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The quality of South African education

Much of this edition has been devoted to important findings from local research into schools and school effectiveness that have been published over the past 12 months. We first became aware of the availability of this material after it was presented to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee in March 2012 by representatives of the various organisations responsible for the research.

What we found most interesting about the reports of the various research teams was the extent to which they had used their data and data analysis to identify quite specifically some of the factors that are inhibiting school improvement in the majority of public schools. This specificity is important because it helps those involved in attempts to improve our schools to develop interventions that can be directed at addressing the specific weaknesses that have been identified.

Perhaps the most important of the various research projects was the National School Effectiveness Study, which provided compelling evidence linking the poor performance of Intermediate Phase learners in mathematics and English to teaching quality and curriculum coverage. The research suggest that the coverage of the mathematics curriculum is both limited and patchy, leaving learners with significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding of a range of important mathematical concepts. This has disastrous consequences when they move into the higher grades.

In the case of languages, poor learner performance can almost certainly be linked to limited practice in writing in language classes. The NSES examined the books of the best leaner in each class in an effort to determine how often learners were required to write in their language classes. What they found was astonishing and dismal – on average learners in the sample schools completed just 42 exercises per year with the writing of single words being the most common exercise. These 'single words' exercises represented on average 22 of the 42 exercises. Exercises involving the writing of up to half-a-page were found to occur on average less than three times a year and the writing of more than half a page just once each year on average. Given these statistics, which are derived from a study of Grade 3, 4 and 5 learners over three years from a representative sample of schools from across the country, we should not be surprised at how poorly our learners perform in international benchmark tests in literacy and numeracy or why so many schools struggle to produce acceptable NSC results. Understanding the problem is the first step to fixing it provided there is the political will. What is needed is more and better training of mathematics teachers and better and more rigorous monitoring of classroom practice.

Also in this issue is news about an innovative compulsory first-year module for students at the University of the Free State, an article on the relationship between emotional intelligence and successful leadership, an article by Erich Cloete on the troublesome issue of the school dropout rate and some interesting research on the relationship between the language and numeracy skills of preschool children and their later academic success. We hope that you will find this edition to be another interesting and informative read. ■

In this issue:

SM&L
Is published five times a year by Ednews. It seeks to provide the leaders of South African schools with current and relevant information on issues of policy, leadership, management and governance.

Improving the Quality of Education in South Africa: the Literacy and Numeracy Challenge

A recent presentation to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Basic Education by representatives of research teams working under the auspices of the Human Sciences Research Council provides some useful insights into what is and is not happening in many of our public schools.

On 5 March 2012, representatives from a number of research organisations working under the auspices of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) presented some of the key findings from their research to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Basic Education, at parliament. The four groups involved in the research programme – HSRC (Education and Skills Development Unit), Education Policy Consortium, JET Education Services, and Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South African (PRAESA) – worked to achieve four programme objectives:

- knowledge advancement – to identify critical areas for enhancing school and classroom practices in literacy and numeracy
- research capacity – to build research capacity among a wide range of stakeholders, including teachers, departmental officials and communities
- policy knowledge and strategies – to produce a set of ideas and implementation strategies for use by policy makers and other actors for improving levels of learner performance
- institutional and community support – to determine support roles of school management, local education districts, communities and parents in supporting literacy and numeracy programmes in schools.

The research programme was funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The title of the presentation to the portfolio committee, which was essentially a compilation of the findings of the four groups with little or no attempt made to integrate the different findings was 'Improving the Quality of Education in South Africa: The Literacy and Numeracy Challenge'.

We were able to access the material used in these presentations, including the PowerPoint presentation used and an audio recording of the full briefing, thanks to the services of the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG), who monitors the work of parliament and more particularly the proceedings of parliamentary committees, which is where most of the important work of parliament is transacted. The PMG was established in 1995 as a partnership between Black Sash, Human Rights Committee and Idasa as an information service that aims to provide 'a type of Hansard' for the more than 40 South African parliamentary committees. More information on the PMG and the good work that it does can be obtained from its website www.pmg.org.za. Unfortunately the quality of some of the presentations was fairly poor but the information provided did allow us to track down either the original reports or detailed abstracts and this allowed us to fill in some of the gaps and make better sense of what was transacted.

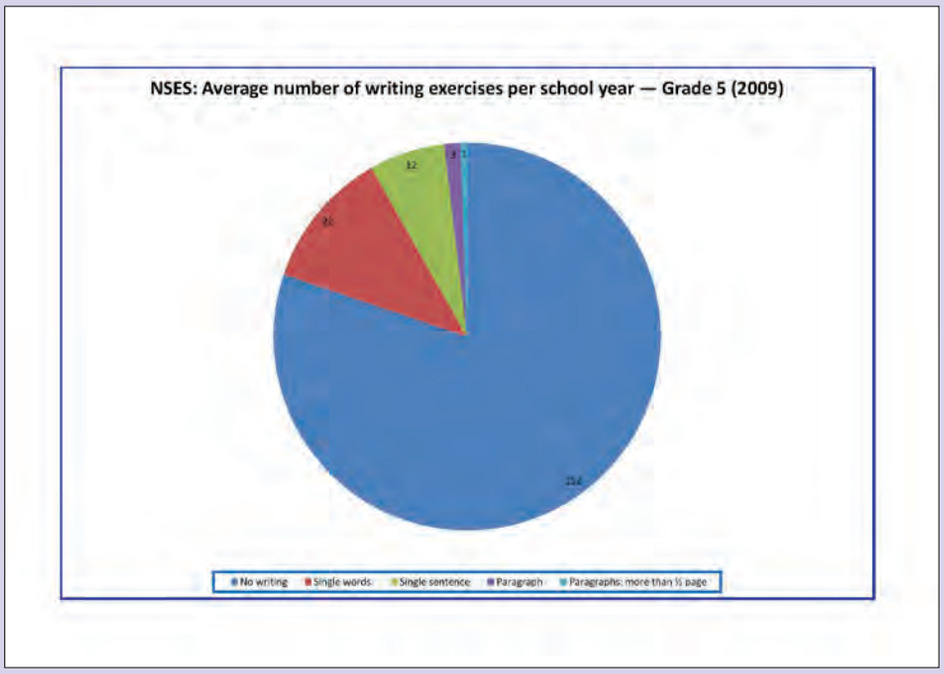
Because each of the sub-topics dealt with in this briefing to the Portfolio Committee have significant importance in their own right we have presented a synopsis of their reports, supplemented by additional material that we have gathered from other related sources, in the following series of articles, each based on one of the sub-topics of the presentation. Because of the wealth of important data on factors that impact on the quality of schooling that JET was able to unearth from the National School Effectiveness Study (NSES), we have been able to use this data to provide three interpretative articles each dealing with a different aspects of its findings. Some data from the NSES: Summary for the Synthesis Report[1] that was the basis of the JET presentation to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee has been included in these articles. ■

References

1 Nick Taylor, *The National School Effectiveness Study (NSES): Summary for the Synthesis Report*, Jet Education Services, August 2011.

Too little writing makes Jack (and Sipho and Rizaan and Koos) a dull boy

Nick Taylor's 'Summary for the Synthesis Report' of the National School Effectiveness Study identifies glaring inadequacies in the classroom practice of language teachers in the majority of primary schools that formed part of this national study.



Research undertaken as part of the NSES revealed just how little writing takes place in public school classrooms, which is well illustrated by this pie chart that is based on a school year of 190 days (the academic school year is normally between 194 and 200 days). Data collected as part of the NSES included a count of the number of written exercises completed in the year by the best learner in each Grade 5 class of the sampled schools. The study selected for the study constituted a nationally representative sample of schools.

The National School Effectiveness Study (NSES), which forms the basis of Nick Taylor's Summary for the Synthesis Report[1] prepared for JET Education Services, is a research study that looks to identify data that can be used not only to inform government policy and practice but which also provides guidance for principals, teachers and parents.

From a government perspective, research that can be shown to apply to the whole school population is the most useful because the lessons from research of this kind can be used to reappraise and reformulate national policy to address the findings that the research identifies. The NSES study falls into this category of research as it assessed the performance of a cohort of children from a nationally representative sample of 268 schools drawn from all provinces except Gauteng. Gauteng was excluded because learners from Gauteng schools were involved with provincial testing at the time at which the first round of NSES data was collected. The research tracked the performance of the 2007 cohort of Grade 3 learners from the selected schools for their Grade 3 (2007), Grade 4 (2008) and Grade 5 (2009) years. Data was collected from approximately 16 000 children each year and from this data it was possible to track the performance of 8 383 of the children across all three years of the study.

The research team used tests, administered in English, to assess the performance of learners at the end of each year in literacy (language) and mathematics. The data on factors that may have an influence on learner performance was collected using survey questionnaires, interviews, direct observation using

The resources may be there but are they used? The Science store rooms of two Eastern Cape Dinaledi schools suggest not.

structured instruments, and teacher practices through an analysis of planning and assessment records.

Despite the fact that, because of cost constraints, the research team was not able to include direct classroom observation as part of the data gathering process, they were able to extract meaningful data about teachers' classroom practices from a detailed analysis of the written work in the mathematics and literacy exercise books of the best learner in each class.

The research team also administered a short mathematics and language test to the respective teachers of these two subjects.

The socio-economic status (SES) of learners and of the schools involved in the study was also assessed using a process that had been shown, in other studies, to be a reliable proxy for SES. Further data on educational practices in the homes of learners, including reading, homework and exposure to the school's language of instruction (LOLT), was gathered using questionnaires.

Once the data had been collected, statistical modelling techniques were used to determine the extent to which the differing factors identified from the research influenced learners' test scores in language and mathematics. The factors and relationships identified are listed here.

1. Children who read frequently on their own at home do better than those who don't.
2. Greater exposure to English through speaking the language and hearing it on television are associated with higher achievement when the influence of home language and poverty is controlled.
3. 'African language' learners at historically white schools perform better than those at historically black schools if the influence of school and learner SES is controlled. This difference in performance is particularly significant in the case of mathematics.
4. Learner achievement is strongly associated with home SES but this relationship is heavily influenced by the effectiveness of the school the learner attends.
5. There is a weak but positive relationship between availability of school resources, including learner-teacher ratios and school facilities, and learner achievement.
6. Better management of school resources has a far greater influence on learner achievement than the availability of the resources themselves.
7. Learners performed better in both language and mathematics at those schools at which the principal and teachers were all present on the day of the survey. The author sees this relationship in part as better time management and use and his comment in this regard are pertinent – 'No resource is more poorly used in South African schools than time'.
8. Better languages scores were positively associated with schools that were able to produce an up-to-date inventory of textbooks and readers.

Better language scores are associated with the proper care and control of textbooks and readers.

The enterprising principal of this rural school near Port St Johns in the Eastern Cape encouraged the community to build the additional classroom that the school needed (the building in the left-hand picture) and also persuaded an international foundation to provide the school with the computers for their computer lab. The desks in the computer lab were funded by the community and built by the school's technology teacher.

