


FOCUS

EDUCATION OVERCOMING & INNOVATION

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Overview and welcome



Gillian Godsell

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Welcome to the first 2013 issue of Focus, devoted to education and organised along the themes of Overcoming and Innovation.

This issue of *Focus* is an attempt to broaden and deepen the education debate, moving beyond our stagnant litany of educational woes. It includes personal perspectives, as well as expert opinions, because education should be understood as much through the lived experience of learners and families as through policies and theories. There is an emphasis on the Arts, an increasingly neglected weapon in our armoury against both ignorance and exclusion.

Writers in this issue offer different resources for overcoming problems in education: Family and community, Information and Communication Technology, the Arts, individual perseverance. Readers are taken elsewhere, through Africa and the Middle-East, to encounter individuals and communities Overcoming and Innovating.

Remedies that harm

Helen Suzman, defending her opposition to sanctions, explained her fear that the remedy might cure the disease but kill the patient.¹

The same may well be said for the current public discourse on education. We are so busy pointing out the failings of 'the government'² that we dishearten those participants who are making a difference, particularly teachers, but also parents and whole families. When we constantly tell parents that the education their children are receiving is worthless, can we honestly be surprised when the parents in North-West decide to keep their children out of school to achieve other political goals? When we explicitly treat teachers like factory workers, clocking them in and out³, how do we expect the smartest matriculants to choose teaching as their preferred career option?

Suzman's credo was "see for yourself". She did just that, for the whole of her political life, visiting people in jails and bleak resettlement areas far from her comfortable constituency of Houghton. This issue of *Focus* seeks to take the reader onto some important but neglected education battlefields. Mabena (p13) reminds us of the obstacles encountered by Deaf learners, and challenges us to remove the label 'deficit' when discussing solutions for this group of people. She offers an innovative use of Arts teaching, not as an end in itself, but as a vehicle for bringing different groups together, and respecting different languages.

Hlasane (p16) also describes Arts education as a better way of teaching a group with many difficulties to overcome. His *Keleketla!* Library in the Old Drill Hall in central Johannesburg does not just offer a safe reading space to inner city children: It uses its own historical location to teach critical thinking skills relevant to the young people's own experience of themselves as migrants and outsiders.

Dangazele and Mokuku (p25) provide new ways of linking Shakespeare into post-apartheid South Africa. This innovation is not an end in itself, but translates back into the English distinctions that matter for getting into university and acquiring bursaries.

We will need brave citizens to bring creativity back into our classrooms and political and social worlds⁴. We are not alone in having narrowed our teaching down to what is conveniently monitored and measured: from words to numbers⁵. Much of the education reform in the USA has excised the Arts from the curriculum, whether via the intended improvements of the old No Child Left Behind policy and the newer K-12 reform, or the unintended consequences of budget cuts. A growing chorus of comment is arising to count the cost of this.⁶

Overcoming

Botha (p39) and Gambu (p35) provide an insider's view of the problems experienced at school and university by learners with insufficient finance, language, support from family, community and government. Both their stories are accounts of young people leaping the hurdles they describe so vividly, and triumphing against the odds.

Botha's insider-account of the difficulties of students who have made it all the way to tertiary studies helps us appreciate the graduation success-story described in Van der Berg's article (p6).

One of the reasons the education debate goes wrong is the way we measure our progress. Sometimes we choose a yardstick representing imagined excellence, elsewhere in the world, or in our own past. Van der Berg shifts the usual time-perspective and reports on a longitudinal study of NSFAS⁷ students. He finds that over a period of 5-9 years, the pass rate is not very different from the overall pass rate of students in the USA: less than 55% of first-time college students graduate in 6 years⁸. The new South African figure is even more heartening when we compare it to the pass rate of first-generation students in the USA⁹ which is reported at 11%.¹⁰

Over time, young people who have persevered to overcome many obstacles are making their way via university into levels of society where they will have influence. It is to be hoped that they will give our young democracy a different shape, drawing on their life experiences as well as their formal education.

Taking a strict pass-in-three years measure, the overall SA university pass rate has been estimated at 22%¹¹. Expanding the time used as a yardstick gives us a more optimistic measure, not just of what is happening at university, but of what is happening in our society. Over time, young people who have persevered to overcome many obstacles are making their way via university into levels of society where they will have influence. It is to be hoped that they will give our young democracy a different shape, drawing on their life experiences as well as their formal education.

Innovating

Dale-Jones points out that the South African education system is "rife with dysfunction, yet filled with creative innovation" (p50). She reminds us that innovation does not have to be the creation of something new, but that the term can also be applied to the deepening and combining of what already works. Both Dale-Jones and Smit describe the potential role of principals as leaders and innovators. Smit explains how current government performance measurement policies hamper this.

Information and Communication Technology is an obvious area of innovation in education, to improve teaching, to reach into under-resourced schools, and to cut costs. O'Hagan (p55) describes some of the many innovations in this area, some globally award-winning. South Africans are early adopters. They love technology.

The good news is that even South Africans on very low incomes are managing to access the internet.¹²

Brewer and Harrison (p60) have applied ICT to develop an affordable private schooling system. The research on which their work is based, has produced a useful figure: R22 091 per learner as the Cost of Schooling at the lowest level. This minimum figure helps us to expand the debate into where this money comes from for each learner? What is the contribution that must be made by state, parents, donors?

Mkencele's article takes ICT to tertiary level, (p68) referring to the Virtual University of Uganda. One of the exciting things about ICT is that it puts power in the hands of the learner. The box on p74 gives the story of Joseph Mathaba, who without any intervention from anyone else, passed matric with several distinctions with the help of *wikipedia*^{13 14}.

Black learners with this inadequate education became teachers who are still in the system today: teachers with a poor grasp of English, who nevertheless are teaching through the medium of English.

O'Hagan stresses the importance of creating conversations round technology that include all stakeholders. This edition of *Focus* is a contribution to such a national conversation.

Winning, or not?

With all of these heroes, all of this innovating and intervening, why isn't it working? Why do 24% of schools in the Eastern Cape get under a 40% matric pass rate; why do 402 quintile 1 and 2 schools get a

less than 40% matric pass rate, and only 38 quintile 5¹⁵ schools?¹⁶ The counter-question to this is: winning, measured against what?

In 1969 Muriel Horrell of the Institute of Race Relations¹⁷ reported that 13 Africans in every 100 000 reached matric. This referred to the Bantu Education matric, substantially less demanding than the common matric written today. Horrell compared this rate with the number of 866 matriculants per 100 000 of the white¹⁸ population. Black learners with this inadequate education became teachers who are still in the system today: teachers with a poor grasp of English, who nevertheless are teaching through the medium of English. Sometimes they are even teaching learners attempting English Home Language for matric.¹⁹

We cannot put a correct value on where we are if we forget either where we came from, or the educational obstacles which still remain to be overcome. Education is a battle, everywhere in the world. Educating poor people is the hardest of all, as both Botha and Gambu remind us. Perhaps we should stop now and then, and spend some time celebrating every first-generation, every first-in-family student who makes it through matric and then through university. These students are both markers and agents of transformation.

Surprising Allies

The education battle cannot be won alone. Not by government, nor by teachers, learners, or citizens. Alliances, some to be found in unexpected places, are the name of the game.

Part of broadening the education debate is listening seriously to a wider range of voices. The importance of the inclusion of the NAPTOA article (p46) is twofold.

The article makes a very pertinent point about the ambivalence of the official stance on accountability of principals. It also raises an important voice: that of unions striving for greater professionalism of teachers. It is easy to adopt an un-nuanced view of teacher unions. “Off with their heads” is a not uncommon South African response to all union activities in education. However, teachers are the bedrock of education improvement in SA, or anywhere else for that matter. If the state can be trusted with the well-being of teachers, well and good. Unions are redundant. But what if the state cannot be so entrusted? What happens to the country, if teacher working conditions are so bad that the chances of attracting competent young people into the profession diminish year by year? Then there is a role for unions in insisting that conditions of employment must be improved.

Unions in alliance with teachers seeking to play a professional role, in alliance with government and even with parents, are a potent force for change.

Dale-Jones (p50) describes the importance of developing alliances among teachers in communities of practice. Gambu, Mkencele (p68), EL-Namrouti (p43) and Dampier (p29) look at the role of both community and family²⁰ in supporting teachers

and learners. Mkencele describes the role of volunteer teachers in assisting South Sudan’s incredibly difficult switch from Arabic to English as an official language. South Sudan, like South Africa, has to combine development with cultural diversity, although South Sudan has the daunting task of dealing with over sixty different indigenous languages.

Education is primarily about numeracy and literacy, critical thinking skills and employability. But it can never be only about these things. El Namrouti and Mkencele remind us that it is also about identity, development and re-construction. It is about “the continued effort to establish a more equal, transparent and cohesive society.” (Dampier p29).

Education is about how we live in the world. Even, or perhaps especially, a very battered world. That is why, in the very last article in this issue of *Focus*, the story of the orphans appears. In the last article in in this issue, Mkencele describes how a group of young people in South Sudan, orphaned and taken as child soldiers by Joseph Kony, have come back, and established the Self Help Orphans Association. This is a self-funded school where older orphans provide education for younger orphans.

NOTES

- 1 Interview published in Optima May 2004.
- 2 In the South African education debate, it is sometimes not clear who or what is meant by 'the government'. Is it the Minister of Education, or a specific district official, interacting well or badly with a particular school? Is it the South African Schools Act, or a national policy, or a provincial policy, or a common practice which does not comply with policy at all?
- 3 In the Sowetan February 11, 2013, the Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga was quoted as saying that “Just like in factories, teachers have to [scan their fingerprints] when they report for duty. By 10 o'clock we will know how many teachers are not at school, nationwide. At the end of the day they must scan their fingers again and sign off.”
- 4 Nanjira Sambuli, Kenyan musician, mathematician and technologist, argues that most African governments believe that development of maths and science will promote competitiveness in the global market, forgetting that skills taught through literature, design, dance, visual arts, will encourage the originality and critical thinking which grow scientific discovery. Nanjira is quoted by Sandra Pitcher (2013) Three things mobile web East Africa taught us about the state of Tech in East Africa. Accessed 28 February from memeburn.com/2013/02/3-things-mobile-web-East-Africa-taught-us-about-the-state-of-tech-in-africa/
- 5 Sullivan, G (2011) The culture of community and a failure of creativity Teachers College Record 113 (6) 1175-1195
- 6 Collins DE (2013) K-12 Education Reform and Unlearned Lessons from Magnet Schools Teachers college Record February 15 2013. Accessed 22/2/2013 from <http://tcrecord.org> ID number: 17027
- 7 NSFAS is the National Student Financial Aid Scheme of South Africa, a state funding scheme available only students from low-income families. Many families who can in fact not afford to send their children to university, earn too much to qualify for NSFAS loans.
- 8 University of Charlotte accessed 25 February from unc49er.com/588/study-shows-less-than-55-of-college-students-graduate-in-6-years/
- 9 First-generation students are those who are first in their family to go to university; often also the first in an extended family, and/or the first in a neighbourhood. Statistics are not kept separately for first-generation students in SA, but Van der Bergh suggests that many NSFAS students are first-generation, or face the same hurdles as first-generation students.
- 10 Groux, Catherine (2012) First Generation Students strive to persevere Despite Obstacles US News: University Directory. Retrieved 25 February 2013 from www.usnewsuniversitydirectory.com/articles/first-generation-students-strive-to-persevere-desp_12269.aspx#.US4y86Ury-1
- 11 Letseka, M and Maile S (2008) High University drop-out rates: a threat to South Africa's future. HSRC policy brief
- 12 deLanerolle (2012) The New Wave: who connects to the internet, how they connect and what they do when they connect. South African Network Society Project. University of the Witwatersrand. Accessed 25 Feb 2013 from <http://www.networksociety.co.za>
- 13 Learners from Sinenjongo High School in Joe Slovo Park outside Cape Town are lobbying local mobile operators for free access to Wikipedia in SA. It is easier for learners in poor communities to access cellphones than computers. In India, Wikipedia Zero, which enables free access to Wikipedia for cellphones, was rolled out in 2012. www.news24.com/Technology/News/SA-learners-lobby-for-free-Wikipedia-20121210
- 14 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinenjongo_High_School
- 15 South African state schools are divided into 5 quintiles, according to the socio-economic status of the area around them. Quintile 1 and 2 schools pay no fees, receive higher state subsidies and free books. Quintile 4 and 5 receive lower subsidies, may levy fees, and learners must supply their own books and stationery. The system goes badly wrong when there is a mismatch between the area a school is in, and the learners attending that school. A school may receive no additional subsidy for out-of-area learners who can pay no fees.
- 16 Department of Basic Education: NSC Examination Results 2012: Technical Report
- 17 Horrell, M (1969) Bantu Education to 1968. Johannesburg. South African Institute of Race Relations.
- 18 The Star January 10, 1969
- 19 Jonathan Jansen: Pupils Aren't the Problem The Times 31 January 2013. In a personal communication, Jansen told me that very many learners who did not speak English in the home attempted English Home Language, a very difficult exam, for matric because they believed it would improve their chances of acceptance into university.
- 20 Muller (2013)

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Beyond expectations: Progression of poor students through university



Servaas Van der Berg is Professor in Economics at the University of Stellenbosch and NRF National Research Chair in the Economics of Social Policy. His research interests are in poverty, distribution and development, and in social policy areas that relate to these matters, in particular education.

A good education is the only reliable way of escaping from poverty, but this is seldom available for South Africa's poor. Most poor children attend schools where the quality of teaching and learning is extremely weak, even when compared to much poorer African countries. Those who do well in matric then face financial constraints to further studies. Thus, almost two decades after the political transition, the largest population group, black Africans, is still poorly represented at university because of weak schools and the cost of university.

Government has tried to address the financial constraints poor students face through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). This essay sets out some surprising results of a study¹, financially supported by NSFAS, of the progression of five cohorts of students through the higher education system. The study *inter alia* compared the progression of first year students supported by NSFAS for at least one year to those students who never obtained such support, and found the cumulative performance of the NSFAS students to be better than that of the unsupported students.

After a short discussion of the importance of university qualifications and a brief description of the NSFAS system, the essay turns to the presentation and discussion of the results of our study. This is followed by some thoughts on the implications for policy.

Why are degrees important?

University qualifications are important both at the level of society and the economy and at the level of the student, household and community. South Africa needs the scarce skills that drive economic progress. For first-generation university students, successfully completing their studies brings an immense gain in self-confidence compared to those who drop out, as well as economic rewards. The probability of employment amongst those aged 25-30 rises from 69% for those who hold only a matric certificate to 88% if they have a degree. It is also associated with much higher earnings. The average employed graduate in this age group earns more than

four times as much as a matriculant, and this gap is even larger amongst the black population.

Of course, the higher incomes earned by people with degrees may not only be because university degrees make them more productive. Attributes that the labour market rewards – motivation, dedication, intelligence – could perhaps also bring academic success. Put differently, the attributes correlated with the academically more able may be the same attributes that are associated with better job performance, in general. However, academic learning itself probably also does bring some skills valued in the labour market, such as how to persevere, or knowing how interest rates are determined, or how to communicate well in written form.

Education beyond matric has a very important additional benefit also. It helps to break the cycle of weak education and poverty. Children of parents with university education are far more likely to receive a good education themselves, to be employed, and to hold good jobs when they grow up. Education offers the most consistent lifeline out of poverty, in our society as in many others. University education offers, to many, an opportunity to break out of the low income and low education cycle. Only 2.5% of graduates find themselves amongst the poorest half of South Africans. And as will be shown, it appears that NSFAS funding has made a large contribution in this regard, despite some operational and other problems that have plagued this institution through much of its existence.

By the early 1990s, outstanding student debt to universities had risen strongly. Some mechanism was required to assist poor students and thereby to reduce the inequality of opportunity in university access.

NSFAS and the funding of universities and students

The state subsidy per student to universities has steadily declined for decades: for instance, it fell by a third in real terms from 1987 to 2003. Universities typically responded by increasing tuition fees, which increased the costs of attending university and made university education even less affordable to poor students. By the early 1990s, outstanding student debt to universities had risen strongly. Some mechanism was required to assist poor students and thereby to reduce the inequality of opportunity in university access. Providing financial aid to needy students was seen as central to the imperative of deracialising universities and also the top end of the labour market. The Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa (TEFSA) was thus established in 1991 by the Independent Development Trust as a not-for-profit company to provide loans to students. In 2000 TEFSA was reconstituted as NSFAS – a statutory agency with a board appointed by the Minister of Education to represent all major stakeholders in higher education. It receives allocations from the state as well as donations from local and international donors to financially support students.

Financial support to students largely takes the form of student loans (though some donors insist on only funding bursaries), on the understanding that the individual student has much to gain from such studies and that the task of NSFAS is largely to make up for the lack of a viable credit market for university education. To be eligible for a NSFAS loan, a student must be judged to have the potential to succeed and must be financially needy. Once funds have been allocated to universities by NSFAS, based largely on the racial composition of their student bodies, universities administer the selection of the loans using customised means tests to suit their

specific context. Within each institution no racial distinction is drawn in allocating available funds: students meeting the means test criteria receive NSFAS awards irrespective of race. Means tests usually consider family income, household size and composition (whether parents are divorced, the needs of other dependents), and the cost of living. The universities grant the bursaries or loans and report to NSFAS on the progress of these students.

NSFAS has reported that students passed on average 74% of the courses for which they enrolled over the period 1996–2009, which seems inordinately high. In contrast, in 2010 a Ministerial Committee reported that only 19% of all the students NSFAS had funded over the years had completed their studies successfully

The need for financial assistance is massive. Even in 1996, 223 000 students applied for loans, but only 70 000 could be assisted. By 2005 the number of students supported exceeded 100 000 for the first time, and by 2009 it exceeded 135 000. Awards paid out increased substantially from only R154 million in 1995 to R3.2 billion in 2009. Whereas government itself contributed a mere R40 million to NSFAS (then TEFSA) in 1995, in 2011 R5.4 billion was budgeted. Women typically constitute a slight majority of recipients (around 54%), while the vast majority (91%) are black and only 5% coloured, 2% white and 1% Indian. In 2010, the maximum loan that could be allocated was

R47 000. Even this maximum loan is not enough to support students fully during their studies. Of the maximum (which not many students get), between one third and one half would typically go towards university fees, leaving an inadequate amount for covering other living expenses, particularly for those students who have to leave home to attend university.

Loan recipients only start repayments once they are employed and earning at least R30 000 per annum. A student will then be liable to pay 3% of his/her income as a premium on the loan, thus only R75 per month. This percentage increases on a sliding scale to 8% of income for persons earning R59 300 (thus just under R400 per month). Up to 40% of the loan can be converted into a bursary, depending on the student's academic results. Interest paid on the loan is relatively favourable to students.

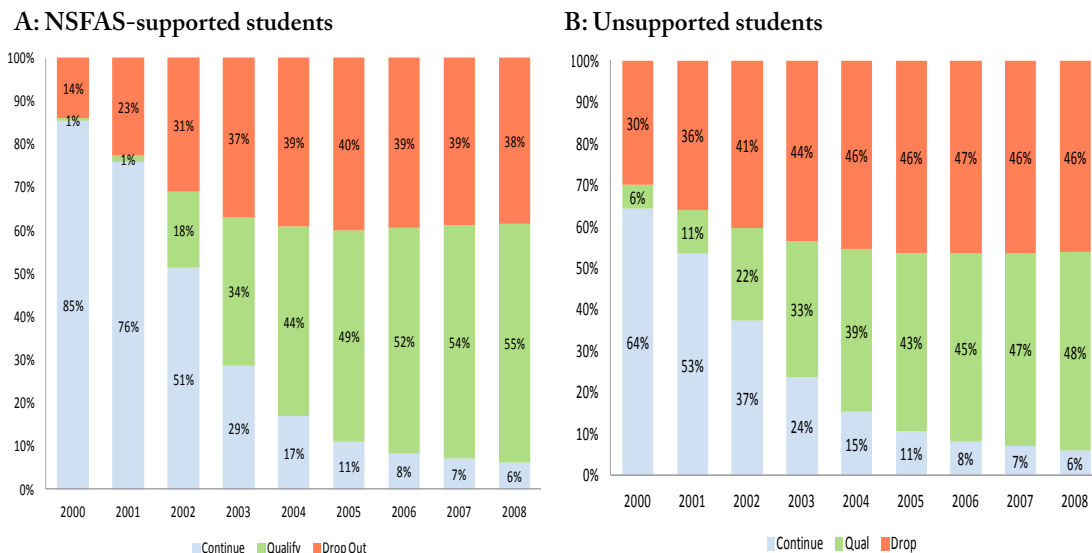
NSFAS has reported that students passed on average 74% of the courses for which they enrolled over the period 1996–2009, which seems inordinately high. In contrast, in 2010 a Ministerial Committee reported that only 19% of all the students NSFAS had funded over the years had completed their studies successfully, that 33% were still studying, and that 48% had dropped out. But these reports are based on limited investigation of the data. Our report provides one of the first systematic assessments of the success of NSFAS awards in assisting students through university.

