School

2010

Volume 4 Number 5 & 6
Double edition

Management & Leadership
POLICY LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE
for South African Schools

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SM&L

is published 10 times per year by Ednews. It is editorially and financially independent and it is not affiliated to any organisation. It seeks to provide the leaders of South African schools with current and relevant information on issues of policy, leadership, management and governance.

Literacy, Leadership, Workbooks and Strikes

This 28-page double edition represents the first stage in a process of upgrading and redesigning *School Management & Leadership* in an effort to provide a better service to you, our readers. Our next edition will include a complete design makeover to improve its visual appeal and to make it more accessible. We also plan to upgrade our web-page to make it more useful and user-friendly and to publish ***SM&L*** Update, our electronic supplement, on a more frequent and regular basis.

The public servants' strike is going into its fourth week as I write this, with apparently no end in sight. There are no good times for teachers to strike but for the current Grade 12 class, this strike could not have come at a worse time. The teachers of the majority of Grade 12 pupils would not have covered the complete curriculum in their respective subjects at the time the strike began, partly as a consequence of the longer mid-year break to accommodate the 2010 World Cup and the impact that this 5-week break from schooling will have had on learning. The prolonged nature of the strike and the decision of most provinces to postpone their common "Mock Matric" examinations to later in the term means that the teachers at the majority of schools will have very little time available to provide the important and necessary feedback to pupils on their performance. Worse, still is that strike has curtailed the time available for focused revision on those areas of weakness that have been identified from the performance of their pupils in these exams. Although we are reluctant to suggest it, it may better for those schools at which there has been no teaching to simply abandon a formal "mock matric" and to rather make sure that all of the necessary work has been covered before embarking on a revision programme. With the syllabus completed they will be able to devote their energy and effort to ensuring that their Grade 12 classes are provided with a programme of focussed revision on those elements of the syllabus which will secure them the most marks together with as much practice as possible in writing typical examination-type questions.

This edition includes a number of articles related to the challenging issue of adolescent literacy and the kinds of classroom strategies that research suggests can be used to improve the reading skills of reluctant and struggling adolescent readers. Reading with understanding is an essential skill for academic success and future employment; yet many - if not the majority of - pupils who enter high school do not have adequate reading and comprehension skills in the LOLT of the school. This should be a major concern for high schools but one which few high schools seem to try to address, perhaps because principals and teachers are not sure about what to do. We

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Leadership

Good leaders build better teams for best schools

Evidence from research from both within education and in the wider business sector shows that a team-based approach to leadership has many advantages over the more traditional hierarchical model with all authority vested in a powerful chief executive.

Although we have no hard evidence to prove it, it is our experience that the daily operations of most of the better performing schools in this country are managed by a wide range of individuals and teams, each of which has significant authority and decision-making power for those functions which have been delegated to them. These will include subject heads and their subject teams, phase and grade heads working with members of their phase teams or class teachers, together with individuals and groups responsible for aspects such as school finance, physical amenities, pupil discipline and the school's co-curricular programme. The presence of these well-functioning teams is almost always a sign that the head of the school is confident of his/her authority and has a good understanding of his/her own strengths and weaknesses as a leader. Conversely, in schools where these management structures are absent or perform poorly, you are likely to find a head who is unsure of his/her authority, and/or who lacks confidence, or is simply incompetent or disinterested in achieving what is best for his/her school.

Building effective management teams and developing efficient accountable management structures is perhaps the most important work of any principal. This is because it is through these people and structures that she can best extend her influence and vision for the school and grow the leadership and management expertise of her staff.

Interestingly, the author of a recent report[1] published by the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) notes that despite the prevalence of leadership teams across schools in England, "very little has been written about them". He contrasts this with the substantial literature on school leadership which focuses mainly on the role of the principal and with the massive body of published work devoted to leadership, management and teamwork outside of education, much of which has at least some relevance for schools.

Six conditions need to be met for your Leadership Team to work effectively

Six conditions for Leadership teams to be effective

1 An appropriate team structure
2 A clear and compelling purpose
3 Able and competent members
4 Clear operating rules
5 Strong team leadership, and
6 Regular self-evaluation.

The research on which the report is based was undertaken in 2008 in six secondary schools in England which had been identified by school inspectors as having outstanding leadership and management, with a particular emphasis on a strong leadership team. Both state and independent schools were included in the group and the schools varied in size (in terms of pupil enrolment) between 621 and 1 742 pupils.

David Thomas, the author of the report, compiled a list[2] of the characteristics of effective leadership teams based on his review of the literature. Our "Effective leadership team checklist" in the box on the adjacent page is largely based on

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Leadership team effectiveness checklist[1]

[1] Based on material contained in the NCSL publication, *Working together is success: How successful headteachers build and develop effective leadership teams*, a Research Associate Report by David Thomas (2009).

- ☐ Team members work well together
- ☐ Team members have a range of strengths in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes
- ☐ The roles and responsibilities of individual team members are clear to staff
- ☐ Team members fulfil their individual management responsibilities and are willing to be held accountable for their actions
- ☐ Team members communicate a clear and coherent vision for the school
- ☐ Team members share a common set of principles and values and operate in accordance with these principles and values
- ☐ The leadership team consults widely before making key policy decisions
- ☐ Where there are differences of opinion these are dealt with in an open and constructive manner with team members focusing on achieving consensus on solutions that are in the best interests of the school
- ☐ Team members take joint ownership of all decisions once made
- ☐ Team members are proactive and are adept at anticipating future developments and their implications for the school and in doing so avoid crisis management
- ☐ The leadership team sets out the broad strategy for change and then encourages and supports teachers in a way that allows them to adapt and develop their own appropriate professional responses to anticipated/proposed changes
- ☐ When introducing change the leadership team identifies priorities and phases in new developments, allowing time for consolidation
- ☐ The leadership team maintains an intense focus on teaching and learning and stays abreast of the latest development in pedagogy.
- ☐ The leadership team evaluates all potential new initiatives in terms of their likely impact on pupil achievement; and the evaluation process considers the broader implications of any initiative and not just on results.
- ☐ Members of the leadership team are highly visible and approachable and model desired behaviours and attributes such as hard work, commitment, mutual respect, teamwork, loyalty, openness, honesty and integrity.
- ☐ Team members develop positive relationships with other stakeholders in the school community and are good at managing people and at encouraging others to develop their talents and to contribute their energy and skills for the good of the school.
- ☐ Team members have good communication skills and work to recognise, support and commend the work of others.
- ☐ Team members set high standards and have high expectations that staff will meet these standards while remaining sensitive to issues such as staff mood, morale and workload.
- ☐ Team members acknowledge that they are accountable to others for their performance and provide clear evidence of the results and consequences of their decisions.
- ☐ Team members readily admit to their mistakes and are willing to consider alternatives.
- ☐ Team members have an in-depth knowledge of the school and of the wider community that it serves.
- ☐ Team members work to build effective relationships with other schools and community-based organisations.
- ☐ Team members participate in training on how to function effectively as a team and spend time reflecting on their performance and in developing their individual and team skills.

Continued from page 2

this list and other material and sources derived from the report. Based on his review of the literature, he identified six conditions which need to be met for leadership teams to be effective. The six conditions are:

1 An appropriate team structure
2 A clear and compelling purpose
3 Able and competent members
4 Clear operating rules
5 Strong team leadership, and
6 Regular self-evaluation.

1 Appropriate team structure

For the leadership team to work together effectively, it is important that the management responsibilities of each member of the team are clearly defined and that these management responsibilities cover all of the critical operational areas of the school. Ideally, teams should consist of between five and eight members, irrespective of the size of the school. This is because larger groups tend to become unwieldy and smaller groups are unlikely to be able to be assigned responsibility for all of the critical operational areas of the school. It is worth noting that this kind of a model is not based on a specific number of allocated promotion posts but rather on the major areas of responsibility that need to be covered.

2 A clear and compelling purpose

The principal, as team-leader, has two critical responsibilities:

- he must articulate the purpose of the team, constantly reminding team members of the need to focus their efforts on those priorities which will contribute most to the achievement of their long-term vision for the school; and
- he must ensure that individual team members have clearly-defined tasks and that they understand the extent to which the overall success of the team depends on their personal contribution and best efforts.

3 Able and competent members

While the SMTs of most public schools are traditionally constituted from teachers who hold promotion posts, this is not necessarily the best way to constitute a management team if it is to be effective. As suggested in item 1, the team ideally needs to include all those members of staff who have been delegated with responsibility for one or more of the major operational areas of the school. If some of these tasks have been assigned to teachers who do not hold promotion posts, then it would be best, in terms of the overall effectiveness of the team, if these individuals were included as team members. The opposite is also true: there is little value in inviting a teacher to become part of the team simply because he or she holds a promotion post if (s)he is not also assigned responsibility for one or more core functions. Some of the information gleaned from research findings on team effectiveness suggests that 'team-working skills' – the ability of an individual to work as part of a team – may contribute more to team success than the experience or knowledge of individual team members.

Some of the most influential findings on team effectiveness are derived from research undertaken by Dr Meredith Belbin[3]. Belbin suggests that for teams to operate effectively, they need to include individuals with complementary personalities, as well as with a varied array of knowledge, skills and expertise. He identified and defined nine different specific team-working roles which he considered were necessary for teams to function effectively. These are listed in a box on the adjacent page, together with a brief descriptor of each.

