-related diseases (Unicef & IRC, 1998).



Giacomo Pirozzi/Panos Pictures

Outdoor latrines built for the Unicef-assisted Mazabuka Community School in the village of Mazabuka, south of the capital Lusaka, Zambia.



New school latrines in Kenya

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Roles to play

In essence the school teachers, who often head the school management committee, reflect a major resource in the community and present a general commitment towards the well-being of communities in general and children in particular. School teachers have a major responsibility for providing ‘quality’ education to their students. Quality in the context to SSHE refers to a number of issues, namely:

- Quality of content; including that of life skills and health/hygiene education
- Quality of the teaching-learning process
- Quality of learning environment including adequate hygiene and sanitation facilities.

Their role is multi-sided as they may be in contact with numerous stakeholders from children, parents, local authorities, the educational department and NGOs. Some of the other roles which schoolteachers undertake include: health educator, monitor of sanitary facilities and facilitator of community actions to improve sanitary conditions. S/he is also usually the key person in the community to contact for any development programs. The role of the school teacher could therefore symbolically be reflected as the ‘spider’ in the web of SSHE.

The role of the schoolteacher in ensuring good quality education and a quality learning environment is crucial. There are a number of practical steps, however, which schoolteachers need to undertake in order to provide better school sanitation and hygiene education. First of all, schoolteachers, through their school management committee, need to allocate part of the school budget to

SSHE. Once a budget is in place, schoolteachers need to facilitate a participatory process approach towards the changes required, involving children and community members through their SSHE programme.

Schoolteachers need to facilitate such processes, whereby problems and needs are assessed, possible improvements identified and planned for, with maximum involvement of all stakeholders in the community. Possible outcomes of this facilitating process may be, for example, the implementation of sanitation facilities. In this process, schoolteachers need to ensure contact with local authorities/NGOs or private sector organisations for support, monitor construction and get management and maintenance organised.

In terms of practical items in the classroom, schoolteachers require curricula and teaching aids, which are all too often still being developed at the national level. These tools need to be used creatively and adapted to local realities to become meaningful learning tools.

In addition, the amount of time spent on hygiene-related issues in the school curriculum is minimal. This means that teachers need to select the content very carefully. Although the number of formal periods available to teach are limited, there are some other practical ways to address hygiene issues. For example:

- Passing on messages to children in short ‘health spots’ for ten minutes each day by the class teacher or in assembly
- Singing songs, reading poems or performing plays containing health messages;
- Undertaking latrine cleaning demonstrations with the children;
- Joint handwashing after lunch with children and teachers;
- Taking classes to the courtyard for cleaning the area and/or
- Inviting health staff or health education workers to come and talk to the school or to individual classes (Hawes, 1997).

Finally, the implementation and impact of SSHE needs to be monitored, preferably not just by the schoolteacher, but as a learning event by all concerned. The schoolteacher nevertheless has the main facilitating role and should ensure this final step, namely to organize follow-up actions.

The skills teachers need to gain in order to provide better SSHE also mean a

basic insight into the more technical aspects of how sanitary facilities work in practice which include the construction, operational and maintenance aspects. School teachers should also be aware of the organizational issues of the sanitary facilities and also ways they can monitor behavioural changes.

What are the on-going and up-coming challenges if schoolteachers play their SSHE role meaningfully?

Schoolteachers are the spider in the web but won't be able to implement successful SSHE programmes on their own. They face a number of different challenges at an institutional, political, social and practical level. In order to implement successful programmes they will need support. International and national, non-governmental and governmental organizations can give this support to the teachers. Without being directly involved in the implementation of the programmes, they can, for example, create a conducive environment at the different levels in the society, involve all stakeholders in the development of national and international plans, develop and produce teaching materials and support the teachers with advice and finances. Some considerations to ensure the successful implementation of SSHE programmes are mentioned below, namely:

Political

1. Support from national and international organizations.

National and International organizations can be the catalysts in the country for successful implementation of SSHE, through the creation of favourable conditions for the implementation of such programmes.

Create high level of political commitment.

This also means a focus on ensuring political support and commitment at both the national and international level.

2. Include Hygiene Education in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools.

This required a genuine support from stakeholders at the national and international

level to include hygiene education in curriculums.

Institutional

1. Implementing a demand driven and bottom up approach.

This approach reflects genuine interest where schools express their demand through, for example, filling in applications forms and sending them to the district office. It also ensures that all partners commit themselves to play their roles, such as digging the pit for example.

2. Working through existing organizations.

It will be important to work through the existing institutions rather than creating specific structures, this will ensure ownership, capacity and sustainability of the activities.

3. Moving towards group 'ownership' of the SSHE programme.

This entails that both teachers as well as communities have the shared responsibility of the implementation of the SSHE programmes. The community must have a sense of 'ownership' towards the programme, and feel responsible for its success.

4. Creating a conducive environment.

Advocacy for the issue, for creating a conducive environment at international, national, regional and community level. Implement policies which make putting sanitation facilities at schools and hygiene education compulsory. Involve all stakeholders and develop an

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Rural schoolchildren witness the first flow of water from piping laid by the Rural Advice Centre, a development NGO – the area has a high incidence of bilharzia (Mafefe, Northern Transvaal, South Africa).

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IRC in collaboration with UNICEF is working on two school sanitation and hygiene education (SSHE) projects. SSHE Global consists of a number of participating countries: Vietnam, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Nepal, Nicaragua and Zambia. SSHE India focuses on three states: Bihar, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. If you would like more information on school sanitation and hygiene education you can order the quarterly newsletter *Notes and News* which focuses on current and up-coming issues in SSHE.

inter-sectoral approach which include the education, health, water and sanitation sectors.

Provide reasonable salaries and job security to teachers

Ensure teachers are not overburdened

5. Support and motivation from the regional supervisors.

Financial

1. Financial support

For the construction of the facilities

For the development and production of teaching materials and aids

Practical

The teachers are a large and enthusiastic resource that should be supported in their efforts to make the school a child friendly and healthy environment. The participation and willingness of the schools, school management teams and the teachers, especially the head teachers are crucial.

1. Development and production of teaching materials.

Develop and produce hygiene educational materials, which can be reproduced on large scale, so that these are not too costly and allows for easy adaptation to suit circumstances.

Promote a structured, child-centered curriculum appropriate to the child's developmental level, abilities, and learning style

2. Understand the basic insight into the more technical aspects of sanitation facilities at the school.

This is in reference to how sanitary facilities work in practice which include the construction, operational and maintenance aspects.

3. Being aware of the organizational issues of the sanitary facilities.

This also refers to ways they can monitor behavioral changes.

4. Teacher training.

Training of the teachers on:

The subject SSHE

How to use the materials

How to organize/implement a SSHE programme

Ideas planning for the replacement of the facilities

5. Outreach programmes to the communities.

For the support of the communities as well as to ensure that the learned behaviour can also be practised at home.

6. Monitoring, evaluating and documentation of the experiences:

For the teachers in the other schools

For other countries

Monitoring and evaluation tools in the schools should be simple to use and should take very little time

Roles to play

The principal challenges of the next decade will therefore not only be technology questions- the hardware of water supplies and sanitation- but the software issues: How can the water supply and the education sector effectively support schools? How can teachers' training be adapted to suit the needs for implementation of SSHE? How can teachers be helped specifically in adapting and producing materials, developing outreach programmes? How can we learn from experiences gained so far with relation to ways to motivate children to undertake proper hygiene habits? Although this article has just touched upon some of these issues, they remain some of the major questions for fieldworkers and researchers alike in this new millennium.

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