The performance of NSFAS-supported students

The data we could extract from the EMIS and NSFAS records were for the period 2000 to 2009, i.e. ten years of data. However, for comparability purposes it was decided to investigate the performance of only new first year students in each of the years from 2000 to 2004, and to follow these cohorts through time. This allowed us to observe the performance of the oldest cohort of first years, those starting in 2000, for nine years, but the cohort starting in 2004 could only be observed for six years, 2004 to 2009 inclusive. As will become apparent, one needs long periods to observe students' performance, as many students remain in the university system for several years.

Panel A of Figure 1 below shows how the 2000 cohort of NSFAS-supported students performed. Unfortunately it is not possible from the data to separate the performance in terms of certificates, diplomas and degrees, as students often initially enrol for one but then convert during the course of study, often from a degree to a diploma. Fortunately, deeper digging into the data shows that this does not matter too much in terms of the assessment of the success of students. Interestingly, at the end of the period of observation, 43% of the 2000 cohort who had obtained a qualification had completed a degree, and this had risen to 55% for the 2004 cohort.

Figure 1: Progression through university of students who started their studies in 2000



Panel A of Figure 1 shows that at the end of 2000 (the first year), 1% of the 15 345 NSFAS students had obtained a qualification, 14% had dropped out of university, and 85% were continuing their studies (though some might already have changed courses or even universities). After three years, the cumulative qualifications had increased to 18% of those who had started, but by that time dropouts had increased to 31% of those who started, leaving 51% still continuing their studies. As can be observed in the graph, the proportion who obtain a qualification rises quite sharply in the fourth and fifth year of studies, so that by the end of five years 44% of NSFAS students had obtained a qualification, while 17% still remained in the system, trying to obtain a first qualification. It is apparent that after high early dropouts, there is virtually no further dropout occurring from the end of the fourth year and there are even some drop-ins from time to time, i.e. students who had left university who returned. (This explains the occurrence of even some small reductions in cumulative dropouts between years.)

At the end of the nine year observation period, i.e. at the beginning of 2009, 55% of NSFAS students had received a university qualification. For this cohort, that was 8 678 students who had been supported by NSFAS for at least a year (most were supported much longer). Interestingly, something our study did not emphasise was second qualifications – 2 450 of the successful students, or about one in six, had also obtained a second qualification in the observation period.

On its own, the information in the figure may not seem encouraging. There is much dropping out amongst NSFAS students, and many take very long to obtain a qualification. However, in comparison with students never supported by NSFAS, the supported students perform surprisingly well. There are many reasons why NSFAS students can be expected to perform below average. Application of the

The South African university system – like most around the world – is not very efficient in how students progress through the system. Students learn and get degrees, but generally this does not happen very quickly.

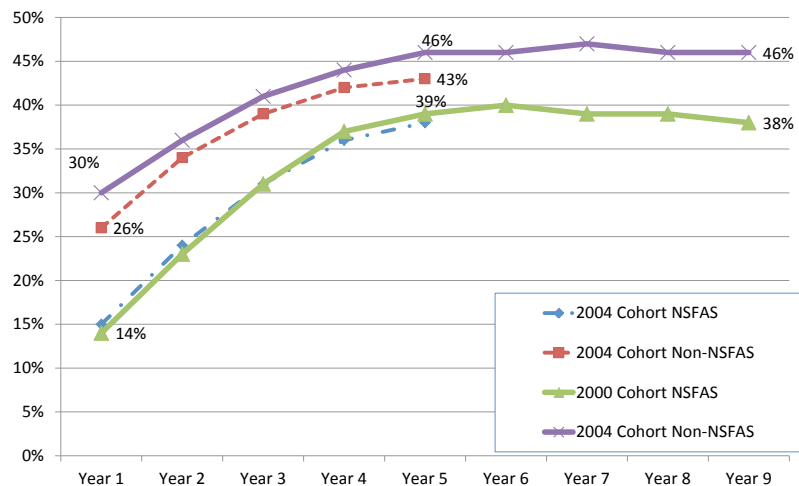
means tests ensures that NSFAS students are drawn from amongst the poorer parts of the student body. Many unsupported students would also be poor, but among them there would also be a good many from middle class, especially white, households. So NSFAS students should generally have an educational disadvantage, in terms of the quality of schools they attended, parental support and home circumstances, and being predominantly first generation university students. Yet, remarkably, after the first few years at

university, the cumulative performance of the NSFAS students is better than that of the unsupported students. At the end of the nine years, 55% of NSFAS students had attained qualifications, as against only 48% of the non-NSFAS students; and more of the latter had dropped out (46%) than of the former.

The performance of NSFAS students in terms of how long it takes to get a university qualification is not very good, but that of non-NSFAS students is even worse, as Panel B of Figure 1 shows. The South African university system – like most around the world² – is not very efficient in how students progress through the system. Students learn and get degrees, but generally this does not happen very quickly. That is a subject requiring further attention in its own right, but here we focus on the relative performance of NSFAS-students.

Newer cohorts do not appear to perform all that differently, at least among NSFAS students. In fact, over all the years observed, the performance of NSFAS students has remained remarkably stable. There has been some improvement in the drop-out rate of the non-supported students, though, as Figure 2 shows. Dropping out amongst such students has declined over that period, but is still higher in the first year than amongst NSFAS students.

Figure 2: Cumulative dropout amongst cohorts of students who started their studies in 2000 and in 2004: NSFAS-supported and non-supported students



Discussion: What explains why NSFAS students outperform others?

If NSFAS students outperform others in terms of our simple measure of performance, the proportion obtaining a qualification, how can this be explained? One possibility is that early dropouts may be less likely to be identified as NSFAS supported students, if they drop out before loans have been awarded. But this can at best explain a small part of the gap in first year dropouts. Also, after the first year supported students do no worse than unsupported students in terms of dropping out.

In our study, we have also tried to statistically control for other factors that may affect the differential performance, insofar as the data allow, in particular the universities at which students study. But these factors do not statistically explain the NSFAS advantage.

Thus we can only speculate, based on the little that we know. Although NSFAS students are supposed to be selected by universities on the basis of need and academic promise, we know from experience and conversations with university and higher education officials that academic potential does not feature strongly in the way universities allocate NSFAS loans. The only criterion is financial need, as reflected in the means test. Selection of students thus does not provide an explanation for the NSFAS-advantage. Neither does the NSFAS advantage appear to be the result of easier courses attended, or specific universities that may set lower standards: controlling for these does not explain the gap either.

Despite the odds being against them, NSFAS-supported students achieve more than other students do, largely because they are less likely to drop out of university. This may be related to the incentives they face ...

The only conclusion that we have been able to draw is that the NSFAS advantage arises from a stronger incentive to complete their studies among NSFAS students. Despite the odds being against them, NSFAS-supported students achieve more than other students do, largely because they are less likely to drop out of university. This may be related to the incentives they face: repaying the loans they have received is likely to be more difficult if they have not obtained a degree or diploma, and there would be more to repay, because the loan has not been converted to a bursary. Thus loan repayment provides the incentive to make NSFAS students more likely to succeed, despite the fact that they are more likely to have been from the lower end of school performance.

It is ironic that repayment of the loan should have such a large effect on the behaviour of NSFAS students. Internationally, such schemes face a large problem of loan repayment after recipients leave university. This is also true for NSFAS. Though employers are obliged by law to report when they employ NSFAS students, most problems are experienced in tracking debtors to their place of employment. NSFAS records of what they are owed and what part of it is being recovered are weak. Capital repayments grew from R30 million in 1998 to R636 million in 2009, which is not an insubstantial amount, but it is unclear whether South Africa is doing any better than countries elsewhere that use a similar type of scheme. What is clear though is that the bulk of the loans are never recovered and, in the assessment of those administering the funds, repayment is quite low. So the threat of having to repay may have an influence on behaviour, but once repayment is required, many do not repay their loans, which are thus *de facto* simply converted into bursaries.

Policy implications

What do these results imply for policy? In the first place, they show that the funds allocated to NSFAS have made a substantial difference. More of the same is likely to bring even greater benefits. That is indeed what government is planning, judging by the rapidly growing medium term budget allocations to NSFAS.

A policy area to explore is what mechanisms can help to better identify student potential, so that loans can be targeted at those poor students who are more likely to be successful. Academic support programmes at universities have long tried to measure academic promise, with limited success, so not too much faith should be put into any attempt to improve on targeting in this way. It is simply extremely difficult to predict who will successfully make the transition to university.

Finally, what the remarkably successful record of NSFAS students shows, is that a loan, rather than a bursary scheme, is a very good way of providing an incentive to poor students, who are often from weak academic backgrounds, to persevere. While time is often considered the enemy of university completion in developed countries (i.e. as the length of time at university increases, so does the probability of dropping out), for the South African situation it appears that keeping capable students at university beyond the initial difficult adjustment period from school is crucial for ensuring that they fulfil their potential. By enabling this, NSFAS has provided a lifeline out of poverty for many.

NOTES

- 1 Pierre de Villiers, Chris van Wyk & Servaas Van der Berg. 2012. The First Five Year Project – a cohort study of students awarded NSFAS loans in the first five years 2000-2004. Stellenbosch: Bricolage & University of Stellenbosch.
- 2 In the USA, only 58% of full-time students complete a four year bachelor's degree within six years, and 61% within eight years. (See College Completion USA, Graduation rates bachelor's degrees, at http://www.completecollege.org/state_data/).



Simangele Mabena

graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand with a Master of Arts Degree in Applied Drama and Theatre in 2008. She has worked in various organisations working with disabled youth and the arts. She has recently returned from completing the Sauvé Scholars Programme in Montreal, an international Fellowship for young visionary change makers from across the globe. There she launched the *WordPlay Symposium*, an Arts and Literacy Symposium, bringing community artists and educators in Montreal together to collaborate in innovative teaching practices to teach literacy to special needs students. Simangele is currently an Associate Lecturer in the South African Sign Language Department at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Visual Literacy – New ways to see Deaf Education

This article will explore an innovative way in which Visual Theatre can be used to overcome educational barriers. This is accomplished by establishing access to literacy and quality education for Deaf children. According to the Deaf Federation of South Africa, one out of three Deaf people are functionally illiterate.¹ To put this overwhelming statistic into context, the average Deaf grade 12 learner has the reading comprehension of a hearing 8 year old, and by adulthood, these learners are unsuccessfully integrated into mainstream society as a result of their disempowering educational experiences.

The medical view of disability describes deafness as an illness whereby the deaf are impaired in the physiological ability to hear. The social attitude embodied in this medical classification results in unfair social discrimination. It is this “health-related inability”² that reinforces the idea that the deaf community is disabled. This negative attitude is still prevalent within the greater hearing society, as deafness is seen as a condition categorised by a sense of ‘lack’ in health and language. There are, however, deaf people who consciously do not identify themselves according to the societal definitions of deafness. These deaf people proudly group themselves according to a shared signed language and recognise the culture associated with the deaf collective. They identify themselves as a community that is a linguistic and cultural minority.³ They identify themselves according to a social model that is based on the belief that the circumstances and discrimination faced are socially constructed phenomena that have little to do with the impairments of disabled people.

The identification of the Deaf⁴ community also has ramifications on the education of Deaf learners. The education of the Deaf learners is mainly under the jurisdiction of the hearing society, which adopts the medical view of “deafness-as-disability”⁵. Deaf learners are mainly seen as disabled within the education system rather than part of a cultural and linguistic minority. As a result, there are many complex factors that affect the education of Deaf learners that include, South African Sign Language (SASL) not being recognised as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT), and only a few teachers being fluent in SASL.⁶ These have negative effects on both educators and learners.

Sign languages fulfil the same communicative functions and possess the same grammatical complexity inherent in any natural language. The difference lies in the mode of communication:

hearing society utilises an oral-aural mode of communication where messages are produced orally and are interpreted aurally, while the Deaf community communicate through a visual-gestural mode where messages are produced using manual signs and facial expressions and interpreted visually. These differences act as a barrier in education between the hearing educators and the Deaf learners. There have been efforts made over the years by the hearing society to 'overcome' this language barrier but these have not been truly successful. In the South African context, schools tend to employ Total Communication as a

One such method that can be applied to Deaf education is drama and theatre, as it is a bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence that integrates both mental and physical activities to solve problems.

LOLT, which is a mixture of signs that are supported by a spoken language in an *ad hoc* way.⁷ Although the learners are receiving an education, the quality of education must be questioned, as this LOLT is inaccessible and confusing to the Deaf learners because it is neither based on SASL nor does it follow the same grammatical rules as spoken language.

A different solution must be sought that addresses the need to provide an alternative literacy education to Deaf learners while not compromising the LOLT that is not text based as it puts the Deaf learners at a disadvantage. One method that can be used is from developmental psychologist Howard Gardner (1993), who introduced the notion of Multiple Intelligences with its references to the addition of multimodal creativity in education. According to Gardner, learners have multiple intelligences that range from:

- Linguistic
- Logical-mathematical
- Musical
- Bodily-kinaesthetic
- Spatial
- Interpersonal, and
- Intrapersonal intelligences

Gardner saw these intelligences as rarely operating independent of one another and tending to complement one another as people developed skills or solved problems. He encouraged educators to approach education with creative and non-traditional methods. One such method that can be applied to Deaf education is drama and theatre, as it is a bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence that integrates both mental and physical activities to solve problems. Many traditional theatre practitioners still prefer using text-based theatre approach, but this is a barrier for the Deaf, as their literacy levels are not on a par with the hearing. One of the pioneers of non-traditional form of theatre which relies on neither spoken nor signed language to convey narrative is Visual Theatre.⁸ Alternative mediums such as gesture, puppetry, masks and projection are used. These mediums, when present in drama and theatre, are useful in facilitating dialogue between Deaf and hearing performers.⁹ They have the potential to facilitate education between Deaf learners and hearing educators as they are not text based, but rely on visual images.

In addition to Gardner's philosophy, is Brazilian theatre maker Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed". It is a theory on utilising theatre to liberate an individual from personal oppression, and could also be beneficial in Deaf education. One of his earlier forms of emancipatory theatre was "Newspaper Theatre"¹⁰, where he provided illiterate audience members with visual performance skills to transform

daily news or articles into theatrical scenes as a way to help them to access literacy. From this theory, Boal later devised the term “Spect-Actor” to describe an actor who observes and actively participates in the theatre action. For Boal, the Spect-Actor had the privilege of simultaneously engaging in two different worlds: the real world and the theatre world. In Deaf education, the Deaf learner has the opportunity to be both the spectator as well as actively engage in the actions of the drama, rather than being the mere spectator in the education process.

In order for Boal to transform the spectators into Spect-Actors, he established a series of processes within the theatre action to achieve this. Boal promoted the language of the body by familiarising the spectators with their bodies through participating in various theatre games without the use of spoken language. From the subsequent games, the spectators become more like actors and began relying more on producing images using their bodies to create dramatic action.¹¹ Boal’s processes of creating a Spect-Actor resonate with this article’s claims that drama and theatre can be used as effective and accessible

educational methods between Deaf learners and hearing teachers. Boal’s drama and theatre techniques are less reliant on a spoken or signed language than on the language of the body, which is a gestural language collectively understood by Deaf and hearing in the expression of dramatic action. It is within the context of the drama and theatre that the body will create meanings on many levels.¹² In the educational context, the body is then the primary visual carrier of meaning of educational content between the Deaf learner and hearing educator. Visual Theatre is the ideal form of theatre, as it is the most visual of forms of theatre.

As a linguistic power struggle continues between the Deaf and hearing community regarding the education of Deaf learners, an innovative approach needs to be introduced. Non-traditional drama and theatre and Visual Theatre is proposed as an integrated educational approach in breaking the linguistic barrier between the Deaf and hearing. The meanings derived from the visual images between the bodies amongst the learner and educators are collectively understood in the education process. In the playful way of Visual Theatre, literacy can now be accessible to the Deaf learner in a visually appealing way that will not rely fully on SASL or spoken language.

NOTES

- 1 DeafSA, 2006
- 2 Shapiro, 1999:87
- 3 Ladd, 2003
- 4 Wrigley, 1996: Culturally Deaf individuals and community are referred to with a capital “D”. Deafness with a small “d” refers to the simple fact of audiological impairment and is distinct from self-identification.
- 5 Lane, 1999:19
- 6 Magongwa, 2010
- 7 Magongwa, 2010
- 8 QuestFest, 2012
- 9 Mabena, 2008
- 10 Boal, 1979
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Fleishman, 1996

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Culture as development of voice and self-articulation: *Keleketla!* after-school programme



Rangoato Hlasane is an artist, writer, illustrator and DJ based in Johannesburg, South Africa. He completed MTECH in Visual Arts from the University of Johannesburg, FADA. His dissertation was an investigation into the role of the arts in mobilising communities. He is the co-founder and co-director of *Keleketla!* Library, an independent, interdisciplinary library based in Johannesburg. He has facilitated and coordinated community-based arts and development projects around South Africa over the last five years, most recently with Thenjiwe Nkosi, Raymond Marlowe and Musina artists for a formation of a community-led functional arts network in Musina. Rangoato acts on the advisory committee of VANSA Gauteng.

This text explores the role of the arts and media as tools in articulating independent voices. Descriptive and interjected by anecdotes, it shares some of the methodologies employed at Keleketla! Library, an independent and interdisciplinary library and media arts project based at the historic Drill Hall in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Background context: The Drill Hall

Built on the ruins of a 'native prison' in 1904, a military base buttressing British colonial power, the site of the 1956/7 Treason Trials and marshaling point of armed forces across the African continent over the course of a century, the Drill Hall has a remarkable history. It specifically reflects the story of Johannesburg within the larger narratives of South Africa's social, military and political shifts. Between 2002 and 2004 the Drill Hall was redeveloped as a historical site through the efforts of the City of Johannesburg and the South African Heritage and Resource Agency.



The public square used to be the hall that hosted the 1956 Treason Trial preliminary hearings

With the support of the City of Johannesburg, the independent artist organisation, the Joubert Park Project (JPP), has taken on the task of activating this multi-use space through arts, culture and heritage programming. Operating from the Point Blank gallery in the west block of the Drill Hall precinct, the JPP implemented groundbreaking cultural and arts programmes including exhibitions, interventions, residencies and workshops with local and international artists and cultural workers.



The Keleketla! Contemporary Dance group (seen here performing a piece titled Movement Mandela) consists of the longest standing members of the library, two of them members since 2008

In February 2008, the JPP ceased working on the site after the establishment of a new entity: *Keleketla!* Library. The JPP invested its time and resources to build the capacity of the new organisation. Part of this capacity building included the implementation of the Drill Hall Arts, Culture and Heritage Programme funded by the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund, a highly successful project that brought together school learners, artists, historians, cultural workers and educators through dialogue and creation.

The *Keleketla!* After-School Programme

The *Keleketla!* After-School Programme (KASP) was established in 2008 as a youth learning space that relates history and contemporary issues to the lived experience. The point of departure is informed by the view of culture as a basic human right. It is through culture that true articulation of the self can occur. The programme aims to engage the youth in critical analysis of contemporary social, political and economic issues of the city, the country and the continent.

The programme's goals are achieved through dialogue over a period of approximately ten weeks. The dialogue is interactive and centres on heritage and real life experiences of the youth (high school learners and young practitioners). The dialogue also leads to creative output in the form of visual art, recordings, published texts, performance and other expressive mediums.

The programme creates a meaningful space for the youth to use available tools in ways that contribute to learning and personal expression.

The programme creates a meaningful space for the youth to use available tools in ways that contribute to learning and personal expression. This consistent programme, as opposed to once-off activities, enables sustained growth through scaffolding of information. This further attracts members to return year after year, some moving into higher education with strong ties to *Keleketla!* Library.

The first point of entry is the library. The library has over 1800 members able to access the items. Members are then able to access the after-school programme, where they can participate in the projects on offer, including dance, music, writing and visual art. The dance group members have been consistent since 2008, while the music group has been recording since 2010. In this way the programme builds a community.

KASP contributes to high school education and develops young thinkers and problem-solvers. It builds talent and skills in arts methods and critical thinking. Our After School Programme contributes to not only the demands of high school education, but also develops ‘voices’ and self-articulation in a city of outsider representation.