4 Clear operating rules

All teams work more effectively when team members understand and accept the basic tenets within which the team operates. These include issues such as confidentiality, how conflict will be dealt with and the need to place the best interests of the team and the school ahead of personal preferences and ambitions. At a more basic level, teams also need to be quite clear about such matters as meeting times and punctuality, meeting agendas and the kinds of minutes that are kept – for instance, will minutes simply record decisions that are taken or will they also reflect the discussion and how the decisions were reached? Perhaps most important of all are the related issues of integrity and trust. For a team to work effectively, individual members must believe that they can trust one another to act with integrity in all of their dealings. If this trust is lacking, members are unlikely to speak openly and share their perspectives with the other members of the team.

For a team to work effectively, individual members must believe that they can trust one another to act with integrity in all of their dealings

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Without this trust, meetings quickly degenerate into political events driven by self-interest, point-scoring and rhetoric rather than seeking to achieve consensus about what is best for the school. It is the duty of the principal, as leader of the group, to ensure that this does not happen and the best way to achieve this is through the example set in the chairing of the meetings and in the day-to-day dealings of the principal with the members of the team.

5 Strong team leadership

As we have indicated in the previous section, members of the team are likely to take their cue and model their behaviour on that of the team leader. It is also important to emphasise that choosing a team-based approach is not an indication of weak leadership; rather, the opposite is true. This is because it is far easier to challenge a leader's views from within the team than when she stands apart at

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Belbin Team Role Descriptions*

* More information can be obtained from the Belbin website www.belbin.com

Team Role	Contribution	Allowable weaknesses
Plant	Creative, imaginative, unorthodox. Solves difficulty problems.	Ignores incidentals. Too preoccupied to communicate effectively
Resource investigator	Extrovert, enthusiastic, communicative. Explores opportunities. Develops contacts	Over-optimistic. Loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed.
Co-ordinator	Mature, confident, a good chairperson. Classifies goals, promotes decision-making, delegates well.	Can be seen as manipulative. Offloads personal work.
Shaper	Challengin, dynamic, thrives on pressure. The drive and courage to overcome obstacles.	Prone to provocation. Offends people's feelings.
Monitor/Evaluator	Sober, strategic and discerning. Sees all options. Judges accurately	Lacks drive and ability to inspire others.
Teamworker	Co-operative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic, Listens, builds, averts friction.	Indecisive in crunch situations.
Implementer	Disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient. Turns ideas into practical actions.	Somewhat inflexible. Slow to respond to new possibilities.
Completer/ Finisher	Painstaking, conscientious, anxious. Searches out errors and omissions. Delivers on time.	Inclined to worry unduly. Reluctant to delegate.
Specialist	Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated. Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply.	Contributes on only a narrow front. Dwells on technicalities.

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the apex of the pyramid of a traditional hierarchical management model.

The team leader's most important role lies in setting the tone and establishing an environment which encourages and promotes team work. The team leader's other tasks include delegating tasks and

One of the measures of the commitment of the principal to a team-based approach is the willingness to accept that his view will not always prevail

allocating areas of responsibilities, setting standards and establishing levels of accountability and laying the ground rules for meetings.

One of the measures of the commitment of the principal to a team-based approach is the willingness to accept that his view will not always prevail and that there will be times when he needs to accept team-based decisions that are contrary to his or her inclination on a matter. He also needs to accept that despite his contrary opinion, he has an obligation to support the decision and remains accountable for any adverse consequences that may arise from it. A principal's willingness to act in this way sends a strong message to the other members of the team that he has trust in them and values their opinion.

6 Regular self-evaluation

Teams, like individuals, need to learn from their experiences and regular reflection not only on successes and failures but also on their own internal dynamics and team-learning through reflection and self-evaluation is another characteristic of effective teams. Those who have undertaken studies of teams outside of education consider self-evaluation to be an important element in the successful working of teams and it is something that school-based leadership team could learn from.

David Thomas the author of the report[4] found that most of the six "conditions for effective leadership teams" that he had identified were present in the leadership teams of the six successful schools that he used for his study, with two of the schools demonstrating all six of the conditions.

Part of the purpose of reports of this kind commissioned by the NCSL is to gather and collate information about best practice so that this can be disseminated to other schools and where necessary incorporated into the leadership development programmes that the NCSL provides to school leaders. This report makes a number of recommendations which include the following:

- that the building and development of leadership teams becomes a core part of appropriate NCSL programmes
- that "inspection" frameworks focus more on team leadership and less on the individual principal
- that the National Standards for School Leadership include an emphasis on the development of strong and effective leadership teams. The National Standards of School Leadership are a set of standards which have been developed by the Department of Education in England and which aspiring principals are required to meet before they can be considered for appointment to the position of principal.

Included with the recommendations is a list of question which the author compiled to assist principals in the team self-evaluation process. The questions are:

- What is the purpose of my leadership team?
- Why do I need the team to carry out this purpose?
- Do I have the best people available to me on my team?
- If not, how can I restructure my team to include them?
- How can I ensure a balance of team-working skills within my team?
- Have I agreed with the team a clear set of operating principles to ensure effective team-working?
- What do I need to do to lead them effectively?
- How do I know how well we are doing? What process do we use for self evaluation? ■

References

[1] David Thomas, Working together is success: How successful headteachers build and develop effective leadership teams, Research Associate Report (2009). The report can be downloaded from the NCSL website www.ncsl.org.uk

[2] "An effective head and leadership team", Ibid, p.9

[3] The author cites the following. Meredith Belbin, Management Teams: Why they succeed or fail, (2nd Edition, Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann: Oxford 2004). More information on Belbin's work can also be obtained from the website www.belbin.com.

[4] Ibid.

Professional Development

Principal Training in the Graaff-Reinet District

Managing Editor, Alan Clarke, recently visited the Graaff-Reinet District, to present workshops to the school principals from the district. He discovered a district of committed officials, working hard to develop and support the principals and teachers from their schools despite the vast geographical area that they must cover.

Willowmore Primary School, Willowmore, which was the venue for the training.

Managing Editor, Alan Clarke, recently involved in the professional development of principals in the Graaff-Reinet District of the Eastern Cape. His work there, which was unfortunately curtailed as a result of the Public Service strike, involved presenting a number of one-day workshops to the principals from the district based on his two books, The Handbook of School Management and The Handbook for School Governors.

The Graaff-Reinet District is one of the smallest districts in the province in terms of schools and pupil numbers but is also the largest district in terms of the Geographical area that it covers. The distances between the major centres in the district and the fact that many of the schools serve small isolated communities involves district officials in significant travel. Despite these challenges the district has over the past few years been consistently recognised as being one of the best performing districts in the

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Wollowmore Primary school was established in 1913. One wonders what the dignitaries whose names are listed on this school Foundation Stone would think of the school today?

Mr Patrick Hector, Education Development Officer for the Graaff-Reinent District. The workshops were the result of Mr Hector's initiative, supported by his District Director, Mr EM Kani.

Mrs Snyman (Rietbron Primary, Rietbron), Mrs Stegman (Stegman Primary, Stegman farm) and Mrs Poultny (Willowdale Primary, also a farm school).

Leadership

Getting the best from your Senior Management Team

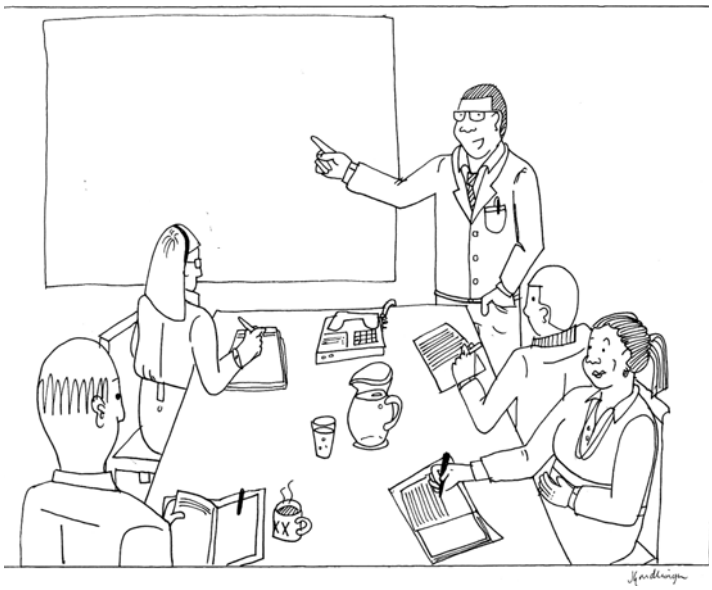
Advice from consultants from the Hay Group on what it takes to develop successful and well-functioning management teams based on their findings from rigorous research and the consulting work that they do with some of the world's most successful organisations.

In an article[1] published on their website, Lusi Lubis and Ed Krancher, Managing Consultants, Hay[2] Group Indonesia, share some of the expertise of the Hay group, gathered over time through rigorous research and the consulting work that they do with some of the world's most successful organisations.

What they have found is that large organisations are too big and complex to be led by a single person, and that organisations of this kind work best where they are led by well-functioning teams. However, leading a team of leaders is not always easy because they tend to be assertive personalities with strong views about what needs to be done to solve problems and to improve performance. The leaders of top teams, they suggest, need to focus their efforts on developing a team which can:

- formulate and execute the right strategy in order to achieve the objectives of the organisation
- respond promptly and decisively to challenges that the organisation may face.

They identify 6 key issues that the leaders of top leadership teams face. In business the leader would be the CEO, while in schools it is the principal. They then provide 6 conditions, which if met, will make the team more competent and better equipped to achieve its goals.



