

Teenage pregnancy and parenting at school in contemporary South African contexts: Deconstructing school narratives and understanding policy implementation¹

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South African national education policy is committed to promoting gender equality at school and to facilitating the successful completion of all young people's schooling, including those who may become pregnant and parent while at school. However, the experience of being pregnant and parenting while being a learner is shaped by broader social and school-based responses to teenage pregnancy, parenting and female sexuality in general. Drawing on qualitative research with a group of teachers and principals at 11 schools (over 80 interviewees) and 26 learners who are parents at school, in Cape Town and Durban, the article argues that dominant moralistic discourses on adolescence, normative gender roles and female sexuality, perpetuating the representation of teenage pregnancy as social decay and degeneration, underpin negative responses to learners. In addition, the school is constructed as a space where pregnancy and parenting are unintelligible. These discourses are shown to be experienced as exclusionary practices by some learners. The article foregrounds the imperative of addressing the larger ideological terrain that impacts on the successful implementation of the policy, recommending support for teachers in the challenges of providing meaningful guidance, constructive support and appropriate interventions in the nurturance of pregnant and parenting learners.

Keywords: teenage pregnancy, parenting, gender equality, female sexuality school, policy

Introduction

Pregnancy and parenting among school-going learners is not uncommon in South Africa. Nearly a third of women have children before they reach the age of 20 (NRC-IOM 2005; Vundule, Maforah, Jewkes & Jordan, 2001). Since education is compulsory until the age of 16, and many learners continue to attend school until they are 20 and beyond, pregnancy and parenting is apparent at many South African schools. In 2007, for example, nearly 50,000 learners became pregnant while at school, with high rates in poorer provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo (Department of Basic Education, 2010). While the Constitution and current educational policy ensure that pregnant and parenting learners may continue schooling, the context of teenage pregnancy is shaped by a wide range of discourses relating to teenage sexuality, pregnancy and motherhood (Luttrell, 2003; Macleod, 2011). As evident in a recent article in a national newspaper, entitled 'Pregnancy Tsunami' (*The Times*, 21 February 2011), teenage pregnancy is an emotive issue in South Africa, constructed in the popular media as well as in much of the scientific literature as essentially problematic, "disastrous" and "damaging", not only for the young women, but also for broader society (Macleod, 2001, 2011). At the core of this popular representation of teenage pregnancy is a range of normative assumptions about what young people should or should not do with respect to sexuality and reproduction, infused by dominant moral, cultural and ideological positions on pregnancy, parenting and families. In a rigorous account of scientific and public discourse, Macleod (2011) unpacks the way in which such responses are framed in a discourse of 'degeneration' in which the pregnant teenager

is viewed as a threat to the social order, both symptom and cause of social problems. Macleod (2011: 5) argues that the “[p]ublic discussions of ‘teenage pregnancy’ and abortion, for the most part, construct a threat of degeneration, in which young women are positioned as contributing, through their sexual and reproductive status, to social decline”.

As a result of the dominant discourses on adolescence, and moralistic positions on young female sexuality, in particular, the position of young parents as learners in schools remains highly contested. A number of recent local studies at schools and with pregnant and parenting learners highlight how the translation of the legal measures supporting pregnant and parenting learners is mediated by the context of the school and the broader community, including the views of principals, teachers and community members (Bhana, Clowes, Morrell & Shefer, 2008; Bhana, Morrell, Shefer & Ngabaza, 2010; Ngabaza, 2011; Nkani & Bhana, 2010). These studies illustrate that there are supportive and nurturant teachers and principals, yet they also highlight a continued resistance and discomfort with pregnant and parenting learners that extends to peers.

