

**Community-Based Information System (CBIS):**

**GRADE 8 LEARNERS BECOME RESEARCHERS AND DEVELOPERS IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITY**

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**1. BACKGROUND**

The Free State Rural Development Partnership Programme (FSRDPP), of the University of the Free State, has been actively involved with the Philippolis community since 1999. During 2003 the University and the HSRC took the first steps towards implementing a CBIS-research project in Philippolis. This project was planned to serve as a pilot project to determine whether it is feasible to use grade eight learners as field workers and respondents. The project was implemented during February and March 2004.

The HSRC aims at establishing further CBIS surveys in many more communities, if the planned pilot project in Philippolis is successful.

Philippolis is situated in the Xhariep district in the Southern Free State province, which is one of the priority areas in the fight against poverty. The community is typically rural and consists of four main groups viz Sotho- & Xhosa-speaking people who live mainly in the suburb of Poding-Tse-Rolo; Afrikaans-speaking coloured people who live in Bergmanshoogte; Afrikaans-speaking white people who live in the central municipal area and farmers and farm workers who live on the surrounding farms.

There are three schools in Philippolis viz: a primary school in Poding-Tse-Rolo, an intermediate school in Bergmanshoogte and a high school in the central municipal area. At the school in Bergmansnhoogte there is only one grade eight class with Afrikaans-speaking children. The high school has two grade eight classes accommodating Sotho- and Xhosa-speaking children. The medium of instruction is English at the high school and Afrikaans at the school in Bergmanshoogte.

**2. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**

- To determine if grade eight learners can be used as field workers and respondents.
- To investigate the possibility of including the research activities in which the grade eight learners participate, into their normal curriculum.
- To collect information about the living conditions for the inhabitants of Philippolis.
- To make the information available to service providers and other role players who are involved in the community and who are striving for the development of the people.

### 3. THE RESEARCH PROCESS

In order to achieve the proposed goal, the following process was followed:

#### 3.1 A preliminary investigation

During the preliminary investigation the Free State Education Department, the principals of the schools and the teachers responsible for life-orientation were consulted to acquire their co-operation and their permission to conduct this research project.

Consultations with the Free State Department of Social Development and other interested groups were held as well, in order to gain their co-operation and to give them the opportunity to make recommendations about questions that should be included in the questionnaires.

#### 3.2 Recruiting and motivating field workers

The grade eight learners were informed about the planned research project during visits to their classes. They were invited to participate as field workers and respondents. The learners were very excited and willing to be trained as field workers.

Ten unemployed youths as well as the 120 grade eight learners, between the ages of 12 and 18 years, were recruited to act as field workers. The ANC Youth League helped with the recruitment of the unemployed youth. Four final-year social work students, who are doing their practical work in the community of Philippolis, complemented the field workers.

#### 3.3 Training of field workers

The general concept was explained to the grade eight learners and they were trained in basic communication skills needed for conducting interviews and for completing questionnaires. During training, much use was made of role-playing to give everyone the opportunity to practise doing research interviews. The children appeared to enjoy the training.

The same process was followed with the unemployed youth. They were trained in two three-hour sessions. Because the social work students received training in research skills during their studies, the questionnaires were merely explained to them.

#### 3.4 Collection of data

Data was collected by means of a survey. Two draft questionnaires were put together viz learner-to-learner and home-to-home questionnaires. After discussions had been held with a few members from the community and from the local clinic, more questions were added and the

questionnaires were finalised, so that they could be used during the survey. The learners filled in the learner-to-learner questionnaire in class. Every learner had an opportunity to interview a class-mate and complete the questionnaire. Then the learners each took two home-to-home questionnaires to be completed at their own homes and at the homes of their neighbours. Every learner, therefore, filled in three questionnaires.

### 3.5 Data processing

The statistics division of the HSRC processed the collected data. The most important information was captured in a power point presentation to introduce the data to the learners.