KASP is realised through the following guidelines:

- The programme is ongoing, enabling scaffolding of information for returning and consistent members;
- Returning members assume responsibility due to familiarity and rapport, taking leadership roles. Some members volunteer shifts in the library and act as runners during events;
- The invited facilitators enjoy a fulfilling learning environment, leading to further collaborations;
- The project is attractive to undergraduate students and recent graduates who build profiles and enhance employment opportunities.

Not to be understood as a ‘social development’ or an after-care project, KASP is a programme that foregrounds arts and media processes as platforms for the youth to define contemporary experiences of the city, the country and the continent.

Keleketla! Library provides a space for experimental and independent thought that challenges and expands the notion of a library. The library is as much a space for knowledge resources as it is for knowledge creation and dissemination. In the context of youth education, the media arts provide a space for experimentation and self-assertion.

KASP is an arts and media space for learning through experimentation. Not to be understood as a ‘social development’ or an after-care project, KASP is a programme that foregrounds arts and media processes as platforms for the youth to define contemporary experiences of the city, the country and the continent. The recent project, *Teen Talk*, is a reference point for articulation of voice.

Teen Talk: Fun but not Funny

Teen Talk is a youth forum in the format of a talk show, produced by members of KASP. It was realised in partnership with Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders), as a school workshop component of the anti-xenophobia campaign, ‘Solidarity for Survival’. *Keleketla!* developed a series of workshops in the form of a fictional youth magazine show as a build-up to a multi-disciplinary march. The ‘show’ took place at Constitution Hill on the 2nd, 9th, and 16th of June 2012.



Teen Talk hosts in conversation with (left) Marc Gbaffou of the African Diaspora Forum and Sharon Ekambaram of Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF). (Below) in front of a diverse audience

The nine-member strong crew worked under the guidance of experienced and energetic mentors from diverse fields including research, television and film production and visual arts. Furthermore, the show invited knowledgeable practitioners as guests, ranging from activists on Pan-African diaspora issues, to public health practitioners. The audience consisted of a diverse group of youth living in greater Johannesburg. As an appropriation of a youth magazine programme, the shows incorporated contemporary dance, poetry and music charged with fresh perspectives and powerful expressions. The combination produced a rich dialogue on migration through media processes and tools.



Esmay Masauso, a young poet who participated in the show, and Wesley Hlongwane, aKASP member and *Teen Talk* crew, reflect:

“...[T]he speakers brought into discussion the South African historical experiences under Apartheid. This surely took the audience into retrospection as many folks in the audience could connect with the country’s experiences. Interesting ideas such as how Nigerian folks helped set South Africa free were useful. The audience was given a kind of a serious historical lecture which surprised and even shocked some members of the audience.”



The march connected Constitution Hill and the Drill Hall on 23 June 2012

On Saturday 23 June, 2012, a multi-disciplinary march commenced from Constitution Hill and ended at the Drill Hall. The march's aim was to link two communities that were, and still are, greatly affected by the xenophobic attacks: Hillbrow and the inner city of Johannesburg. The areas are homes to foreign nationals from all parts of Africa. The march incorporated silk-screened posters and live music, concluding with a multi-media physical theatre performance at the Drill Hall. *Teen Talk* presenter, Trish Sibanda, speaks about the impact:

"I have been part of many workshops in the past but *Teen Talk* was a different workshop altogether. Why am I saying so? It is because other workshops were directed and led by adults and barely took into consideration the youth's perspectives on certain issues that were discussed. *Teen Talk* is the brainchild of a youth (Emma) and the team on its own consisted of mostly youths. We had adults amongst us, but whatever decision taken was made as a team, because

everyone's voice, no matter how small, mattered. In *Teen Talk* we basically discussed how the 2008 xenophobic attacks affected us and how as South Africans are learning from our mistakes, to try and avoid repeating the same mistakes again."

Tammy Trish Sibanda, *Teen Talk* crewmember and co-presenter

In the long term, we believe that the current KASP members are the future Keleketla! leadership. In the short and medium term, the programme enhances the learning experience of the members. Members indicate leadership qualities, which makes it easier for rotating facilitators to practice.

KASP believes in sustainability. A clear example is how members return year after year. Some have been members of the programme since its establishment in 2008. In the long term, we believe that the current KASP members are the future *Keleketla!* leadership.

In the short and medium term, the programme enhances the learning experience of the members. Members indicate leadership qualities, which makes it easier for rotating facilitators to practice. As a result, facilitators and learners develop a rapport that leads to meaningful exchanges, imagination and creation. Thus

Keleketla! simultaneously provides opportunities for emerging cultural practitioners and generate a platform for artistic excellence rooted on heritage education.

The Drill Hall as a physical heritage space is a living history. It occupies space and defines the lives of those around it, people of the city and society in general. It is both imagined and lived. It is contested, vandalized, used and abused. Arts programmes contribute to a sense of shared ownership.

Knowledge application and generative use of heritage

Keleketla! Library possesses historical material courtesy of the Mayibuye Archives and Museum Africa. We have secured rights to use the material for educational purposes within the programme. Furthermore, the JPP has produced remarkable amounts of artwork and research around the Drill Hall and the Treason Trial. The JPP has also granted *Keleketla!* full permission to use the art collection and publications towards the educational programmes.

The material referenced in the programme is used to enhance the experience of each project. The KASP members reflect on the value of selected material and imagine strategies to contribute new perspectives on historical artifacts and facts. History is seldom repeated in music and the dance productions that emerge out of the programme. The new short stories written by young learners explore issues such as teenage life, loyalty, ambition, religion, history and (dis)ability. The narratives found in the creative work are sophisticated, expressive, and not mere representations of history.

For example, Phomolo Sebopa's 'Bibi the Special Swimmer', a story of a person's disability, is handled with the utmost sophistication, sensitivity, critical awareness and pride. There is no victimhood or self-pity; it is full of voice and dignity. It is important for a people to assert their own reality in relation to the world and the arts enable such self-realisation.

When art is permitted to reflect on history people can imagine alternative histories, enabling fertile ground for discussion and reflection. Heritage thus initiates dialogue, allowing us to see heritage education as new form of knowledge production.

The outcomes of KASP are valuable as they provide insight into young people's perspectives, develop skills, expose new talent and nurture growth. We believe heritage can be used to evoke nostalgia, provoke anger, encourage healing, and avoid repetition. History is believed to be the story of the victor and as a result it leaves multiple perspectives out of the historical narrative. When art is permitted to reflect on history people can imagine alternative histories, enabling fertile ground for discussion and reflection. Heritage thus initiates dialogue, allowing us to see heritage education as new form of knowledge production.

Scientific Relevance

The programme uses the on-site library, the physical Drill Hall site and archival material as references in its activities and initiatives. For example, the 2011 Visual Art group painted a mural of people holding posters on the wall along De Villiers Street, referencing actual documentation of the Treason Trial. The mural site was selected because it is a high traffic zone, and an informal taxi rank for northbound commuters.



The 'We Stand By Our...' mural on De Villiers street combined historical and contemporary politics of the continent.

The mural site was also selected because of its political significance. De Villiers was one of the areas affected by the xenophobic violence in 2008. De Villiers was also an assembly point for the supporters of the Treason Trialists in 1956. The supporters lined up along De Villiers to enter the Drill Hall through Quartz Street, holding posters stating, "WE STAND BY OUR LEADERS". The mural incorporated various posters from The Chimurenga Chronic's public art intervention, with titles such as 'Are diplomats immune to xenophobia', 'Why are Kenyans running to work', and 'Introducing the South African Guilt Tax'.

'The Chronic', was a once off, one-day-only newspaper that goes back in time to the week of 18 May 2008, when xenophobic violence broke out in Alexandra and spread to other parts of this country. To accompany the launch, *Keleketla!* Library was commissioned to coordinate a six-week public art poster campaign in Johannesburg, of which the mural forms a part. The Chronic posters share an important conceptual link with the posters used by the supporters of the Treason Trialists in 1956. Thus the mural served as both a reminder of a historical event and as a canvas to express current socio-economic and political reality of our society.

In 2012, the Freedom Community College choir worked with a five piece band to re-imagine liberation era songs towards a public concert. Thus the programme explored history through the medium of music.

We believe that our programme contributes new knowledge based on the following strengths:



An interdisciplinary concert, the performance combined a choir, a five-piece band and dance

Access:

- The programme attracts undergraduate students, recent graduates and self-taught artists from Johannesburg and beyond.

Exchange:

- The programme design includes critical feedback sessions with inner city high schools. We invite a Grade 11 history class and a teacher to reflect on how our programme links to the school curriculum.

Share:

- Together we explore how art and media tools could enhance the learning experience of school learners. As a result we developed an innovative education supplement

Experience has taught us that new knowledge is valuable. Thus KASP aims to produce new knowledge on heritage through publications in print, performance and online media. We intend to share our processes and outcomes. We believe publishing is part of a cycle in the production of knowledge. Thus arts and media should be made accessible to people as a basic human right.

At the end of 2012, *Keleketla!* Library published a dense educational publication titled '56 Years to the Treason Trial'. The publication presents narratives, questions, answers and issues by historians and youths, side by side. In reaching towards



The 56 Years to the Treason Trial publication as a platform for multiple voices and perspectives on history and the living experience

opposite ends of the spectrum bringing together young and old, those who fought for democracy and those who live in a democracy, the diversity of personal lives that helped shape the struggle as well as those who shape the inner city today. The publication therefore suggests the role of individual agencies and strategies for change.

The publication is produced as a fragmented collection of voices; young and old, learners and graduates, artists and historians, archival and contemporary. It is ambitious as it speaks to a wide audience – it reads as a magazine and a textbook, a journal and a notebook.

Conclusion

Culture is a tool to imagine our worlds and represent them. It is recognition of self in relation to the world, as opposed to the world in relation to self. Culture provides tools for self-emancipation. To quote one of the long-standing members of KASP and founder of *Teen Talk*, Emma Ramashala,

“My vision is simple: reach out to teenagers all over. And I’m happy to say that we reached India. I want this message of ‘You are not alone’ to spread because parents can’t be there when we need them. They don’t understand us but our peers who go through what we go through can. So imagine the power of teenagers understanding each other and solving each other’s problems together, it will not only benefit individuals but South Africa as a whole because we’d have a brighter future.”

Keleketla! Library: A five-year reflection,
Rangoato Hlasane and Emma Ramashala,
56 Years to the Treason Trial, 2012

NOTES
All photographs by Rangoato Hlasane and courtesy of Keleketla! Library
To learn more about Keleketla! Library and to read the stories mentioned in this text please visit: www.keleketla.org
A new website to mark Keleketla! Library's five years of practice can be accessed here: www.call-response.org

Shakespeare: Friend or foe?



Nobulali Dangazela is the founder and Managing Director of Nobulali Productions. She is a Mandela Rhodes scholar and has a Masters Degree in Dramatic Arts. She is a sought after motivational speaker, facilitator and thespian. She is a Naledi judge and a Drama For Life (DFL) lecturer, based at Wits university. She worked closely with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) as a local artist in the Shakespeare: World Wide classroom project.



Selloane Mokuku is a Drama For Life (DFL) alumni, with a Masters Degree in Dramatic Arts. She is a ShakeXperience facilitator, Programmes and Curriculum Developer for Nobulali productions (www.shakexperience.com). She worked as an independent Consultant for various UN organisations and research institutes, and currently lectures for DFL based at Wits University.

'Now is [truly] the winter of our discontent! These are the words that come to mind when one thinks about the English set work of one's year. As it means hours and hours of awkward encounters with rather boring men in tights, monotonous thees and thous, convoluted stories about someone who killed someone's something and now seeks revenge and has returned in 2013 through reincarnation as an English teacher because, yes, one has to read ... Shakespeare!'



Roshnee Gupta and Nobulali Dangazela

The greatest complaint is that *'Shakespeare is boring and irrelevant in our lives! And that's why he sucks'*. These were the words uttered by matriculants from Nobulali's former high school in 2008. *Perhaps?* She responded. Nevertheless, their objection did not fall on deaf ears. An opportunity to make Shakespeare and other set works prescribed by the Department of Education (DOE) as well as Independent Examination Board (IEB) easy to understand came into being, and a facilitation approach called *Shakexperience*^{TM1} was birthed.

In South Africa, Shakespeare is amongst the few playwrights that English Heads of Department have to choose from. Which of Shakespeare's 37 plays get chosen depends on whether a school is English

The project aimed at exploring where, how, and why Shakespeare is taught around the world, with 2012 having marked 400 years since his death. The focal point of the project was put on young people's lived experiences of Shakespeare in different cultures and countries.

First Language or First Additional Language. And, although optional for First Additional Language (FAL), there are other schools, such as Prudence High School, that still dare to take the bull by the horns to become one of the two schools (amongst 56) doing Shakespeare in Soweto.

Numerous efforts have been undertaken to make Shakespeare discernible. These include The Shakespeare School's Project (1988), and, more recently, the *Maskew Miller Longman Active Shakespeare* series. As of 2008 Shakexperience™ joined the ranks and became one of these responsive efforts.

As a model, Shakexperience™ uses applied drama and theatre methodologies to facilitate teaching and learning. Pedagogically, it relies on four components:

- eXite (our way of teaching),
- eXplore (our way of learning),
- eXchange, (our way of growing); and
- eXamine (our way of improving).

Accordingly, the self (marked X) is at the centre of one's own learning. After many years of trial and error, the method finally got a nod from the *Royal Shakespeare Company* (RSC)² as we got to participate in an international initiative called *Shakespeare: A World Classroom project*, led by the RSC. The project ran from August 2011 to September 2012. This article shares a reflexive narrative of using the method during the collaboration.



Lucky Masipa and participants

The project aimed at exploring where, how, and why Shakespeare is taught around the world, with 2012 having marked 400 years since his death. The focal point of the project was put on young people's lived experiences of Shakespeare in different cultures and countries. Participating countries included China, India, United States of America, Oman, and South Africa.

Each country was represented by a team of three: a teacher, a learner and an artist. South Africa was an exception to the rule with two of each. The participating schools included Dendron Secondary School, and Ridgeway College. Dendron Secondary school is a non-fee paying school from Limpopo, and Ridgeway College is a diverse private school that

prides itself on its community based initiatives.

The exchange also allowed for a member of staff from the RSC to visit South Africa. Tracy Irish, a former RSC Education Programme Developer, shares in her travel blog, *Shakespeare: A World Classroom*, that when she got to South Africa, she was introduced to *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is a concept that she thinks Shakespeare would have loved, as it permeates his work with its 'universal human truths, and it expresses the value and strength of community, a cornerstone of theatre.'

Theatre practitioner Tim Prentki maintains that applied drama and theatre processes enable participants to (re)discover their innate capabilities for play, for

imagining, for creating, and for relating to others by exploring the self in the other and the other in the self.³ Thus the experience enabled the participating schools to have positive and, at times, challenging discoveries about their circumstances. Through both international and local visits, it also enabled them to meet other young people from other countries and communities, with Shakespeare being the common denominator. They soon found that, although RSC research shows that half the world's children read Shakespeare, many complaints such as 'boring and irrelevant' were rife.



Lucky Masipa and participants

The young people shared the idea that perhaps it is how Shakespeare is taught that led them to engage or disengage with his work. The RSC argues, in their *Stand up for Shakespeare* manifesto for schools, that learners get most out of Shakespeare when they:

- Do it on their feet!
- See it live!
- Start it earlier!

In a similar manner through Shakexperience™, we endeavour to eXite learners to engage with Shakespeare by introducing exercises that acknowledge and make use of contemporary examples of people who display similar traits to the characters created by the bard.

Before the learners and teachers left for the UK, we offered them an interactive introductory workshop to *Othello*. During this workshop we invited the learners and teachers to play (eXplore) with us because Shakespeare wrote plays to be performed and not novels to be read. We note that play is 'an activity executed within limits of space and time, accompanied by feeling...and the consciousness that it is different from ordinary life'⁴. We therefore negotiate the intended learning outcomes with the learners and like the RSC, co-create meaning and Shakespeare's text through a shared space.



Mualusi Ravele and participants

When we arrived in one of the participating schools (Dendron), there was an anxiety about the space in which we would conduct a Shakespeare workshop. We are quickly reminded about Peter Brook's notion of an 'empty space', and how it rejects the need for traditional theatre spaces.⁵ We marvel at a school hall being transformed into a village where witches meet to fore-shadow the downfall of Macbeth.

At Ridegeway College, we witnessed how a school field and administration block turned into a great site specific space for a moving out door performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The performance culminated in a banquet shared by the actors and the audience as the theatre's fourth wall gave way to reasoned imagination. In the process we shared (eXchange) our experiences on the text, the author and relevance of the play in South Africa today, and in a subliminal way continue the dialogue that Educationalist Paulo Freire advocated for in any learning environment⁶.

The programme, which was sponsored by the British Council, led to great outcomes for all involved. Lucky Masipa, from Dendron Secondary School, went on (with the support of her teacher Marvellous Jore) to establish 'Willy Shakers'. Although we tried to put forward some concerns with the said name, the group of grade 8-12 found it rather befitting as they insisted they were "shaking off the myth that Shakespeare is boring". They are using theatre techniques to learn about English, History, and Geography presented in Shakespeare's plays. Jore adds that it came as a pleasant surprise to know that English has outshone all the other subjects in the 2012 matric results, with a record breaking 23 distinctions.

I am making use of the techniques I learnt through the project, and I am encouraged to be creative in my teaching, learn with my students, but at the same time adhere to curriculum requirements'.

He argues that it is because: *I am making use of the techniques I learnt through the project, and I am encouraged to be creative in my teaching, learn with my students, but at the same time adhere to curriculum requirements'.*

Jore also posits that there are not enough debates in schools to engage Shakespeare in post-apartheid South Africa, a move which we believe can go a long way in shaping the Shakespeare discourse. Nelson Mandela's official biographer, Anthony Sampson, shares that *'if the Robben Islanders had a common culture and text, it was not the Bible or the Koran, but Shakespeare.'*

Perhaps it is not about whether Shakespeare is a friend or a foe, but it is about a search for creative means through which Shakespeare could be made relevant and not boring to our contemporary context.

In South Africa today, theatre can play a significant role in encouraging conversations about our plight, and we believe Shakespeare is as relevant to us, as he was to the English in Elizabethan times. And from the look of things so do learners who avoid reading Shakespeare but rather have a *Shakespreantial* way of:

Doing Shakespeare on their feet!

NOTES

- 1 www.shakexperience.com
 - 2 <http://www.rsc.org.uk/>
 - 3 Prentki, 2009
 - 4 Huzinga, 1955
 - 5 Brook, 1968
 - 6 Freire, 1971
- Photos: Steward Hemsley (2012/13)

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A nation must now educate the child



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My basic premise is that the struggle for democracy in South Africa is not over and that when it comes to education in particular, we need to adopt a radical set of ethical principles to change the system fundamentally.

In this article, I interrogate the notion of democracy in the post-Apartheid era, and argue that the transition from one system of governance to another does not, in and of itself, end the struggle, or the demand for a more equal, transparent and cohesive society. More work must be done to ensure that pre-democratic ambitions of quality education for all South African children are realised. At the moment, education policies and the repeated impositions of new national curricula give the impression that brash and irresponsible decisions are being made by those charged with caring for education in South Africa.

The basic purpose of this essay is to comment on the continued effort to establish a more equal, transparent and cohesive society, and the concomitant effort to fundamentally alter the course of education in South Africa. Regarding the latter, I turn to the insights of the work by Emmanuel Levinas which offers a system of education, and, for that matter, a society suspended in fracture. Levinas offers a system of ethics which, if adopted widely in society, could result in a more harmonious and integrated society. This system of ethics has a universal appeal, since its basic premise is that taking responsibility for others should instil itself in every individual member of society.

I suggest that government, teachers, adults and society at large should all take responsibility for the education of children in South Africa. We have an ethical obligation to consider the well-being of children before we make any radical changes to the system. Continually changing the curriculum, closing down teacher training colleges, splitting the department of education into the superfluous distinction between basic and higher education, and constant calls for strike action are all overlooking the essential object of education, which is the child who needs to learn, develop and grow.

By adopting a system of ethics that seeks to establish universal accountability toward, and responsibility for, the children of South Africa, we have a better chance of settling peacefully on what is contested ground.

My line of reasoning rests on the idea that, becoming democratic means to continue to struggle for a more equal, transparent and open society. And in becoming more democratic, we are obliged to become more responsible for others. These ideas about democracy refer to an on-going process, and the idea that responsibility for others is intimately tied to this, is applied to education in South Africa. I refer to the system of education as a whole from the most general level of policy making to the most basic level of interaction between the teacher and the pupil.