In 1996, the South African Schools Act (No 84) was an important moment in translating the broader constitutional commitment to gender equality into the schooling environment. Prior to the Act, it had been fairly legal (and common) for pregnant learners to be expelled. The Act (9(2) (b)) now limited the grounds on which expulsion was permissible to the commission of an act of “serious misconduct”. It also terminated the power of a school principal or governing body to expel a learner unilaterally. However, loopholes in the Act were identified almost immediately. The Gender Equity Task Team (GETT), established to examine the state of gender in South African education, called for special attention to pregnant learners and young mothers at school, recommending that the Department of Education “facilitate the schooling of pregnant adolescents and young mothers, and provide affordable and accessible childcare facilities” (Wolpe, Quinlan & Martinez, 1997: 230). However, until the publication of *Measures for the prevention and management of learner pregnancy* (Department of Education, 2007), schools were left to interpret the law and put it into practice. The 2007 document, designed to make explicit the rights and obligations of schools, teachers and learners, is framed in a discourse of prevention of pregnancy, but also attempts to provide guidelines with respect to pregnancy and parenting at school. The document emphasises the responsibility for parenting as that of the learner, recommends that “a period of up to two years may be necessary for this purpose”, and that “No learner should be re-admitted in the same year that they left school due to pregnancy” (5). On the other hand, schools are told to “encourage learners to continue with their education prior to and after the delivery of the baby” (6). Anecdotal evidence presented in both newspaper articles and a growing number of empirical studies (Ngabaza, 2011; Shefer, Fouten & Masuku, 2012; Shefer, Bhana, Morrell & Manzini., 2012) suggests that this particular aspect of the guidelines is interpreted in diverse ways by schools and not always necessarily in the interests of the learners. As Morrell, Bhana & Shefer (2012: 7) argue “despite the document’s attempts to erase ambiguity, the guidelines are not clear, leaving much interpretive discretion with teachers and school managers, particularly in relation to how long a young mother should be away from school before and after birth”. The rulings with respect to the stipulation not to return to school in the same year, and the guideline that learners are allowed to take up to two years, are particularly open to a wide range of interpretations that do not always necessarily suit the needs of learners. Media examples and the findings of the study on which this article is based (see Bhana *et al.*, 2008) suggest that learners are frequently turned away from school earlier than they would like on these grounds.

This article examines the way in which schools interpret policy within a specific ideological framework and focuses on how discourses shape and, in some instances, undermine a more supportive interpretation and attitude towards pregnant and parenting learners. We are interested, in this instance, in the complex discursive and material context in which pregnancy and parenthood at school is located, and concerned to unpack, in particular, the ways in which policy intention is affected and undermined by continued normative assumptions about gender, sexuality, teenagers and parenthood.

Methods

The article draws on qualitative data from a larger study conducted in two provinces in South Africa, namely KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and the Western Cape (WC), between 2005 and 2007. A diverse group of schools was included in the study, representing the historical divides of apartheid, including schools in historically Black, Coloured and White areas of Durban and Cape Town.² Few significant differences between the various school systems and across the regions were identified, and in this article we were less concerned with identifying differences between schools and regions and focused instead on identifying themes that emerged in the interviews and focus group discussions that were key features of the methodology. The study included interviews with 26 learners (21 female, 5 male) who were pregnant and/or parenting, and 19 focus groups with a total of 79 teachers, and individual interviews with 11 principals, deputy principals or life-orientation teachers at these schools. The ages of the teachers and principals ranged between 22 and 64 years. Most learners interviewed were from lower socio-economic households, some extremely poor, while a number of the Cape Town sample was slightly more affluent. Their ages ranged from 16 to 20 years at the time of the interview. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed *verbatim* and translated, where necessary. This study primarily represents the voices of young women, as they constituted the majority of those interviewed. Interviews with the teachers and principals tended to assume a discussion about young women in talking about pregnancy and parenting at school. Locating fathers to participate was difficult and only possible at one school, so their voices regrettably are mainly unheard.³