### 3.6 Presentation of the data

The data was presented to the various grade eight classes during class-time. The power point presentation was used and the most important matters were discussed in greater depth. The learners were very interested in the findings. During the discussions I asked them if they would like to hold more discussions about their community and how they could become involved in helping to bring about possible changes in their community. One of the Sotho- and Xhosa-speaking classes was so enthusiastic that they proposed having a discussion on this matter the following Saturday. The learners from Bergmanshoogte suggested that we should get together on Youth Day which was to be held in two weeks' time.

## 4. CELEBRATION

A celebration event was held after the data had been collected. During a visit by senior staff members of the UFS and the HSRC, certificates were presented to the learners as recognition of their participation in the research project. A floating trophy was also given to each school to be presented on an annual basis to the best learner in the learning area, life orientation.

## 5. FURTHER ACTIONS

During the follow-up discussion held on the next Saturday, 15 of the 38 learners arrived. They participated in the discussion with great interest. At the start of the discussion, I asked why they had come. They answered: "We want to do something for our community – we want to change things." Their reply to the question about what should be changed was: "Stop alcohol abuse! Stop family violence! Stop HIV/Aids and stop unemployment and poverty."

In the discussion, ways of how to put an end to all these problems were discussed. Gradually the learners reached the conclusion that the values of the community have to change. They identified two categories of actions that need to be taken. Firstly, something has to be done about the people's values and secondly, concrete actions, such as the establishment of vegetable

gardens, should be taken. At the end of the discussion they decided that on the next Monday they would negotiate with the local municipality about ground which they could use for a vegetable garden. They also decided to have regular group discussions with the social work students on ways to improve the values of the community members.

Twenty learners arrived on Monday to discuss the matter with the municipal officials. When their negotiations did not meet with any success, they, on their own initiative, went to the local clinic and obtained a piece of ground to use as a vegetable garden. On Tuesday they brought gardening tools and began with the vegetable garden. At present they are making good progress and should have vegetables available within a month.

Every week the group comes together for group-work sessions to discuss relevant matters such as: self esteem; values and how can I contribute to the development of my community. They are also planning to hold a talent evening.

The group of grade eight learners from Bergamshoogte held discussions on Youth Day about what they really want to change in the community and about what must be done to bring these changes about. They decided to help clean their environment and participated in a clean-up campaign. They, too, came together for group sessions to give attention to the development of good values.

#### 6. FEED-BACK SESSIONS WITH THE TEACHERS

After the completion of the research project, feed-back sessions were held with the relevant teachers. The teachers were all in agreement that participation in the research project had led to learners participating more enthusiastically in school activities. This enthusiasm was seen in their schoolwork as well. The conclusion was reached that the learners' participation in the research activities had contributed positively to their development and, it is to be recommended, that learners participate in similar projects in the future.

#### 7. CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the actions taken because of the research project, the following conclusions were reached:

- Grade eight learners can, with the necessary training, be involved as field workers in the collection of data for their communities.
- Making quantitative information known, offers the possibility of developing qualitative research and especially participatory action research. It also has the potential of stimulating development actions.

- The participation of the grade eight learners in the research project aroused an awareness, which led to the learners accepting responsibility for the development of their own communities. In this process their self value probably improved as well. The impression was gained that the participation of the learners in this research project activated a positive spiral effect which will probably result in better school achievements and the initiation of actions that will lead to the development of their communities.
- The learners' participation in the project trained them in basic field-work skills and probably contributed to their realisation of the value of research. They will no doubt be enthusiastic about participating in research projects in the future as well.

#### 8. WAY FORWARD

There are plans to follow-up the pilot project with similar projects at other schools in the Southern Free State. In Philippolis the research project will be repeated annually so that the CIBIS can be updated regularly. Currently, further roll-out is being organised in Springfontein, Jagersfontein and Trompsburg. Schools in these towns will, together with Philippolis, participate during January, February and March 2005.

Negotiations with the Department of Education should be initiated in order to make the grade eight learners' participation in the CBIS project, officially part of their curriculum and to link this other initiatives to integrate mathematical literacy in the curriculum.