In my view, changing education in South Africa requires a commitment from all sectors of society to be more responsible for the child's desperate need of having a good experience of education. However, this responsibility should also be extended to all stakeholders in education. The minister of education, directors of school districts, district officials, school principals, teachers, academic staff at universities and other teacher training institutions, staff of NGO's, journalists and parents should all commit to being responsible for the other, which is equivalent to caring for the other. Only when we take responsibility for each other in a caring and meaningful way will we be able to take a step in the right direction.

... various conflicts where unique dialectical tensions are causing grave despair and human suffering. I think most heavily of the conflict in Gaza, described so vividly in el-Namrouti's article in this issue, but also of Zimbabwe, Burma, North Korea, and many other locations where space and power are contested so violently.

The struggle continues

I begin my discussion of post-Apartheid South Africa with a philosophical idea that governed (many would argue still governs) discussions of the development of human history. Hegel's dialectic view of human development posited that through a series of ontological theses and antitheses human society would settle on the ultimate synthesis, or absolute truth, which would reign over all societies as the end of historical and political development¹. For Hegel the end of history culminates in the prevailing rule of the liberal state². Hegel developed his theory of

history during the Napoleonic wars, and considered Napoleon's victory at Jena in 1806 as an end to European historical progress, since it effectively displaced the monarchical system that prevailed over Germany for centuries.

One could be forgiven for seeing the end of Apartheid as falling in line with this dialectic view of history. It is perhaps not a co-incidence that Francis Fukuyama considered the advent of democracy in Eastern Europe, Russia and South Africa in the 1990s as being evidence for the argument that human progress has a limited, definite end in sight. Fukuyama argues: "Hegel saw rights as ends in themselves, because what truly satisfies human beings is not so much material prosperity as recognition of their status and dignity"³. During the 1800s many Western nations were making the often very violent, shift from monarchical rule, with the accompanying restriction of individual and civil rights, to republican democracies which by contrast, emphasised the importance of individual liberties. The fall of communism, colonialism before it and the end of Apartheid resulted in similar social freedoms that have prompted many to consider Hegel's dialectic of history as being confirmed with every new "end".

My thoughts turn though to various conflicts where unique dialectical tensions are causing grave despair and human suffering. I think most heavily of the conflict in Gaza, described so vividly in el-Namrouti's article in this issue, but also of Zimbabwe, Burma, North Korea, and many other locations where space and power are contested so violently. The development of human societies often follows irrational routes that cannot be brought under the dialectic law of Hegel's philosophy of history.

Fukuyama writes that "[w]ith the American and French revolutions, Hegel asserted that history comes to an end because longing that had driven historical process - the struggle for recognition - has now been satisfied in a society characterised by universal and reciprocal recognition"⁴. The ultimate culmination of human activity

manifests as a social system wherein all members of society are free of the master-slave dialectic; equal players in an economy that is left to its own devices and where peace prevails internally. “No other arrangement of human social institutions is better able to satisfy this longing [for reciprocal recognition], and hence no further progressive historical change is possible,” Fukuyama explains⁵.

In South African terms, the end of Apartheid signals the end of the struggle for a democratic, open and equal society. Whilst I see the end of Apartheid as a step in the right direction, I believe the struggle continues in various other areas of our society. The chasm between rich and poor, the discontent of our workforce, the crises in education, widespread state corruption and the efforts to increase state control of civil society need to be addressed if our democracy is to fully mature.

In a sense the end of Apartheid is the beginning of history and of a new historical dialectic for South Africans. To consider the struggle ended, would be to side with Hegel and Fukuyama’s ideas of history and human progress. This would amount to gross social complacency and the resignation of the vanguard of social progress to the annals of history. As far as education in South Africa is concerned, and this is true for various aspects of our society, the historical dialectic continues. There is evidence for this everywhere, the most obvious is the so-called crisis in education and the multiple attempts to better education in South Africa (this ironically includes the various articulations of our national curriculum and, very importantly, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme – or NSFAS).

Our democratic state is not assured; it is a state that we must continue to struggle and work for. The end of Apartheid signals the beginning of a new struggle.

The democracy to come

I reject the view of there being any end to history and of referring to “the struggle” in the past tense. Instead, I view history and social development as existing in a state of perpetual becoming. However, I do consider human development to be coherent and meaningful, in that there appears to be some latent logic behind the very peculiar evolutionary journey of our species. Our democratic state is not assured; it is a state that we must continue to struggle and work for. The end of Apartheid signals the beginning of a new struggle. A struggle for responsibility in the face of the Other that must permeate every fibre of the fabric that holds our society together, however tenuously.

By this logic, the end of Apartheid and Bantu education in 1994 coincided with the inception of a new system of education that must undergo various theses and antitheses that are part of the dialectic before it is possible to settle on a synthesis that stabilises the tensions inherent in the system. Stated differently the post-Apartheid system of education needs to develop internally; but it is essential to steer this development to avoid the various crises it may encounter along the way.

One may take this line of reasoning further and argue that if our democracy and system of education are in a perpetual state of becoming, and if there is no final synthesis, then our picture of the democracy that “we struggled for” and the vision we had of education at the fall of Apartheid are images we see on the horizon. They are always still *to come*. I take this cue from Jacques Derrida who views the revolutions in America and France, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the fall of Apartheid not as signalling the end of the struggle for a more equal, free and just

society – but the very beginning of for it. He argues instead that if democracy is the result of the internal dialectic all sovereign nations are subject to, which entails the inner strife between democratic and autocratic rule, the victory propels society into a perpetual state of *becoming* democratic. Democracy is never established, because it is not the end result of a series of events and it is not the prize won in victory. Democracy is not something we can elect to exist within, even after we have struggled for it.

This shift will necessarily require deep change in society at large. From the most general level of policy making, planning and implementation, to the most basic interaction between the teacher and the learner, a responsibility for the Other and in the face of the Other, are sorely needed.

Instead, democracy – the true equality of individuals – is necessarily beyond the limit of human history, as we can never fully realise, achieve or articulate it. The advent of democracy, the event which signals democratic rule, is logically an event that we are always moving toward. The moment of becoming democratic is an event that is always hurtling towards us as we have to undergo further struggles to ensure that our conception of democracy is truly achieved. Of democracy, in the strictest sense, we can only speak in the future tense. Derrida writes⁶:

“... democracy remains *to come*; this is its essence in so far as it remains: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, *to come*: even when there is democracy, it never exists, it is never present, it remains the theme of a non-presentable concept.”

Democracy is always to come and to refer to a country as being democratic is to describe it as being in the perpetual state of moving towards democracy. In this state: “a call might thus be taken up and take hold: the call for a thinking of the event to come, of the democracy to come, of the reason to come. This call bears every hope, to be sure, although it remains, in itself, without hope. Not hopeless, in despair, but foreign to the teleology, the hopefulness, and the *salut* of salvation”⁷.

Responsibility to the other and radical social change

In my view, to change education in South Africa fundamentally would require a profound shift in the ethics that govern the system. This shift will necessarily require deep change in society at large. From the most general level of policy making, planning and implementation, to the most basic interaction between the teacher and the learner, a responsibility for the Other and in the face of the Other, are sorely needed.

This system of ethics developed by Levinas calls simply for one to “receive from the Other [which includes whoever one encounters in life] beyond the capacity of the I, which means [...] to be taught”⁸. Or stated differently to converse with the Other, to encounter the Other and to exist in a face-to-face relation with the Other in the most radical sense of interaction, requires the willingness to be taught by the Other: “Teaching is not reducible to maieutics [it is not simply a matter of eliciting new ideas from another more knowledgeable person]; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I can contain”⁹.

In their article Brewer and Harrison (p60) present a model of education that requires a deep sense of responsibility to the Other if it is to work. The model was conceived as a way of making education more affordable without reverting

to government or donor subsidy to ensure that quality teaching and learning take place. This model was developed by citizens who are themselves taking the task of changing education. They are assuming responsibility for the Other – the children of South Africa in need of quality education – by developing a cost-effective model of education that uses computer aided learning to free up time for a teacher to develop and deliver a more personalised lesson. More time means that a teacher is more likely to be encountered by each learner as someone who has something of value to teach, which is likely to be a human experience or understanding of reality, as opposed to the alienating epistemological routine of a standardised curriculum.

As Levinas conceives it, the separated “I” has a limited view of the world in that without the “Other” the “I” would only have knowledge of itself without relation. The “Other” is required to provide the “I” with knowledge of what exists beyond the horizon of the separate “I”. He states that the “relationship with the ‘Other’ as interlocutor, in relation to an *existent* precedes all ontology – it is the ultimate relation in Being. Ontology presupposes metaphysics”¹⁰. Levinas’s system of ethics repositions the locus of learning and redirects the flow of teaching, which is no longer located in the mind of the child: in this system the teacher will learn from each child, since the “Other” brings more than the “I” can contain. Similarly, teaching is no longer directed at the child from an all-knowing source, but circulates between the teacher and the learner as dialogue.

In terms of education in South Africa, this would amount to every child currently in the system being elevated to a position of supreme priority, a position that will define every child as being the focal point of all endeavours to improve education in South Africa.

The face-to-face interaction with another human being, Levinas argues, is the essential relationship to manifest in human reality. This I-Thou relation is a mode of existence “in which the I is *for* the other”¹¹. The “I” exists to encounter and interact with the “Other”. Lisbeth Lipari writes: “Levinas theorises that the ethical relation originates in the asymmetrical subordination of self to other, wherein the priority of the other always comes first”¹². What is more, since the “I” would be insular and inert without the “Other” any interaction between them necessarily entails the teaching of the “I” by the “Other” and vice versa. But, in order to be taught, the “I” must recognise the irreducibility of the difference that defines the poles of the I-Thou interaction. The “Other” can never be the same as the “I” and by definition exceeds the limits that define the “I”.

The mere coexistence of the “I” and the “Other” does not lead naturally to a sense of responsibility for the “Other”. Levinas argues that responsibility for “Others” redefines the proximity between members of society and more than likely brings individuals closer in an ethical and metaphysical sense. In terms of education in South Africa, this would amount to every child currently in the system being elevated to a position of supreme priority, a position that will define every child as being the focal point of all endeavours to improve education in South Africa. Responsibility does not arise simply when an individual begins to relate to another. The intention to learn from the “Other” does not presuppose a sense of responsibility for the “Other”. It is instead an extension of the limits that define the “I”. One cannot learn responsibility from the exterior and it is not brought to the “I”¹³:

“The ethical relation to the other person, the proximity, the responsibility for others is not a simple modulation of intentionality; it is the concrete modality in which there is produced a non-indifference of one to the other or of the same

to the *Other*, that is, a relation from the Same to what is *out of all proportion* with the Same, and is, in a sense, not of the “same kind.” The proximity ensured by the responsibility for the other is not the makeshift link between “terms” that cannot coincide, cannot be fused into one because of their difference, but rather the new and proper excellence of sociality.”

We see a profound degree of responsibility being displayed in the National Student Financial Aid Scheme as discussed by Van der Berg in this issue of *Focus*. Van der Berg’s account of the criteria for selection that prevails in the NSFAS endeavour indicates a strong sense of responsibility toward the marginalised sections of the student body. By providing these students with the opportunity to study at university, a faceless institution is altering the conditions in which these many individuals are bound, even ordained by circumstance, to live through. The startling effect of this simple, but necessary, gesture is that, according to Van der Berg, “[d]espite the odds being against them, NSFAS-supported students achieve more than other students do, largely because they are less likely to drop out of university.”

Conclusion

Even though it is not possible to fix all the problems we face in education with a single brush stroke, I maintain that what we lack is a common set of values and ethics. This lack of social cohesion has resulted in many errors and blunders that collectively constitute what many South Africans are referring to as a crisis in education. My view is that if we can legitimately call this a crisis we have only ourselves to blame. While the government is the obvious target, we cannot allow something as important as education to be located within the ambit of centrally administered power alone. Learning does not only happen within four walls. We can and we must shoulder some of the responsibility for ensuring that our children receive the best education we can collectively deliver. In

fact, we must demand the right to invest our time in changing the situation; that is, we must reclaim a portion of the responsibility of caring for education back from the government. It is time that we raise our children as though this vast land were but a small village.

Gambu (in this issue) describes a society where individuals had a sense of responsibility for others. This society resembles the system of ethics developed by Levinas. In this society a child was raised not by the nuclear family alone, but by society, which is a common motif of many African cultures. She relays her personal experiences of being raised and cared for by her neighbours.

This was a routine experience for many. Now much crime exists in a society that has displaced this once cohesive social system characterised by narrowly defined lines of proximity and relation. One can only assume that a certain tension exists in a society that in the past placed so much value on shared responsibility for others, on the one hand, and the current blatant disregard for the safety, health and wellbeing of others, on the other. This inner tension between accountability and what is abraded disregard for others suggests “the village” is an ideal that needs to be resurrected if we are to arrive at a more cohesive society. The harmony of the village and the moral degeneration of post-Apartheid South Africa (with all its stories of crime, domestic violence and gang rape) are two images I find difficult to reconcile. If responsibility for others was ever practised in townships to any meaningful extent then I am convinced that the practice can be resurrected and re-established in South African society as a whole.

Simply put, the maxim that “it takes a village to raise a child” needs to be expanded to “it takes a township, a city, a nation to educate a child,” or in isiXhosa: “Kuthatha isizwe ukufundisa umtwana.”

NOTES

- 1 Hegel, 1952
- 2 Fukuyama, 1992: p. xii
- 3 Fukuyama, 1992: p. xviii
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Derrida, 2005: p. 306
- 7 Derrida, 2005a: p. xv
- 8 Levinas, 1969: p. 51
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Levinas, 1969: p. 48
- 11 Levinas, 1993: p. 27
- 12 Lipari, 2012: p. 229
- 13 Levinas, 1993: pp. 45–46

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Learner, parents, community, teachers, government: The critical partnership



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According to an old African adage a child is raised by a community. When I was growing up this was how we lived, and was applied in all spheres of life in each society. Each adult was responsible for all the children around her, and even those she came across in life. Children's upbringing was a collective project so much that in some areas children were named by neighbours. Their progress throughout life was supported and nurtured by all. An African child was a special child.

As a young mother of two I have benefited from this practice and I strive to do the same for all children I meet. I take it as a responsibility not because the parents are not there, but because it is my duty as a member of society as I try to build a better future for my own children and their peers.

People often frown when I tell them I was raised by neighbours. Not because my parents were not there, but because members of my township, White City Jabavu in Soweto, practised this adage that I rarely see in suburbs, something which I believe is a crucial part of nation building.

When we were growing up life was very challenging because as a youngster you were watched by everyone you came across. If an older person found you on the streets doing something wrong they would immediately reprimand you and even go as far as walking you home so they could explain why they had to discipline you. It was tough. We simply couldn't understand the motive; but I am glad it happened to me. One had a deep sense of responsibility because it felt as if there were guardians everywhere who wanted only the best out of us.

This practice not only covered behavior but the wellbeing of the kids in the township as well. In my area no child went without food because you would be offered food when you went out playing with friends. Even those who couldn't afford "Christmas clothes and presents" also received something from a kind neighbour who understood the situation but did not judge. Your neighbours knew your shoe size! This was partly because as kids you would exchange shoes with friends, ending up in confusion and a few squabbles about lost shoes. It was also because the neighbours were there when you were born. They assisted with transport or gifts of clothes and many other essentials. There was always a sense of family and life was the better for such people. So, beyond our parents, the community were our partners in the difficult business of living well.

Once we were at school, we acquired specific partners to promote our educational progress. The older girls took it upon themselves to allocate themselves one of us younger kids to mentor and guide. This meant little time for playing if you still had homework. Parents knew of this system and therefore when they arrived back from work they would check what had been done. This was even more important in those households where the parents were absent or in the case of parents who couldn't read and write. The partnership between the young child/learner and her mentor

Our teachers were a bunch of hardworking and committed women who devised ways to get help even for those kids who were struggling. This was not easy but those learners who did better were required to assist others. Education was a collective responsibility.

was a major factor in the education of the child. I have fond memories of my friend's sister, Sasa, who taught me how to write and mentored me throughout my primary school years. She was a personification of a boarding school matron. My school days included a session with her every afternoon including Sundays when we would prepare for the week. Despite her age, she commanded respect. With the years passing, she became a member of my family and my mother supported our relationship.

When I was a teenager I read *Maru* by Bessie Head. Even as a young girl I understood what Margaret

Cadmore said. She was a teacher in the book who had recently joined the school in Dilepe village. In the book she argues that it doesn't matter if the child is intelligent or not. If the environment is conducive, even a learner who was not born intelligent has a chance to succeed.

As I read the book, and based on my experience then, I decided that the conducive environment was that critical partnership between the parents, community, government and teachers, with the learner in the middle.

My primary school teachers knew my parents and made regular contact about progress. This was not a given in every township in the early '90s. Teachers were each allocated 40+ learners and the system expected results with limited support. Our teachers were a bunch of hardworking and committed women who devised ways to get help even for those kids who were struggling. This was not easy but those learners who did better were required to assist others. Education was a collective responsibility. This did not negate individual excellence. Somehow we had to help the learners who struggled, and do enough work for a place in the coveted top ten. We competed with one another and also helped. The individual and the collective existed comfortably together. High school was slightly different. Again, partnership was expected, but this time between parents and learners. On the first meeting with learners and parents, our teachers made it crystal clear to our parents that they had a role to play in making sure we pass and progress in life. As part of the same meeting, parents were called into a separate room where the principal flanked by his army of teachers presented the "agreement" for all parties to adhere to. Parents were informed that we would knock off at 4pm daily to allow us to do our homework, or the bulk of it. They were even advised that chores were to be kept to the minimum in order to allow us to study.

The response from parents was one of cooperation and, at the end of the meeting, we had an agreement that would be implemented and monitored. Learners were allowed to be children and our only goal was to study, work hard and pass. I still remember my then Economics teacher, Mrs. Visser say to us "you are going to work hard and pass, whether you like it or not!" We understood the passion in that

statement and did exactly that. She, like all my high school teachers, kept reminding us that they themselves had taken an oath to act in our best interests and ensure we were prepared and ready for the next phase of our lives.

At home things were the same. Parents were aware of our studies; they could and often did contact the teachers to get feedback on conduct and performance. The partnership was in full force. Each party fulfilled its own responsibilities and our results showed.

Unfortunately the school I mention above was not in the township. It was a special school created by the then Rand Afrikaans University through a system of selecting learners with potential but who could not afford “private” or “Model C” education.

The practice done in primary schools seem not to have succeeded in most township high schools. There were less and less high school graduates who gave of their time to assist others and so the African child started to suffer. The good schools started to suffer because of demand from parents who wanted a better education for their kids. The best teachers left the township and sought work elsewhere. I remember feeling very sad one day when I realised that the young girls I went to primary school with were stuck in bad schools and there were no mentors for them, or for me.

... I have learned to appreciate the significance and integral role played by society, government, teachers, and parents. They form what I like to call a sacred square, within which the learner may thrive.

I was fortunate because of the support Rand Afrikaans College for the Advancement of Learning and Leadership (RAUCALL) had for me. Even when the late Dr. Nthato Motlana came to our school to announce the partnership Metropolitan Life had started we realised how special we are. I was sad nonetheless because I began to realize that there was still something missing from the partnership. What about people to whom the resources of this special school were not available? Where was government?

I was lucky. I owe my educational good fortune to the partnership that formed the basis of my formative years as far as education is concerned. This partnership transcended all areas of my life and contributed to the person I am today. On the other hand, my peers were not so lucky. They only benefited partially. Their parents were not fully involved, unfortunately. That critical link between the parents, learners and teachers was broken and my friends suffered the consequences. This has also created a gap between us now that we are parents.

Looking back, I have learned to appreciate the significance and integral role played by society, government, teachers, and parents. They form what I like to call a sacred square, within which the learner may thrive. Without full participation from these four stakeholders, collectively and equally, the full potential of a child cannot be fulfilled. The conducive environment I mentioned earlier cannot be realised if these four parts of the sacred square do not work together.

Of course, the role of the learner within the sacred square is not a passive one.

Parents:

Have a duty to actively participate in the strengthening of schools through the school governing body. I should know; I was once a member when I was a teenager representing my parents and now as a mother. More than this, parents

must be present in their children's schooling and life in general. We can no longer make the excuse that parents are busy. We must make the time to see progress, time to encourage, time to engage.

Community:

ALL children in the neighbourhood are our collective responsibility. Do not be afraid to stop a child and find out how they are doing at school. Create an environment where those children in need are allowed to receive help and encourage mentorship of the young ones by the older children. Create role models within the neighbourhood.