This article uses discourse analysis that is located in a social constructionist framework and is sensitive to gender and power. We were concerned with unpacking the way in which participants' narratives reveal dominant aspects of "the macro-social and cultural environment of public discourse and practice" on teenage pregnancy (Macleod, 2011: 130). Our analysis is geared towards assessing the extent to which national policy is able to meet its intentions, and how meanings and belief systems impact implementation. We interrogate how school teachers and principals speak about pregnancy and parenting, and juxtapose their views with the reported experiences of a group of learners. This analysis focuses particularly on narratives that illustrate the way in which Macleod's argument about the dominant discourse on teenage pregnancy, which marks teenage mothers as a 'threat of degeneration' and as inevitably a social problem, is enacted in current practices in schools. While acknowledging the presence of positive experiences and more supportive schooling contexts, we identify obstacles that continue to stand in the way of the successful implementation of policy designed to assist pregnant and parenting learners.

Findings

Findings are presented in two themes that speak to ways in which some school authorities continue to stigmatise and 'other' pregnant and parenting learners, thus rationalising and legitimising their exclusion and marginalisation in the school, and reflected also by the reported experiences of learners. These include a moralistic discourse bolstered by images of pregnancy and parenting at school, as both reflecting and generative of moral and social decline, and hinging around normative prescriptive and punitive responses regarding adolescence and young female sexuality, and an exclusionary discourse in which schools are sites of learning in which pregnancy and parenting do not belong.

Moral panic and 'disgraceful' young women

Teachers' discourses and learners' stories reveal that pregnancy and parenting at school continue to be constructed within a framework of shame, disgrace and concerns about the moral integrity of broader society. Reflecting the arguments of Macleod, the pregnant teenager and parent who continues to attend school is constructed as a child and yet has illustrated her adult capacity to reproduce, thus destabilising the normative adult-child binarism, which appears integral to the responses of educational authorities. It is within this context that moralising discourses on pregnancy at school emerged frequently in the qualitative interviews with principals and teachers. Even while well aware that the policy expected them

to be supportive of such learners, some participants' language reflected their underlying disapproval of such learners and disagreement with the policy.

Discourses on the deterioration of the moral fibre of society, with the paradoxical image of the pregnant and/or parenting learner representing a loss of 'proper' relations of authority and systems of morality, were evident:

I also think that this sort of thing has seeped into all aspects of our society – from government level down and today everything is acceptable, we are no more strict about what is right and what is wrong – all the wrongs are now acceptable, that is why we are having the problems that we are having. There are no morals anymore. (Female teacher, Nehru High, KZN)

The state and its relatively new policies, which are supportive of the sexual and reproductive rights of young people, was criticised for actively encouraging 'moral degeneration', both regarding sexual practices and for undermining 'normal' family and maternal responsibilities:

... the government's policy states that after child birth, a learner has to return to school to carry on with her studies; this somehow promotes pregnancy because the learner knows that after child birth, she'll go back to school as usual and she will not suffer the consequences of having a child and raising one. (Female teacher, Dingiswayo High School, KZN)

Pregnancy and parenting at school is thus entangled within regulatory discourses about what young people should or should not do or be, hinging around normative notions of the child-adult binarism and lines of authority and control. Teachers' responses to teenage mothers appear to be troubled by tensions which situate normative notions of childhood/adolescence against the broader human rights policy context. Participants drew on religious and moralistic discourses to articulate their concern about the deconstruction of traditional lines of authority. For example:

I cannot accept a school child being pregnant and in school. Coming from the old school of thought, a modern teacher may accept that but I can't accept that. From a religious background, our teachings do not accept that kind of thing. If we accept it, what kind of message are we sending out to the other learners. It is OK to get pregnant because we allow you in school and everything is fine ... As a teacher we also have to watch what we say and how we treat these learners ... but there is a fine line. You are still a youngster and I am still the teacher, a senior person. (Male teacher, Nehru High, KZN)

The perceived blurring of the child-adult boundary is somehow exacerbated by its evidence in the school, an institution bound up with notions of childhood and preparation for adulthood, in which any show of assumed adulthood is taboo:

I don't think it is wise to have learners being pregnant at school. First and foremost they're supposed to be children, what precedent are they setting? I would have understood if they didn't get pregnant whilst at school or if they took time off and had their children. (Male teacher, Maputo Secondary, WC)

