

Collaboration event by the Democracy Development Programme and the Government Communication and Information System RSA (GCIS)

DATE: 19 March 2008

Venue: Chatsworth Youth Centre

Time: 11h00 -14h00

Attended by: Manju Marimuthu

Objective for the discussion forum

“Views on the National Schools Pledge and the bill of Responsibilities for the youth of SA”

The Proposed Pledge must be considered together with the Bill of Responsibilities for Youth. There was much debate around the issue of the Schools Pledge. It was therefore important that the youth gave their expression to their views and sentiments about the pledge. The Forum was well attended by students and teachers from schools representing mixed races.

Programme

The discussion forum was addressed by Mr W. Tabata (Department of Education) and Dr Maggie Govender (UKZN) and the forum was facilitated by Mr Kiru Naidu. They encouraged the learners to share ideas on how to shape the National Schools pledge which is linked to the Bill of Responsibilities for Youth. Mr Tabata also explained that the Bill of Rights has been manipulated by certain youth and that the Bill was initially meant to get the youth to appreciate the rights and responsibilities in a tangible way and to create a National conversation for the youth.

Content

The purpose and content of the Bill of Responsibilities for Youth was explained and a questionnaire handed out. The students and teachers were given the opportunity to discuss the questions in breakaway groups and feed this to the entire group.

Issues that emerged from the discussion groups:

Issues affecting youth in the school

- Lack of respect for teachers
 - Unqualified teachers
- Peer pressure
- Poverty
- Drug abuse
- Racial issues

Issues affecting the youth in the community

- Poverty & theft
- Exposure and availability to drug and alcohol abuse

The students felt that the reintroduction of school guidance councilors during Life Orientation lessons should address these problems and enable them to gain more knowledge on the peers and cultural differences. Other suggestions were; the introduction of peer mentor groups, sport groups and rotational cultural clubs.

They went on further to discuss the issues that divided them and united them.

The outcome, religion, race , gender, morals and economic status was what divided them and democracy, sport, clubs, job opportunities, natural disasters, tragedies and national pride was what they felt , united them.

Stemming from these discussions they were then asked to comment on how the pledge could be used to strengthen the issues that unite them.

There was a strong appeal from the youth that democracy begins at parliament and that there should be no **them** and **us**, the youth must not be discriminated against as being the only ones to recite this pledge. The reciting should start at government and government must set an example.

It was thereafter suggested the “We the Youth of South Africa” be changed to “We the people of South Africa”

The second suggestion was that “Recognizing the injustices of our past, honour those who suffered and sacrificed for justice and freedom” be removed from the pledge. Reason being and as stated by the students that presented “We want to leave the past behind and concentrate on our future”.

In closing,

It was moving to see the unity between the students and their willingness to share their sentiments.

In my opinion, the youth are definitely strong individuals who are quite capable of making their decisions be it good or bad, and the sense perceived was that they wanted to be reminded of the positive democratic future ahead of them and not the pains and the sufferings of their forefathers.

In relation to the DDP’s contribution to the future of these students,

The conversations in the breakaway groups reiterated the need for peer mentorship. DDP is currently piloting a peer mentorship programme with We Help Our Children (WHOC). This programme could be duplicated with the students that attended this forum.