Large organisations are too big and complex to be led by a single person

Issue 1: What kind of a team do you want?

Research by the Hay group suggests that there are essentially 4 kinds of teams:

- Information sharing teams

These are teams that you would put together before embarking on a major project to make sure that you had considered all of the relevant facts; or it could be a team which was put together to share ideas on a specific issues such as the extent of bullying or sexual harassment in the school.

- Consultative team

You would establish a team of this kind to provide you with advice on specific topics or issues. Members of consultative teams usually have knowledge or expertise about certain specific matters and can provide valuable insights, advice and guidance about challenges that the school may face. So, for instance, in a multi-faith school, a committee of religious leaders or community members from the different faiths could provide useful advice on what should be included in the school's religious observance policy.

- Coordinating team

You would establish a team of this kind to manage a fund-raising function such as a fête or, at a more strategic level, to co-ordinate efforts to improve the Grade 3 literacy levels or the Grade 12 NSC results.

Four kinds of teams

- Information sharing teams
- Consultative teams
- Coordinating teams
- Decision-making teams

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- Decision-making team

As is the case with the other teams, the purpose of this team is clear from its name. Teams of this kind are brought together to debate and share ideas about how best to deal with complex or costly problems.

Condition 1: You must have a real team

For a team to be "real" according to the authors, three conditions need to be met:

- The team must be bounded – meaning that the number of people who are members of the team must be fixed. They have found that in some teams the membership of the team may vary and that some people who attend the meeting are not sure or do not feel that they are genuine members of the team. This kind of situation may arise in schools where the SMT includes both HODs and deputies but where the deputies also meet as a separate group with the principal. The same would apply in cases where the SMT includes members who do not hold promotion posts. Are they really full members of the team and are their contributions and insights considered as important and valid as those of their peers who may be senior to them in the formal school hierarchy? Members of real teams need to perceive the team to be a gathering of equals.
- The team must be stable. If the membership of the team keeps changing, it becomes difficult for members to develop the kind and trust and interdependence that are needed if it is to function effectively. Team members will also be less willing to accept and share accountability for team decisions to which they were not party.
- The team must not be too large. Large teams are more likely to fragment into competing subgroups with less of a sense of common purpose and shared responsibility. When establishing teams to deal with strategic issues, particular care should be taken not to include too many people who are heavily involved in the day-to-day operations of the school, as they are likely to cloud long-term strategic thinking with the challenges of day-to-day operational minutiae.

Issue 2: Do you know what the purpose of the team is?

Team members are unlikely to work well as a unit if they are unclear about the reason for their existence.

Defining SMT Team purpose – some examples

- To improve the operational effectiveness of the school's management systems.
- To manage and monitor the quality of teaching and learning at classroom level.
- To manage and monitor curriculum coverage, teaching quality and pupil performance in Mathematics throughout the school.
- To improve literacy and numeracy levels of pupils as measured by Grade 3 and Grade 6 systemic evaluation assessments.
- To improve/increase the percentage of pupils who pass Grade 12 with a Bachelor's level pass.
- To manage and monitor the use of the school's Learning and Teaching Support Materials, including the school's textbook stock and to ensure that teachers make greater use of the available resources in their teaching.
- To use funds allocated in the school's budget for the purchase of those Learning and Teaching Support Materials which are most likely to improve the literacy and numeracy

Leaders do not always explain what exactly it is that they require from the team. In some instances they may not even be clear about the purpose of the team in their own minds. It is also important to understand that the purpose and goals of a team like the Senior Management Team is not necessarily the same as those of the school. If the leader is unable to articulate a clear and compelling reason for the existence of the team in terms of the value that it adds to the organisation, then it is important to ask oneself whether it needs to exist at all. If the team contributes no value, then the time spent in meetings is time that team members could probably better spend dealing with their own individual responsibilities within the organisation.

Condition 2: A compelling purpose

According to the authors, great leadership teams exhibit three common elements in terms of their purpose:

- Their goal is clear – they know exactly what their organisation will look like when they have achieved their purpose
- Their goal is challenging – achieving their

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goal is going to test their commitment, their competence and their ingenuity

- Their goal is consequential – what they are hoping to achieve will make a difference in terms of the success of the organisation in achieving its vision.

The point of articulating the purpose of your team in a way that is both clear and compelling is that it helps to focus the minds of team members on your reason for gathering them together as a group. There may be times when they need to be reminded that they are not there simply because of their status or as a reward for loyalty or good service; they are there to do a specific and clearly-defined job in a way that will best help the school to achieve its vision and long-term goals.

One way to remind members of this is purpose is to use the team's purpose as you have defined it as the heading of the agenda of every team meeting. Some examples of these kinds of statements are listed in the adjacent box. Before formulating your statement defining the purpose of the team, it might be an interesting exercise to ask the members of the team to write down what they consider to be the team's purpose and then to compare these to your own definition of its purpose.

Issue 3: Who should be in the top team?

The experience of the Hay consultancy suggests that constituting the top team from those people who report directly to the CEO is not necessarily the best way to go. It is also useful to bring in people who have the best interests of the organisation at heart but who may not necessarily be senior in the hierarchy. Loyal and long-serving members of staff may be able to provide useful and balanced perspectives based on their experience of the school and its community.

The authors caution about including the best-performing individuals ("stars") in the team. This is because high performers frequently focus their efforts more on their own area of special interest rather than on those things which are in the best interests of the school as a whole. So, for instance, you may find that the excellent head of Mathematics or highly successful head of sport that you include in the team because of their success ends up derailing team plans because of their constant attempts to manipulate decisions to favour their area of special interest.

Top team members need to be able to see past their own limited area of responsibility to the bigger picture of what is in the best interests of the school.

Condition 3: The right people

Top team members need to be able to see past their own limited area of responsibility to the bigger picture of what is in the best interests of the school. They must also be able to work with others in a team setting. What you do not want in any team are those who are unwilling to examine issues from the perspective of others, or who are more interested in winning a debate than in accepting that an alternative approach may be a better option. This does not mean that there should not be intense debate. Intense debate is good; provided it is focused on facts and ideas and not on personalities and personal issues. Equally important are issues of trust and integrity. If a member of the team breaks trust, or is dishonest or personalises issues, or undermines other team members, then it is better to exclude or remove them from the team.

Issue 4: Meetings are a waste of time

Members are likely to perceive meetings to be a waste of time when they:

- are unsure of the purpose of the meeting, or
- think that the purpose of the meeting is trivial relative to their other work and responsibilities, or
- think that their opinions and recommendations are not valued or implemented.

This is a serious indictment of the team leader whose responsibility it is to make sure that the purpose of the meeting is clear and that recommendations made and decisions taken will be implemented.

Condition 4: Sound structure and good ground rules

One of the best ways of ensuring that the team works in a purposeful way is by ensuring that it is not too large – they suggest that there should be fewer than 10 members, and that there are clear meeting rules. These should include the preparation and distribution of the agenda, meeting times, what will be included in the minutes and the importance of team members arriving at meeting properly prepared.

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The leader should therefore avoid approaches which may promote competition between team members

Issue 5: Meetings which are less productive than they should be

Factors which affect the productivity of meetings include the following:

- Meeting logistics – this includes the meeting venue, seating arrangements, the allocation of sufficient meeting time to deal fully with the most important agenda items, and poor meeting etiquette (interruptions, use of cell phones, etc.)
- The data available is insufficient to support meaningful decision-making

Condition 5: A supportive context

A supportive context is one which encourages team members to collaborate and to focus on team goals. The leader should therefore avoid approaches which may promote competition between team members. Leaders can create a supportive context by:

- Rewarding team success rather than individual success
- Making sure that team members have all of the data that they need. For schools, this could include data about funding, budgets and costs; or academic data such as marks and symbol distributions.
- Providing team members with administrative support or additional training to improve their level of expertise.
- Providing a suitable meeting venue and sufficient time for members to consider fully the matters they have been asked to deal with.

Issue 6: The team remains stuck despite a supportive context

It may be necessary to bring in a "Team-coach" if the team continues to struggle despite all of the above conditions having been met. Choosing the right coach is key and who to choose will depend on the nature of the blockage. The leader needs to decide whether the problem is mostly a problem of relationships or mostly about the challenges of the task as this should influence the choice of coach. When using a coach, it is important to remember that they are not there to usurp your role as team leader. Rather, they are there to help individual members and the team as a whole to reflect on the way they have approached their tasks and on their performance as a team. ■

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province in terms of pupil performance and in 2008 was rated as the top district in the province.

Part of their success can be attributed to the focus on improving the knowledge and skills their teachers and principals through on-going professional development. The district issued each of the principals in the district with copies of The Handbook of School Management in 2009 as part of this programme and the principal's workshops based on the book and were designed to help them further develop their management and leadership competencies.

The District Director is Mr EM Kani and he and his district officials are to be commended on the constructive way in which they engage with their schools and on the success that they have achieved despite the challenges that they face. Mr Patrick Hector, Education Development Officer for the district, is the person responsible for driving the day to day operational effectiveness of the professional development programmes in the district and it was good to see the obvious positive relationship that exists between him and his team, and the principals of the schools that he serves. ■

Mr Ferreira (Willowmore Secondary), Mr Mabetshu (Carel du Toit Secondary, Steytlerville) and Mr Sodladla (Klipplaat Secondary, Klipplaat).

References & Notes

[1] Lusi Lubis and Ed Krancher, *What the leader at the top wants to know: How to create a winning top team*, (The President Post, Hay Group Indonesia, 12 May 2010),Downloaded 2 August 2010 from www.haygroup.com.