Constructions of the pregnant teenager as an object of shame were common in the narratives of school authorities and also reflected in the lived experience of the teenage mothers interviewed. Punitive narratives and notions of disobedience, through the construction of the pregnant learner as a 'naughty child' that refuses 'to listen', to conform to the expectations of childhood, were interwoven in schools' responses to these young women, as elaborated by one of the principals:

[W]e are not happy, we are not happy that our learners young as they are, fall pregnant and we are surprised as to why and how because we preach the gospel of abstinence or at least those who cannot resist ... must practise safe sex but the problem is still there. (Male principal, Lillian Ngoyi High, KZN)

Teachers and principals also expressed their outrage and resistance to what they regarded as young women's lack of shame, for they remain convinced that being pregnant at school is shameful, and that the problem with government policy is that it is diffusing this shame, making it acceptable, thus undermining public 'moral standards':

They come to school, have their baby, leave it home, come back to school, and carry on. And most of them are proud of it! And they don't feel at all ashamed! I mean when I was at school and someone fell pregnant it was: "Oh my word! Biggest secret!" But today they flaunt it. (Female teacher, Munster High, KZN)

That teenage mothers at school also experience this 'othering' through discourses of shame was apparent from the narratives of the participants themselves:

Sometimes teachers make comments and use me as an example when they are talking about young girls who fall pregnant. I laugh it off but it actually hurts and it makes me feel embarrassed. Then once in Drama, my teacher was talking about "fallen women" and then she said "like [name of participant]". (Thabisile, Munster Girls, KZN)

There is an evident disjuncture, in this instance, between national policy script and the moral discourse of teachers. Implicit in the policy is an acceptance that pregnancy may happen at school and that parenting learners should be protected from censorious discourses and institutional prejudice that have prevented them from continuing their education successfully in the past. To continue at school with a pregnant body, and to return to school, possibly still breastfeeding and now parenting as well, requires actively discarding such a discourse of shame.

Particularly evident in teachers' talk was a construction of the teenage mother as 'contaminating'. Those pregnant or parenting at school were constructed as infectious to, and polluting of other learners. The rationalisation that such learners would inevitably provide a negative role model for others and necessarily 'influence' others served to legitimise the exclusion of pregnant learners as soon as their pregnancy became visible:

Firstly, I think for them to be at school it's not right coz it's creating the other kids to do exactly as they are doing, to get pregnant and then go to school ... so the others will be encouraged by that and they will go to school being pregnant, all of them will do that. (Male principal, Lilian Ngoyi High, KZN)

I think that they should not be in school. It encourages the other girls to do the same-if she can get away with it why can't I do it. Although the education department is saying that we must accept them, etc., my personal opinion is that they should not be allowed in school. (Male principal, Nehru High, KZN)

Underlying the discourse of disgrace is the denial and rejection of sexuality implicit in the pregnant and parenting body. Being pregnant at school is shameful not only because pregnancy among unmarried teenage mothers who attend school defies normative expectations of school-going learners, but also because the pregnancy hails an active sexuality which underlies the 'moral decay' discourse. Epstein & Johnson (1998) argue that sexuality is both produced and silenced in schools. Teachers' construction of schools as regulatory institutions for sexuality was evident in their insistence that pregnancy was a marker of secrecy and shame.

In this study, teachers appeared to be strongly entrenched in normative notions about when it is appropriate to be sexual and to parent. Some teachers and principals expressed ambivalence about accepting the agency of young women enshrined in the human rights framework if it means that they may illustrate their right to be sexually active. Thus, even while teachers were aware that pregnancy could be the result of sexual abuse and linked to poverty and other disadvantage, they appeared to assume pregnancy as a show of sexual precociousness:

I think some of the teachers are more sympathetic than others, but nobody's really sympathetic because all the girls have had warnings. They have been told how to protect themselves and we're not sure how many of them ... most of them, when you get them in and you say "who is the father of the baby? Is it a boyfriend?" "Yes it's my boyfriend." And so it's not rape. If they were all products of rapes, one would be much more sympathetic. We know we have girls who are indulging in unprotected sex. (Female principal, Munster Girls, KZN)

Moralistic and blaming discourses regarding young women's sexuality were also evident in learners' reported experiences as they spoke about being 'othered' and shamed publicly in the classroom and, in

some instances, actively punished by teachers. The following quote shows the sexualisation of this young woman within a blaming discourse:

There is this lady teacher [names and describes her], she really is on my case. She always shouts at me, about my not doing school work, my absenteeism and she always accuses me of enjoying boys' company all the time. I had to openly tell her before the whole class that I was struggling with my school work because I was a mother. I missed lessons because I would have taken my child to the clinic. (Molly, Josiah Gumede, WC)

Practices of exclusion and the sanctity of the school

The notion that pregnant girls and parenting learners do *not* belong in school was evident in interviews with principals, but also in interviews with some teachers and learners. The presence of pregnant learners was clearly discomfiting, constructed as reflecting 'badly' on the school, and the desire to render such learners invisible as far as is possible was present in the narratives of teachers and principals:

Let me be honest ... it looks nasty, you know ... grade twelve learners with a big tummy in the school with small kids, grade eight learners you know, didn't look pleasant at all. (Male principal, Dingiswayo High, KZN)

Teenage mothers confirmed that schools privilege reputation above their needs and best interests:

Yes, and he makes a mockery out of you in front of the whole school, because he says that you are giving the school a bad name. When you want him to fill in some forms for you so you can carry on with your schooling somewhere else, he just tells you that he doesn't deal with pregnant school girls. So that really puts a strain on the person concerned. I could be in tertiary now, doing my first year, but I couldn't because of that principal. (Ayanda, Dingiswayo High, KZN)

The oft-quoted argument that the school does not have facilities for child-bearing, implying the improbable conclusion that many workplaces and other public spaces (such as supermarkets) do, as well as calls for their safety and medical care, was used to rationalise the exclusion of pregnant learners as soon as their pregnancy was evident. Some learners recognised the exclusionary logic of what principals and teachers said and took steps to avoid detection. Pheli, at Maputo Secondary, described this experience:

At school when teachers notice that your pregnancy is showing they call you and ask the stage of your pregnancy. If you happen to say around eight months they ask you to stay at home as it would be dangerous for you to come to school, as you could possible deliver at any time or you could be knocked down by other students and things like that. So they ask you to come back to school after you have delivered. As a result most learners conceal their pregnancy because they don't want to stay home, and I also did the same, and no teacher noticed or approached me. One funny thing is that it is only lady teachers who seem to be telling learners to stay away from school, male teachers do not seem to care at all.

In Pheli's account, pregnant learners would like to attend school as long as possible. In concealing their pregnancies, pregnant learners may expose themselves and their babies to detrimental health consequences. This narrative also highlights the way in which female teachers may serve as agents in policing young women's respectability and morality, taking responsibility for ensuring subscription to 'proper' femininity.

What appears common is that the school authorities (as opposed to the pregnant learners) make the decisions about when learners should leave school, and it seems that decisions are in the interests of 'sanitising' the school from 'bad press', rather than the learners' needs. Ntombi, at Munster Girls elaborated:

I was pregnant in grade 11 and I missed three weeks of school. I had to come back and write the June exams without knowing what had been taught in those three weeks. I had missed all that work and no-one was getting the work for me. Luckily I coped, but I don't know how. I don't think that the teachers are doing this for our benefit, but for the school. It's not really about concern for us. It's all about reputation these days.

Pregnant learners find themselves caught between their own academic needs (to attend as much school as possible) and the demands of the school to avoid the ‘disruption’ of learners in an advanced state of pregnancy or in the early stages of motherhood. This response is rationalised by concerns for their safety and a lack of medical resources to cater for their birthing and nursing needs. On the other hand, it is evident that pregnant learners themselves would rather continue until they feel it is necessary to withdraw from school.