9. Learner performance in language and mathematics was positively associated with schools at which teachers could produce a curriculum plan for the entire year.
10. Learners of teachers who had recorded more than two marks for English in their assessment records performed better in language tests.
11. Learners of teachers with very poor assessment records for mathematics performed worse than learners whose teachers kept good and up-to-date assessment records.
12. Teacher scores in the literacy tests were not strongly associated with learner performance in language tests.
13. Learners of teachers who scored 100% in the numeracy test did better than those whose teachers scored less than 100%.
14. Learners whose mathematic workbooks showed that they had completed more than 25 curriculum topics performed better in mathematics than those who had covered less work.
15. The performance in language tests of learners with no record of paragraph-length writing in a year was significantly less than those learners with some paragraph-length writing.
16. Learners who had completed more than 27 writing exercises in a year scored significantly higher in language tests.

In an effort to better understand the influence of school management on learner performance, the research team undertook a series of detailed case studies and used the findings from the case studies together with data from this and other research to identify management practices that are associated with better learner performance. Their findings include the following:

1. In well-functioning schools the principal and staff work together to develop systems that 'drive the work of teaching and learning'.
2. Parents are encouraged to become part of an 'extended' teaching and learning support team with the role and responsibilities of the school, teachers, parents and learners all clearly defined.
3. Well-managed schools have systems in place to manage and monitor the use of teaching time, curriculum planning, assessment, book procurement and retrieval, and teacher professional development.
4. The principal and his/her management team develop innovative solutions to problems endemic to poor communities including learner hunger, poor punctuality, shortages of books and classrooms, and home conditions not conducive to parental engagement. The author goes on to note that 'The case studies provide vivid examples of how enterprising principals deal with these issues under the most difficult conditions. These studies suggest that a good principal can make an enormous difference to the quality of teaching and learning, when compared to an ineffective principal working under the same socio-economic and cultural conditions.'

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Having identified the critical role that good principals play in creating schools in which quality teaching and learning becomes possible despite the socio-economic and cultural challenges that they face, the author

More paragraph-length writing is associated with better learner performance in language tests.

makes some pointed and disturbing comments about systemic failures that undermine and limit the potential contribution of the best and most committed principals and teachers.

These failures, he suggests, are a result of 'institutionalised nepotism', which 'undermines the use of expertise as the main criterion in the recruitment and promotion of teachers, principals and system-level officials'. This 'institutionalised nepotism' is a consequence of appointments 'to all positions in the school system' being determined by 'union regulation'. As a result, people are appointed to positions for which they are ill-equipped and are therefore unable to perform the duties that are assigned to them, thus increasing rather than decreasing the level of dysfunctionality in the system.

'Institutionalised nepotism' is a consequence of appointments 'to all positions in the school system' being determined by 'union regulation'. As a result, people are appointed to positions for which they are ill-equipped and are therefore unable to perform the duties that are assigned to them.

The other, more insidious effect of this union-driven nepotism is the message that it sends out about what it takes to succeed – success in systems of this kind is not about expertise, or hard work or commitment to the needs of schools and their learners, it is about patronage and networks of connected individuals in unions and political and civic associations.

Although the author does not provide specific examples in support of this scathing indictment of this aspect of schooling, the frequent press reports of repeated failings of some provincial education departments, districts and schools provides ample evidence of a system driven by factors other than expertise, professionalism and a commitment to meeting the basic rights of children to quality education.

Besides the leadership and management issues dealt with in the previous paragraph, the case studies and a parallel survey of 65 of the schools, the research also revealed that the majority of principals underestimate the subject knowledge needs of their teachers. Most of the teachers were also unaware of their own shortcomings in this regard, while those who did appreciate the limits of their subject knowledge and pedagogical expertise were unable to identify possible sources of support other than that provided by their district. This aspect of the research provided some detailed and revealing data about the teachers who teach at these schools, and their classroom practice, including their competence in the mathematics that they are required to teach, their coverage of the mathematics curriculum, and the amount of writing that learners are required to complete in language classes. We have dealt with some of the findings from these three aspects of the research as three separate topics in the following pages because of the significance of the problems that they reveal.

The final element dealt with in this summary of the NSES is that of the age of learners. The study found that:

- 53% of Grade 3 learners were appropriately aged in 2007, with 3% underage and 36% overage.
- 51% of the Grade 4 learners were appropriately aged in 2008, with 3% underage and 41% overage.
- 50% of Grade 5 learners were appropriately aged in 2009, with 3% underage and 46% overage.

One must assume, although the report does not comment on this, that the balance in each grade is made up of learners for whom there is no reliable birth-date data.

- Overage learners were mostly male with 50% or more overage by the end of Grade 5. Overage learners were also more likely to be the children of families with a lower socio-economic status.
- Approximately one in three learners (37%) had repeated at least once.
- The performance gap in literacy and numeracy tests between overage and appropriately aged learners increases as learners progress through the grades. The poorer performance of the overage learners is persistent, irrespective of grade, gender, province, socio-economic status or former department of the school. ■

References

1 Nick Taylor, *The National School Effectiveness Study (NSES): Summary for the Synthesis Report*, Jet Education Services, August 2011.

Coverage of the curriculum by teachers of Grades 4 and 5 Mathematics

Research undertaken by JET Education Services as part of the National School Effectiveness Study (NSES) suggests that the coverage of the mathematics curriculum by teachers who teach Mathematics in Grades 4 and 5 is sporadic at best.

As part of the NSES, the research team examined the written work in the exercise books of the best learner in each of the Grade 4 mathematics classes in 2008 and Grade 5 mathematics classes in 2009, of the schools that formed part of the survey. The mathematics curriculum for each grade is made up of a number of topics that are grouped together under the following five Learning Outcomes:

- Numbers, operations and relationships (LO1)
- Patterns, functions and algebra (LO2)
- Space and shape (geometry) (LO3)
- Measurement (LO4)
- Data handling (LO5).

From their examination of the exercise books of the best learner in each class, the members of the research team were able to determine the extent to which the learner's mathematics teachers had covered the topics listed under each Learning Outcome for the grade. A topic was considered to have been covered (taught) if at least one completed written exercise on the topic could be identified. They found that for both grades, the average coverage was just 24% but that this dropped to just 10% in the case of the 12 topics listed under Learning Outcome 5, which is Data handling. Table 1 provides a more detailed breakdown of the number of topics and the mean percentage coverage of the topics for each Learning Outcome in each of the two grades.

Table 1: Learning Outcome topics covered

Learning outcome (LO)	Grade 4		Grade 5	
	Number of topics	Average percentage coverage	Number of topics	Average percentage coverage
Numbers, operations and relationships (LO1)	32	35	34	38
Patterns, functions and algebra (LO2)	12	13	12	12
Space and shape (geometry) (LO3)	15	23	14	18
Measurement (LO4)	14	17	17	15
Data handling (LO5)	11	12	12	10
Total	**84**	**24**	**89**	**24**

The report goes on to note that 88% of the teachers, and by implication 88% of the Grade 5 classes that they taught, had covered no more than 34 of the 89 topics specified for the Grade 5 year, which represents just 40% of the curriculum. In Grade 4 the picture is equally troubling with 58% of the teachers covering a maximum of 20 topics (out of 84), representing a mere 22% of the curriculum.

As might be expected, the topics that were covered by the majority of teachers where mostly the simplest to teach and understand and included counting, writing numbers, the operations of addition, subtraction and multiplication, and the rounding off of numbers. The more complex and difficult subjects were covered by very few teachers as is illustrated by Table 2.

Table 2: Topic coverage by Grade 5 teachers of Mathematics		
Topics covered by 50% or more of teachers	**Topics covered by between 5% and 20% of teachers**	**Topics covered by 5% or less of teachers**

• Counting
• Writing numbers
• Operations:
  • Addition
  • Subtraction
  • Multiplication
• Rounding off numbers
	• Ratio and rate
	• Relationship between multiplication and division
	• Checking solutions
	• Additive and multiplicative inverses
	• Commutative, associative and distributive properties
	• Shapes, especially 3-dimensional models
	• Converting between units of measurement (m to cm, hrs to min. etc.)
	• Practical work on measurement
	• Symmetry
		• Patterns:
		  • Completing, describing and formulating numerical patterns
		• All topics on data management

This element of the NSES study, more than any other item of recent research on learner performance that I have seen, provides the kind of data that helps explain the poor performance of learners in the various systemic tests that have been used over the past decade to assess the performance of learners in numeracy and mathematics and also goes a long way to explaining why the majority of high schools find it so difficult to provide significant numbers of learners who are capable of passing Mathematics in the NSC examinations. Nick Taylor, the author of the 'Summary for the Synthesis Report' on which this article is based, explains it as follows:

For both grades, the average coverage was just 24% but this dropped to just 10% in the case of the 12 topics listed under Learning Outcome 5, which is Data handling.

'It is therefore of crucial importance that teachers follow the curriculum, ensuring that all students have a sound grasp of all the topics specified in the curriculum at each grade level. Failure to do this will lead to gaps in learner knowledge, which multiply rapidly as they proceed through successive grades carrying learning deficits.'

The topics that were covered by the majority of teachers where mostly the simplest to teach and understand and included counting, writing numbers, the operations of addition, subtraction and multiplication, and the rounding off of numbers.

This is all useful information for principals and district officials who are looking to improve the mathematics results of their schools. It suggests two strategies that could be used to improve learner performance in mathematics:

1. Schools should closely manage and monitor curriculum coverage in all mathematics classes to ensure that all topics are adequately covered by the teachers who are assigned to teach the subject. The regular monitoring of learners' that are in the curriculum mathematics exercise books is one way of checking that the required work is covered.
2. Ensure that teachers who are assigned to teach mathematics have the requisite subject knowledge and skills that they require to teach the subject. This is more difficult to achieve. Subject advisors from the school's local district office is one place to start, although sadly in some districts the individual subject advisors may themselves not have the required mathematical competence. Support, however, is also available from universities, NGOs and schools who may be in the fortunate position of having well-qualified and competent teachers.

Doing nothing should not be an option. ■

Teachers' mathematical knowledge

Research undertaken by JET Educational Services as part of the National School Effectiveness Study (NSES) suggests that few primary school mathematics teachers have the mathematical competency that they need to adequately teach the subject.

As part of the National School Effectiveness Study (NSES), researchers invited the Grade 4 and 5 mathematics teachers at the sample schools to complete five simple mathematical tasks taken from the Grade 6 Mathematics curriculum. The five tasks are included on the following page. The teachers' test results are shown in Table 1. While the results achieved by these teachers of mathematics are pretty shocking – 66% could answer only three questions and just 12% could answer all five – the relationship between the scores of the teachers in this simple test and the performance of the learners that they teach in standardised maths tests suggests that a teacher's mathematical competence may not be directly linked to learner performance.