[2] The Hay Group is a global management consulting firm that works with leaders to transform strategy into reality. According to their website their "focus is on making change happen and helping people and organizations realize their potential". They have more than 2 600 staff, working in 86 offices in 47 countries.

Literacy

Improving adolescent literacy - some management strategies for high schools

Improving adolescent literacy is not just about what happens in the classroom, it is also about creating a school environment which encourages and promotes the value of reading and good language skills and this is the responsibility of the principal and the Senior Management Team.

The language of learning and teaching (LOLT) for the majority of pupils in this country is not their mother tongue and for most, this must have a significant impact on their ability to comprehend and learn what they are taught in every subject. A further factor in many schools is that the teachers themselves may not have a sufficient mastery of English, the LOLT in the majority of schools, to give adequate explanations of some of the technical terms and complex concepts that they are required to teach. While teaching basic literacy and numeracy is a core function of primary schools and one which primary school teachers are trained and equipped to deal with, high school teachers mostly assume that the pupils who enter their classes have

Primary school teachers are mostly better trained and equipped to teach basic literacy and numeracy than are their high school colleagues

mastered the basic literacy and numeracy skills that they will need. Evidence suggests, however, that in most high schools this in not the case.

The root of this problem is the absence, up until recently, of any mechanism of systemic assessment and monitoring of the learning outcomes of pupils in the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior phases of the GET band. Schools have been largely left to their own devices in terms of determining standards, with the only monitoring coming from the district officials who are required to sign off the results of their schools at the end of each year. These officials mostly seem to focus their efforts on ensuring that even the weakest pupils pass, so that they can remain with their age-group cohort in line with national policy for the GET band. A consequence of this is that we have no valid and reliable data relating to the individual performance levels of the majority of children in our schools.

Results from the Western Cape, which has been systemically testing the literacy and numeracy levels of all Grade 3 and Grade 6 pupils since 2003, demonstrate quite clearly that the majority of pupils are performing well below the required levels of their age-group and grade. These results, however, do not appear to have been used to monitor or moderate the results of individual schools, resulting in many pupils - perhaps even the majority - entering high school without the basic skills knowledge and skills that they need to succeed. The one positive aspect that one can draw from this is that all primary schools teachers in the province are now provided with benchmarks against which they can measure their own standards. Nationally, the Grade 3 and 6 systemic testing of literacy and numeracy has been of a rather different nature. The results of this testing is based on tests that have been administered to a small but representative sample of schools from across the provinces. Although these results provide a reasonably accurate picture of the average literacy and numeracy levels of the pupils in these grades at a national level, they provide little of value to individual schools because the pupils from most schools will not have been tested. The results of 2005 systemic evaluation of Grade 6 learners, which was based on a sample size of 34 015, demonstrates quite clearly that the majority of pupils are performing at well below the required level for their grade. The three subjects in which the pupils were tested were Language (LOLT), Mathematics and Natural Sciences. For LOLT, the mean score was 38%, in Mathematics it was 28% and in Natural Sciences it was 41%. More significantly, in each of these subjects the percentage of pupils who performed at or above the "Achieved" level were as follows: LOLT: 28%; Mathematics: 12%; Natural Sciences: 31%.

The message for high schools from all of this is that they should treat the results of incoming Grade 8 pupils with a degree of caution and that the primary school

Continued on page 14

Improving adolescent literacy

A management checklist for high schools

1 Make certain that everyone on the staff understands the strong positive relationship that exists between reading with understanding, and school success.

2 Make sure that everyone on the staff has a good working knowledge of those classroom strategies which have been shown to be effective in promoting and improving the literacy levels of adolescents. Our article on page xx provides some useful guidelines in this regard.

3 Identify a member of your staff who is strongly supportive of the need to improve the language skills of pupils and who is willing to champion a language improvement strategy to drive the literacy improvement programme.

4 Insist that subject heads, together with their subject teams, do a thorough analysis of the textbook(s) they are using with a focus on:

- Determining the readability levels of the language used in the textbook. There are several tests which can be used to determine the language levels of a piece of text. Microsoft Word automatically runs two tests of this kind when reviewing the spelling and grammar of a section of text. More information on these two tests is provided in the box on page 18 and we have provided the results for the analysis of the article provided by these two tests in a separate box at the end of the article.
- Identifying and listing all of the technical words and terms which appear in the textbook and which pupils need to be able to understand and use in the subject

5 Insist that non-language teachers set aside some lesson time every week for explicit vocabulary instruction on subject-related technical terms that pupils have encountered and will encounter in the coming week. (For more on explicit vocabulary instruction, turn to page 12.)

6 Insist that non-language teachers devote a portion of every lesson to reading, writing or discussion-type activities based on subject-related text.

7 Encourage pupils to read by making use of one or more of the following strategies which should be promoted and used by all language teachers:

- Provide lists of suitable, carefully selected and readily available, age and grade-appropriate books in all classrooms and in the school library if the school has one.
- Invite pupils who are voracious readers to talk to their class or grade about the books that they have most enjoyed reading. Purchase copies of these books for the school library.
- If the school does not have a library, provide language teachers with funds so that they can establish mini classroom libraries. Invite pupils to recommend titles for inclusion in the library and encourage parents and pupils to donate new or used copies of these titles to the school.
- Insist that language teachers devote some lesson time each week to reading aloud to their classes from books that they may find interesting.
- Watch the press for advertisements for book sales. Approach the booksellers before the sale starts to see if they will allow you to go through the books before the start of the sale to select and purchase copies titles which may be of interest to your Grade 8 and 9 pupils.
- Approach publishers and booksellers for copies of promotional posters and flyers advertising coming book releases and post these on your classroom and library notice boards.
- Collect clippings of book reviews from magazines and newspapers and use these as classroom displays.
- Award certificates or badges to pupils who read more than a certain number of books each term.

8 If school funds are tight, approach service organisations such as Rotary and Round Table, to see if they would be willing to take on the provision of additional library books for your school as one of their fund-raising projects.

9 Ask your local municipal library to provide the school with a list of suitable books that pupils can take on loan from the library. Municipal libraries may also be willing to provide your school with a block loan of suitable books for a term.

10 Encourage teachers to talk to their classes about books that they have read and which they can recommend.

Continued from page 12

attended by a pupil may well be a be the best indicator of whether the results reflected on an applicant's Grade 7 year-end report is a valid and reliable measure of his or her academic performance.

What this means in practice is that a large proportion of the pupils start their high school careers ill equipped to deal with the greater academic rigour and demands of the high school curriculum. This shortcoming is without doubt an important contributor to the dramatic increase in the drop-out rate of pupils as they progress through high school.

One of the paradoxes of the current educational environment in this country is that the very considerable pressure placed on high schools to improve their NSC results may well be having the opposite effect (see the article *Is short-term thinking hampering long term gains?* on the facing page). What we have found in the little work that we have done with underperforming high schools is that, in their eagerness to improve their NSC results, schools are focusing most of their effort and energy on their Grade 12s and largely are leaving the rest of the grades to their own devices. This is not the way to improve. By the time pupils reach Grade 12, schools should be putting the finishing touches on the hard work and preparation that has been done in the previous 11 years, not trying make up in one year for the backlog and failure of the past 11 years. The place to start for underperforming high schools is with Grade 8 and 9, with a focus on ensuring that by the end of Grade 9 as many pupils as possible have the basic skills that they need to succeed in Grades 10 – 12. Some suggestions for a school-wide strategy to improve the reading and comprehension skills of pupils are provided in a box on page 19. ■

Flesch-Kincaid Readability Test

These tests, devised by Rudolf Flesch, provide a means of measuring the reading difficulty of a passage of text. 'Difficulty' in this instance refers to how easy or difficult the text is to understand, rather than to reading fluency. There are two components to the test:

The Flesch Reading Ease test which produces a high score for text that is easy to read and a low score for text that is difficult. So, for instance, a passage of text with a score of 90 – 100 is considered to be easily understandable by an average 11-year-old; a score of 60 – 70 is easily understandable by 13 to 15-year-olds; and a score of 0 – 30 is the kind of text that usually requires the expertise of a university graduate.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Test converts the score of the Reading Ease test to a score which is equivalent to the grade of a child. A score of 8 on this test would mean that the average child in Grade 8 should easily be able to understand the passage of text.

Readability Statistics for this article

Flesch Reading Ease Test: 44.5
Scores range from 0 (very difficult to understand) to 100 (very easy to understand).

Flesch-Kinkaid Grade Level Test: 14.7
Best understood by people who have at least 2 year of post Grade 12 education.

Continued from page 1

hope that after reading this edition, school leaders will feel better equipped and show greater commitment to dealing with this problem and they and their schools will make improving adolescent literacy in Grades 8 and 9 one of their key priorities of their School Improvement Plan (SIP) for 2011.

Also included in this edition are articles on effective team leadership, some interesting findings on the potential value of pupil workbooks, news about the SAPA National Conference which took place recently at the CTICC in Cape Town and much more. We hope you will find it a useful and enjoyable read. ■

Opinion

Is short-term thinking hampering long-term gains?

Has the pressure on high schools to improve their NSC results become so intense and teachers so focussed on their Grade 12 that pupils in the other Grades are being left to fend for themselves?

One of the consequences of the huge pressure on high schools to improve their NSC results is that in many schools the efforts and energy of the entire staff are focused almost exclusively on Grade 12, leaving the other grades largely to fend for themselves.