“There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

– Nelson Mandela

Develop support systems for the families in areas you live in, but also keep a close eye on misbehaviour. We are not allowed to turn a blind eye whenever we come across wrong doing by children while we say “It's not my child; it's not my problem.”

Government:

Can do much more than just build schools. We need a working partnership, and the involvement of committed teachers cannot be over-emphasized. The Inspectors need to create an environment where the governing bodies and government collectively work towards goals and priorities that will ensure a better future of a child who is prepared to enter the next step of their lives.

Teachers:

Must go back to basics and remember the passion they once had when they decided they wanted to become teachers. They must take their rightful place in society and demand support from parents, government, communities and hard work from the learners.

The above are anchored in the old African adage that a child is raised by a village. In order for us to secure a future for our children the sacred square of education and learning must be formed, strengthened and protected. If adopted, it could form a strong basis for the development of a child. The involvement of each society in the upbringing of children cannot be over-emphasised. Education and learning are integral parts of child rearing and therefore all parties: parents, teachers, government, and the learners themselves must commit and work together.

Learners:

Need to appreciate that education is a non-negotiable. The future does not start tomorrow but now and hard work cannot be put off for another day.

“There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.” – Nelson Mandela.

Despite the odds, they succeed



Mathakga Botha

is a lecturer at the Wits School of Education while also completing her PhD. She initially taught in primary schools, and later joined the NGO sector to work with farm school teachers. She went back to university after teaching for 16 years. After completing her first degree, she worked with a publishing company for a year, but realised her place was in the classroom. She has been teaching since 1995 and enjoys sharing her experiences in making a difference in other's lives.

Students at university experience feelings of isolation and exclusion based on, among other factors, disadvantage in ability to attain success in their studies as a result of a variety of culturally and linguistically different social capital.¹

Despite the odds, for many first year students at university, the key to succeed is a combination of hard work, determination and perseverance. It is common experience to notice that many students from poor socio-economic background are likely to be challenged by various factors.² The socio-economic divide of students at university is but one of the factors that determines who will succeed in higher education. However, there are some students from dire socio-economic situations who succeed through sheer determination in spite of the financial challenges, and inferior standards entrenched by South Africa's past.

My encounter with the realities of different standards of living and the experiences of many, including myself, coming to university with little social capital and even less financial capital, shows the students' inner determination and ability to succeed. Even students who have bursaries, and access to a residence, live with anxiety and stress. For them it is never a sure case that the bursary money will be in their accounts to cover daily costs. They have no reserves or support structure to bridge all-too-frequent bursary payments that are late.

Some students are admitted to university, but receive no financial support. The struggle to travel from home to university and home again, using various types of transport, is a challenge to reckon with on a daily basis. Some do not have the luxury of a meal to sustain them through the day. The question is what motivates these students to persevere and become what others can only envy? Where do they derive the energy to hop from one lecture theatre to another and have time to attend tutorial classes where they have to concentrate and absorb knowledge, participate and share what they may have had to prepare prior to coming to class? Only those who are determined to realise their dream will not be deterred by these challenges. All they desire is to achieve a dream and to start a new life with better rewards.

This article presents incidents that illustrate some of what I consider challenges that students overcome during the time they spend at university. These students study for the B. Ed. with the intention of securing jobs as teachers after their studies. I have made it my responsibility to have friendly chats, on a regular basis, with students at first year level in order to encourage them to understand the demands and expectations of university life. This is also to help them to manage their time to avoid finding it difficult to cope with their studies. When all goes well, I have observed them grow and mature into responsible individuals who enjoy making a contribution to the development of others.

For most of these students, their stories end well when I see them walk onto the stage at their graduation ceremonies. Some may take longer than the four years to complete a B. Ed. degree, but what is to be celebrated is that they succeed, in the end, through hard work, and perseverance.

One of my favourite stories is that of three friends from the same township school who passed their National Certificate and chose teaching as their future career. They were accepted by a prestigious university, and they intended to do their best to pass their degrees and become alumni of the University of the Witwatersrand (Witsies). However, on a weekly basis, these three friends have to find money to travel from their township to campus to attend lectures and tutorials. The lack of finance is one of their biggest challenges. Over weekends they offer their services to the taxi owners and wash taxis in their township to earn their travel money. However, this employment is never guaranteed, as there are many others seeking the same jobs.

On days that they have not managed to secure enough money to cover the travelling costs for all three of them, they make arrangements as to alternate who will attend the lectures and tutorials. In the weeks that they face serious financial constraints, then only one of them attends for the week, takes notes, collects any material issued and then attempts to share the knowledge with the others.

On days that they have not managed to secure enough money to cover the travelling costs for all three of them, they make arrangements as to alternate who will attend the lectures and tutorials. In the weeks that they face serious financial constraints, then only one of them attends for the week, takes notes, collects any material issued and then attempts to share the knowledge with the others.

How these students decide how often each gets a chance to attend lectures, and how effectively that person is able to engage the others with the knowledge he has gathered, is unimaginable. These friends have developed a familial bond that has kept them together since early in their schooling life. As I write this article, they have all passed their second year B. Ed. studies in Secondary School teaching. This, despite the almost insurmountable odds they faced.

The second story is that of a student who is not deterred from his studies by the fact that he does not have money. He is on campus daily attending lectures and tutorials, yet at night he does not rest, as he takes one of the lousiest jobs in order to be able to raise funds to enable him to cope. This is one of the students with absolute dedication and passion for the teaching profession. Such students remind us of what each one of us can achieve through hard work, dedication and perseverance.

The last story I want to share is based on my own observation, and comments made by students coming to university with little learning culture and linguistic capital. South African schools have very diverse learning cultures. In particular, the choice of Language of Learning in schools creates serious barriers for students at tertiary level. Some students who come to university make claims that although the medium of instruction or Language of Learning, Teaching, and support³ (LOLTs) is English, in most schools in South Africa, not all subject teachers have the language proficiency to teach their subjects in English. As a result, many students will not have been exposed to the effective use of English. Somehow these students pass well enough to gain entry into university, perhaps because they come from schools where teachers drilled them to succeed. It is only when they encounter a new culture of teaching and learning at university, whereby they have

to do extensive reading on their own, interpret knowledge and develop skills such as writing academic essays that these students start to realise the challenges ahead of them. For some, adjustment is quicker, depending on their exposure to other resources such as English-language television, radio programmes and newspapers. For the unlucky ones, English remains a problem, despite encouragement to work in groups, in order to build confidence.

Unlike school, university teaching does not offer the luxury of student dependency. Habits of self and time management are for most students a big challenge as they are used to being followed and forced to do what they have to do. The relationship between students and lecturers also takes time to establish unlike the case at school. However, there are students who, after their first assignments, when they realise that they did not perform as expected, confront such challenges and use all available opportunities to improve themselves in areas they lack. This only happens to those with determination to overcome their challenges. There are still those among them who will take time to acknowledge their weaknesses and, as a result, they delay seeking help until it is too late to make significant changes. To those who acknowledge weakness and attend to it, improvement in reading and writing ability becomes significant. They also make good efforts to improve spoken efficiency, which they will need if they are to cope when they do their teaching practice.

I had students reporting after their first teaching practice that it was the first time they had been required to speak in English in front of learners. For some it was worse when they had to do teaching practice in former Model C schools with a majority of learners from white communities. The issue of language emerged as a problem that almost prevented them from imparting the knowledge they had, but could not communicate verbally. The best of the students derived courage from experiences that could easily have caused them to lose hope. Sharing their teaching practice experiences motivated others to take courage, knowing they were not the only ones struggling. They shared how terrified they were, how much they realised that the way they had been taught in school hampered their own good teaching practices. After sharing these experiences, they were determined to get it right on their next teaching practice. It takes determination and motivation for these students to make it at the end, despite all the odds. They accept that they were not well prepared for challenges of learning at a university, but through hard work, they pull through and become better at what they do. Although not all students succeed at first, those who do are a symbol that determination and hard work pays.

They shared how terrified they were, how much they realised that the way they had been taught in school hampered their own good teaching practices. After sharing these experiences, they were determined to get it right on their next teaching practice.

It is through these cases that we can hope that once these students do become teachers, they will not repeat the kind of teaching they may have gone through, but that they will have pride in their achievement and plant back in society a good learning culture. They will teach good habits that prepare young upcoming generations, and expose them to necessary knowledge and skills they will need in their own higher education studies in future. Using their own experiences as students at university they have to make their teaching focus on what they know may create barriers to effective learning. It is skills such as reading, writing, and note-taking that are not given priority in most schools and impact negatively on students who get admitted to university. It can be expected that these students will

share their experiences with their learners to motivate them that they can make it, only if they have the will and determination to overcome obstacles in life.

Experiences related to financial challenges cannot be escaped. But if students who overcome these odds can tell their stories, maybe these can inspire others to understand that to achieve in life does not always come easy. Achieving students from poor social backgrounds prove that it is not only the wealthy who may succeed, and that making the right choices can lead to high achievement. There are many stories such as these that can be shared to inspire young people not to feel pity for themselves, but to take courage and overcome the odds.

NOTES

- 1 Omeri, Malcolm, Ahern & Wellington, 2003:5
- 2 See Omeri, et al. 2003
- 3 Additional Support covers interventions such as writing centres

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Growing, in spite of: The story of the Islamic University of Gaza, 1977 – 2013



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The story of the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG) is not just a story of growth in numbers, from 25 students in 1978 to 20 000 in 2013; it is also a story of modernisation. In 1978, the only subjects taught to those 25 students studying in tents were Sharia Law and Arabic Language. Now Religious Foundation is a separate faculty, alongside faculties of Commerce, Engineering, Medicine and Arts.

Until 1977, there was no university in the Gaza Strip. Students studied in Egypt, whose universities accepted hundreds of students from Gaza every year. Because of political disagreements between the PLO and the Egyptian authorities, Egypt drastically decreased the number of students they accepted. At the same time, the restrictions on travel and the expenses of studying abroad were high for the people of the Gaza Strip. A board of trustees from the Palestinian community in the Gaza Strip was formed and Shaikh Mohamed Awaad was the first chairman of the board. IUG was established as an extension of the Al-Azhar institution in Cairo. For its first five years, the university operated out of a collection of tents.

The growth of the university in its inception phase was not even. In 1987/88 student numbers were up to 4504 when the university, which has a strong Hamas affiliation as well as weaker links to Fatah, was closed by the Israeli authorities. By 1988/89 numbers had dwindled to 358.¹ What is interesting is the role of the community in keeping the university alive through the ensuing four years of closure. Classes were held in houses, mosques, clubs and public spaces. Lecturers continued in their posts, despite non-payment of salaries for several months at a time, and many arrests. Although the university was officially closed, an office was opened to allow student registration, particularly for students close to graduation. “Students and staff demonstrate the intense commitment to education that has long characterized



the Palestinian people” wrote Jimmy Carter in his introduction to Baramki’s book.² In 1989/90, student numbers had grown again to 1034.

Politics played a huge role in the fate of the university. After the signing of the Oslo agreement in 1993, the university was able to enter a stage of consolidation. Pre-fab buildings were replaced by permanent structures. New faculties were opened, and Masters’ programmes added to existing Bachelors’ degrees. The consolidation phase also had its ups and downs.

During the war in December 2008, Israeli aircraft bombed and completely destroyed all the buildings of science and engineering laboratories, offices and classrooms. University staff responded by rescheduling lectures and postponing practicals.

The occupation of Gaza in December 2000 provided obstacles to the smooth functioning of the university. For example, the need to pass through barricades and military checkpoints meant that it could take staff, students and workers several hours to get to their jobs or homes whereas, in normal circumstances, it does not take more than 40 minutes to get from the far north to the far south of Gaza strip.

To avoid wasting time at checkpoints, IUG staff were relocated. Lectures were circulated through videos and emails. In addition, IUG leadership started building

new campuses to serve students in isolated areas where more than 30% of the total number of IUG students live.

During the war in December 2008, Israeli aircraft bombed and completely destroyed all the buildings of science and engineering laboratories, offices and classrooms. University staff responded by rescheduling lectures and postponing practicals. They also co-operated with local universities to use their laboratories for practical classes. They also started fund raising for reconstruction.

In 2010 a new phase of construction and development commenced. Money came in from the EU, Japan, Malaysia, Qatar, as well as Palestinian individuals and institutions in the diaspora. Turkey financed the building of a Medical Faculty complete with hospital; the first doctors graduated in 2012. IUG became a member of the Union of Arab and Islamic Universities and Universities of the Mediterranean in addition



to membership in the World Association of Universities. Several cooperation and partnership agreements were signed with many European, American, and other universities in the world.

Overcoming the obstacle the IUG faced, in partnership with local and diaspora communities, has developed a spirit of belonging and affiliation to and within the university. IUG has become the largest university in Palestine³, with high-calibre staff who win international recognition. For example, in 2006, prof. Mohamed Shabat won the Galileo International Prize for Optics. In 2009, Prof. Naser Farahat won the Majorana Award – for the best published research in the Italian E-Journal of Theoretical Physics. In 2006 and 2010, IUG won the Islamic Development Bank Prize for Science and Technology for their scientific research institutions. In 2012, IUG was awarded a UNESCO Chair in Astronomy, Astrophysics and space sciences. And, finally, just a few weeks ago, in January 2013, IUG won the first place among Arab countries universities in terms of green environmental standards.

In 2013, student numbers had grown to 21 000 student (61% are female and 39% are male) studying at 11 faculties with more than 110 specializations.

It is not just at university level that education is important to Palestinians. The World Bank estimated youth illiteracy in Gaza in 2012 as only 1%. But higher education has a particular role to play: “Having a university was crucial if we were to resist the occupation. We would produce well-educated, confident graduates, proud of their Palestinian identity and eager to contribute to the development of their homeland” wrote Baramki in 2010⁴.

NOTES

1 Al-Sinwar and Muteer, 2009.

2 Baramki, 2010: p. ix.

3 In 2012 there were 5 universities in the Gaza strip.

4 Baramki, 2010: p 35.

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Wanted: Accountable Principals



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“What then makes a good principal, one capable of leading his/her school to success in examinations, on the playing fields, and in the preparation of learners for the hard knocks of life? There is no short answer to this question. There are, however, issues that point to the answer, most which relate to the principles of accountability.”¹

If it were not so painful, one could find the discourse about the state of education in our country amusing: “The education crisis is a threat to democracy.”²; “There is no crisis in education.”³; “Of the 15 countries in the study, SA had the third highest proportion of functionally illiterate learners (27%) and the fifth highest proportion of functionally innumerate learners (40%).”⁴

Reality tells us that our education system is in trouble. The focus of this article, however, is not to lament over the shortcomings of our schooling system, but rather to reflect on one possible way of improving accountability of school principals, as championed by the National Professional Teachers’ Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA).

One issue on which there is general consensus amongst most education stakeholders is that principals, as leaders and managers of their schools, are pivotal to the success of schools in providing quality teaching and learning. The opposite is also true. If poor leadership is evident and the school is poorly managed, the primary task and central purpose of a school – of providing quality teaching and learning – is likely to suffer.⁵

The core duties and responsibilities of a principal are set out in the Personnel Administrative Measures.⁶ These responsibilities relate to administration, personnel, teaching, extra and co-curricular activities, interaction with stakeholders, and communication. As far back as 2005 the then Minister of Education announced that she intended introducing legislation that would increase the power and authority of school principals. The reason given for this intended policy adjustment was that there was a need to re-assert the professional responsibility of principals.⁷

This became a possibility when the Education Laws Amendment Act was promulgated in 2007. The Act makes it clear that:

“the main purpose of the school is learning, elevating it above the myriad of other priorities with which principals are besieged daily. The law places accountability for learning squarely with the principal, making it mandatory for heads to report annually on the state of learner performance in their schools, to formulate a plan for improving learning, and to report progress against the school plan.”⁸

In contrast to these expectations (and legal obligation), many principals do not realise that their main function is to lead and direct teaching and learning within

the school. Some principals also seem to think that their primary responsibility is to discipline learners and perform administrative duties.⁹ Of even more concern is the perception of some principals that their primary accountability is to the district office.¹⁰ Where does this leave accountability to learners, parents and communities for teaching and learning outcomes in the school?

The call for accountability within schools has been made over many years by many concerned educationists. According to Hoffman¹¹ accountability “entails a culture of justification in which those in authority are required to explain their policies and justify their decisions, actions and omissions, rationally and responsively to the needs of those they serve ...”.

What stakeholders are calling for is for principals to give an account of the actions they take in ensuring quality teaching and learning in their schools, and being held accountable for these actions.

One way of giving account of one’s actions and being held accountable for them is through a performance management system. Christie¹² states that the setting of “professional standards” for principals forms part of the broader drive for accountability. She also quotes Moller (2009) who concludes that “these standards are codified descriptions of work and operate as a regulative framework of accountability.” One would, therefore, expect that the performance assessment instrument applicable to principals would reflect the responsibilities of principals as required by law and other policies.

That is sadly not the case. Principals’ performance is still assessed in terms of the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS), which was agreed to in the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) in 2003. There are 12 standards in terms of which a principal’s performance is assessed – 7 of which are exactly the same as that of a post level 1 teacher – focussing on teaching that happens in a specific classroom. In addition to these seven standards, the principal must also give account of administration of resources and records, personnel, decision-making and accountability, leadership, communication and servicing the governing body, and strategic and financial planning. Clearly omitted is the overall responsibility of the principal of being the leader and manager of the teaching and learning process that should be the central focus of the school.

Great expectations were raised by the Minister of Basic Education when she announced in June 2011 that Government would empower principals to manage their schools and they would be held accountable for maintaining a high standard of education in schools. Principals and deputy principals would be required to enter into performance contracts with clear performance targets. NAPTOSA welcomed this announcement as the Union had argued for many years that there is a distinct difference between the responsibilities of a principal of a school and a post level 1 teacher. Mr Ramasehla, the then President of NAPTOSA added, however, that the matter would have to be negotiated in the ELRC.

The Minister repeated this statement in the Basic Education Budget Vote Speech on 17 May 2012:

In addition to these seven standards, the principal must also give account of administration of resources and records, personnel, decision-making and accountability, leadership, communication and servicing the governing body, and strategic and financial planning. Clearly omitted is the overall responsibility of the principal of being the leader and manager of the teaching and learning process that should be the central focus of the school.

“Our system is as good as its teachers. Teachers are at the heart of curriculum delivery. Accountability across the system is the key. A process is underway in the ELRC to streamline the IQMS, to improve the evaluation of educators’ performance. This is done as a broad accountability process for the sector. An integrated assessment instrument to improve performance of principals, deputy principals and teachers is in its final stages of negotiation.”

At the time of the Minister’s announcement, draft documents had already been discussed in the ELRC, setting performance standards (key result areas) for principals and deputy principals such as: leading the learning school, shaping the direction and development of the school, managing quality and securing accountability, developing and empowering self and others, managing the school as an organisation, working with and for the community, managing human resources in the school, management and advocacy of extra-mural activities and training and development needs.

What the proposed QMS is doing, is defining and evaluating a principal of a school first and foremost as a class teacher, and then, as an afterthought, as leader and manager of the school.

NAPTOSA fully supported (and still supports) this draft quality management system and performance assessment instrument for principals as the Union believed that it reflected the core responsibilities of principals, that it would go a long way in improving the accountability of principals and should result in the improvement of teaching and learning. This was in line with the growing recognition that school leadership requires a different skills set from classroom teaching.¹³

To NAPTOSA’s disappointment, the proposed performance management system was withdrawn in the ELRC in 2012 owing to the input of one of the unions. It was replaced by another draft performance assessment instrument, which undoubtedly will not take education forward. Once again principals are regarded as being class teachers in the first place and are expected to give account of, inter alia, the seating arrangements in his/her class, teaching environment and other classroom specific issues. This in spite of the statement that the “streamlined” IQMS, now called the Quality Management System (QMS), is “designed to evaluate the performance levels of individuals in order to achieve high levels of school performance. It is critical in assessing the extent to which educators are performing in line with their job descriptions in order to improve levels of accountability.”

When breaking down the proposed performance standards for principals, an uninformed person may conclude that the single biggest responsibility a principal has, is to teach and that almost 60% of what is expected of a principal, is also expected of a post level 2 educator (head of department) – the same functions, job description and levels of accountability. This totally defeats the object of trying to improve the accountability of principals as leaders and managers of their schools. What the proposed QMS is doing, is defining and evaluating a principal of a school first and foremost as a class teacher, and then, as an afterthought, as leader and manager of the school.

When the perception is created that there is no real difference between the responsibilities of a principal and a post level 1 or 2 teacher with regard to teaching and learning and curriculum delivery, what effect could it have on the authority of the principal as leader and manager?