This table shows quite clearly and most disturbingly that nearly half of the Grade 4 and 5 mathematics teachers were not able to correctly answer each of these questions, and in the case of question 2 nearly 70% of the teachers could not answer the question.

Table 2 compares the extent to which the performance of learners in a standardised maths test is influenced by their teachers' scores in the five-item test. The table shows quite clearly how little the average score of learners differs if their teachers answered four or less of the five questions correctly. Yet although the average score of the learners taught by the teachers who answered all five questions correctly is more than 10% better than learners taught by the poorer-performing teachers, the average score of these learners is still less than 50%.

Table 1: Teacher test results in the five-item test

Test item	Grade 4 Teachers (2008) Average percentage correct	Grade 5 Teachers (2009) Average percentage correct
1	53	54
2	31	30
3	53	72
4	51	51
5	64	68

Although this five-question teacher test can only provide a very basic measure of a teacher's mathematical knowledge, the results of these findings are similar to those drawn from a more comprehensive study undertaken as part of SACMEQ III and which involved a longer test. The author of the Synthesis Report makes reference to another, more detailed study that is currently being undertaken at Harvard University and the University of Michigan. This study, which assessed the deeper levels of teachers' mathematical understanding, found clear links between teacher competence and improved learner performance. The authors of the study concluded that for teachers to be effective they need to have a good conceptual understanding of the material that they are teaching.

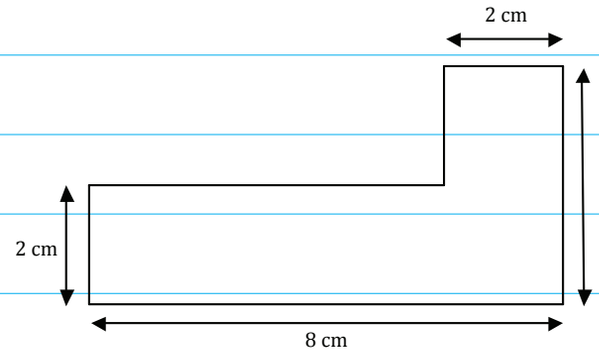
Table 2: Learner performance relative to teacher test score (number of questions correctly answered)

Teacher score (Max = 5)	Number of learners taught	Number of learners as percentage of total	Average score of learners (%)
0	210	2	37
1	2 130	22	33
2	2 774	28	34
3	2 168	22	34
4	1 408	14	35
5	1 209	12	47
Total	**9 899**	**100**	**35**

Maths test items

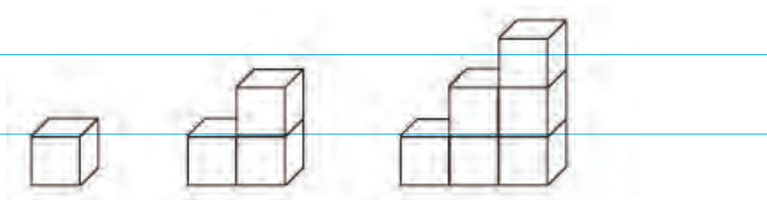
1. 10 days 75 hours can be written as ___ days ___ hours.

2. The perimeter of this figure is: ____ cm.



3. $\frac{1}{4} + \frac{3}{5} =$ ____

4.



Step 1 **Step 2** **Step 3** **Step 4**

How many cubes are there in Step 4?

Answer:_____

5. Without calculating, choose the best estimation for adding the two numbers 4723 and 2319.

Circle the letter that shows the answer.

A. 4000 + 2300 **B.** 5000 + 2300 **C.** 5000 + 2400

Besides the relationship between teacher maths knowledge and the performance of learners, the NSES research team also examined the relationship between teacher maths knowledge (as revealed by their performance in the five-item test) and teachers' time spent on teaching mathematics. The worst-performing learners in Grade 4 were exposed to less than 18 hours a week of maths instruction and/or were taught by teachers who had low test scores. As might be expected, those groups of learners who performed best in the maths assessment tests were provided with more than 18 hours of maths instruction each week and were taught by teachers who score 100% in the maths test. The average score of these learners was 54%, which compares with the average of 35% for the other learners. The author of the report notes that 'Unfortunately, only 7% of students were in this fortunate position'. ■

Enhancing teaching and learning in schools through assessment: challenges and possibilities

Research undertaken by the Education and Skills Development Unit of the HSRC examined the manner in which two provinces, Gauteng and the Western Cape, used the assessment data they collect to equip and support teachers with the skills and knowledge they need to improve their classroom practice. A good summary of this specific project has been published under the same title in the September 2011 edition of *HSRC Review*[1].

The research team used a case-study approach to scrutinise the manner in which the two provinces used the assessment data provided by the Grade 9 systemic tests in mathematics and English. The study forms part of a larger project that is attempting to develop and pilot an integrated national assessment system that will provide relevant and timely information that can be used to improve decision-making at all levels of the schooling system – classroom, school, district, province and national.

The research team found that the two provinces used very different approaches in the way in which they managed and utilised the assessment data, with the Western Cape adopting an integrated approach, treating curriculum and assessment as part and parcel of the same process; while Gauteng treated the curriculum and assessment as two separate elements and dealt with them as such. The main differences, identified under the following headings, were as follows:

Structure

Western Cape: The curriculum sub-directorate at district level deals with both curriculum matters and assessment. Curriculum advisors provide both curricula and assessment support to schools. Curriculum advisors are 'assessment savvy'.

Gauteng: The system is skewed towards the curriculum, with curriculum advice and assessment advice being provided by different individuals. Assessment advisors are fewer and have their own separate reporting systems.

Use of information (both systems have research units)

Western Cape: The focus of the research unit is on collecting, processing and analysing assessment data and feeding it back to the system for utilisation. The WCED has a functioning 'e-system' (electronic system for distributing information to schools using e-mail and the internet), which is used to collect and disseminate information.

Gauteng: The research focus of the GDE is more curriculum-based and this extends to its 'e-system' Gauteng Online, which 'had problems at the time of the study'.

Resources

Western Cape: WCED officials who were interviewed felt they had sufficient access to basic facilities, which included stationery, cars, telephones, computers and printers. Officials are also provided with subsidised cellphones to encourage communication with their schools.

Gauteng: GDE officials who were interviewed felt that districts needed to be allocated more money. Officials have limited access to cars, computers and telephones, and not all have access to e-mail.

In its recommendations the research team stressed the need for greater integration between curriculum planning and assessment with a focus on using assessment data to improve the quality of teaching and learning. It suggested that there was a need for national policy guidelines in this regard and also the need for similar research into how the relationship between curriculum implementation and monitoring, and assessment is dealt with in other provinces.

Another study, the National Assessment of Learner Achievement, undertaken by the HSRC in 2009, which we reported on in 2011[2], collected data on learner performance in language, mathematics and science from 9 000 learners from 300 schools in all nine provinces. Perhaps the most disturbing finding to come out of this particular project, which had a data set that made it possible to group learners into quintiles according to their socio-economic status in the same way that schools are grouped, was the finding that over 50% of 'quintile 1 learners' who attended quintile 5 schools did not meet the required performance standards. There is a clear message from this finding which is that we cannot assume that well-resourced schools will provide a silver bullet solution to children from poor households. ■

References

1 *HSRC Review* 9 (3), September 2011. Download from http://www.hsrc.ac.za/HSRC_Review_Article-275.phtml.

2 Grade 9 Learner performance in literacy, mathematics and science, *School Management & Leadership*, 5(5) 2011, pp. 14–15.

Teaching literacy and numeracy in multigrade classrooms in rural and farm schools in South Africa

This study, which was conducted by the Education Policy Consortium, examined the problems faced by teachers who are expected to teach literacy and numeracy in multigrade classrooms in rural and farm schools.

Multigrade teaching is a term used to describe situations where a teacher is required to teach learners from more than one grade in the same classroom. Multigrade classrooms are typically found in small rural primary schools with a staff compliment of fewer than seven people, including the principal.

The research team attempted to find answers the following questions, which framed their research brief:

- What is the extent of the multigrade phenomenon in the South African education system?
- What are the literacy and numeracy teaching practices of educators in multigrade classes?
- How effective are these teaching practices in facilitating the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills amongst learners?
- How do initial professional education for teachers (IPET), and continuing professional teacher development (CPTD) programmes, capacitate educators to deal with multigrade classes?
- What are the challenges and opportunities presented by multigrade situations in ensuring that multigrade teaching benefits learners?

The methodology used by the research team included an analysis of data derived from the Education Management Information System (EMIS), which is the DBE's database that holds a comprehensive data set on all schools, including infrastructure, staffing and learner enrolment; case studies of six schools (located in North West province), which included interviews with the principals and teachers at these schools, lesson observation and a review and analysis of the documentation of each school linked to the teaching and learning process (such as lesson plans, learner books and timetables); interviews with provincial and district officials, and with teacher trainers. The team also conducted a review of education policy linked to multigrade schools.

Multigrade teaching is common practice in approximately 27% of schools in the country and affects 4% of learners. To put this in perspective, 27% of schools equates to 6 900 schools and 4% of learners equates to approximately 491 355 learners. One of the things that these statistics demonstrate is that although multigrade schools represent a significant proportion of this country's public schools, the number of learners who attend these schools is relatively few. This,

The curriculum taught in multigrade schools needs to be adapted to suit their specific circumstances.

together with the fact that these schools are mostly situated in remote and isolated areas, helps explain why they are generally poorly resourced and given little support by district and provincial officials. Sadly the majority of learners who attend these schools are also the children of the poorest of the poor.

The findings of the research team support this view. In their report on their findings they made the following points:

- Multigrade teaching takes place in approximately 27% of schools.
- There is no recognition of multigrade teaching as distinct from monograde teaching by the DBE.
- Multigrade schools are poorly resourced.
- The curriculum taught in these schools is not adapted to deal with their specific set of circumstances.
- The planning requirements demanded of teachers are the same as for monograde classes.
- Teachers of multigrade classes are seldom provided with guidance on appropriate teaching strategies for multigrade classrooms.
- Teacher-training institutions do not provide multigrade-specific teacher training. Most teachers who teach multigrade classes rely on experiential learning, i.e. they have to develop their own teaching strategies based on their own experience of what works and what doesn't.
- There is no specific support for multigrade teachers from the DBE.
- Multigrade teachers have high workloads as a result of the DBE's planning and assessment requirements.
- Grade 4 learners in multigrade classes struggle with transition to English as the language of learning and teaching.
- The availability of mother-tongue learning materials is limited and the material that is available is not designed for self-study.
- There is a generally negative attitude to multigrade teaching amongst teachers and departmental officials.

The research team expressed their concerns in relation to these findings with the following words:
There is a 'lack of recognition, and general neglect of the multigrade question in the education system'.
This 'continued neglect of the multigrade question constitutes a furtherance of marginalisation of the poor and voiceless for whom multigrade is a reality'.
'It is antithetical to social justice, and the transformation project in our country.'