Read almost any book on leadership and management and somewhere you will find reference to the need to adopt a long-term view, particularly when it relates to issues of quality. In his book *Good to Great: Why some companies make the leap and others don't*[1], Jim Collins notes that for the good-to-great companies that he and his research team identified, the lag time from the initial launch of the improvement efforts initiated by the organisation to the time that it began to show a return on these efforts was approximately 4 years. During this period (which he describes as the "build-up" period), there appeared to be very little improvement, although small improvements in results were achieved as these companies built up a momentum of quality. It was only after this 4-year build-up period that these organisations experienced the breakthrough moment which catapulted them onto the improvement path that left their once equally-good peers in their wake.

If our public education system is to move out of crisis mode and into a more thoughtful and systematic approach to school improvement, then those responsible for driving the process will need to set the example by being patient and adopting a more long-term view.

High schools that are struggling to improve their results could learn from this approach and should shift the focus of their improvement efforts away from their Grade 12s to their lower Grades. Focusing efforts on the Grade 8 and 9 pupils gives 4 and 5 years respectively to make sure that by the time they reach Grade 12, they have a sufficient mastery of the basics of their mother tongue, of the LOLT of their school and of Mathematics to succeed. Having received dedicated literacy and numeracy input in Grade 8 and 9, the Grade 10s will be more competent in those areas. Thus the Subject Specialists in Grades 10 and 11 will be able to teach content knowledge and skills that are unique to the subject in a way that will ensure that pupils entering Grade 12 have the wherewithal to pass well. With this approach, Grade 12 is no longer the year devoted to cramming what should have been taught and mastered over the past 4 years, but rather one dedicated to building on the solid foundation that has been laid and in polishing the skills and examination techniques that candidates need if they are to excel.

The PEDs and their district officials can help schools to move to a more systematic and balanced approach of this kind by being more vigorous about the quality of teaching and learning and of assessment practices in Grades 8 to 11, and by being less concerned about what happens in Grade 12. The extra lessons and Saturday and holiday classes which have now almost become endemic in some schools should also not be needed - except perhaps for the weakest of candidates, if teachers did their work properly in the other grades.

If our public education system is to move out of crisis mode and into a more thoughtful and systematic approach to school improvement, then those responsible for driving the process will need to set the example by being patient and adopting a more long-term view. This approach, however, needs to be coupled with a steely resolve to ensuring that there is good teaching throughout the 12 years of schooling.

Collins talks about the "professional will" of level of Level 5 leaders: leaders who, in Collins's words, "channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company". Level 5 leaders, like most successful leaders, are individuals with incredible ambition. What differentiates them is that their measure of success is the performance of their organisation and not their own self-interest or ego-satisfaction. This is the kind of steely will that it needed from National and Provincial Governments, from district officials and from principals if we are to achieve our goal of good quality education for all of our children. The *McKinsey Report*[2] used the following simple statement to articulate the goal of a schooling system:

References

[1] Jim Collins, Good to Great, Why some companies make the leap and others don't, (Random House, London 2001).

[2] McKinsey & Company, How the world's best-performing school systems come out top, (September 2007).

Literacy

Adolescent Literacy

Some strategies and practical suggestions for improving adolescent literacy based on guidelines published by the Institute for Education Science of the U.S. Department of Education.

Teaching children to read and write and to understand and use number in basic calculations is the core responsibility of primary schools. The challenge for South Africa - and one which we share with many other developing countries - is that children from impoverished backgrounds enter our school system with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills, placing them at a severe disadvantage relative to their better-off peers. Their deficiencies are a consequence of multiple interlinked factors including poverty, the absence from their homes of the basic resources of play such toys and books and parents who themselves are illiterate and who do not appreciate that there are things that they can do to advance their child's cognitive development and prepare them for their first year of school. Added to the challenges faced by most of these children will be their introduction to a second language, the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) of the school, before they have properly mastered the basics of their own language.

All of these are issues that teachers in primary schools must grapple with on a daily basis. Recent evidence from the Grade 3 systemic testing suggests that the work that schools are doing in the Foundation Phase is beginning to bear fruit, as least as far as literacy levels are concerned, although the evidence from the Grade 6 systemic testing is far less reassuring. Unfortunately, the literacy and numeracy levels of pupils are not tested again using any form of standardised benchmarked tests until they reach Grade 12 - by which time they are beyond any help that the schooling system can offer.

Because high school teachers are mostly subject specialists, they have little knowledge of the kinds of strategies that they need to employ to help the many children who arrive at high school with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills. This is true for even the language and Mathematics teachers who are usually the first to discover the challenges that they face. Evidence from national pass and drop-out rates suggests that the majority of schools deal with this problem by simply lowering their standards in Grade 8 and 9. It is only in Grade 10, when the NSC examination begins to loom that standards are raised and pass requirements rigorously implemented. It is this process, together with other socio-economic factors, that is part of the reason for the significant increase in the numbers of pupils who drop out of school after the end of Grade 9.

Grade 9 Pupils at Zimasa Community School in Langa practice their reading under the watchful eye of their teacher.

As we have stated earlier, the challenge of poor literacy and numeracy levels is not unique to our country. Teaching strategies to address these challenges have been widely researched, with most of the effort directed at interventions at pre-school and foundation phase level. There is much less research on effective strategies to deal with the problems when children enter secondary school. Recently, however, we came across an excellent guide published by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES), a unit of the U.S. Department of Education. The great value of this guide (entitled, "Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom intervention practices"[1]) is that it makes recommendations and provides clear explanations of specific classroom-based practices which can be used to improve literacy level in middle and high schools (Grades 7 – 12). The strategies and practices they recommend are founded on strong evidence from research which has shown them to be effective. We have listed and provided a brief outline of what each of the strategies entails below and on the adjacent page.

Recommendation 1: Teachers should provide explicit vocabulary instruction

Pupils, particularly those who are second language learners,[2] come across words which are new to them all the time. Some of the words will be those

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commonly used in everyday conversations, while others will be those which form part of the technical vocabulary of a specific subject. Technical words usually have clearly-defined meanings which are specific to a subject. A word like "contour", for instance, is a technical term used in Geography to describe a line on a map linking all the points of an equal height above sea-level. There are also words which have one meaning when used in everyday conversation but a different, more specific meaning when used in the context of a specific subject. "Power" is an example of this kind of word. In everyday language it can mean much the same as the word "strength" but has a much more specialised and technical meaning if used in science. It is the technical meanings of words of this kind that create problems for second-language learners and it is these words which they need to have explicitly explained to them when they first encounter the words in their technical contexts.

The school library at St James Primary School in Kalk Bay was built into an old shipping container because the school had no space. The library is a product of the innovative thinking of the principal, Mr Gregory Gordon, and the local community who refurbished the container and helped fund the book stock. The librarian is a community volunteer who was trained for the job by the professional librarians at Edulis, the WCED's excellent library in Bellville.

The authors suggest the following strategies which teachers can use to assist pupils:

- Set aside part of each lesson to teach pupils the meaning of new words when they first encounter them (explicit vocabulary instruction)
- Use the new words in a variety of different ways and encourage pupils to practice using these words to help them gain a better understanding of how they are used. This should include discussion in which the word is used in different contexts, using the word in written exercises and in reading items of text such as extracts from a textbook which include the word(s).

Potential challenges that they identify include the ability of teachers to identify the words that matter and to explain their meaning correctly. They also caution that some teachers may feel that that these kinds of strategies are unnecessary and that they take up valuable teaching time which is needed to complete their syllabus for the year.

Recommendation 2: Teachers should provide direct and explicit instruction to pupils on strategies they can use to help them improve their understanding ("comprehension") of a passage of text.

Not only do pupils need to be taught the meaning of new words and to learn how to use them in the context of the subject, they also need to be helped to understand (comprehend) what they read. Because a pupil is able to read a section of text with reasonable fluency does not mean that the pupil understands what is being read. The suggested strategies for improving comprehension include:

- asking pupils to summarise the main ideas from a section of text
- asking pupils to paraphrase a section of text
- encouraging pupils to pose questions to themselves about what they have read
- asking pupils to make inferences from ideas contained in the text
- inviting pupils to ask and answer questions derived from the text
- encouraging pupils to draw pictures or to

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create diagrams such as graphs and mind maps to illustrate what they have understood by the text or to give the meaning of ideas contained in the text and the relationships between them.

Recommendation 3: Teachers should set aside time for extended discussion on the meaning and interpretation of subject-related text.

Once again the emphasis here is on creating situations in which pupils can talk about and use the words and texts which are specific to the subject. This can be best achieved by setting pupils tasks which require them to discuss and provide answers to higher-order, open-ended questions. Questions of this kind help them to develop a deeper understanding of what words and terms mean and how they are used in relation to one another. These discussions can take place either in small groups or be posed to the whole class. For these kinds of activities to be successful, teachers need to carefully select the topics and questions that are posed to pupils and, where possible, should try to link them to the pupils' own experiences.

Recommendation 4: Increase pupil motivation and involvement in literacy learning

The point is to get pupils to read and the best way to achieve this is by providing them with reading materials which include content that is relevant to their own interests and experience. Interestingly, the research showed that extrinsic rewards such as prizes for those who read well or achieve good scores in comprehension tests were found to be generally ineffective in promoting a reading culture. They found that pupils are generally more responsive to direct encouragement and positive feedback from teachers than by material rewards. One of the key factors in getting pupils to read, they found, lay in providing them with carefully-selected appropriate textbooks and articles whose content is meaningful to them and which have readability levels within their level of ability. Put more simply, pupils need to be provided with texts that have subject matter of interest to them and which they have the ability to read and understand.