Cecil Scorgie, NAPTOSA chief negotiator in the ELRC, summarized this situation neatly:

“We believe that central to the underachievement of any school is the inability to manage practical aspects of a successful learning environment. [...] This would require a clear job description for specifically principals and deputy principals that can be used to set clear targets for them to achieve and to be assessed by. This will restore the authority and status of the office of the head of the school. The head of the school can then be held accountable for the performance of the institution measured against a valid, reliable and fair instrument.”

There is a dire need to improve the management and leadership of principals of schools in South Africa. Having a set of core responsibilities and duties on paper, in training manuals and law books on the one hand, while equating the principal's role and responsibilities with regard to teaching and learning to that of a classroom teacher when being assessed, sends confusing messages to principals, teachers and the school community. This will not assist in clarifying their role and responsibilities to principals and what they are accountable for.

NAPTOSA believes that education can be turned around. The Union believes that in a school, it starts with the principal. Isn't it time for everybody to recognise that a school principal is being paid to be the leader and manager of the school – not to be a class teacher – and that the principal must be held accountable for what he or she is paid to do?

NOTES

- 1 Paul Hoffman, 2009.
- 2 Prof J Jansen, 2012.
- 3 Minister A. Mothsekga, 2012.
- 4 Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality III (2007), survey of grade 6 mathematics and reading.
- 5 Christie, 2010.
- 6 Employment of Educators Act, 1998.
- 7 Swanepoel, 2008.
- 8 Taylor, 2008.
- 9 Hoadley and Ward, 2009.
- 10 Bush et al., 2011.
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Bridge's communities of practice for school principals – A driver of innovation in South African education



Barbara Dale-Jones is an organisational and project manager with experience in social development as well as e-learning, publishing and education. Since 2010, Ms Dale-Jones has worked for *Bridge*. Before that, she worked for Convene, a venture philanthropy company, the goal of which was leveraged, systemic change through collaborative initiatives, and from which *Bridge* emerged.

The work of *Bridge* – an innovation agency in South African education

The education system is rife with dysfunction and yet filled with creative innovation. This anomaly led to the emergence of Bridge, an organisation which aims to create linkages between instances of effective practice in the belief that connecting what works can have the effect of changing the system for the better. Bridge is an education-focused non-profit organisation that links innovators in education in South Africa. Its mission is:

“to connect key leverage areas in the education system with working practice, and where necessary to create working practice, in a way that optimises diversity and values so that the whole is bigger than the sum of the parts”¹

Innovation in the context of *Bridge* is not the creation of something new, but rather the deepening and combining of what already works. *Bridge's* model of scale is, therefore, relational. It focuses on connecting and spreading multiple points of successful practice through understanding their collective impact on the entire education system. This differs from, but is complementary to, traditional models of scale, which focus on finding particular models and rolling them out at scale, or on driving scale through large policy-driven interventions.

The community of practice as a driver of innovation

Bridge brings together a range of innovators in education and it connects them in organising units with specific objectives that can link and spread successful practice. *Bridge's* strategy in this regard is the use of a ‘community of practice’ approach to promoting the sharing of good and effective educational practices so that there can be an increase in common purpose, a reduction in duplication, a maximising of resources, and an impact on policy so that the education system as a whole can benefit.

The foundational building block of a community of practice needs to be trust. *Bridge* has discovered that, without the development of trust and peer support, the objectives of a community of practice will not be met. When trust is developed, however, remarkable collaborations can take place. An example is a *Bridge* community of primary school principals in Gauteng, which agreed that the member schools would like all Grade 7s leaving their schools to be tested in numeracy to determine where the teaching gaps are. An examination of the data has allowed individual schools to identify weak areas in the teaching across the different schools and also for better co-ordination between primary and secondary schools in this geographical area.

Communities of practice are not just gatherings of people with similar interests. They are groups of practitioners who share an interest in a field and who collectively learn how to perform better in that domain as they work together and regularly engage. *Bridge* has, for example, seen one group of principals in a community of practice share a primary school booklet, with tests and text for the foundation phase, which was developed by one principal in the group.

Rather than slow, costly learning from experience, the deliberate development and support of communities of practice offer a way to empower members for well-judged responsibility and action.

The community of practice as a tool of innovation provides three main levers of change to its members:

- it develops confidence;
- it develops trust; and
- it develops a sense of belonging and shared identity.

Communities of practice assume that learning is collective, social, and comes from our experience of participating in daily life rather than from an isolated or academic pursuit. Rather than slow, costly learning from experience, the deliberate development and support of communities of practice offer a way to empower members for well-judged responsibility and action. Pleasingly, in the case of one *Bridge* community of practice of principals, the members now attend district meetings as a group, and sit with each other and not as individuals. A set of principals which, in this case, were historically divided, are now homogenous.

Communities of practice are fundamentally different from, and offer much more to participants, than the disciplinary and professional knowledge offered by professional learning communities, which focus on a specific subject or skill. Much more importantly, though, they offer morale-building fellowship and resources for exercising power with good judgment. Communities of practice allow for the development of collective wisdom and collective action. This collective action is not reactive, though. In successful communities of practice, there is a building of a range of innovative solutions to problems as well as a shared applied vision of good educational delivery.

Bridge's methodology for communities of practice stresses the importance of the voluntary participation in these communities of their members. Participants are encouraged to set their own collective agenda. Their developmental needs emerge organically from within their own contexts, and they are encouraged to engage in reflective practice, thus learning from experience and gaining new insights into their work. The main purpose is to support participants to work together to become empowered and central agents of change in education. The sharing of vision and

the growth of collective problem-solving approaches are greatly beneficial, and with these the potential for empowering participants is great. One *Bridge* community of practice for principals has seen the development of a brief for principals, designed by a member, about how to ensure that a School Governing Body (SGB) election runs smoothly, and what the legislation involved is. His willingness to share his experience of potential pitfalls has been to the benefit of the group.

The role of the facilitator in the community of practice

The facilitator is central to the success and meaningfulness of *Bridge's* community of practice intervention. The complex and varied dynamics of communities of practice mean that this role requires a mature and sophisticated Development Professional in this position. The facilitator needs to be able to bring to life the vision of the community in a spirit of co-creation, symbiosis and collaboration rather than in one of competition or threat. This involves encouraging the participants to move beyond a position that seeks competitive advantage and to value the work of a group working collaboratively.

They are expected to carry out day-to-day administrative duties, handle the management of a school and exercise professional judgment. In addition, they are expected to articulate a vision and provide the effective organisational and instructional leadership needed so that teachers can succeed.

The facilitator also needs to identify and clarify the community's own understanding of both its challenges and opportunities, as well as to develop its sense of what it can do to meet its challenges and maximise its opportunities. To accomplish this, the facilitator must put aside any belief that problems can be solved for the community. Only the community of practice can work for and achieve the change that is possible.

Working with school principals

Although *Bridge* convenes and facilitates communities of practice in a wide range of focus areas, it has a growing and particular commitment to communities of practice for school principals because of its belief that principals are agents of change within the broader system, both individually and collectively. International experience and research emphasise that the principal, more than any other role player in the system, holds the key to school improvement. The leadership, management and administrative structures provided by principals are essential for teachers to discover and exercise their competence. These principals can therefore provide the environment for competent teaching, without which public education could potentially fail.

In spite of the centrality of the principal, however, the education and training of principals often provide very little preparation for the range of responsibilities they are required to perform. They are expected to carry out day-to-day administrative duties, handle the management of a school and exercise professional judgment. In addition, they are expected to articulate a vision and provide the effective organisational and instructional leadership needed so that teachers can succeed.

Even the best education system cannot offer complete support for principals, and interventions by central departments and district offices are only part of the support that principals need. The social reality of school communities is one of local autonomy where central authorities may provide guidance and even inspiration at times, but may be seen as interfering, frustrating, or ineffectual to others. The effective principal at the centre of the school system can be a powerful positive force

in utilising this autonomy while drawing on the resources offered by the authorities and other community and business stakeholders. The competent principal must be accountable to the authorities and formal structures, but is above all responsible for the growth of the school as a whole. The principal is thus the link between the hierarchical structure of the department and district offices but also, between the stakeholders of the school and local community. However, these competing demands can leave principals feeling disempowered, exhausted, and incapable of dealing with the stresses of these pressures. While this poses threats to both principals and schools, and can expose their weaknesses, it is precisely in relation to this tension where a community of practice can provide an opportunity for collaborative transformation.

Case study: the South African Extraordinary Schools Coalition

Within a community of practice, the development of a sense of relationship and commitment among its members is most important. In this regard, there is a lot to be said for the highly specific, attainable project that is carried out by the members of the community and which deepens the bonds between them. An example of this can be found in the work of one of *Bridge's* communities of practice for school leaders: The South African Extraordinary Schools Coalition².

The Coalition is a self-regulating collection of leaders of intervention-based independent and public schools and supporting organisations. All of the schools in the Coalition are committed to the continued creation, implementation and dissemination of innovative, high-quality and sustainably affordable educational practices, processes and models directed at providing access to, and ensuring success for, socio-economically vulnerable children. Collectively, they form a community of practice that is committed to transforming the lives of children disadvantaged by the realities of poverty.

Through understanding what effective practice is, the ultimate objective is to integrate this effective practice into broader educational policy decisions within the national context, influencing and supporting the dialogue around a potential impact school movement in South Africa.

When it first formed in 2010, the Coalition defined its own set of educational themes and broad strategic objectives, which have guided its activities over the first years. One of these objectives is to create common purpose through developing peer support and trust amongst Coalition members. Additionally, and through collaborative work, the Coalition aims to explore the collective impact of its schools and to share its experience. Through understanding what effective practice is, the ultimate objective is to integrate this effective practice into broader educational policy decisions within the national context, influencing and supporting the dialogue around a potential impact school movement in South Africa.

Thus, the principals and school leaders of the Coalition are engaged in defining, sharing and refining best educational practice, actively participating in reviews of each other's work and school evaluations, attending content-based workshops, and participating in assessment and monitoring and evaluation as and when necessary. Two examples of how good educational practices are shared are, firstly, that one school is embarking in 2013 on an integrated curriculum approach in Grade 8 as a direct result of seeing this at work in another Coalition school while, secondly, a school in the Coalition reports that it is funding bursary students differently having seen the structure of funding that another school uses.

The power of peer reviews

It is in relation to the specific task of school peer reviews, though, that the Coalition has seen some of its most exciting work. In order to develop and drive quality across a range of schools, the Coalition members have agreed that there is a requirement for a shared commitment to on-going improvement. Peer reviews, where school leaders and their staff observe each other's schools in action, are a good mechanism for schools to establish a process of self-reflection and continuous learning as well as to participate in and support each other's school improvement initiatives. Instead of focusing on the approval or punishment of a school inspection, the peer reviews focus on discovering opportunities to serve learners better, as well as to transform school leadership and thus achieve school improvement. They create a safe environment for a principal to understand the strengths and weaknesses of his or her own school, thus acting as an effective driver for change. Members of the Coalition went to the United States for a workshop, where they collaborated on the development of tools and templates for the peer review process. The trip was in June 2012 to Newark, New Jersey, and the workshop created the opportunity for 8 coalition leaders to share their past experiences with school inspections, become familiar with peer review models, develop their own review criteria that are relevant to the SA context, and conduct mock reviews in a number of different school contexts. As one principal said:

“Having staff members being part of a team has brought a richness to them and their approach within our school, and the preparation and receiving of a review has been a gift to our school and staff. It has already resulted in a more collective leadership approach and caused staff to reflect deeply on their teaching practice, their classrooms and their engagement with students. The privilege of being involved in the development of the instrument and going to the US to create it was an amazing opportunity, not only the development of the instrument but the engagement with other SAESC members and the journey travelled together there and my own personal growth. I have learnt so much more about myself and been encouraged to be bolder with difficult conversations and to practice more constructive self-reflection.”

Conclusion

This case study reflects the purpose and process of *Bridge's* communities of practice. Members of the Coalition have been able to build a sense of relationship and cohesion, as well as a sense of ownership, through creating standards of excellence and formulating the evidence which defines those standards. This community of practice has also developed its own review criteria and the tools for its peer review process. Consequently, the community of practice has provided a quality learning and transformation opportunity for its members. The work of this Coalition confirms the foundational premise of communities of practice, namely, that if the development of communities of practice is not approached through a focus on its members' power to identify and solve their own problems, a very good idea in principle will not go very far in practice.

NOTES

- 1 <http://www.bridge.org.za/30.page>
- 2 <http://www.bridge.org.za/171.page>

Mobility in Education: can mobile devices support teaching and learning in South Africa?



Thandi O'Hagan

is a stubbornly independent, committed lifelong learner. Passionate about her personal freedom she knows that quality education for all is key to a free society. She loves working with, developing and promoting pioneering learning programmes that nurture active learning and self-discovery. She ardently supports, delivers and promotes education systems that foster motivated, creative and critically thinking youth, skilled to lead a sustainable future.

From smart phones to tablets, from Mxit to Facebook to Twitter to Pinterest- mobile technology is rapidly transforming the way we live, study, play and communicate.

Mobile education provides unparalleled access to information, raising the quality of education and enhancing learning outcomes worldwide.¹ Mobile Education or 'mEducation' is defined as any technology-enabled learning solution that allows learners to access educational content through internet connectivity. Any portable device – mobile phone, laptop or tablet – can be a tool for mEducation.²

Across the globe, digital learning is being embraced by schools and higher institutions of education. In 2012, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) appointed a Professor of Chemical Engineering as their first Director of Digital Learning.³ In 2011, Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller of Stanford University launched 'Coursera', an online platform that partners with top universities across the world to offer free courses from leading lecturers.⁴ In 2013, over 23,000 students registered online for just one of these courses.⁵

Is this digital revolution relevant in the context of the ongoing education crisis in Africa? Does mEducation have a role to play in resolving South Africa's education challenges?

Education Crisis in South Africa

South Africa's endemic education crisis is characterized by a shortage of motivated, qualified and experienced teachers. Africa has one of the lowest teacher-to-learner ratios of 2.2 teachers per every 100 learners.⁶ According to the UNESCO Report on Mobile Learning, the Sub-Saharan Africa region will have to recruit 350,000 new teachers if we are to reach the Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015 – an insurmountable task without divine (or technological) intervention.

The 2012 textbook saga highlighted the inefficiency of textbook distribution, not to mention the high cost of printing and transporting materials continues, with schools still claiming that they do not have all the correct textbooks. Only 7% of public schools have stocked libraries, symptomatic of the general lack of resources and infrastructure.⁷

Not surprising then that South African learners score on the bottom end of two

international benchmarking literacy and numeracy tests: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).⁸

Inadequate transport adds to the inequity in education with rural teachers finding it particularly difficult to access resources and training. Typically rural schools perform worse than their urban counterparts.

Mobile Penetration in Africa

Although Africa still has the lowest global cell phone penetration at 67.55%, it is the fastest growing mobile market in the world.⁹

South Africa recorded 12,6 million internet users in 2012. The number of users who access the internet *via* mobiles is expected to rise to 23 million by 2016.¹⁰

The demographics of South African internet users are changing. The majority of new users are young, black, and live on less than R1500 a month. Almost three quarters of these users access the internet via their phones. Their top five reasons for going online: to get information; socialise; study; work and look for a job.¹¹

Mobile Technology in Action

Research across Africa reveals the use of mobile technology in remote communities to address pressing challenges in agriculture, water and sanitation, health and education.

Most incredibly, within five months the children had hacked the operating system to enable the locked camera and to personalise their tablets. All this, without a teacher on hand.

In 2012, One Laptop per Child (OLPC) conducted an mEducation experiment with astounding results.¹² Led by MIT Professor Nicholas Negroponte, the research aimed to answer the question: Can we give the 100 million children around the world who don't go to school, a tool to read and learn without having to provide schools and teachers and textbooks?¹³

Tablets preloaded with monitoring software, alphabet training games, e-books, cartoons and other educational applications were “dumped” in closed boxes without instructions in two remote villages in Ethiopia.¹⁴ The children who had no previous access to the printed word opened the boxes and found the on/off switches within minutes. Five days later children were using up to 47 applications per child per day; within two weeks they were singing ABC songs in the village. Most incredibly, within five months the children had hacked the operating system to enable the locked camera and to personalise their tablets. All this, without a teacher on hand.¹⁵

As versatile as tablets are proving to be, they are not yet easily affordable. In 2009, Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, described the cell phone as “the single most transformative technology for development”.¹⁶

mEducation in a Mobile South Africa.

Developed in Stellenbosch, 'Mxit' is an instant messaging servicing available on 3,000 different cell phones including relatively low cost feature phones. It is the cheapest, most accessible and consequently most popular social media tool in South Africa with over 10 million subscriptions¹⁷. Mxit has become a leading platform

for a variety of home grown mEducation tools. In November 2012, Mxit reported 5 million subscribers to its educational content and 600,000 to its eight exam preparation applications.¹⁸

One of the most innovative applications available on Mxit is 'Dr Maths'. Developed by the Meraka Institute at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Dr Maths is an online tutoring system that enables 32,000 learners across the country to chat to, ask questions and gain real-time support from qualified maths tutors.¹⁹ All volunteers, the tutors are predominantly recruited through maths and science departments in universities. Mxit reported a significant spike in usage of the system during the 2011 teacher strike, indicating mEducation's potential to provide learner support with or without a teacher in the classroom. The Dr Maths application won the 2011 United Nations Technology in Government in Africa Award for its powerful impact on education.²⁰ Laurie Butgereit, the principal technologist and creative spark behind Dr Maths, explains: "It's about using a fun and exciting medium to connect instructors and students in a teaching process that is readily accessible, interactive and effective".

Launched in 2010 by the Learning to the Max Foundation, 'Quizmax' is a cell phone-based revision tool for Grade 10 – 12 Maths, Physical Science, and Life Sciences learners. The quiz tool enables its 129 601 active Mxit users to do revision at their own pace. Learners are given questions in sets of 5; if they are unable to complete the task successfully, they are presented with simpler problems. Questions are upgraded as the learner gains mastery. The system provides valuable feedback to schools and institutions through detailed online reporting.

The Nokia Mobile Mathematics project is possibly one of the most thoroughly researched mEducation tools in South Africa. Designed by Nokia in partnership with provincial officials from the Department of Education, the tool offers theory, tutoring, exercises and peer-to-peer support.

'Siyavula' poses a real solution to the South African textbook crisis while seriously challenging the current publishing model. The Siyavula team identified key education experts and facilitated writing sessions with these volunteers to produce textbooks and teacher guides for Maths and Science Grade 10 – 12. Developed under an Open Copyright licence the books are aligned to the South African curriculum and are downloadable on mobile and PDF formats. 150 000 subscribers were recorded within 48 hours of the content being placed on Mxit.²¹ The freely downloadable textbooks include embedded videos, simulations and presentations, making them more interactive than an ordinary printed textbook and, delivery time is almost instantaneous.

The Nokia Mobile Mathematics project is possibly one of the most thoroughly researched mEducation tools in South Africa. Designed by Nokia in partnership with provincial officials from the Department of Education, the tool offers theory, tutoring, exercises and peer-to-peer support.²² The Nokia project has a zero rating agreement with two of the major mobile network carriers ensuring free access to users. Grade 10 – 12 learners access maths content via mobile/computer and interact via social platforms. Teachers monitor, track and analyse learners' progress via computer. The project was designed to integrate with classroom learning, offering support to both teachers and learners. The pilot project was established in 2010 with 260 learners in 3 provinces. A 2010 evaluation showed a 14% improvement in maths competency with 82% of learners also accessing the tool outside of school hours.²³ Teachers at one of the participating schools highlighted the ease with which they

were able to personalise exercises for individual learners and the ability to track the progress of their learners as particularly advantageous in their classes of over 50 learners. In 2011 the project involved 25,000 learners and 500 teachers in 172 schools across four provinces. The project is due to be replicated in three additional African countries.²⁴

mEducation as a tool for collaboration

SchoolNet SA has effectively created a supportive online community of educators who use a variety of social media platforms for sharing skills and resources.²⁵ In 2012 a Cape Town based principal started an online twitter conversation group: #EdchatSa and every Monday evening teachers from across the country meet virtually to network, discuss and debate selected topics.

It is critical that we create conversations that include all stakeholders: teachers; learners; parents; government; content providers and the mobile industry.

In 2012 Ligbron Academy, a private school in Mpumalanga, won the Creative Problem Solving Institute Public Sector Innovation Award for their project.²⁶ Their project connects 5 rural schools to their maths, science and technology classrooms using a wireless network. Schools share lessons, material, and resources through an integrated system that makes use

of video conferencing and interactive white boards. The project demonstrates how mEducation can be used to increase access to quality education.

Are we ready for a learning revolution?