Although multigrade schools represent a significant proportion of this country's public schools, the number of learners who attend these schools is relatively few. This, together with the fact that these schools are mostly situated in remote and isolated areas, helps explain why they are generally poorly resourced and given little support by district and provincial officials.

Their recommendations for addressing the problem included the following:

- the re-establishment of a permanent Rural Education Directorate within the DBE with a separate division within the directorate assigned responsibility for multigrade schools
- the development of a policy framework to guide and monitor the operations and effectiveness of multigrade schools
- a review of initial teacher-training courses by the DBE; Higher Education and Teacher Training institutions to ensure that initial teacher training included courses that focused specifically on the 'philosophies, curricula, practices and pedagogies of multigrade teaching'
- the use, by educational planners, of qualitative and quantitative data to monitor trends, costs and learner performance of multigrade schools and to use this data to establish the costs of the development and provision of additional multigrade-specific learning materials for these schools
- the provision of special incentives, including salary incentives, to make teaching in isolated multigrade schools more attractive within the profession as many of these schools struggle to attract suitable staff
- the provision of sufficient and suitable facilities for multigrade schools, including safe toilets, spacious classrooms and staff accommodation
- revisiting the current policy of merging and closing multigrade schools in the interest of the government's stated commitment to rural development. ■

Multigrade schools are frequently not as well resourced as monograde schools.

Evaluation of the CLING project

This research was undertaken by the Education Policy Consortium, which attempted to determine the extent to which community involvement in the affairs of schools could contribute to the improvement in the numeracy and literacy results at primary schools.

Working with the community, members of the Community Literacy and Numeracy Group (CLING) project team introduced a number of interventions, in an effort to promote the importance of literacy and numeracy development within the community.

The interventions included:

- building relationships with local government departments and institutions
- assisting in the development of reading clubs
- Saturday classes and Early Childhood Development aftercare
- the provision of libraries
- encouraging young people to become involved in schools and community work.

Key findings and recommendations from the research into the effectiveness of the CLING projects included the following:

- Greater collaboration between community organisations and schools in poor communities can lead to improved literacy outcomes.
- There is a need for government departments to recognise the positive contribution that school-community collaboration can make to school effectiveness and to actively support the work of community organisations in schools.
- There is a need for policies that support school-community collaboration.
- Members of poor communities are capable of finding solutions to their own problems. ■

The box below provides more information about CLING projects.

The Community Literacy and Numeracy Group (CLING)

The CLING project's approach is to mobilise the entire community by working to improve the literacy and numeracy abilities of all members of the community. They consider everyone's interests in their efforts to promote the importance of literacy and numeracy – younger children are exposed to books, stories and numbers; teachers are encouraged to assemble classroom and school libraries; adults are encouraged and helped to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. The project also targets government departments in an effort to gain their understanding and support for the work that they are doing.

In an effort to ensure that each project is sustainable, CLING commits to funding each project for a period of five years. The funding includes an amount of R5 000 per year as 'seed money' to cover the cost of resources and other operational costs; and the payment of a stipend to each of two young community activists who represent the face of the project in the community and who will promote and encourage support for the project from within the community. CLING operates in Evaton and Freedom Park (Gauteng), Tshatshu (Eastern Cape), Ha-Davhana and Siyandhani (Limpopo).

For more information about the CLING project, visit www.uj.ac.za/Faculties/Faculty of Education/Centres and Institutes/CERT/Research Projects/Community Literacy and Numeracy Group (CLING) Project

Preschool numeracy skills best predict later academic success

School-readiness research undertaken in 2007 in the United States suggests that preschool numeracy skills are the best predictors of later academic success.

Pre-primary learners at Zimasa Primary school in Langa and Little Bosch in Rondebosch. Research shows that the development of early maths concepts such as the knowledge of number and ordinality are the best predictors of later academic success.

This study set out to examine the extent to which a range of commonly used school-readiness indicators were reliable predictors of later academic achievement. Part of its purpose was to build on earlier school-readiness research and it used data from six large-scale longitudinal studies of United States (US) children, with two of the six studies involving US children from Great Britain and Canada. In their analysis of the data, the research team looked to separate out, as far as was possible, specific and clearly defined 'school entry skills'. The skill sets based on the various assessment tools, including tests and teacher and maternal reports, that were used to assess school readiness in the six studies were:

- reading (letter recognition, beginning and ending word sounds etc.)
- language/verbal ability
- maths (counting, ordinality, relative size)
- attention skills (continuous performance of a task)
- attention problems (hyperactivity, impulsivity)
- socio-emotional behaviours (headstrong, temper, bully)
- internalising problems (anxious, unloved)
- social skills (self-control).

As far as was possible for research of this kind, statistical modelling was used to control for factors such as gender, socio-economic status, and school and classroom factors.

The results of the study showed that the development of early maths concepts such as the knowledge of number and ordinality[1] were the best predictors of later academic success. One of the more interesting and unexpected findings in this regard was that good entry-level maths skills were also good predictors of later reading achievement and that the predictive value of later reading achievement was at least as strong as that of early language and reading skills. Early reading and language skills, which include skills such as vocabulary, knowing letters, words and the beginning and ending of word sounds, were also strong predictors of later academic success but their effect was not as strong as that of early maths skills. The only other factor that was linked to later academic success was 'attention skills', which describe the ability of a child to persist with a task. Although attention skills were predictors of later academic success, the relationship was not as strong as that for number skills or language skills. None of the other factors showed any discernible relationship to later academic success, although the authors suggest that these may well influence other important educational outcomes and should therefore not be ignored. ■

Note

1 Ordinality in this context refers to the ability of a child to understand that numbers occur in a fixed sequence, i.e. 1, 2, 3 etc.

Nurturing an active citizenry at the University of the Free State

Dr Francois Strydom

The University of the Free State has launched an innovative undergraduate core curriculum that is aimed at creating the new generation of active thinking citizens.

What do university students really need to know so that when they graduate, they can participate meaningfully in our post-apartheid context?

Last month the University of the Free State gave its first classes in a now compulsory undergraduate module informed by this root question.

Writing as one of the staff members who helped to design the module, I can say we started from UFS rector Jonathan Jansen's premise, namely that South African students are trained too narrowly and too early in the various disciplines – law, chemistry and medicine for example – that constitute the specialisations on which their future careers are based.

Such specialist technical training is certainly crucial for expertise in particular fields and careers, but we believe it must be complemented by a broad-based general preparation in the foundations of knowledge.

More than 2 000 first-time students in all fields are taking the module, which is now the university's 'core curriculum'. We hope to enable students to be intellectuals, not only technicians, that is, to be active public participants rather than disengaged members of society. We would like our students and graduates to be knowledgeable rather than impulsive, actors in a complex world, as Jansen suggested in one of his publications two years ago. He also guided the team I led in developing the core curriculum.

Following the tradition of the liberal arts, the curriculum exposes students to questions aimed at disrupting existing knowledge and ways of thinking by stimulating debate on some of the 'big issues' across different disciplines.

The module comprises seven units, each aimed at raising its own 'big issues':

This article first appeared in the 'Getting Ahead' supplement to the *Mail & Guardian* of April 5–12 2012. We are grateful to its author Dr Francois Strydom for granting us permission to use it. Dr Strydom is director of the University of the Free State's centre for teaching and learning, which oversees the teaching of this curriculum.

We chose to republish the article in SM&L because, in our view, this course is conceptually such an innovative and exciting project and one that we think could be emulated in schools, perhaps at Grade 11 level. Getting learners – and their teachers – to think about and respond to the important issues that these questions raise is also important at school level, although the depth and diversity of perspectives is likely to be far less demanding. A better and more thoughtful conception of these topics will certainly help learners to deal with the complexities of adult life in a diverse and rapidly changing world. One additional benefit for learners is that a course of this nature will provide them with opportunities to expand their intellectual and language skills by forcing them to grapple with the challenges of articulating personal responses to the complex issues the questions broach.

1. How should we deal with the violent past? (History, Pedagogy and Political studies)

The past is not dead, it is not even past,' goes the well-known saying in reference to how the present reflects long-forgotten histories. Among South Africans this is a sensitive and persistent problem: do we forget everything about the past in the interest of moving forward, or do we deal with that past to ensure it never – well – comes back? This is a question students must address in relation to themes such as the balance

between reparation and reconciliation. Here a few powerful problem sets can engage students on the issue. For example, a white student and a black student apply for one remaining place at a medical school, with their respective results showing excellence (9 As) versus promise (3 As) despite markedly different schooling backgrounds for the two students. Taking reparation and reconciliation into account, which one of these two students should be admitted to medical school?

2. What does it mean to be fair? (Law)
In this unit students will be introduced to the law as a type of authority structure needed to facilitate peaceful interaction between people in a society – the rule of law. The presence of a social contract as an agreement to give up some personal freedoms in exchange for peaceful co-existence will be introduced. Law as an attempt to portray the shared values of the majority of the population will be explained, as well as the legitimacy crises that arise when a loss of confidence in the legal system surfaces. Students will be confronted with questions such as: What is the role of law to order society in a constitutional democracy? What is your role as a citizen in accordance with the role of law in our country? What is the right thing to do?

3. Are we alone? (Astronomy, Physics)
With the great advantage of remote access to the Boyden Observatory via an Astronomy Fair, students will learn about the nature of the universe and how scientists measure and make sense of the worlds around us. One of the fundamental questions that persist concerns other universes and the possibility of life beyond Earth. What are the conditions necessary for other life forms to exist elsewhere? How do we know that such life forms exist, or not? What counts as evidence in making these judgements in the arena of science (e.g. the scientific method)? How close are we to making definitive conclusions about life beyond Earth? What do astronomers do to establish such answers? How is this relevant to students and how does it impact their disciplines?

4. 'Did God really say?' (Theology, Philosophy, Text analysis)
The issue under discussion is not whether or not God exists, or whether religion is good or bad. The issue under discussion is the misuse of God (and religion) from a theological perspective and its impact as an undeniable part of the world we are living in. The misuse of God ('God says' discourse) manifests in all religions and related religious texts and religious speech. Hence the question: Did God really say? In this unit, hermeneutics (the study of the meaning and interpretation of religious texts and creeds) is of a particular interest. This topic allows students to examine 'God said' discourses from a global and local perspective. Students are provided an opportunity to reflect on: What are the things that have been said in God's name by various leaders, what were the implications? How are divine texts (the written word) to be understood? How do we understand forgiveness and how do we create reconciliation where there is conflict?

5. How green is green? (Physics, Chemistry, Nanoscience)
Advances in chemistry have made a significant difference to modern-day living in a vast number of ways. Different forms of chemistry have been applied to develop a wide range of products. However, advances in our chemical understanding have not come without cost. Waste products created in large-scale chemical production processes can pose serious environmental threats, e.g. fracking in the Karoo. Going green is about being environmentally friendly. Chemistry is the connecting science, making you aware of everything around you. Green chemistry provides a solution; it's all about cleaner ways of making chemicals and materials. Thus, modern society is faced with the ethical dilemma of how to use findings in the realm of chemistry to the benefit of society, whilst still acting responsibly towards the environment and communities for a sustainable future.