Recommendation 5: Provide struggling readers with intensive individualised support using qualified specialists

Most high school teachers do not have either the time or the expertise necessary to assist readers who are very weak. Rectifying the problem is worse if the pupils concerned are working in a language other than their home language. Therefore there is a need for schools to identify those pupils who are most at risk because of their poor reading levels when they first enter high school and to put in place measures to provide them with immediate additional specialist support. Regrettably, most public schools do not have the resources to provide support of this kind and need to call on support from outside agencies if these are available or from their district office. We suspect, however, that despite the desperate need for remedial specialists of this kind, there are very few districts offices which include amongst their staff experts of this kind.

Qualified specialists like Dr Shelley O'Carroll of Wordworks, pictured here working with a child and community volunteer in Vrygrond, Western Cape, can assist schools by providing specialised support for pupils who are very weak.

The ability to read with understanding is probably the skill that contributes most to school and future academic success. More important than academic achievement, however, is the value of basic literacy for all citizens: it is a fundamental requirement for all employment other than the most menial of jobs and those who never learn to read are forced to live their lives largely isolated from the main stream of society, excluded from all but the most meagre opportunities for personal growth and social progress. ■

References & Notes

[1] Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices, (ML Kamil et al, National Centre for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gove.ncee/wwc.

[2] Second language learners are learners whose mother tongue is not the language of learning and teaching (LOLT).

Adolescent literacy improvement: A checklist of schools

Based on the guide, *Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom intervention practices* published by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES), a unit of the U.S. Department of Education.

Recommendation 1: Teachers should provide explicit vocabulary instruction

☐ Teachers in every subject regularly set aside classroom lesson time for explicit vocabulary instruction.

☐ When pupils are first introduced to a new word or term, teachers use the word or term repeatedly in a number of different contexts to help pupils to understand its meaning and how it is used.

☐ After pupils have been introduced to a new word or term, opportunities are created for them to use the word in a range of different contexts. The activities in which they are expected to use the word include small group and class discussion, writing and extended reading.

☐ Pupils are taught strategies such as the use of glossaries and dictionaries and the meanings of prefixes and suffixes which they can use to help them understand words and to improve their vocabulary.

Recommendation 2: Teachers should provide direct and explicit instruction to pupils on strategies they can use to help them improve their understanding ("comprehension") of a passage of text.

☐ Teachers make sure that they have a good understanding of the strategy or strategies that they plan to use with their classes before introducing these to their pupils.

☐ Teachers understand what each of the following strategies involves and how each can be used to help pupils improve their understanding of words and texts:

- summarising the main ideas from a section of text
- paraphrasing a section of text
- make inferences from ideas contained in the text
- creating mind maps to illustrate the main ideas and relationships contained in a section of text

☐ Teachers take care when they first introduce pupils to a given strategy to ensure that the readability level of the text they use is appropriate for the given pupil group

☐ Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to practise the strategies that they are taught and help them to master these strategies.

Recommendation 3: Teachers should set aside time for extended discussion on the meaning and interpretation of subject-related text.

☐ Teachers prepare thoroughly for these discussions by:

- selecting material that is appropriate and which will be of interest to the pupil group
- ensuring that they themselves have a good background knowledge in the topic covered by the text (They can do this by reading more widely about the topic or by searching the internet for related issues.)
- formulating a set of thought-provoking questions for pupils to answer based on their understanding of the text

☐ Teachers pose additional questions during the discussion to force pupils to reflect on their answers to questions and to what others have said during the course of the discussion.

☐ Teachers develop a set of simple rules for pupils to ensure these discussions take place in an orderly manner and that all pupils are able to participate and benefit from these discussions

☐ Teacher help pupils to produce a common summary in point form of what they have learned from the discussion

Recommendation 4: Increase pupil motivation and involvement in literacy learning

☐ Teachers create a classroom climate which promotes the importance of reading. This can include:

Adolescent literacy improvement: A checklist of schools (cont.)

- setting aside time for reading during class time on certain days or periods
- establishing an in-class library of appropriate subject-related books and magazines
- providing pupils with a list of suitable subject-related books and magazines which are available in the school library or local municipal library
- encouraging pupils to cut out and collect subject-related articles from newspapers and magazines and to post these on a section of the classroom noticeboard set aside specifically for this purpose

☐ Teachers talk about subject-related books and articles that they have read and which they think may be of interest to the class

Recommendation 5: Provide struggling readers with intensive individualised support using qualified specialists

☐ The school has access to an appropriate diagnostic test or other screening tool which can be used to identify those pupils which have reading difficulties which require intervention and support from a remedial specialist.

☐ The school uses these tests to identify - by the end of the second term - those pupils who may be at risk because of their reading difficulties.

☐ The school provides appropriate remedial support for pupils who have been identified as being at risk because of their reading difficulties or the school is able to direct those pupils to individuals or organisations which can provide them with this support.

Parliament
Portfolio Committee hearings

The Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee acknowledges receipt of the submission we made on behalf of our readers.

Earlier this year we made a submission to the Basic Education Portfolio Committee on behalf of our readers. The submission was in the response to a call by the committee for public comment on "Quality of and access to basic education". We encouraged our readers to respond to the call for submissions and also invited readers to contribute to a collective respond which we planned to submit on behalf of our subscribers based on a questionnaire which we had prepared for this purpose. The issues which we listed in the questionnaire were issues of concern which principals have raised with us repeatedly over time. Seventeen completed questionnaires were returned to us. We collated and summarised these responses and submitted a report based on this information to the portfolio committee before the due date on 28 February.

We recently receive a letter of thanks for this submission from Fatima Chohan, the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee, which is displayed on the adjacent page. The committee is in the process of deliberating on both the written and oral submissions that it has received. We will bring you an update on what has been transacted so far in these hearings and deliberations in next edition of ***SM&L***.

Readers who are interested in the work of the Portfolio Committee for Basic Education can get further information from the Parliamentary Monitoring Group website www.pmg.org.za

Commonly identified problem by schools that responded

(17 respondents in total)

1. Curriculum (9 responses)

1.1 Lack of proper detailed guidance on what should be taught.

1.2 Constant changes to the curriculum documents.

1.3 Last minute changes (prior to the start of the school year) to curriculum documents.

1.4 Administrative and other demands imposed on teachers by departmental officials.

2 Teacher development/ In-service training (11 responses)

2.1 In-service training provided by district officials is generally considered to be of little value.

2.2 Schools feel strongly that In-service training should not be conducted during schools hours as having teachers away disrupts teaching and learning at the school.

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3 Teacher qualifications/ competence (4 responses)

3.1 More recruits need to be attracted to the profession.

3.2 Teacher training needs to place greater emphasis on developing the skills that students will need when they enter the classroom.

4 Teacher professionalism (4 responses)

4.1 More recognition needs to be given to good teachers who behave in a professional manner.

5 Class size (7 responses)

5.1 The teacher-pupil ratio needs to be reduced with special provision made for schools with particular needs such as multilingual schools

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Portfolio Committee on Basic Education

OUR REF. BAS.EDU 162 Clarke

Thursday, 26 August 2010

Mr Alan Clarke
Managing Editor
School Management and Leadership

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Dear Mr Clarke

Written Submission on "Delivery of Quality Education & Access to Education"

Our national call for written submissions on "Delivery of Quality Education in South Africa and the Challenges Pertaining Thereto" and the crucial issue of "Access to Education" refers.

The Portfolio Committee on Basic Education, National Parliament, takes this opportunity to thank you for your comprehensive submission received on the above topic. Please be assured that your submission has been distributed to all Members of the Portfolio Committee and has received the necessary attention. We will put forward the vital issues you raise during the Portfolio deliberations.

6 School Leadership (1 response)

6.1 Competence should be the sole criteria when appointing principals.

7 Managerial capacity of the principal/ school leadership team (1 response)

7.1 Better training needs to be provided for those who take up leadership positions.

8 Values in education (6 responses)

8.1 Developing a common value system within a school community is difficult because sound moral values in the wider society have been eroded and because of the different value sets that are found in the cosmopolitan communities that many schools serve.

9 Access to education (2 responses)

9.1 Increasing the number of good schools will reduce the demand for places in these schools.

10 School safety and security (7 responses)

10.1 Schools which struggle with safety issues need greater support from district offices, the community and other agents of the state (Departments of Social Development, South African Police Service)

11 Teacher unions (4 responses)

11.1 SADTU's militancy, and its willingness to disrupt schooling to the detriment of learners through strike action when its often unreasonable demands are not met, is seen as a problem.

11.2 Senior appointments at provincial and district level based on union affiliation rather than merit/ competence is considered to be detrimental to quality service delivery.

12 Provision of Learning and Teaching Support Materials (4 responses)

12.1 The failure of provinces and districts to deliver sufficient LTSMs before the start of the school year remains a problem.

12.2 There is a problem with the quality of some LTSMs.

13 The advertising and appointment of staff (7 responses)

13.1 Gazettes/ Vacancy lists are not published so it is not possible to advertise posts or make permanent appointments.

13.2 School are not able to appoint there preferred candidates or to make appointments on merit (person best qualified/ most experienced etc.)

13.3 Long delays in the processing of nominations for posts.

14 Norms and standards funding of schools (6 responses)

14.1 Funding provision is insufficient to cover the operating costs of some schools.

14.2 Allocated funds arrive very late in the year contrary to what is required in terms of policy.

15 Communication between DoE, PEDs, districts and schools (10 responses)

15.1 Communication, in terms of notices of meetings

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Policy

Will Workbooks work?

