

Combining school sport with mediation skills as a catalyst for post-conflict community healing: The case of one school in Cape Town



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By Dr. Clever Chikwanda

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Abstract:

The realisation of sustainable post-conflict reconciliation, integration and community healing faces uncertainties due to numerous reasons including insufficient research in the field. Researchers and practitioners continue to seek answers that adequately explain why conflicting parties perpetually revert back to violence after settlement of disputes. A good example is in South Africa, where, after the harrowing injustices of the colonial epoch, the post-conflict government is still to adequately provide sustainable solutions, forcing polarisation and the cycle of violence to escalate in communities.

There is no single explanation to what drives the cycle of violence in the post-conflict South African communities but one dominant discourse is that it could be because the government has failed to genuinely engage grassroots communities in such initiatives, making the achievement of unpretentious reconciliation and community healing elusive, since it does not address the real causes of conflicts.

This paper argues that post conflict communities need capacity to effectively deal with violent conflicts. One of these capacity building mechanisms is through the use of school sport. This study therefore examines avenues through which school sport can be used as a catalyst for mediation programmes in South Africa, to address sustainable community healing. This will capacitate communities with the skills to mediate and resolve their own conflicts, thereby contributing to knowledge and changing the paradigm of post-conflict community healing and social change.

Grounded in the structural functionalist theory and John Paul Lederach's leadership Pyramid, this study was carried out at a school, in a township in the Western Cape, where mediation training for sport participants was carried out. It was assessed at all the stages using the qualitative research methodology.

This study discovered many benefits derived from the sport and mediation training. However, successful implementation of sport and mediation training in post-conflict communities can face challenges around language, diverse ways of interpreting terms and related issues by stakeholders; the extreme dominance of religion; superstition and use of magic in sport; lack of acceptance in communities on issues around age and gender, owing to patriarchy. It also noted that the school system is replete with loopholes that threaten the security of learners. Also, the school system is caught in the net of propagating patriarchal values, albeit in subtle ways. As such, the need to take all these into consideration cannot be overemphasised.

This paper argues that in order to maximise the said benefits, there is need to include all stakeholders in the planning and implementation of such interventions, including the allocation of resources. It concludes that a thorough research needs to be carried out in order to understand and respond to specific community dynamics before this model can be

rolled out in schools and communities. Additionally, there is need to take into consideration the ages of participants, gender, religion and spirituality, the culture of the people, individual participant needs, among others.

The findings of this research greatly assist in formulating strategies for adoption by practitioners and other stakeholders in using combined sport and mediation skills to achieve post-conflict community healing. The knowledge generated contributes to the realisation of new and unique knowledge that contributes to improved approaches to post-conflict community healing. This lays a firm foundation for further research in this field. At policy level, the findings help with evidence-based influence to policy, which can be adopted by governments and help to achieve durable community healing, peace and development.