6. Why is the financial crisis described as 'global'? (Economics)
The interconnectedness of the world, often described through the word globalisation, is crucial to understanding not only economics, but other fields as well. National borders matter of course, but crucial transactions take place on a global scale in real time all the time, fundamentally altering social and economic relations across the world. It is important therefore to understand how an economic crisis in one country triggers a global collapse of interconnected financial systems. How do economists explain this phenomenon? How could so many smart people have been so wrong? And what are the limits of economics as an explanatory framework?

7. How do we become South Africans? (Anthropology, Social psychology)
The purpose of this unit is to demonstrate how national identities are formed, through reflexive enquiry into the concept of South African citizenship. This unit will facilitate the process of engaging critically with the key concepts, questions and issues regarding how to become South African. Students will be introduced to readings of Bettina von Lieres and Steven Robins on Democracy and Citizenship, as well as Benedict Anderson on the Nation as Imagined Community. The key is for students, who are the bearers of the future of this country, to reflect on their civic responsibilities as individuals, but also as part of the South African collective. ■

Does emotional intelligence (EI) matter?

Daniel Goleman, co-chair of the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organisations at Rutgers University, suggests that a high level of emotional intelligence is what distinguishes great leaders from the rest.

In an article published in the *Harvard Business Review,*[1] Daniel Goleman identifies emotional intelligence (EI) as the attribute that has the single greatest influence on leadership effectiveness and that the more senior the leader is in the organisation the more important high levels of EI become. His views on the importance of EI are based on his work as co-chair of the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organisations, which included an analysis of the competency models from 188 mostly large, global companies. Competency models are testing instruments used by psychologists in large companies to help them identify and develop those employees from within the company who are likely to go on to become future members of its senior leadership teams.

Emotional intelligence is the attribute that has the single greatest influence on leadership effectiveness and the more senior the leader is in the organisation the more important high levels of EI become.

Goleman used his analysis to group the capabilities that were described in these competency models into three categories:

- technical skills, which included such skills as accounting and business planning
- cognitive abilities, such as analytical reasoning skills
- competency that demonstrated EI, which included such things as an ability to work with others and effectiveness in leading change.

Comparisons between the profiles of the best leaders and the average performers showed that almost 90% of the difference in performance could be attributed to EI-related factors rather than cognitive factors or technical skills.

Other business-related criteria were then used to assess the effectiveness of the leaders tested using objective criteria such as the profitability and/or performance of the company division that the leader led. The final analysis produced a list of between seven and 14 characteristics that were common to all of the effective leaders. A quantitative analysis was then used to measure the relative contribution of each of these factors to leadership success. Comparisons between the profiles of the best leaders and the average performers showed that almost 90% of the difference in performance could be attributed to EI-related factors rather than cognitive factors or technical skills. The importance of EI relative to other leadership attributes was also found to increase as leaders progressed up the corporate ladder.

EI is considered to be comprised of the following five interrelated elements:

Self-awareness: The ability to recognise and understand your moods, emotions and drives as well as their effects on others. People who are self-aware have self-confidence, are able to realistically assess their own performance and behaviour, and show a willingness to laugh at themselves.

Self-regulation: The ability to suspend judgement and to think before acting, together with the ability to control and/or redirect your moods and impulses. People who self-regulate are trustworthy and have integrity, are open to change, and are able to deal with ambiguity.

Motivation: Persistence in the pursuit of goals and a willingness to work hard to achieve these goals for reasons other than money or status. People who are motivated demonstrate a strong desire to achieve and are optimistic even when faced with the possibility of failure.

Empathy: The ability to understand the emotional make-up of other people and to respond appropriately and sensitively to their emotional needs. People with empathy are able to develop the talent of others, are sensitive to the needs of clients and customers and can respond appropriately to cultural differences.

Social skills: The ability to manage relationships, to find common ground where there is conflict and to build networks. People with social skills can be persuasive, are effective in leading change and in building and leading teams.

Although nature and nurture (genetic make-up and emotional development) appear to contribute to the EI of individuals, there is also good evidence to show that EI can be learned and that it increases with age. It is important to understand, however, that EI is learned using a different part of the brain from the part that we use to develop our analytical and technical ability, to grasp concepts and for reasoning and logic. Learning activities aimed at enhancing a leader's EI should therefore be directed at activating those parts of the brain that are responsible for the processes that direct our emotional behaviour.

Because our EI is closely linked to the manner in which we react to others on a daily basis, it is difficult to deal with our emotional shortcomings without a strong commitment to making the behavioural changes that may be required. This is partly because many of our behaviours in response to others become habits, and some of these habits, such as interrupting others before they have finished speaking, are difficult to break and awkward to deal with especially if you as a leader are trying to change habitual ways of dealing with subordinates.

Goleman suggests coaching and mentoring as effective ways of improving a person's EI skills, particularly those relating to self-awareness and self-regulation, and makes the point that good coaches are able to get inside the head of their protégé, helping them to reflect on their behaviour and how it affects others. A willingness to honestly reflect on one's personal behaviour and performance is an important characteristic of good leaders, so if you really want to improve your emotional intelligence and by implication your leadership skills, set aside a little private time each day to talk to the person in the mirror.

Because our EI is closely linked to the manner in which we react to others on a daily basis, it is difficult to deal with our emotional shortcomings without a strong commitment to making the behavioural changes that may be required.

Ask him or her those difficult questions about how you dealt with your peers, team members or subordinates that no one else was willing to ask or challenge you on. This kind of reflection is particularly critical following events that have not gone well or when you have found yourself angry or frustrated when things have gone wrong or not worked out in the way in which you had hoped.

Coaching and mentoring are effective ways of improving a person's EI skills, particularly those relating to self-awareness and self-regulation.

Play back in your mind the processes and events that created the unhappiness or disruptions and consider the things that you could have done to produce a happier or better result. Try to develop some mental cues that could alert you to your problematic responses should similar situations arise in the future. Remember you are trying to develop skill sets associated with self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation and social skills, and that like all skills they can be learned and improved with practice.

Greater EI means better leadership, happier organisations and improved results. It's what the best leaders do. ■

Note

1 This article is based on material derived from "What Makes a Leader?" by Daniel Goleman first published in the *Harvard Business Review* of June 1996.

Is our pass rate focus too narrow?

Erich Cloete

In addition to having a high pass rate, an effective education system should also satisfy other criteria of which one is a low dropout rate and a good retention rate.

Dropout rate by grade is defined as the proportion of learners from a cohort enrolled in a given grade in a given school year who are no longer enrolled in the following school year. On the other hand, retention is defined as the continued participation of a learner in the formal schooling system. It can be said that learner retention is the complement of dropout. If we consider the number of learners who enter the system in Grade 1 compared to the number of these learners who actually write the NSC examinations 12 years later, it is possible to ascertain what the retention or through-flow rate has been for learners progressing through the system and completing their school careers.

At national primary level, nearly all children attend school. This retention is largely sustained until the end of Grade 10, but then the decline is dramatic. It can be seen in the following table:

Number of learners in public schools per grade as the 2011 Grade 12 group progressed through the system

Year	Grade	Number of learners
2000	1	1 055 397
2001	2	944 961
2002	3	949 721
2003	4	952 465
2004	5	916 911
2005	6	898 495
2006	7	872 051
2007	8	930 019
2008	9	902 656
2009	10	1 016 360
2010	11	841 815
2011	12	496 593
	Passed in Grade 12 in 2011	**348 117**

This means that the through-flow rate from Grade 1 in 2000 to those who passed Grade 12 in 2011 is 32,9% and from Grade 10 in 2009 to those who passed Grade 12 in 2011 is 34,3%.

When we consider the learners who wrote the Grade 12 NCS in each province and compare the through-flow rate for each province, we see significant differences in retention between otherwise similar provinces. North West and the Free State fare worst: of learners who completed Grade 10 in 2009 they retained only 38% and 41% respectively who wrote matric in 2011. By contrast, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, although also largely poor and rural, achieved retention rates of 54% and 57% respectively, not far behind Gauteng's 58% and Western Cape's almost 62%.

At national primary level, nearly all children attend school. This retention is largely sustained until the end of Grade 10, but then the decline is dramatic.

What is better? A 78% matric pass rate as in North West, while losing 62% of learners between Grade 10 and Grade 12? Or a 68% matric pass rate as in KwaZulu-Natal, but with a much lower prior dropout rate of 43%? Schools (or provinces) that achieve high pass rates at the cost of 'pushing out' learners are not contributing to an effective education system, or a just and sustainable society.

Schools (or provinces) that achieve high pass rates at the cost of 'pushing out' learners are not contributing to an effective education system, or a just and sustainable society.

The through-flow rate as shown remains a matter of concern for education specialists. This can be seen in the Department of Basic Education's 'Action Plan to 2014: Towards the realisation of Schooling 2025'[1]. Goal 13 of this action plan speaks directly to the problem of dropout and retaining learners in the school system: 'Improve the access of youth to Further Education and Training beyond Grade 9'. The importance of this issue is also reflected in the request of the Portfolio Committee on Education to the DBE to prepare a report on dropout rate and retention strategy, which was released in June 2011[2]. Also placing great emphasis on this issue is the National Planning Commission, appointed by the President in May 2010. In their vision statement and plan for 2030 they identified the increase of school learner retention rates to 90% as one of their priorities. The commission's vision statement was released on 11 November 2011 and the plan is currently up for consideration.

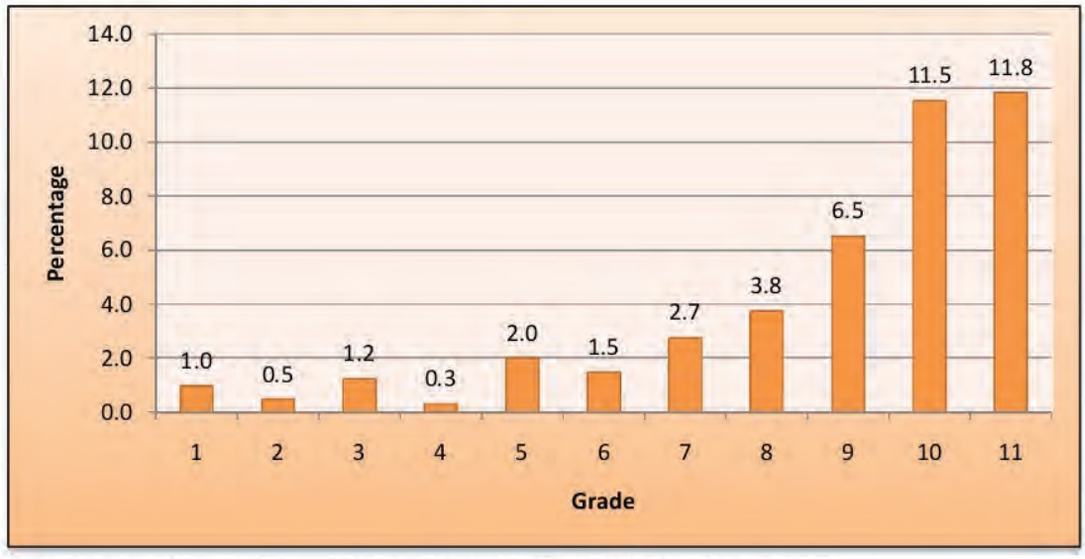
The report on the dropout rate and retention strategy prepared by the Ministerial Committee provides ample information on the dropout rates as well as initiatives introduced by the DBE to counter dropout rates and to provide incentives for children to go to school, but it is not a forgone conclusion that these strategies would turn the situation around on a more permanent basis. The report does not provide any new information on the DBE's strategy to counter the dropout rate and improve the retention rate of learners; it only indicates actions that are already in place. It is, however, still useful to take note of the research that has been done on this very important issue in order to help us find ways to counter the high dropout rate at school level. The following is a brief discussion of the main findings of the report.