Recent research undertaken by Prof. Brahm Fleisch and colleagues from Wits suggests that the R1 billion that the DBE plans to spend on Workbooks over the next few years may be better spent on training teachers to properly use good quality textbooks.

The Department of Basic Education has committed significant funds to the development and production of the workbooks as part of its "Foundations for Learning" campaign in the hope that the distribution of this resource will be the catalyst that is needed to improve literacy and numeracy levels. Recent research suggests that underperformance may be more about people than about books.

The "Foundations for Learning" Campaign, launched in 2008 by former Minister of Education Naledi Pandor, established as its primary goal a "national focus on improving the reading, writing and numeracy abilities of all South African children". The details of the campaign were set out in a Government Notice[1] published in March 2008. The notice provided clear and specific guidelines for schools about such things as the amount of time that should be devoted to the teaching of literacy and numeracy and also when and how these subjects should be taught on a daily basis. It was a four-year campaign stretching from 2008 – 2011 and its target was a 15% - 20% improvement in the average literacy/language and numeracy/ Mathematics performance of pupils over the four-year period of the campaign. The decision of the DBE to develop and distribute "workbooks" for pupils was a product of this campaign. The workbooks differ from ordinary textbooks in a number of ways, the most important of these - from a cost perspective - is that pupils write directly in the books and for this reason the books can be used only once and by only one child. Textbooks, on the other hand, can and are expected to be re-used from year to year and with proper care and retrieval systems should have a useful lifespan of up to 4 years.

The process of developing these books has not been without controversy. The original tender to develop the materials, which was advertised by the DBE in November last year, was later withdrawn because of concerns that the short timeframes that were stipulated would compromise the quality of the final product.

The potential of these workbooks to improve the quality of the teaching and learning process and thereby to improve results has been widely touted by the DBE. In a presentation the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on 4 May 2010, Mr Edward Mosuwe, Acting Deputy Director General: Curriculum, explained the reasoning behind the decision to develop and distribute the workbooks, as well as the processes that would be followed to ensure that they were fit for purpose. In his presentation he indicated that:

- Two workbooks would be produced for each of Grades 1 – 6, one for literacy and one for numeracy
- Each workbook would include 200 activity sheets, equivalent to one activity sheet for each day of the school year
- The workbooks would be developed in English but would then be translated into each of the other official languages
- The workbooks would be developed by a team of writers with appropriate expertise
- The workbooks would be ready for distribution to schools by the end of September 2010. This rather ambitious target has been amended and the workbooks are now scheduled for delivery before the start of the 2011 school year.

According to Mr Mosuwe's presentation, the DBE expected the workbooks to achieve the following purposes:

- They would provide schools and teachers with good quality activities and ideas and serve as example of good practice; the hope being that teachers would, in time, learn from them and be able to develop their own materials of similar quality.
- The unique design of the books ensures that the teaching and learning process takes place in a carefully constructed and systematic way. The books ensure that pupils have time to consolidate their skills through written responses.
- The books will include activities which will assist teachers in monitoring pupil performance in critical skills and will also help prepare pupils for standardised tests by giving them practice in responding to the kinds of test items that are used in these tests.

So keen is the DBE on the development and distribution of these workbooks that it has set aside

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an amount of R750 million from the 2010/2011 Education budget towards the cost of their development, production and distribution, with this figure rising to an estimated R1 billion in 2012/2013. The decision to manage the teaching and learning process in this way appears to be a good initiative, at least on paper, but recent research undertaken by Prof. Brahm Fleisch and others from the University of Witwatersrand suggests that the poor performance of our pupils in literacy and numeracy may relate more to the availability and use of textbooks or workbooks than to the kinds of book that are used.

So keen is the DBE on the development and distribution of these workbooks that it has set aside an amount of R750 million from the 2010/2011 Education budget towards the cost of their development, production and distribution, with this figure rising to an estimated R1 billion in 2012/2013

The findings from some preliminary research undertaken by Prof. Fleisch and his colleagues which were presented in a paper at the Wits Education School Research Seminar on 24 August 2010 suggested that, at least in the case of Mathematics, good improvements in pupil performance are possible by simply ensuring that pupils are provided with adequate textbooks or workbooks and that teachers use these in a systematic way.

The study compared the extent to which the results of pupils from two matching groups of schools improved after a 14-week trial period during which they were taught by their usual teachers using either a Grade 6 Mathematics textbook or a workbook which is produced and used by the Primary Mathematics Research Project (PMRP). The textbook chosen for use in the study is one which is commonly used in schools, while the PMRP workbooks were designed and produced by Eric Scholler and Associates. The use and approach to the teaching of Mathematics using the PMPR materials was field-tested in 40 schools in Limpopo in 2007.

Research suggests that the provision of textbooks makes little difference if it is not accompanied by the appropriate training of teachers in their use

The results of this initial PMRP intervention indicated that the progress of pupils who used the PMBR workbooks and its methods was two to three times that of the control group who were taught in the usual way using the resources that were available at their schools.

Prof. Fleish's study set out to mimic the original PMRP study. In the Fleisch study, however, the only difference between the learning experiences of the two groups involved in the investigation was that pupils in the test group were provided with a PMRP workbook, while those in the control group were provided with a traditional textbook. The designations "PM" for Primary Mathematics using workbooks and "CM" for Classroom Mathematics using traditional textbooks, were used to identify the two groups

In order to ensure that the two groups of pupils were evenly matched and any improvement in their performance could be reliably attributed to the use of the workbooks, all pupils were tested before and after the intervention using the pre and post-tests developed by the PMRP. All of the teachers, who were normally responsible for teaching these pupils and who would be teaching them using either the PM or CM books were given the same training and all were expected to cover exactly the same sections of the Mathematics curriculum during the 14-week period of the study.

A pilot study to test the efficacy of the process was conducted in the third term of 2009 with the main study conducted in 2010. All the schools involved in the study fell under the jurisdiction of the Gauteng Education Department and schools were considered for the main study only if they fell into quintiles 1 – 4. The wealthier quintile 5 schools were therefore excluded from the sample, as were schools with more than two Grade 6 classes or fewer than thirty Grade 6 pupils. Forty-four schools in all were included in the final study and these schools were randomly assigned to either the test group (that would use the PM books) or to the control group (that were to use the CM books).

In order to assess the availability of learning and teaching resource materials (LTRMs) at the control schools, the research team undertook a comprehensive audit of these materials at the twenty-two schools.

One of the surprising findings of this audit was that only two schools had sufficient Mathematics textbooks to provide each child with a book and that more than half of the schools had only a teacher's copy of the book. It was therefore necessary, before the study could commence, to provide every pupil in the control group with a copy of the textbook. The textbook chosen to address this need was *Classroom Mathematics*, a textbook which is widely used in schools.

All the pupils in the study group were provided with copies of the PMRP publication, *Back to Basics! Getting Learning Outcome One Right Intermediate Phase* (Schollar, 2003).

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The research team developed a 40-item test which it could use to test the 8 skill categories included in Learning Outcome 1 of the NCS. These categories are: number concepts (place value, comparing numbers), fractions, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, problem-solving and mental operations. These 40 test items were selected from a larger bank of 60 items because statistical analysis showed that pre-test results using these items were reliable predictors of post-test results if the tests were carried out under similar conditions.

The final area of preparation involved training the teachers from both the control and the test schools. The teachers were trained over two days prior to the start of the 2010 school year in the use of the materials that were to be provided to the pupils they were to teach. The teachers of the control group were trained in the use of the CM books and the teachers of the test group in the use of the PM books. All pupils were then pre-tested, to determine their skills levels, using the 40-item test before the commencement of the 14-week teaching programme.

After the 14 weeks all pupils were tested again using the same 40-item test. The results of the pre and post-test scores were then analysed to determine the extent to which the teaching interventions using the books had improved pupil performance.

Findings

1 Both groups made significant gains as a result of the intervention and according to the research team, the most likely reason for these gains was the provision of the learning materials. The gains that were made were also very significant. The post-test score represented a 17.7% increase on the pre test mean score. The authors of the paper note that "average gains of above 5 percentage points for any education intervention is unusual both in the international and South African literature". Equally impressive was the fact that the number of pupils who scored 50% or more increased from 1 062 in the pre-test to 1 533 in the post-test which means that 18.7% more pupils passed at 50% and above in the post-test.

2 The purpose of the research, however, had been to test the effectiveness of the workbooks and to determine whether they are more effective than standard textbooks in improving pupil learning. The findings from this study, in terms of the relative value of workbooks vs. textbooks, is that it made little difference which of the two LTSMs was used. The authors caution, however, that it may not be the use of LTSMs alone which makes a difference as other research suggests that the provision of textbooks makes little difference if it is not accompanied by the appropriate training of teachers in their use.

3 The research team also determined relative costs of providing the two kinds of LTSMs. In determining these costs they took into consideration such things as the actual purchase costs of the materials as well as the fact that while textbooks can be used more than once workbooks could not be re-used because pupils wrote directly in these books. Those using textbooks, on the other hand, would incur additional costs because they would need to be provided with suitable stationery (exercise books). Their calculations showed that the annual unit cost of these materials for the CM pupils (textbooks) was R46.90 while for the PM pupils (workbooks) the cost was R58.96: a difference of approximately 26%.

> The calculated annual unit cost of textbooks was R46.90 while the cost of workbooks was R58.96, a difference of approximately 26%.

