

The intertwining of children's well-being and educator well-being in low socio-economic contexts: where should the focus be?

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Our teachers are the building blocks of our children's future. Over and above parents, teachers offer the most influence to our youth and therefore to the future of our country. Yet, they are in serious need of support structures to help deal with their psychological and emotional challenges and can sustain their well-being. It is therefore important that research is conducted that explores the perceptions of well-being within school settings particularly from the perspective and experience of educators. Studies show that it was highly significant that the most stress and burnout occurs with educators in schools serving diverse children living in poverty. In these contexts, teachers often have underachieving students who are affected by unstable home situations, absent parents or are dealing with student addiction. This is not a reflection of teacher ability or expertise however; it is a by-product of the system and the circumstances in which the teacher finds him/herself trying to work in and manage well. This study followed from a PhD research study around developing partnerships towards developing effective learning environments within low socio-economic contexts. The aim of the study was informed by key findings from the PhD highlighting the need to engage in more research around educator well-being especially during the COVID-19 lockdown. A qualitative approach was employed and 12 educators were interviewed using a semi-structured interview that explored their notion of well-being within school contexts. The findings suggest that educator well-being was inextricably linked to the well-being of the learners/children that they were teaching. The key findings include that learners' well-being was an extremely important factor in relation to educator well-being and rated high on the overall experience of educator well-being. Due to unemployment, poor educational background and ability to provide basic needs such as food, parents cannot provide adequate support for children and the educators have to facilitate these basic needs through innovative and creative ways of accessing resources so that learners can enjoy educational instruction and learn optimally. Maslow's hierarchy of needs indicates that emotional support could in fact be a prerequisite for higher functions such as learning. As shown in this research study, learners' well-being to a large extent is linked to emotional health and the learners within this demographic had specific challengers and stressors that affected their well-being and thus their experiential learning process. Public schools are meant to be environments that allow for all children to receive access to basic education. However, in some disadvantaged communities, schools face many additional obstacles and when parental support for learners is absent the pressure increases on educators to fulfil multiple roles. The focus of well-being initiatives is questioned and this research therefore posits an argument for ensuring children's well-being by providing support for educators specifically within low socio-economic contexts.

Key words: children's well-being, educator well-being, low socio-economic contexts, support