Quality data

To calculate the dropout rate accurately, it is vital to have good quality data. The committee found it difficult to collect accurate data from the DBE and decided to make use of the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) to calculate dropout rate by grade in 2007–2008. However, the DBE has reviewed its survey instruments and it is envisaged that the data quality will improve in future.

Figure 1 on the following page shows the dropout rate from school by grade between 2007 and 2008 (i.e. children who were enrolled in a particular grade in 2007 and were not enrolled in school in 2008). Since the NIDS data is only available for one year, no trend analysis could be undertaken. The overall dropout rate from the school system in lower grades varied but not by much and usually not by more than 4%. The dropout rate before Grade 9 was extremely low. It was around 1% in Grades 1 and 3 and lower than 1% in Grades 2 and 4. From Grade 5 to Grade 8 the dropout rate ranged between 2% and 4%, still very low. From Grade 9 upwards, however, the dropout rate increased, reaching almost 12% in both Grades 10 and 11. In total 10% of learners who had been enrolled in Grades 9 to 11 dropped out of school between 2007 and 2008.

Figure 1: Dropout rate by grade: 2007/2008[3]



Factors that contribute to dropout

Research has found that the following factors, combined with poverty, make learners more vulnerable to dropping out of school:

- disability
- orphanhood
- being eligible for social welfare, but not accessing it
- living in isolated communities.
- family structure, i.e. not living with biological parents or grandparents.

Studies also found that parental aspirations and attitudes to education varied strongly by socio-economic status, with 81% of the richest mothers saying they hoped their nine-year-old would go to university, compared with only 37% of the poorest mothers. If there are no expectations of further study then motivation to stay in school would also decrease.

Other contributing factors identified by research include issues such as financial pressure, teenage pregnancy and substance abuse. These, combined with in-school factors such as repeating grades and lack of stimulation and support, result in learners disengaging with their education and eventually dropping out of school.

Repeaters

The report further indicates that repetition is a strong indicator of dropout and that there is a strong correlation between repetition and dropout. It also indicates that South Africa's average level of repetition in primary schools (7%) was higher than the average level for developing countries (5%) and for developed countries (1%). In general, repetition is higher among male learners than female learners. A concern, however, is the much higher percentage of repetition in higher grades. This occurs as a result of teachers in the higher grades trying to deal with learners who have failed to master basic skills in primary school but who have nonetheless progressed. Research has shown that in 2007 a third of all children at school had repeated a grade. This applied to 21% of learners in the Foundation Phase, while 52% had repeated by the time they were in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase.

Repetition is a strong indicator of dropout and there is a strong correlation between repetition and dropout.

DBE's response to dropout

In response to this critical issue, the DBE introduced a number of initiatives and incentives for children to come to school. These include:

- the National School Nutrition Programme that provided for more than 7 million learners in over 20 000 schools in 2009
- the 'no-fee' schools policy, an initiative aimed at improving access to education for poor learners
- the workbook project through which the DBE has distributed millions of workbooks to public schools. These workbooks are designed to assist teachers who may not have access to stimulating reading material and will relieve teachers of having to write up lessons and exercises on the chalkboard or struggling to produce their own worksheets when the school does not have photocopying facilities.

- the provision of textbooks by provincial departments to ensure that learners are provided with textbooks for every subject
- the expansion of Grade R – studies indicate that a child who attends pre-primary programmes is likely to remain longer in the education system
- the reduction of school violence
- full-service schools that would ensure that learners with disabilities have access to education.
- the Education For All campaign – as a legacy of the 2010 World Cup, a number of NGOs have organised media campaigns that spell out the advantages of education. Such campaigns encourage parents to enrol their children in schools.

While it is clear from the report that the DBE responded well to the challenges, the report fails to give a vivid explanation of the consequences of dropping out. Each class of dropouts is responsible for substantial financial and social costs to their communities, provinces and the country. In addition to adversely affecting the quality of life of individual dropouts, a poor retention rate carries great costs to the economy and community.

All dropout-prevention programmes and curricula need to be designed in accordance with the needs of local communities and should include adult and mentor opportunities as well as integrated programmes for helping the whole person, such as drug prevention and job-readiness training. Education provides the impetus to move up in life. Nelson Mandela said: 'Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that a son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation'. Dropouts significantly diminish these possibilities. ■

References and notes

1 *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the realisation of Schooling 2025,* Department of Basic Education, Pretoria, 2010.
2 *Report on Dropout and Learner Retention Strategy to Portfolio Committee on Education*, Department of Basic Education, June 2011.
3 Source: National Income Dynamics Study Survey database, calculated by the DBE.
4 www.timeslive.co.za
5 www.saou.co.za

Publication of the draft National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) Bill

Former Head of NEEDU, Prof. John Volmink

Towards the end of 2011 the draft National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) Bill was published for public comment. The draft Bill will only become law once the final version has been approved by parliament and signed into law as the National Education Evaluation and Development Act, by the president. Although changes may be made to the Bill as it passes through the legislative processes, we do not think that the final version will differ markedly from the present draft and for this reason have provided a summary of the main elements of the Bill below.

1. NEEDU's governing principles

In terms of the Bill NEEDU is established as a juristic person and is expected to operate according to the following governing principles:

1.1 The Unit must be impartial and must exercise its powers and perform its duties in the public interest;

1.2 No person or organ of State may interfere with the functioning of the Unit;

1.3 The Unit may not appraise or report on the performance of an individual teacher; *(This is clearly an attempt to placate the unions. Ed.)*

1.4 The Unit is accountable to the Minister for the performance of its functions;

1.5 The Unit must recognise the disproportionate and unequal nature of the system of education in terms of infrastructure, resources and capacity and must identify methods and strategies for achieving equality and equity.

2. The functions of the NEEDU

The Unit must:

2.1 Identify the factors that inhibit or advance school improvement, including examples of good practice;

2.2 Analyse and identify approaches and strategies necessary for achieving equality in the provision of quality education, with due regard to human and financial resources and other relevant factors;

2.3 Consider the influence of historical and social factors on the conditions under which school leadership, teaching and learning are practised;

2.4 Evaluate the monitoring and evaluation of schools by the provincial and national departments;

2.5 Evaluate the support provided to schools, school governing bodies, and "professional managements" (sic) and educators by district, provincial and national departments;

2.6 Evaluate the state of South African schools, focussing in particular on the quality of school leadership of teaching and of learning;

2.7 Make proposals for:

2.7.1 remedying shortcomings in educational practice;

2.7.2 eliminating barriers to quality education;

2.7.3 emulating examples of good practice;

2.7.4 developing the knowledge and professional capacity of educators;

2.7.5 improving the support provided to school governing bodies, senior management teams ("professional managements") and educators by the provincial and national departments;

2.7.6 publish reports on the state of the education system.

3. The operational framework of NEEDU

The Bill establishes the following operational guidelines to direct the work of the Unit.

3.1 The Unit is required to give the Provincial Head of Department at least 14 days' notice of its intention to visit a school for the purpose of observing or assessing the following:
3.1.1 classroom teaching;
3.1.2 educator knowledge;
3.1.3 learner knowledge;
3.1.4 the professional management of the school;
3.1.5 the capacity, efficiency and effectiveness of a school governing body;
3.1.6 the efficiency and effectiveness of support provided to schools, educators, professional managements and school governing bodies by a provincial or national department of education.
3.2 The Unit also has the authority to visit any district office or office of a provincial or the national department for the purpose of assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of support provided to schools and educators, provided that the office to be visited is given reasonable notice of the Unit's intention to do so.
3.3 The Unit is expected to publish reports on the state of the education system. These reports must include:
3.3.1 empirical findings;
3.3.2 recommendations for improvement;
3.3.3 accounting measures to ensure that the responsible parties deal with the identified problems.
3.4 In order to achieve it purpose the Unit is expected to:
3.4.1 develop an appropriate theoretical foundation for its work on school improvement;
3.4.2 determine appropriate methodologies for its work;
3.4.3 consider the historical, social and material contexts in which schooling is offered;
3.4.4 base its findings and proposals on the best available empirical evidence and, where required, statistical data or analysis;
3.4.5 conduct its work in an open and transparent manner;
3.4.6 conduct or commission research where this may be required;
3.4.7 liaise with bodies having similar functions in the provinces and in other countries.

4. NEEDU Reports

The Minister of Basic Education is required to consider and respond to the reports that the Unit produces and to engage with them about the contents of these reports. The Minister is also required to table the reports at the next meeting of the Council of Education Ministers (this is the meeting of the Minister and her counterparts from the provincial education departments.

5. The Governance of the NEEDU

The Bill proposes that NEEDU be governed by a Board of between seven and nine members appointed by the minister on the basis of their expertise. The minister is required to invite nominations for appointment to the board by notice in the *Government Gazette*, from people involved in education, from organisations involved in school education, and from members of the public. In making her selection for appointment to the board the Minister is required to ensure that the members of the board she appoints:

- are broadly representative of the school education sector and related interests;
- have thorough knowledge and understanding of school education;
- have an understanding of the contribution school education can make to the reconstruction and development of the South African economy and society;
- have known and attested commitment to the interests of school education;
- have knowledge and understanding of school education evaluation and development matters;
- have the necessary competence to undertake the governance and oversee the financial affairs of the NEEDU;
- are appropriately diverse in terms of factors such a race, gender and disability.

The NEEDU Board is required to meet at least four times per year and its duties include the following:

- the appointment of the CEO;
- the determination of the remuneration and conditions of service of the CEO (with the concurrence of the Minister of Finance);
- the appointment of other NEEDU staff, although this may be delegated to the CEO;

6. Funding of the NEEDU

In terms of the Bill funding for the Unit will be provided by money appropriated by Parliament. This is an important consideration because it means that the Unit will have its own budget ensuring that it financially independent of the DBE. The Bill also makes provision for it to receive donations and financial contributions from sources other than the fiscus. The minister, however, still retains some control as the Unit is required to submit its budget to the minister for the minister's approval.