It is evident that not only is South Africa using mobile education but that we are more than capable of producing our own contextually relevant, award winning tools. These projects show the innovative use of technology to increase learners' access to expert and remote tutoring, support informal learning outside the classroom, facilitate self-directed learning, improve education results, accelerate distribution of low cost resources, streamline tracking and reporting, enable collaboration and skill sharing, and promote equity through improved access to quality resources and teaching.

A truly mobile South Africa is still restricted by low speeds and high cost of data download, as well as inefficient connectivity infrastructure. In 2012 the CSIR developed a pioneering video streaming technology that may circumvent some of the connectivity limitations.²⁷

The mobile technology industry currently contributes 4.4% to the GDP of Sub Saharan Africa and is in a growth phase. In addition to developing entry level phones with enhanced features, Cellphone companies and mobile network-operators have consistently shown a strong commitment, if only to ensure long term market share, to support and develop mobile solutions in the fields of education and health.

A more insidious obstacle is the tendency of educational organisations to operate in silos resulting in crucial decision makers being unaware of existing or potential mEducation projects. It is critical that we create conversations that include all stakeholders: teachers; learners; parents; government; content providers and the mobile industry. Currently South Africa has no policy with regard to mobile learning. Rigorous and relevant quantitative and qualitative research needs to be conducted and used to engage policy makers and influence national policy. Taking the lead, COZA Cares Foundation collaborated with the Bridge SA and the Department of

Basic Education in 2012 to host the ICTs in Basic Education Community meeting to share research and begin to link policy and practice.²⁸

Mobile technology is transforming the way we educate and learn. Taking heed from Katie Lepi's '6 challenges to Education Technology': technology must not be used merely for the sake of technology.²⁹ What tools and how we use them must be aligned to our context, our needs and our desired outcomes. mEducation is just another, albeit extremely powerful tool to aid our quest to achieving quality education for all.

NOTES

- 1 McKinsey & Company, 2012
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Bradt, 2012
- 4 Emson, 2013
- 5 Noor, 2012
- 6 UNESCO, 2011
- 7 Equal Education, 2011
- 8 Nkosi, 2012
- 9 Steve Vosloo, 2012
- 10 PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2012
- 11 De Lanerolle, 2012
- 12 Glen, 2012
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Shiner, 2012
- 17 www.mxit.com
- 18 Gadget, 2012
- 19 eLearning Africa, 2012
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Shillington, 2012
- 22 UNESCO, 2012
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 <http://www.schoolnet.org.za/about-us/today/>
- 26 Centre for Public Service Innovation Awards, The 10th Public Sector Innovation Awards, <http://www.cpsi.co.za/awards.php>
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Blended Learning in South Africa

The dream of every teacher is to genuinely know each student's need and to be able to deliver on it. Spark Schools aim to do just this.



Stacey Brewer is the CEO of eAdvance, an education organisation with a mission to create systemic change in South African education. In January 2013, eAdvance launched *Spark Schools*, a network of blended-learning primary schools in Johannesburg. Stacey became invested in education reform in the course of her MBA thesis, in which she proposed a sustainable financial model for low-fee private schools. Her research involved an international search for best practises that could be replicated in South Africa to provide affordable, accessible education for all. Stacey subsequently graduated *cum laude* and received the award for top student achievement in her MBA class. Now, Stacey is dedicated to demonstrating what is possible in South African education with high academic expectations and a sustainable financial model.

Ryan Harrison is the COO of eAdvance, an education organisation with a mission to create systemic change in South African education. In January 2013, eAdvance launched *Spark Schools*, a network of blended-learning primary schools in Johannesburg. After spending some time working aboard, Ryan returned to South Africa, to ignite his entrepreneurial spirit and did an MBA degree from the Gordon Institute of Business Science; where his most notable achievements were graduation with *cum laude*. Passionate about development in South Africa; Ryan is committed to systemic change in education through promoting an innovative solution that produces high student achievement with a sustainable financial model.

Introduction: Finding the Model

South Africa needs a sustainable, low cost education model, delivering high quality education which is scalable across the country. *Spark Schools* has emerged due to this need. A hybrid of a business and an academic model is what makes *Spark Schools* a sustainable, scalable market-based solution.

Before launching *Spark Schools*, research was conducted to develop a financial model to underpin the sustainability of affordable private schools in South Africa.¹

Affordability was considered on the basis of “the cost the country could afford”. Private schooling by its very nature could not be free; however, it could be made more accessible to a larger group of the population. Thus, while affordable is a relatively loaded term, affordability at scale was considered to be about R12 000 per annum, approximately the same that a non-fee paying government school received. Furthermore while the model had to be an affordable private schooling solution; it was imperative that the model was also transferable to the state system in an effort to provide wider applicability as well as a viable platform for future cooperation with the state.

Key findings in the research showed that the total cost to educate a child, in current affordable private schools, is high, even if school fees are moderate. An average cost of R22 091 per annum to educate was found across the interviewed schools. However, school fees would only cover 51% of the costs. Other forms of revenue like donations contributed 20.3%, government subsidies contributed 19.6% and then other revenue generating options contributed 9.1% to cover operating costs. It was evident that current affordable private schools are made “affordable” not through innovation in the education model but rather reliant on other sources of revenue, other than school fees.

The eAdvance Management Company provides centralised business functions such as procurement and financial management. It also provides specialised education services such as curriculum development and educator development.

Research was then conducted further afield to other networks of low fee private schools in Africa and India to investigate how these schools were able to be affordable.

Again, no innovation was found in terms of the education model to make it affordable. The networks of low fee private schools in Africa have emerged due to the need of providing access to education. The education model is a “school in a box”² model with very basic resources, therefore keeping operational costs at a minimum. This “school in the box” model allows for a high replication which results in economies of scale and hence a reduction in overall operational costs.

The emergence of low fee private schools in India is due to the need to provide access to English education. South Africa and India face different financial constraints. The majority of South African schools are perceived as ‘break-even’ schools to ensure that they consistently attract donor funding. However, in India, the affordable private schools are profit-making organisations. Initially, it would be assumed that the South African schools would be profitable due to the diversification of revenue sources versus the Indian concentration of revenue on one source. The schools in India are made affordable through paying teachers a low salary and increasing the number of children in a class.

Education at *Spark Schools* is made affordable through innovation in cost reduction. This is fostered in the school's 'blended' education' model and the use of centralised business functions. Cost reduction innovation is promoted through generating operational efficiencies at eAdvance Management Company. The eAdvance Management Company provides centralised business functions such as procurement and financial management. It also provides specialised education services such as curriculum development and educator development. The blended model allows the freedom to design new school models by loosening the constraints³ found in traditional schools.

The blended learning model is a combination of classroom teaching and online educational technology, designed to meet the specific needs of each student. This combination allows for individualised learning and accelerated learning. *Spark Schools* acknowledge that teachers are heavily burdened and there are certain tasks that can be facilitated by computers, such as rote mundane learning of basic skills.

Blended learning allows:

- students to get individualised, self-paced learning
- teachers to provide differentiated instruction based on data
- schools to operate at a much lower cost per pupil

Understanding the *Spark* Education Model

The teacher is the foundation for the learning process. Teachers introduce new concepts and conduct guided practice thereof. The student then goes into the

Learning Lab where they practise their rote, learning online. The online practice allows for extension and review of the curriculum, and provides children with immediate feedback. Children spend 75% of their time in the classroom setting interacting with their teacher and peers, and 25% of their day practising content in the Learning Lab. Children thus spend the majority of their day learning in a classroom environment while the Learning Lab is reserved for practice of concepts.

The *Spark Schools* education model also includes daily targeted intervention, which occurs when students need special areas of attention. This is facilitated by tutors who provide intensive and focused work in small groups of at most 5 students.

More academically enabled children are able to progress without being held back and less academically enabled children are provided with support. No child is left behind. *Spark Schools* are able to reduce costs through blending teacher or class based learning with computer aided learning (the Learning Lab). A combination of the Learning Lab and teachings in the classroom has resulted in the blended learning model. The *Spark Schools* education model allows for individualised instruction. The students are further enriched at the developmental level through automation, adaptive repetition and computer aided learning. Teachers can thus focus on developing effective lesson plans, while assessment and repetitive learning is facilitated by the Learning Lab. Critical to the success of the model is the Learning Lab and the data analysis which allows for customisation or student based individualised learning. Comprehensive data analysis is possible as time spent in the Learning Lab, produces data on each child's academic performance, highlighting areas which need additional focus.

It is important to note that the Spark education model follows the South African National Curriculum (CAPS); however, extends the curriculum and provides it with additional depth for the benefit of both the academic staff and the students.



It is important to note that the Spark education model follows the South African National Curriculum (CAPS); however, extends the curriculum and provides it with additional depth for the benefit of both the academic staff and the students. By adopting the South African National Curriculum; *Spark Schools* remains relevant to the greater South African education context, as well as reinforces the possibility of broader state cooperation.

Understanding the Learning Lab

The Learning Lab physically resembles a typical computer lab. The workstations are exclusively used to access web-based learning software. Students use the Learning Lab for 80 minutes per day, which is typically split between mathematics and literacy. The Learning Lab is staffed with 5 individualised learning specialists (tutors). Two of the ILSs tutor children who need specific attention (typically the bottom 20% of a grade), while the remaining ILSs are coaches to the students working in the Learning Lab. The Learning Lab complements the classroom environment because it provides reinforcement of classroom material and allows for repetitive learning. This approach allows students that require specific small group instruction the opportunity to receive that individualised instruction, while the remaining students are given the room to practice at their own pace.

During the Learning Lab block, students work on computers to focus on individual learning needs and general skills practice. This online learning and practice time allows classroom teachers to focus more on their student interactions on concept extension, critical thinking and skills development. They may also engage in offline activities, such as independent reading and enrichment programmes during the Learning Lab block.

Computer aided learning is only used in instances where it is effective and beneficial to the student leaving higher level teaching and instruction to professional educators.

The Learning Lab combines online curricula, independent reading, and tutoring that strengthen basic skills at the appropriate level for each student.

The purpose of Learning Lab is to:

- provide 'the lift' for learners
- practise basic skills
- practise fundamental skills
- perfection
- repetition
- critical thinking and skills development

They are expected to carry out day-to-day administrative duties, handle the management of a school and exercise professional judgment. In addition, they are expected to articulate a vision and provide the effective organisational and instructional leadership needed so that teachers can succeed.

Learning Lab content is linked with the national curriculum through micro-objectives that are set by the school. The Learning Lab combines online curricula, independent reading, and tutoring that strengthen basic skills at the appropriate level for each student. Using this highly differentiated set of instructional methods translates into increased student mastery of basic skills.

Spark Schools prides itself on the generation of rich data that is used to advance student performance. The success of the Learning Lab is the generation of data.

Content vendors are not adopted unless they deliver rich and comprehensive data on each child's progress. The importance of the data is critical as it provides educators with the ability to deeply understand and respond to each student's needs. Computer aided learning without data collection and data analysis, fails to unlock the true value of computer based education.

Spark Schools has dedicated onsite professionals who are responsible for the analysis of data generated in the school, as well as working with educators to understand the data and adapt teaching strategies where required. This function of data informing instruction is referred to as 'data driven individualised learning' and is recognised as a source of advantage for both the school and the student.

Spark Schools ensure that technology used does not add to the total cost to educate but rather decrease the total cost and allow for individualised learning to accelerate the learning process. This is achieved by only implementing technology that provides the school with an operational efficiency. Comprehensive business cases occupy technology implementation that seeks to promote student achievement as well as operational efficiency. Technology is seen as a tool that both promotes learning as well as has the ability to streamline the operations of a school, this technology is considered both for its impact on student achievement as well as on the total cost to educate.

Benefits for blended learning are as follows:

- *Create more time for teachers and increase in academic achievement*

The blended model brings flexibility back to the teachers' roles and job sustainability. This model allows schools to 'free up' teachers time while students work independently. The teacher now has the opportunity to pull small groups of students together to address learning gaps (individualisation), enhance or extend the curriculum, or spend time analysing student data (monitoring). This choice has deep implications for teacher sustainability as the teacher's job shifts from 'spending a little time doing a lot of things' to creating a space for sustained, individualised instruction. Teachers get to spend more time teaching.



Teachers have more control of their time, which has profound implications for good teaching practice, teacher innovation, and job satisfaction. The promise here is that teachers have the space to make instructional choices that allow for the most impact on students. There is freedom to do 1:1, small group, or large group teaching, depending on what is most effective. Additionally time is freed-up to allow for more time analysing and addressing learning gaps that have an increased emphasis on the students' critical thinking and other higher order skills.

The potential also exists to differentiate or modularise teacher roles. Instead of having each teacher try to do everything, the model utilises expert teachers to engage in activities that leverage their extensive instructional expertise while less experienced teachers focus on providing academic interventions, and collaborating with expert teachers to expand their practice. In practise teachers specialise in a specific subject, and only are expected to teach that subject, while less experienced educators become tutors, where they focus on intervention. The subject specialisation from an early stage has the added benefit of ensuring greater curriculum coverage. Through this system, educators are given the choice to focus on their chosen specialisation and become experts, while new educators are given the space to grow, and develop their skills before moving into the classroom.

- *Reallocate resources to tasks that schools otherwise cannot afford*

One of the greatest challenges for school managers is that the cost structures of traditional schools are essentially impenetrable as salaries and facilities can account for as much as 80%4 of the budget.⁵ Students spend time working independently via online platforms, which requires fewer staff members and therefore frees up resources to invest in more essential components of a school. These include academic interventions (tutoring and small group instruction), professional development and extra-curricular enhancements. Blending learning allows school operators to have choices to allocate their resources to things that they previously could not afford.

- *Reduce costs to cope with declining budgets/reduction in funding*

Blended learning offers a path to strategically reduce costs while enabling a high-quality learning environment. This can be achieved through the recruitment of fewer teachers.

A classroom that uses guided instruction is organised into a series of stations where students work independently on different learning activities. While students are engaged in independent work, the teacher pulls groups of three to six students to provide focused individualised instruction. Hence, it is not a case of hiring more people to free up other teachers. The time students do have with teachers is in small-group, personalised environments. This strategy is in contradiction to the traditional cost-cutting of academic programmes and firing of the least tenured teachers regardless of performance. The blended learning model allows for cost savings, which can be reinvested in higher teacher salaries, leadership training, and other areas in the academic discipline.

Expert teachers spend a significant amount of their time analysing student data, designing learning experiences, and providing targeted interventions.

Blended learning model has created opportunities for teachers to find new ways to reach students, individualise instruction, and find more time to teach. The blended learning model allows for effective and professional teaching at the heart of educational reform.

- *Responding to real-time student data*

Teachers appreciate knowing more about each student while reducing time spent on in-class “testing” because assessment data collected from online learning is far more abundant, informative and reliable. Teachers spend more time analysing student data rather than collecting it. The collection of data is critical in monitoring student progress in addition to optimising teacher time. The data that is collected provides robust individualised reporting on student capabilities.

- *Targeting instruction*

The blended learning model allows for student data to be abundant, which loosens time constraints, and allows for individualisation and accelerated learning. Teachers spend more time on targeted instruction (not scripted curriculum). Teachers operate with guided instruction and/or response to intervention, because they are trained to effectively address learning gaps that hamper student progress.

- *Designing learning paths*

Teachers facilitate the creation of learning paths for each individual student based on the student’s individual strengths and weaknesses. These paths are composed of sets of standards-based learning objects designed to build mastery and provide immediate feedback to students, teachers, parents, and other education service providers. Teachers could architect these learning paths based on a student’s prior learning gaps, optimal learning modalities, and/or interest. Teachers should no longer burn the candle at both ends creating their own content, but rather spend their time organising and customising libraries of high-quality learning objectives.

- *Deconstructing the role of the teacher*

Blended learning operators deconstruct the teacher’s role in new and interesting ways that supports novice teachers, makes the profession more sustainable and increases the impact of expert teachers. Expert teachers spend a significant amount of their time analysing student data, designing learning experiences, and providing targeted interventions. Other specialists are tasked with creating projects and experiences that enhance and extend the curriculum. Practically this involves expert curriculum and resource developers that work to support teachers through resources and methodology. This specialisation further promotes professionalisation in the workplace as well as allows teachers to play to their strengths.

Concluding remarks

The most effective blended learning model leverages technology to:

- help each student master the content and skills they need,
- allow teachers to get the most out of their planning and instructional time, and
- streamline operations with costs similar to – or less than – traditional schooling.

The Spark education model presents South Africa with a unique offering; an offering that offers high quality education at an accessible cost. The Spark education model thus has the potential not only to shift the private schooling environment but also substantially contribute towards the state education system.

Spark Schools look forward to transforming education, through innovation, by providing access to affordable, quality education that unlocks a better “passport to the future” for majority of South Africans. This allows for the ultimate goal of *Spark Schools* to be achieved: to create a blueprint in education for South Africa.

NOTES

- 1 Brewer, 2011
- 2 The school in a box concept refers to an education model that is highly replicable and places resource availability priority on activities and functions that directly impact the quality of education.
- 3 Such as, usage hours of teachers per day (efficiency), teacher availability, teacher specialisation, financial constraints (high cost base), inability to capture rich, consistent, independent and deep data.
- 4 The average accounting for 75% of budget
- 5 Brewer, 2011: 5

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Spark Ferndale at a glance

- Spark Ferndale is the first school in the network of *Spark Schools*. The School is located in Ferndale, Johannesburg.
- The students at Spark Ferndale mostly come from the surrounding areas of Randburg and the greater Northgate area. The students and their families are very diverse at Spark Ferndale, a characteristic we pride ourselves on.
- Other than being the first school in the network, Spark Ferndale shows quality because of the dedication and excellence of the academic and support teams making Spark Ferndale work. Knowing that we are providing our scholars with excellent high quality education and working to shift the education landscape in South Africa, is what makes us get up in the morning.

A narrative: A nomad's view on education in South Sudan and Uganda



Nomvula Matakutso Mkencele Researcher, blogger, fiction writer, filmmaker, social-activist, programmes director for SHOA (Self Help Orphans Organisation) in Yambio, Western Equatoria State, Republic of South Sudan.

From smart phones to tablets, from Mxit to Facebook to Twitter to Pinterest – mobile technology is rapidly transforming the way we live, study, play and communicate.

It is true that we can make plans but we cannot always dictate the events that take place while we are travelling on the path we've chosen. In my case the destination was Kampala. In July last year I left South Africa for Uganda to run a marketing company and establish a development consultancy with a friend. As in all good stories, everything didn't go as planned. I then met Dr. Ian Clarke, mayor of Makindye District and Mr. Robert Common, Programmes Director for HOPE for Children, and ended up working with them as a fund raiser for a Public Private Partnership initiative called Events For Namuwongo (EFN). It was during this time in Kampala that South Sudan became more than just a new country I was interested in visiting.

South Sudan

I was oblivious to South Sudan's challenges regarding education until I spoke to Mr. Mabior Garang de Mabior, the director of the Dr. John Garang International School. He painted a realistic picture of the challenges the South Sudanese government is facing in providing adequate access to basic education. These tests include the transition from Arabic to English as an official language, and low adult literacy levels. There is a shortage of well trained South Sudanese teachers and most of the few that there are have to be retrained to use English as a medium of instruction. Other factors that exacerbate South Sudan's situation are inadequate infrastructure and the fact that a universal curriculum is yet to be developed. The state has to rely on importing teachers from neighbouring countries, and these are teachers who do not necessarily speak the local languages. This does not only affect learner-teacher interaction; it is also a costly exercise for a society that is building all institutions from scratch.

Seventy-two percent of the population are below the age of thirty, twenty seven percent are literate. Although females make up over sixty percent of the general population, only sixteen percent of the population of literate South Sudanese are female. Eighty-three percent of South Sudanese live in rural areas and ninety percent of rural women are illiterate.

It is these statistics that make Mr Mabior Garang's idea of replicating the Cuban Literacy Campaign an urgent solution. It would require that battalions of volunteers be trained to go into the countryside to teach basic literacy. This programme would also enable teacher trainers to produce scores of youth who can provide basic education to marginalised rural communities. I believe that this programme can be part of the solution if it also draws from the successes and pitfalls and history of the Botswana national literacy programme. For instance, the programmes in Botswana were conducted in seTswana, which marginalised other languages and cultures. In my view this concern makes it imperative for South Sudan to develop a mother-tongue-based literacy programme. This can be achieved through training locals to implement and develop education programmes that are based on social, economic and cultural needs which are specific to communities. Training local educators would help learners in developing a grasp of English, the official language. It will also help develop indigenous languages and an indigenous literary culture.