For some participants, concern about school attendance may shape their decisions about birthing. Fear of missing work and examinations may encourage learners to intervene in the timing of birthing. Thus, some participants induced birth in order not to inconvenience their schooling, since the policy stipulates that the learner may not return to school in the same year in which the baby is born. State policies and material contexts routinely impact on women’s choices about where, when and how to give birth (Joesch, 1994; Simonds, 2002), although, in this case, the choice of young mothers is shaped by responses of school authorities.

The general lack of empathy and construction of parenting as an intrusion in a space that ‘should not’ accommodate parenting was evident:

The thing that really annoys the staff and me and the secretaries is when they’re given a note to say that they baby is sick and they had to take the baby to the clinic. But that’s usually the type that drops out. (Female principal, Munster girls, KZN)

The learners also articulated a general lack of support and understanding of their parental demands at school, although they often identified individual teachers who provided assistance:

The teachers are usually a problem because in most cases they do not understand. Suppose you have taken the baby to the clinic and you bring evidence to that effect, you get shouted at or they ask why you decided to be a mother if you still wanted to be in school. So really teachers are very unpredictable. Few are understanding, but in most cases learner mothers have to make up stories so that they do not get shouted at or embarrassed in front of the whole class. (Thuli, Maputo Secondary School, WC)

The lack of sympathy for their role as parents may facilitate further concealment on the part of learners:

I prefer to be secretive. I am young and still a student. A baby is not supposed to be a topic at school. My baby is “restricted” to my “outside” life ... babies and baby talk should not be entertained at school. (Tatum, Vespa Senior Secondary, WC)

Similarly, little space for bringing the parenting role into the school grounds was offered, and instead strong arguments against the possibilities of children being cared for at school were made:

We cannot allow [learners] to breast feed here ... and we also discourage them from bringing the kids to school. Because we also work with learners between the age of thirteen and nineteen and we also concerned about the message that can sort of, ja, it can, mostly junior in situations learners can pick up, you know, they can see it as an encouragement (in audible) Its fine to be pregnant just come out of school. (Male principal, Southside Senior Secondary)

Discussion

While studies have shown that there are many teachers and schools who take on caring roles in relation to sick, pregnant and parenting learners, and are aware of their challenges (Bhana, Morrell, Epstein & Moletsane, 2006; Bhana *et al.*, 2010), this article highlighted the continued evidence of discourses of teenage sexuality, pregnancy and parenting that inadvertently or consciously work to undermine the support of such learners in schools. Thus, even though most of the teachers and principals in this study appear to be aware of the stipulations of the national policy, there are also ambivalent and discordant voices in this respect. Discomfort is articulated primarily through a discourse of ‘moral decay’, where the presence of a clearly pregnant or parenting learner is viewed as undermining the school’s reputation and even the broader social fabric of society. Key to that is a notion that pregnant or parenting learners at

school destabilise traditional notions of authority and order. Such a notion may be linked to the dominant construction of the child-adult binarism, in which there is a constant attempt to interpret school-going youth as children rather than as adults. Displays of what is considered adult, such as pregnancy and parenting, are viewed as a challenge to the 'normal' and to social order.

In addition, pregnant learners are judged as infringing prescriptions of sexual modesty that are linked to larger social constraints on young female sexuality. In terms of this global register, sexually active women, in particular those who are assumed to be too young or outside the heteronormative frameworks of marriage and family, are 'othered' by dominant moralities and values, as has been illustrated internationally and locally (Geronimus, 2003; Jewkes, Morrell & Christofides, 2009; Macleod, 2011; Ngabaza, 2011; Pillow, 2006). The response to the teenage mother is thus inscribed within broader regulatory practices related to young sexuality and young female sexuality, in particular (Bhana *et al.*, 2008, 2010).