Until such time as this bill is approved by parliament and signed into law NEEDU has no legal standing and those involved in its establishment are most likely employed by the DBE on short-term contracts. It is our hope that by the start of the 2013 school year the NEEDU will be up and running as a fully fledged independent organisation doing what needs to be done to evaluate and develop our public school system at every level. ■

New Head for NEEDU

In a media release on 26 April, Minister of Basic Education Mrs Angie Motshekga announced the appointment of Dr Nick Taylor as Head of the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) with effect from 1 May 2012.

Nick Taylor, former CEO of Joint Education Trust (JET): Education Services, took up his appointment as the new Head of NEEDU on 1 May 2012.

Dr Taylor, a former CEO of Joint Education Trust (JET): Education Services takes over from Prof. John Volmink who resigned at the end for last year for personal reasons.

Besides his work with JET Education Services, Dr Taylor also served as a member of the UMALUSI Standards Committee and was a contributor to the National Planning Commission.

It is perhaps fortuitous that we are able to report on the appointment of Dr Taylor in the same edition in which we carry fairly extensive coverage of his summary report on some of the findings of the National Schools Effectiveness Study (NSES)[1]. The study was designed and managed by JET Education Services.

Besides his work with JET Education Services, which included 16 years as its CEO, Dr Taylor's earlier career included a spell teaching Mathematics and Science at high school level and working as a subject advisor in Soweto. He stepped down as CEO of JET in 2009 in order to take up a full-time research position in the Education Evaluation and Research division at JET, the division responsible for the NSES. Dr Taylor is co-editor of *Getting Learning Right*[2] and co-author of *Getting Schools Working*[3]. He has a PhD in Maths Education, an MSc in Geology and an HED.

Dr Taylor's extensive experience in school-based research in this country means that he has a thorough understanding of the entire public schooling system and this makes him an ideal candidate for the job as Head of NEEDU. In the past he has also shown a willingness to speak his mind about the many shortcomings of the system and the individuals and groups that have become obstacles to interventions aimed at improving school effectiveness, classroom practice and learner performance. Some examples of these are given on the adjacent page. ■

References

1 Nick Taylor, National School Effectiveness Study: Summary for the Synthesis Report, JET Education Services, August 2011.
2 Getting Learning Right, report of the President Education Initiative Research Project, JET, 1999.
3 Nick Taylor, Johan Muller, Penny Vinjevold, Getting Schools Working, Pearson South Africa, 2003

Nick Taylor says:

'There is no question that the South African public school system is one of the most inefficient in the world, if not at the bottom of the pile. Despite high levels of spending as a percentage of GDP, off a base that is significantly higher than that of the overwhelming majority of developing countries, learning outcomes are either worse than or comparable with those of the poorest nations. This gross systemic inefficiency is the largest single obstacle to overcoming the legacy of apartheid and providing equality of opportunity to all our citizens. While vigorous redress measures have been instituted since the election of the first democratic government, the increased flow of resources to the historically disadvantaged sectors appears to have had little if any effect on improving learning outcomes.

The first step towards increasing efficiency is to adjust the budget so as to target items which make a difference to learning outcomes. A high priority in this regard is to reduce the salary bill by increasing the teacher:pupil ratio, and directing the released funds towards textbooks, stationery and other "strongly cognitive" resources. Government has identified this as a priority for, but it is likely to take time to have any significant effect. Furthermore, the effects on learning achieved by budget adjustments are likely to be small unless combined with other measures aimed at improving institutional functionality.'[1]

'The case studies provide vivid examples of how enterprising principals deal with these issues under the most difficult conditions. These studies suggest that a good principal can make an enormous difference to the quality of teaching and learning, when compared to an ineffective principal working under the same socio-economic and cultural conditions.'

'However, institutionalised nepotism undermines the use of expertise as the main criterion in the recruitment and promotion of teachers, principals, and system level officials. It has become clear that in many parts of the country appointments to all positions in the school system are subject to union regulation. The result is widespread nepotism, which is destructive in two ways. First, it results in inappropriate people being appointed to positions for which they are ill equipped: under these conditions institutional dysfunctionality becomes the norm. Second, and far more important, the distribution of opportunity by patronage signals that expertise is irrelevant and its development and deployment is not the way to get ahead; instead, the livelihood of teachers and principals depends on the cultivation of networks held together by unions and political and civic associations. It is obvious that the systemic improvement of schooling is dependent on a political solution to this problem.'[2]

[The NSES data] 'shows that attendance and punctuality by principals and teachers, thorough curriculum planning, frequency and use of assessment for teaching, teacher knowledge, and curriculum coverage vary substantially across South African schools, and are strongly linked to pupil test scores.'

'The top schools are going to teach NEEDU how schools should be run; the bottom 15% of schools should simply be closed.'[3]

'NEEDU needs to help schools to help themselves by laying the foundation for development.'[4]

References

1 Outcomes, Effort and Values in Schooling, paper presented at the New Millenium Business Conference, Wits University Business School, May 2001.
2 Nick Taylor, *The National School Effectiveness Study: Summary for the Synthesis Report*, JET Education Services, August 2011. p. 4.
3 Presentation to NEEDU Founding conference 17 March 2011.
4 Presentation to NEEDU Founding conference 17 March 2011.

Further Education and Training (FET) colleges – make them institutions of choice

Erich Cloete

In a bid to bolster the country's FET colleges, the government has announced plans for increasing the resources available in this sector.

The government, through the National Skills Fund and the SETAs, will invest R2.5 billion over a three-year period to upgrade and improve the resources available in the FET-college sector. This was announced at the skills development summit that took place in Pretoria on 4 April 2012. This is an indication of the government's concern about the technical skills desperately needed in our country as well as the high school dropout rate beyond Grade 9.

According to the Bureau for Market Research at the University of South Africa, there is high demand for specific skills in the workplace and the school system fails to provide learners with those skills. For a number of decades, South Africa has produced insufficient mechanics, electricians, engineers, welders and builders to meet our economy's needs. There is therefore no doubt that by switching its strategic focus to FET colleges, the government is on the right track. However, to turn each of the 50 FET colleges and their numerous campuses into institutions of choice is an immense task. It is therefore recommended that the government appoint a highly skilled project team to steer the R2.5 billion project in order to get the best return on investment.

The improvement of FET colleges was expected and is much needed. An audit done by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 2010[1] addressed the question of whether colleges were ready to be absorbed into the newly formed Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and to operate on a defined autonomy basis. The government also identified the sector as one that needs to play an important role in providing learners with alternative options to the school curriculum and other tertiary institutions. This is clear from the following:

- The Department of Basic Education identified the refurbishment of FET colleges as one of its goals in its Action Plan for 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025[2]. In this plan, the department indicated that it would like to improve the access of learners to Further Education and Training beyond Grade 9 and set a target of 50% of learners to receive a National Senior Certificate (NSC) and 65% of learners to obtain a FET qualification by 2014.
- The National Planning Commission's national development plan, Vision for 2030[3] released on 11 November 2011, recommended that FET colleges should be capacitated in order to increase learning opportunities after school and to meet specific targets. These targets include:
  - the increase of participation rates in FET colleges
  - the increase of the graduation rate of FET colleges to 75%
  - the production of 30 000 artisans per year
  - the addition of 1 million learning opportunities per year.

What it comes down to is that the government wants school dropouts – including disheartened ones, some of whom stand on street corners daily with no hope for the future – to be able to come back to the Education and Training system. The main purpose would be to support learners so that they can stand on their own feet economically, become skilled enough to find a job and become economically liberated.

What does it the FET landscape look like?

The FET band is fed by NQF Level 1 and ABET Level 4, equivalent to Grade 9 at school. A learner who completes an FET qualification graduates after three years with an NQF Level 4 qualification, the full equivalent of the NSC, but with a practical vocational qualification that can mean immediate employability. Each year is a separate NQF certificate (NQF levels 2, 3 and 4) and after three years a successful learner will achieve a vocational qualification at NQF Level 4. At the same time the curricula of the National Certificate

Vocational (NC(V)) have been designed to permit qualified students to access higher education, so they are not handicapped educationally, being left without further opportunities.

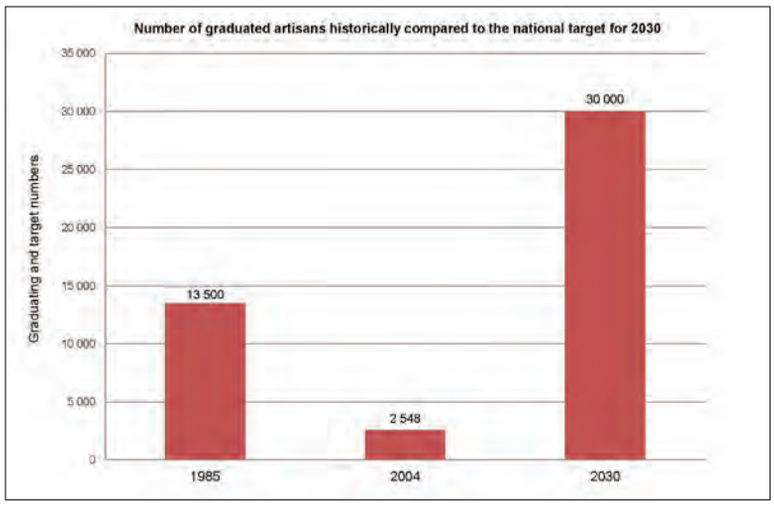
Although the FET sector would like to give school dropouts a second chance to obtain a NQF Level 4 qualification, enrolment numbers in the NSC and NC(V) programmes are still exceedingly low considering the thousands of learners who have not completed Grade 12 and are out of school and not in employment.