South Sudan has the task of developing a state, and it is also faced with the mammoth undertaking of fostering a culturally diverse nation with over sixty different languages. The people of South Sudan are still overcoming conflict, cultural subjugation and statelessness. The transitional constitution exists but the document itself is not accessible to most of the population, physically, and because of literacy and language barriers. The literacy programme can help initiate the process of translating the constitution into all the indigenous languages of South Sudan. This would also empower citizens to exercise their rights and responsibilities, as part of a nation.

Offering to recruit volunteers for a literacy initiative, I ended up visiting South Sudan briefly. Juba is the seat of the Republic of South Sudan's government; it is a rapidly developing urban centre in desperate need of spatial planning and sanitation. Like every developing city, it is a paradox of extreme wealth and extreme poverty co-existing, but not really interacting.

The ethos of "each one, teach one" is a beacon of positive community participation in Yambio, Western Equatoria State, where a primary school was established by orphans in 2001.

I visited the Dr John Garang International School and was impressed by the administration's tireless efforts at providing a world-class education. They face similar obstacles as the government regarding recruitment and curriculum development. Despite this, the school represents a progressive and continuous learning process for the administration and the learners. Dr John Garang International School's premises are available for mixed use as an IT vocational training centre and English language school. This is a worthwhile example of what South Sudan can achieve in utilising limited resources for optimum service delivery in academic development and vocational training. It is an example of an institution that is shaping itself according to the immediate and future needs of the community it is serving.

The ethos of "each one, teach one" is a beacon of positive community participation in Yambio, Western Equatoria State, where a primary school was established by orphans in 2001. Yambio has a high concentration of orphans who were created by South Sudan's liberation struggle and Joseph Kony's raids. The school was started by the Self Help Orphans Association (SHOA) in 2001. This initiative was established by the orphans themselves, some of who are former child soldiers. These youths had left Western Equatoria to seek work and high school education in Kampala. On their return, the enterprising founders first did the teaching themselves under trees.

They took on odd jobs to fund the establishment of the primary school. They also established vegetable gardens to provide food and to raise funds for expanding their programme to human rights and gender sensitivity training, sex and gender based violence awareness, counselling, life skills, a straight talk sex education programme, and a hygiene and sanitation programme.

This initiative is plagued by problems like limited resources and the loss of land to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). This has shut down a steady income stream, because SHOA region can no longer grow crops to raise money. As trying as circumstances are, the school is still running but other programmes have been suspended because of the shortage of funds. As for SHOA, it is now a registered Community Based Organisation which caters for 619 orphans, and has secured financial support for 484 orphans. Just over 100 of the orphans are former child soldiers, and some are arrow boys. The arrow boys also have the role of protecting communities from threats like the Lord's Resistance Army. They are called "arrow boys" because they use bows and arrows as a means of self-defence. The primary school itself now has four classrooms and its teachers are paid by the Republic of South Sudan's Ministry of Education. The Orphan's Primary School offers classes from kindergarten level to P8.

The most urgent goals they are working towards are creating employment and providing vocational training opportunities. SHOA plans to achieve this by building more classrooms, establishing a primary healthcare centre, establishing a water point, opening a restaurant and a charcoal making business, and by developing a volunteer programme of professionals who can impart skills to beneficiaries.

As insurmountable as the challenges appear to be, SHOA is mobilising other CBOs that work with orphans in all nine counties of Western Equatoria. So far they have solidified partnerships in Ezo, Tambura, Ibba and Maridi. SHOA is coordinating with Joint Effort to Support Orphans (JESO) in mobilising a critical mass for affecting change.

SHOA is now trying to develop a programme that will empower young women by supporting them through high school. The founders of the organisation also seek to study further formally and informally, so they can develop the capacity to deliver more services to the orphaned children and the rest of the communities of Yambio. The most urgent goals they are working towards are creating employment and providing

vocational training opportunities. SHOA plans to achieve this by building more classrooms, establishing a primary healthcare centre, establishing a water point, opening a restaurant and a charcoal making business, and by developing a volunteer programme of professionals who can impart skills to beneficiaries. I hope that in the near future most of the volunteers will be young people from neighbouring Uganda.

Uganda

To me, the sight of children walking to and from school is a symbol of continuity, a sign that all is well. It is one of the reasons why I slept peacefully for three nights, in a tent in the garden of a backpackers lodge in Entebbe; the other reason was the armed guard at the gate. During those first three days I met and spoke to all kinds of volunteers. Like the snowboarder who was taking a break from counselling HIV infected and affected children in a rural area. Then there were anecdotes from gap year teenagers who had just completed six months of teaching primary school children who can only speak their mother tongue. These conversations would come to mind whenever I spoke to working class Ugandan parents; mothers and fathers

whose aspirations for their children are beyond their means. Like Eva, a twenty-nine year old domestic worker, a single mother with three children. She earns 40 000 Ugandan shillings per week from two jobs that take 40 hours of her time weekly. She also echoed concerns about overcrowding in classes, shortage of trained Ugandan teachers, limited access to laboratories and libraries, and a pupil to book ratio of +/- three pupils to one book. Those issues were also raised by teachers; a young female primary school teacher spoke of the difficulties she went through to get her diploma.

Seemingly the Ugandan government does not have the money to put enough teachers and nurses through school to meet the nation's demands. Then surely some of the development aid channelled into Uganda can help improve education infrastructure and the quality of the universal primary school education that the government is offering. I think the humanitarian aid would be more effective if education NGOs develop an education delivery strategy in real partnership with the communities they serve, and with relevant arms of government. An example of how such partnerships can be fruitful is Events For Namuwongo. The political will of the Kampala Capital City Authority Makindye District makes it possible for Hope for Children and the International Medical Group to deliver sanitation, health and education solutions to the Namuwongo slum. The aforementioned organisations are just three of Ugandan and international participants and supporters of the EFN initiative.

For the poorest children and orphans, a high school education is a luxury they can only afford through sponsorship. Since the government can no longer afford to provide free secondary education, it is charities like EFN who find individual anonymous sponsors for children.

Private schools provide a better start for middle class children, who then become the most likely candidates for a tertiary qualification.

Just like in most developing countries equal access to schooling does not guarantee good quality education. Private schools provide a better start for middle class children, who then become the most likely candidates for a tertiary qualification. Only a small number of economically disadvantaged children are sponsored through university. It is usually private school taught children who reach the standards of excellence necessary to get a government scholarship.

EFN's goals include setting up an academy that will service 500 children and the needs of the wider community. This academy's curriculum and facilities will be like that of any well equipped, well staffed school in the developed world. I think it is not only a brilliant solution to providing education, but it is also a necessary intervention in providing a safe learning and living environment for indigent and homeless children. According to Hope for Children's Robert Common, the high drop-out rate of indigent and homeless children is caused by harsh living conditions. These conditions include abject poverty and abuses ranging from physical abuse to child labour. Although the academy offers a fighting chance for some disadvantaged children, it is not a solution that guarantees further education. That is why I believe that vocational training as part of the curriculum will go a long way in creating more opportunities of a better life for beneficiaries.

At the moment – for children from excluded communities – tertiary education is a rare gift that sometimes comes from Ugandan philanthropists like entrepreneur and politician, Dr Ian Clarke. He has adopted half a dozen children over the 25 years he has spent in Uganda.

My dream is to see the establishment of more virtual universities, so more working class young Ugandans with full time jobs can study further. This would require improved internet access for all, and mobile phone friendly learning and monitoring tools. It is a possibility that would be realised sooner through strong partnerships between the government, the private sector, non profit organisations and communities. Uganda's progressive information and communications sector makes M-learning and e-learning more feasible. The Virtual University of Uganda is a prime example of how technology can make education cheaper and more accessible. The open source web application, *Moodle*, is a cost-effective tool that is used by VUU, Makerere University and the International Health Sciences University in Kampala.

The challenge is to bring such resources closer to the densely populated slum areas, which have a high number of unemployed and self-employed youth and women.

I think the next step to volunteerism should be a free online Ugandan university staffed by volunteer lecturers who will give non-paying m- and e-learning candidates a high quality education. This move would require more investment in the establishment of more community based, free to access ICT hubs.

I also support the move towards investment in ICT, driven towards vocational and entrepreneurship training. The need for training in gathering and applying open source learning tools is gradually being addressed by ICT driven initiatives like Hive Colab. They are attempting to bridge the gap between Uganda based entrepreneurs and the world market by giving budding entrepreneurs access to a technologically enabled space that allows them to learn how to develop their products, and how to use web-based marketing tools. Hive Colab also provides the physical space and resources required for people to then apply their knowledge in a creative office environment. The challenge is to bring such resources closer to the densely populated slum areas, which have a high number of unemployed and self-employed youth and women.

There are non-profit and religious organisations which are already exploring these possibilities, yielding a mixture of success and teething problems. Some collapse due to administrative failure. According to a former employee of a faith-based NGO that received government funding, corruption and appalling labour practices are some of the contributors to the failure of the organisation she worked for. Despite the uphill walk and pitfalls, education in entrepreneurship as a means of development is a vision shared by young Ugandans who have attended Dr. Mwenza Blell's insightful talks. Like them I believe Ugandans are an enterprising nation capable of propelling an informal sector that can tackle youth unemployment and alleviate poverty. ICT is already creating jobs through the mobile money market. In Namuwongo slum there are more mobile money centres than there are shops that sell bread. I think this development is just a fraction of what ICT can achieve in giving access to education.

Joseph Mathaba

Joseph matriculated at Tholokuhle High School in Richards Bay in 2009. He is currently in 3rd year Metallurgical Engineering at the University of Pretoria. He has a bursary from Exxaro.

- He was acknowledged by Golden Key International Honour Society for being part of 15% top academic achievers at the University of Pretoria in 2010.
- He was elected to be the school president in matric
- He obtained numerous leadership and academic certificates in High School

In his own words:

“I was in an under-resourced school, we had no facilities/equipment for experiments so we had to try and visualise everything in our heads. Each class was crowded with about 60 learners which made it difficult for teachers to control the noise levels sometimes and to give every learner individual attention during assessments and tutorials. There were 30 computers which were only accessed by learners who did IT/CAT, the whole school with more than 1000 learners had no access to those computers.

“The teachers tried their best to assist us (learners) but the facilities limited them, as a result it was a big challenge for them to produce good results and 100% pass rate. As we all know that some learners are good listeners and can grasp the information fast while other need to see animations or see the process practically in order to understand. Therefore, the teachers weren't able to assist us adequately.

“I had material such as textbooks, question papers and memos but all these are not as useful if the concept(s) are not well understood.

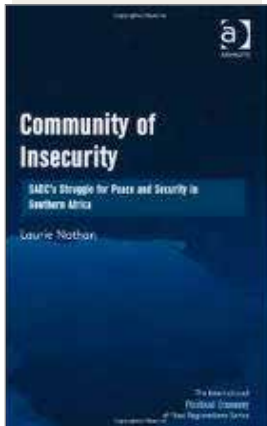
“I used to access *Wikipedia* via cell phone and through computers at the community library. Actually I would Google the concepts I used to struggle with almost every day after school hours and choose *Wikipedia* articles because their explanation can be understood by a layman. I found *Wikipedia* very helpful because even if it gets technical when explaining certain concepts it includes links to help the reader understand certain terms used in that particular field of study. It's unfortunate I was advised not to use *Wikipedia* at varsity because its articles can be modified anytime which is not good for researches and referencing. But I still use *Wikipedia* just to build basic understanding of certain concepts even now.

“I used to help my fellow classmates and schoolmates a lot because I was one of the learners who usually grasped the concepts fast and I used to study ahead. I would normally organise morning classes or after school classes to help them with physics and maths. For this reason my principal still asks me to assist the matriculants during recess.

Thank you to Judy McDougall, Learningtothemax, for this story.



André Dumon is
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COMMUNITY OF
INSECURITY: SADC'S
STRUGGLE FOR PEACE
AND SECURITY IN
SOUTHERN AFRICA
By Laurie Nathan
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BOOK REVIEW

Laurie Nathan's 'Community of insecurity: SADC's struggle for peace and security in Southern Africa'

Laurie Nathan's authoritative examination of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a well sustained analysis on its failure to achieve its main objectives: peace and security in the region. The reasons for this failure are argued to portend a dark future for the regional organisation and its stated objectives. As someone who served SADC in an advisory capacity, Nathan's analysis certainly provides a privileged perspective and he should be given an attentive reading.

The book presents a neat account of SADC's security architecture and the inability of the organisation to live up to the laudable goals sought in its treaty, agenda and protocols. Replete with examples, an in-depth account of SADC's creation, evolution and efficacy is offered to the reader.

The theoretical grounding of the author's argument is found in Karl Deutsch's writings on the idea of 'security communities'. As such, the author is quick point out that the region's lack of a commitment to common values and a deficit of trust, lies at the heart of SADC's failure as a veritable 'security community'. This lack of common values is evidenced in the disparate domestic or 'national' characteristics of each member state. One need only look at the World Justice Project and Freedom House's ranking of the SADC member states to see how the region's members differ in regimes, adherence to the rule of law and democratic character. With such a varied array of identities the region's security architecture is built on bad foundations.

The first problem is then that in the place of common values and trust one finds in SADC priority being accorded to regime solidarity. This is not surprising as SADC is the reincarnation of the former Front Line States, which was a trade and security response to the regional strategy of the Apartheid regime in South Africa. The lasting history of this set of relationships is wonderfully exemplified in the person of the octogenarian Robert Mugabe, who still assumes the role of the 'elder', to whom homage must be paid and deference shown. Obviously, the idea of a historical debt remains in the collective political psyche.

The lack of common values compounds the second reason for SADC's failure: the weakness of the member states and the unwillingness to surrender sovereignty to any

regional or supra-national organisation. For the SADC states, who only relatively recently won their independence and still have a rather tenuous grip of *de facto* sovereignty, even though they have full *de jure* sovereignty, transferring sovereignty to any other organisation comes across as threatening. In an international arena characterised by anarchy, sovereignty in a 'self-help system' remains the guiding rationale. Being mired in such a paradigm is deleterious to the goals of a security community, which requires submission to the institutions of its own creation.

Speaking at 'SADC Tribunal: Removing the scales of justice', a public dialogue series hosted by the University of Pretoria, Laurie Nathan's narrative introduced a timeous addition to the body of literature about SADC. This is particularly true in light of the SADC Summit in August, when the future of the SADC Tribunal will be decided, and with it the efficacy and continuity of its judicial organ, without which SADC's human security onus will be non-existent. This is another instance of a failure to institutionalise the SADC Treaty. The Summit will thus test whether member states cohere to Treaty principles, the normative fabric that is still lacking in SADC, as the book makes unequivocally clear.

Nathan cogently and convincingly argues that the preoccupation with sovereignty results in priority being given to regime security. As a consequence, the liberation movement of the past, now placed in the role of ruling party in a supposedly democratic state, is a conflicted entity, struggling with the two roles. This preoccupation with regime security is done at the expense of human security, one of the objectives of the SADC grouping.

If the lack of common values of the relationships begins to explain SADC failure then it is argued that one must consider the national and domestic failure of the region. The author states this saying, "The inhabitants of a country wracked by violence cannot plausibly be said to live in a security community."¹

The book also contains case studies of instances reflecting those dynamics that inhibit SADC from achieving its objectives. These include the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1998-2002), the on-going mediation in Zimbabwe and the coup in Madagascar (2009). In each case it is shown that the lack of consensus on normative issues results in a lack of unity of purpose and vision.

A general readership would have benefitted from a more systematic exposition of SADC's structural problems, being duplicative membership and competing cooperative schemes in the areas of security and economics. This compounds problems of foreign policy orientations that are often at odds and various degrees of regional responses to the ideal of democratic governance, which the book does take up. Despite not presently much in the way of successes, one must be reminded that this is not the purpose of the book. Nathan does, however, make the telling point that SADC's on-going restructuring suggests more of a forum than a true community.

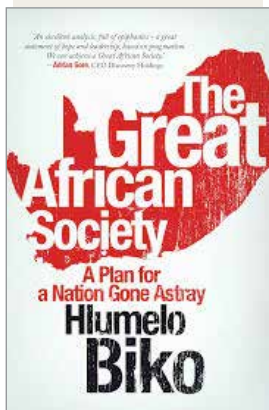
NOTES

¹ Nathan 2012:152

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THE GREAT AFRICAN SOCIETY: A PLAN FOR A NATION GONE ASTRAY
By Hlumelo Biko
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BOOK REVIEW

Hlumelo Biko's 'The Great African Society: A plan for a nation gone astray'

Hlumelo Biko is the son of Steve Biko and Mamphela Ramphele. He holds a Master of Science degree in International Business Government Relationships from Georgetown University, Washington. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree, with majors in History and Politics, from the University of Cape Town. Biko boasts a successful 13 year career as a venture capitalist. He is an executive Chairman of Spinnaker Growth Partners and, before this, he was Managing Director at Circle Capital Ventures. He is an investor in, and, Board Member of, entities like Mediclinic, EduLoan, Endeavor, the African School of Excellence, and Kommunity Group Projects. He has worked for the World Bank. He is a consultant. He is an analyst. He is the vice-chairman of the Baxter Theatre.

Biko's book, *The Great African Society: A plan for a nation gone astray*, is an ambitious attempt to sketch solutions to South Africa's most pressing structural problems. Biko lists these (familiar) problems, along with the mistaken conceptions and misguided approaches that have perpetuated them, point-wise. Illuminating and setting these straight, he proposes plausible sounding solutions. Solutions that will make you think: "Why aren't we doing this?"

The real story of South Africa, as it is today, is that of a nation forged by a rational and deliberate "inter-racial battle for scarce economic resources"¹. Post-apartheid, South Africa has acknowledged its terrible past and taken a hard look at the racism that has characterised it but, in Biko's view, has failed to address the effects of economic discrimination, and consequent inequality, that still divides South Africa. Biko calls on us to acknowledge economic inequality as the primary injustice in South Africa, and to move away from framing South Africa's challenges solely in terms of race.

In South Africa, despite continued economic growth, the majority of South Africans are obstructed from participating in the economy. This is a state of affairs that is not only profoundly unjust, but also manifestly unsustainable. Biko highlights the psychological effects of inequality², and the consequences of an environment where hard-work does not pay, and only a privileged minority is able to progress in the economy. He brings attention to the barriers that ordinary South African face in an unfair system that operates in bad faith.

Biko argues that economic redistribution is priority. This can only be achieved by a feat of social and economic re-engineering. He places particular emphasis on the 'school infrastructure' (i.e. the school system), and its role, in its current state, as an

economic barrier. One of the many intriguing ideas that Biko proposes, is a system whereby the private sector can directly invest and run under-performing schools, in exchange for BEE credits.³

While Biko does acknowledge the achievements of the ANC, and the challenges that the ANC have inherited, he is critical of the on-going economic inequality that still hampers our way towards an equal society. For Biko, the ANC have chosen power over the people. What is needed, and should be embraced, is a “people-centric approach”⁴. This entails a number of further interventions, from policies encouraging investment directly in human-capital (‘better schools, better schooling’⁵), job creation and public sector skills development⁶, to a more representative electoral system⁷. But this book is not about the ANC- it is about what those in a position of power ought to do, given the state of the nation.

Biko proposes a targeted policy-driven approach relying on a social investment fund, the ‘Re-engineering South Africa Fund’. This involves billions of Rands.

Biko calls for ‘restorative justice’. First, all those in a position of power must acknowledge that South Africa’s current socio-economic state is unacceptable. Secondly, assumedly, all must buy into the idea that the great African society is a “functional, equitable meritocracy”⁸. Then, with this realization, these players must make a commitment to economic redistribution. Biko proposes a targeted policy-driven approach relying on a social investment fund, the ‘Re-engineering South Africa Fund’⁹. This involves billions of Rands. The private and public sector ought to work together, and the public sector needs to create the necessary incentives to investment in such a fund (along with the requisite checks and balances).

Biko’s book is very critical. The ANC and their vision, approaches past and present: policies of Growth, Employment and Redistribution, Outcomes Based Education, Black Economic Empowerment, etc. are all examined and critiqued. But the book is also exceptionally *can-do*. All that is needed for the great African society is for the private and public sector to work together.

These ideas seem attractive, at first glance. However, the question of how ideas are translated into initiatives and then into programmes, looms large. What would have been helpful, is some guide to help the reader understand the journey from idea, to initiative, to programme. Perhaps it would have been appropriate to look at the history and development of the *Business Trust*¹⁰ as guide.

NOTES

- 1 Biko, 2013: viii
- 2 p. 89 et seq.
- 3 p. 194
- 4 p. 25
- 5 p. 195
- 6 p. 82
- 7 p. 100 et seq.
- 8 p. 2
- 9 Chapter 12
- 10 <http://www.btrust.org.za/>

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