Schools further appear to construct themselves as spaces in which pregnancy and parenting (at least of learners) are unintelligible and undermine the integrity of the institution. In an increasing context of academic competition and government surveillance of efficiency, schools fear for their public face, afraid that the presence of such learners will devalue their status and 'reflect badly on them'. Thus, a wide range of rationalisations for exclusionary practices of pregnant and parenting learners are articulated, and pregnant learners respond to these in strategic ways to avoid disruptions to their schooling and/or to maintain secrecy regarding their pregnancy, some of which may be dangerous to themselves or their babies.

The responses of schools and the experience of learners to parenting and pregnancy have been shown to be powerfully gendered. Young women bear the brunt of pregnancy and parenting, mostly simply because they are more visible - as our research and other local work indicates, many teenage fathers do not take responsibility for the child and frequently deny paternity (Mkhwanazi, 2010; Ngabaza, 2010) - but more importantly because responses of teachers and principals and even their own peers buy into dominant moralising discourses that stigmatise young women who step out of the normative expectations of school-going female learners.

Conclusion

All policies are open to interpretation, although the 2007 guideline document of the South African Department of Education is particularly conducive to facilitating widely divergent implementation approaches. Normative and gendered expectations of teenagers will shape how teachers and principals relate to pregnancy and parenthood. When dominant systems of morality frown upon learners being sexually active and having children, it is likely that policy will be interpreted in ways that are not always supportive of learners who fall pregnant and parent at school. Addressing key role players at schools as well as in communities, not only to clarify the goals of the policy and implementation, but also to unpack subjective responses to teenage sexuality, pregnancy and parenting, therefore remains a priority. There is clearly still a need among learners for more effective education regarding sexuality and safe sexual practices, which has also been evident with respect to the imperative of halting the spread of HIV, as well as possibly more life skills related to parenting. Since the responses of teachers and school authorities also reflect strong moralistic and judgmental positions, the need to facilitate an interrogation of their own positions on sexuality, gender, and teenage pregnancy and parenting emerges as a priority. In this respect, it is important to avoid a blaming discourse, viewing teachers and principals as those responsible for the challenges that young parents may face. Since these role players are also shaped by their social and cultural contexts, it cannot be expected that they will necessarily have all the skills, knowledge and understanding required to intervene in meaningful ways. Research has, for example, highlighted the challenges that teachers may have in talking about sexuality with young people and generally in providing life-orientation education (for example, Adonis & Baxen, 2009; Macleod, 2009; Motalingoane-Khau, 2010; Rooth, 2005). Teachers and schools need to be adequately supported in the challenges of providing meaningful guidance, constructive support and appropriate interventions in the nurturance of pregnant and parenting learners.

Endnotes

- 1 We acknowledge the financial support of SANPAD (South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development), Grant Number 05/45. We express our gratitude to the learners, teachers and principals who extended hospitality to us during the course of the research project.
- 2 Pseudonyms are used for schools and participants. The following participating schools are cited in this article: Dingsiswayo High (Durban): Former DET township co-educational school; exclusively Black and working class, with a large number of learners from impoverished circumstances. Lilian Ngoyi (Durban): Co-educational township school, with an exclusively Black learner body that includes some from impoverished home circumstances. Munster Girls (Durban): All-girl, former White Model C school; currently more integrated and relatively middle-class with a majority of Black learners. Nehru High (Durban): Former HoD school; includes both middle- and working-class learners, most of whom are Black. Josiah Gumede High School (Cape Town): Former township co-educational school; remains working class with many from impoverished home circumstances, and predominantly Black learners. Maputo Secondary School (Cape Town): Former township school; remains working class with many from impoverished home circumstances and predominantly Black learners. Southside Senior Secondary (Cape Town): Former HoR school; remains working class with some from impoverished home circumstances and predominantly coloured learners. Vespa Senior Secondary (Cape Town): Former HoR; remains working class with some from impoverished home circumstances and still predominantly Coloured learners.
- 3 Swartz & Bhana (2010) provide a valuable account of young fathers' experiences of teenage pregnancy and parenting.

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