So, why do these learners not make use of these FET college facilities? The FET Colleges Audit that was done in 2010 by the HSRC gives valuable information about this sector but paints a rather bleak picture:

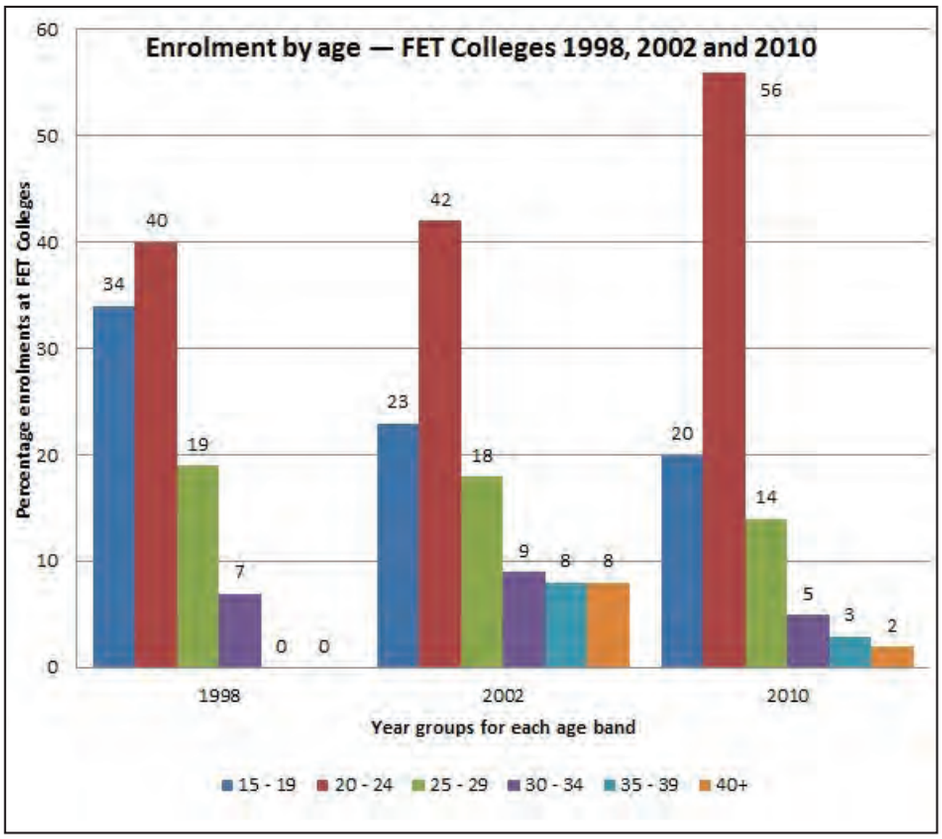
- Learner enrolment has declined. With a benchmark measure established by the National Business Initiative of 406 143 leaners in 2002, total enrolments have fluctuated between 290 000 and 330 000 in the period 2007–2010. This poor enrolment growth has occurred even though government has committed to expanding enrolments in the sector to 1 million by 2014 and to add an additional 1 million learning opportunities per year by 2030.
- Growth in academic staffing has also remained rather flat.
- Prospects for greater institutional diversity seem poor. The FET sector was instructed in 2001 to focus only on N1–N3 (now largely NC(V)) provision rather than post-N3 levels. It is an irony, therefore, that enrolment in the N4–N6 programmes, which run contrary to governmental policy, constituted 42.6% of the FET college system in 2010, with the NC(V) programme constituting only 38.2%. It seems that the post-N3 courses are now the bedrock of the FET system in terms of size. This outcome was never planned or intended by government policy.
- Throughput rates have worsened, especially in the NC(V) programmes. Outcomes for the year-long NC(V) 2, NC(V) 3, and NC(V) 4 qualifications are extremely poor. Statistics show that 8 216 learners graduated with NC(V) 2 and 789 with NC(V) 3 in 2009. However total enrolments in 2009 comprised 93 293 candidates for NC (V) 2 and 24 637 for NC(V) 3. This suggests a completion rate of 8.8% for NC (V) 2 and 3.2% for NC (V) 3.
- At cohort level, progression rates are also exceptionally low. In 2007 26 540 learners enrolled for NC(V) 2 but only 1 194 passed the Level 4 NC(V) examinations in 2009 – a 4.4% 'cohort' progression rate. Such poor cohort progression means that tens of thousands of learners either dropped out of the sector or are literally stuck in the sector with incomplete transitions, taking up valuable places by needing to repeat failed courses and thereby restricting the entry of new learners into the system.

In the 1950s and 1960s the artisan system was the primary focus of the FET colleges. The apprenticeship system peaked in 1985 with 13 500 artisans graduating from the system. Thereafter the system declined with only 2 548 artisans graduating in 2004. (According to the audit, more recent data is not publically available.) When comparing this data with the National Planning Commission's target to produce 30 000 artisans per year by 2030 (shown in Graph 1), it seems we face a tremendous challenge.

With regard to the Department of Basic Education's target of 50% of learners to receive a NSC from a FET college and 65% of learners to obtain a FET qualification by 2014, we face another serious challenge. The audit done in 2010 showed that only 20% of learners enrolling in FET colleges in 2010 were between the ages of 15 and 19, as shown in Graph 2.



Graph 1: National Planning Commission's FET target



Graph 2: Enrolment by age, FET colleges, 2010

The above data suggests that the FET colleges system is not operating as part of a dual-track schooling system. Rather it tends to enrol students who are older, with many already in possession of a matric certificate. This is an indication that admitting students from Grade 9 is not a working proposition across the board and that strategies to increase the intake of Grade 9 learners is something that needs to be investigated and addressed in future developments. This also emphasises the importance of the public schooling system retaining learners beyond Grade 9.

The audit further suggests taking the various economic sectors that contribute to the largest part of annual income into consideration when planning is done. Such information is useful in planning for skills development. It is also true that the overall socio-economic conditions of surrounding areas in which the colleges are located impact on the ability of learners to complete their studies, the likelihood of graduates finding employment in that location and the financial viability of colleges.

The government wants school dropouts – including disheartened ones, some of whom stand on street corners daily with no hope for the future – to be able to come back to the Education and Training system.

If the R2.5 billion proposed investment in the FET college sector will bear fruit remains to be seen. However, there is no doubt that an effective FET sector would benefit the country. The role-players therefore need to seriously investigate and address the barriers that could prevent quality and expected outcomes. This is the only way that FET colleges can become institutions of choice, institutions that are just as important as universities and technical universities. ■

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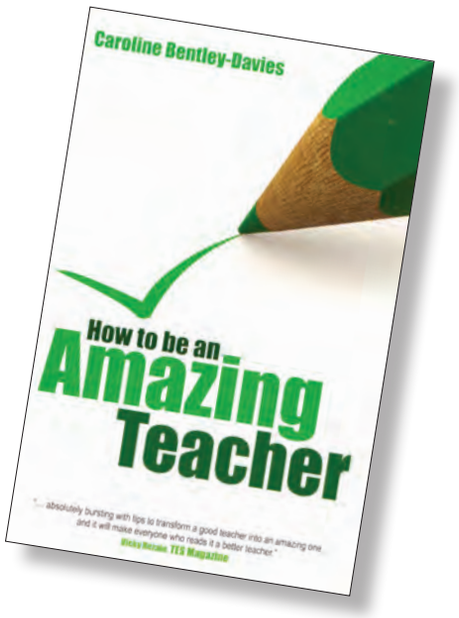
1 Cosser, M., Kraak, A., Winnaar, L. & FET Audit Project Team, *Further Education and Training (FET) colleges at a glance in 2010*: *FET colleges audit: May–July 2010.* (Commissioned by the National Board for Further Education and Training (NBFET), Human Sciences Research Council, August 2011.

2 *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025*, Department of Basic Education, Department of Basic Education, 2010

3 *National Development Plan: Vision 2030*, National Planning Commission, November 2011

Book review



How to be an Amazing Teacher
by Caroline Bentley-Davies,
Crown House Publishing, 2010
Price: R340
264 pages
ISBN: 978-184590442-5

Author Caroline Bentley-Davies has used her wide experience as teacher, inspector of schools in the UK and as an educational consultant both nationally and internationally to produce an excellent and practical guide to good classroom practice.

In her foreword, the author notes that she has observed thousands of lessons and that the book was written in response to requests for advice from teachers from across the UK who have attended her workshops and the INSET (in-service training) days that she has presented for schools and local authorities.

In its layout and style, the book is a bit like a textbook on teaching, which is in essence what it is, but I found this a bit off-putting at first. However, as I got into it, I could see the sense and logic of the approach and, although I am no longer involved directly in classroom teaching, found myself musing about my own past teaching practices as I worked through the 'thinking points' and 'reflection moments'.

The book has 18 chapters grouped into four sections. The first section 'The skills of an amazing teacher' includes chapters on teaching skills, classroom climate, learning from other teachers, lesson planning, the use of questions, group work and homework. Section 2 deals with 'Assessment for learning', while sections 3 and 4 are titled respectively 'Achievement for all', which deals with the teaching of students who are gifted and talented and/or who face barriers to learning, and 'Solving tricky issues and difficulties', which tackles issues such as body language, dealing with difficult classes and 'lifestyle management'.

In the opening chapter the author suggests that five key attributes help define what it takes to become an 'amazing teacher'. The attributes she lists and then describes in detail are enthusiasm, expertise, empathy, the ability to empower and enterprise. She then uses a 'reflective moment' to encourage the reader to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in relation to each of these attributes. This is followed by a light-hearted 10-point multiple-choice questionnaire that can be used to test your areas of strength and those which may need improving.

She uses a variety of activities of this kind throughout the book to challenge the reader to reflect on his or her practice. Some of these activities include suggestions on ways of gathering data about your teaching from the students whom you teach, from departmental colleagues and from peers. She warns that the responses to these initiatives may sometimes challenge the perceptions that you have of your strengths and weaknesses and relates a delightful anecdote about her own experience in this regard. She had invited a range of individuals including the principals of schools that she had been working with – both successfully and with difficulty – young teachers from her courses and members of her own team, to respond anonymously to a series of questions that were designed to provide data on their experience of working with her. She was, in her own words, 'astounded by the results' and thought initially that some of the answers must be mistakes but in the end a pattern did emerge. In seeking advice from her husband on the possible 'erroneous findings' she received the following response: 'If one person calls you a horse, ignore them – but if six do, buy yourself a saddle!'

The book provides a great deal of sensible, practical advice about the basics of good teaching, advice which, if put into practice in the majority of our public school classrooms, would likely lead to a significant improvement in learner performance in all subjects. Some examples include:

On the learning environment:
'The way you act in the classroom and the way it is set out can make or break your classroom management. If it is organised, clean and tidy this sends a message that you expect students to look after and respect the room. Make an effort to ensure that students clean up any paper or rubbish at the end of the lesson and that they straighten desks and chairs. It makes a clear statement that the environment matters and that you are in control of it.'

On lesson planning:
'The deepening of knowledge and understanding should be the key factors when planning lessons. Don't think about what tasks students will be doing, instead concentrate on the learning. What skills do you want them to master? What can they do already and therefore what should be their next learning steps?'

References
1 Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, *Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom assessment*, NFER Nelson, 2004.

On assessment (Citing evidence from studies by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam[1]):
Evidence shows 'that although students like to receive a numerical mark – particularly because it shows them where they are in the scheme of things – what helps them really make progress is the written comment'.

How to be an Amazing Teacher is a wonderful resource, setting out as it does in simple logical steps the skills that are needed and the processes that are involved in becoming an excellent teacher. I would recommend it for inclusion in the professional library of every school that sees excellent teaching as a school priority. ■

How to be an Amazing Teacher is available at bookshops or can be ordered through Juta Customer Services, telephone (021) 659 2300 or cserv@juta.co.za, or online at www.jutaonline.co.za

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