4 More detailed analysis of the results revealed significant differences in the level of improvement of the two groups of pupils in relation to a number of other factors, with the textbook group performing better in some instances and the workbook group doing better in others. For instance, textbooks seemed to produce better improvement for the weakest group of pupils (those who scored between 0 and 30% in the pre-test) while the workbooks produced greater improvements in the strongest candidates (those who scored more than 55% in the pre-test).

This fascinating study provides ample evidence of the value or good research and also how research studies of this kind sometimes produce findings that are not only unexpected but which are also apparently unrelated to the original purpose of the research. In this instance the research team was trying to determine potential educational value of the workbooks which the DBE plans to develop and distribute to schools at considerable cost. What it discovered was that there are many primary schools in Gauteng that do not provide pupils with textbooks as they are required to do. They also learned that if pupils are provided with either a textbook or a workbook and if their teachers a given some basic training in how to use these books in their lessons, significant improvements in pupil performance results. The significance of this improvement needs to be viewed against the background of the Grade 6 systemic assessment results in Mathematics which have remained exasperatingly stuck at damningly low levels since they were first introduced.■

References

[1] Government Notice No.306 published in Government Gazette No. 30880 of 14 March 2008.

News

SAPA National Conference

The Western Cape Branch of the South African Principal's Association (SAPA) hosted the 16th National Conference from 9 to 11 September at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. More than 800 principals attended with representation from all 9 provinces.

Education Minister Angie Motshekga presenting the opening address at the Conference

The South African Principal's Association (SAPA) held its 16th National Conference from 9 to 11 September at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. The Conference was hosted by SAPA: Western Cape and attended by more than 800 principals with representation from all 9 provinces.

Education Minister Angie Motshekga who presented the opening address of the conference was full of praise for SAPA and the constructive role that they have "played over time in promoting and enhancing educational leadership" and "in supporting the national drive for improving the quality of learning and of teaching".

The conference organisers asked that she respond to the following question in her address:

"Is there the political will in the ruling party today to make the critical transformations necessary to meet the demands of a 21st Century developing country?"

Her answer to the question was "a clear YES in bold letters" and she went on to list the following examples of the things that the government has said and done as evidence of this:

- The ruling party's commitment to education as a national priority in its 2009 Election Manifesto at its 52nd National Conference in Polokwane, and its commitment to expanding access to education in terms of the education clause of the Freedom Charter that "The doors of learning and culture shall be opened!" Her government, she noted, sees education as a means of promoting good citizenship and of ensuring everyone has the means to participate fully in modern economy and democratic society.

- An understanding by the government that the quality of education will need to be improved if it is to meet its developmental goals. In order to achieve meet these goals the government has committed itself to the following "deliverables":

- Democratic school governance
- Improving the literacy levels of the general populous by 2014 with the *Kha ri Gude*, the governments mass literacy campaign as the main vehicle for achieving this.
- The introduction of a sustainable model of early childhood development in order to give children a head start in numeracy and literacy. Part of this initiative is a plan to train and employ approximately 15 000 trainers each year and to use them to provide additional support at pre-school level in rural villages and urban centres.
- Improving performance in Mathematics, Science, Technology and language development.

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- Extending the school feeding schemes to high schools where this was needed and improving the implementation of the feeding schemes in primary schools.

• The *Quality Teaching and Learning Campaign* which has been launched by the government as a conscious attempt to enlist the support of all stakeholders in improving the quality of education and learning outcomes.

The Minister went on to identify some of the other pressing issues faced by the schooling system in this country and to explain how her department planned to address these based on the DBE's *Action Plan 2014: Towards the realisation of schooling 2025*

Amongst the issues she identified were:

• Teacher development and training as a means of improving the "professionalism, teaching skills, subject knowledge and computer literacy of teachers throughout their entire careers."

• Training of principals and members of school management teams in order to improve their skills and competencies.

• Improving the procedures used to recruit and select principals.

• The development of induction programmes for newly-appointed principals.

• The professional preparation of principals prior to their appointment.

• Improving the "skills, attributes and competencies of deputies and middle managers".

• Improving the "subject knowledge" of teachers and principals.

After her presentation the Minister was mobbed by delegates wanting to take her photograph or to be photographed with her.

Some fancy footwork by conference delegates at the cocktail party held at Camps Bay High School

The Minister made it quite clear in pronouncing on these issues that the department would not allow the envisaged training programmes to compromise the department's commitment to ensuring that teachers are in school, on time, teaching.

In her address the Minister also touched briefly on the release of the *National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements* which were gazetted on 3 September. These policy statements are now available for public comment and she encourage principals and teachers to thoroughly review these and to provide constructive feedback to the DBE on these through the appropriate channels. The deadline for submissions is 27 September 2010 (21 days after the date on which the documents were posted on the DBE website which was 6 September. For the Foundation phase documents the deadline is 35 days after the posting of the document of the DBE website.)

Two other matters of relevance dealt with by the Minster were the Annual National Assessments (ANA) and the "workbooks project". The first round of the Annual National Assessments will take place in 2011 and will involve testing the literacy/language and numeracy/mathematical skills of all pupils in Grades 3, 6 and 9. The "workbooks" are being developed in line with the CAPS documents in literacy and numeracy for Grades 1 – 6 in order to provide teachers and pupils with additional support in these two critical areas. The Minster stressed that the DBE did not see the "workbooks" as an alternative to textbooks but as an additional resource for struggling schools. She stressed that schools should not use workbooks as a substitute for textbooks. ■

Western Cape snubs SAPA National Conference

Neither the Western Cape Government nor the WCED were represented at the National Conference - this despite the fact that the SAPA: Western Cape were the conference hosts.

A surprising and perhaps the only disappointing aspect of the otherwise outstanding National Conference hosted by SAPA: Western Cape was the complete absence of any representation from either the Western Cape Government or its education department. Their failure to be there is even more surprising given the fact that the Conference was opened by Education Minister Angie Motshekga as one would have thought that common courtesy, if not protocol, would have ensured that there was at least some representation from the WCED.

SAPA President, Alta van Heerden with Education Minister Angie Motshekga and ICP President, Andrew Blair

It is not as if the Provincial Government of the WCED are not aware of SAPA or of the important role that SAPA has played in bringing principals together from across the old apartheid divide. The premier of the Western Cape presented a highly lauded address to the National Conference some years ago when she was the MEC for education in the Western Cape and the DG of the province has also delivered presentations at both Provincial and National Conferences of the Association. SAPA, for its part, has worked hard since its founding conference here in the Western Cape in 1996, to develop strong and constructive relationships with education authorities at both a national and provincial level and the value the DBE placed on this relationships was acknowledge by Minister Motshekga in her opening address.

The local organising committee were rather cagy in their responses to our enquiries about the absence of any form of representation from the Western Cape Government and were not willing to make any formal statement on the matter. What we gathered, however, from our discussion with them, was that their refusal to attend related to the fact that the conference was being held during school time and that principals attending the conference would be away from their schools.

We believe, if this is the true reason for their absence, that it is a short-sighted and mean spirited view of the important role that the SAPA conferences have played and will continue to play in developing the leadership potential, management skills and professionalism of principals. It is time for the Provincial Government and its Education Department to treat its principals as professionals if it expects them to act responsibly, and this applies particularly to the many principals who continue to do sterling work and provide outstanding leadership in their schools and communities with little support and despite the huge socio-economic challenges of the environment in which they must operate. SAPA is the home of these dedicated principals. It is not a union and those who join the association do so because of their commitment to their own professional development and that of their colleagues. It is these principals that the host province has snubbed, not those who are absent from their schools because they cannot cope or do not care. What those responsible for this snub have failed to understand is that their “principled stand”, which are the words we have been told they have used on the issue, has been a great disappointment to those who worked so hard to host a successful National Conference in the Western Cape. Sadly, is a stand that has lost them much of the good will and respect forged over the past 16 years through the good endeavours of some of their best and most committed principals. ■

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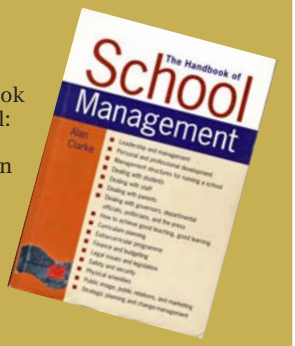

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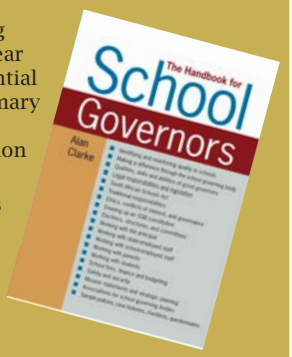

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Kate McCallum

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and the distribution of curriculum and other documents to schools, is poor or non-existent.

15.2 Districts are unresponsive to requests by schools for information.

16 ICT/computers and its/their provision and usage in schools (6 responses)

16.1 Insufficient funding is provided to cover the cost of the procurement and maintenance of school-based ICT systems.

17 Pupil behaviour/ discipline (5 responses)

17.1 Districts and PEDs do not support to schools in their dealings with pupils who are guilty of serious misconduct. The need to either support the decisions of SGBs to suspend and expel pupils found guilty of serious misconduct or by provide support in the form of interventions by Social Workers and other specialists for these pupils whom they refuse to expel.

18 District level support (8 responses)

18.1 District offices and officials are not only seen to be unsupportive but are also considered to be problematic in terms of the demands that they make on schools.

19 Other (7 responses)

19.1 Quality of systemic assessment tests in primary schools (Western Cape)

19.2 School funding

19.3 Grade 9 Pass requirements. ■

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