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Skills for the 21st century

The importance of teaching 21st-century skills is a topic that is often raised in discussions in education circles, mostly without a clear notion of what these skills are or what teaching them may entail. The terms most often bandied around in connection with these usually undefined skills mostly include words associated with the future, with technology, with teamwork and with communication. These skills are also considered to be more future-orientated and therefore of greater importance than traditional subject disciplines, and the kinds of teaching strategies that are associated with them. The outcomes-based education model, that was the foundation of Curriculum 2005, is an example of this kind of curriculum and its proponents touted it as a curriculum for the future designed to ensure that all learners developed these skills.

Given the fact that this country is now in the process of implementing what in official quarters at least is considered to be a revised version of Curriculum 2005 rather than a completely new curriculum, we thought it important to see if we could find some good, recent, well-researched definitions of what these skills entailed and the potential value of teaching them at school-level. Our literature search quite quickly turned up a commissioned, recently published report on 21st-century skills. The report was commissioned and sponsored by a group of highly regarded foundations in the USA, which asked their National Research Council to establish a committee to identify and define these skills. We have made a reasonably thorough study of a recently released, pre-publication uncorrected copy of this report, and have covered its findings fairly extensively in this edition. We hope you will find it useful and that it will help clarify your understanding of what constitute 21st-century skills, or '21st-century competencies' as they are described in the report, as well as their importance and value, and the ways in which they can be effectively taught. What we found most interesting and surprising about the findings of the committee was that other than the competencies associated with the use of new technology, the other competencies they described are almost all competencies that are normally associated with many aspects of traditional teaching methods. So, for instance, they identified 'cognitive ability' and 'conscientiousness' as important competencies, as well as subject expertise, which they noted could only be developed from 'sustained, deliberate practice' over 'months or even years'.

Early College High Schools are one of a number of alternative schooling models that are being successfully tested in the USA and which we believe may be worth investigating as an educational option in this country. They are probably best described as school-FET college hybrids because they make it possible for high school students to take and gain credit for the kinds of career-related courses that are normally only offered by FET colleges in this country. Their success in the USA has at least partly been due to their ability to help at-risk students make the link between schooling and the world of work. We believe that introducing similar models in this country could improve the employment prospects of the many under-performing over-age learners in our high schools by providing them with the essential work-related skills they need.

This edition also includes our regular guest articles by Erich Cloete. In one he unpacks some of the issues that the implementation of the the National Protocol for Programme and Promotion Requirements (NPPPR) will have for schools and for primary schools in particular, and in the other he highlights some of the key elements of the new policy on the minimum requirements for teacher education, which was Gazetted last year.

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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.

21st century skills: If we can define them can and should we teach them?

A recent report published by the National Academy of Sciences of the USA provides a number of useful and thought-provoking ideas about what are commonly referred to as 21st-century skills.

The report with the title 'Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st century'[1], is the work of a committee established by the National Research Council. This committee, which the document calls the 'Committee on Defining Deeper Learning and 21st Century Skills', was charged with the task of defining these skills, of describing how these skills relate to one another and to more traditional academic skills, and of summarising and preparing a report on their findings.

As part of the process of identifying and defining what would constitute 21st-century skills the committee identified a wide range of words and terms from the literature that were linked to the concept of 21st-century skills. A list of some of these words and terms appears in the adjacent box (What are 21st-century skills?). The committee also needed to determine whether these 'skills' are cognitive or non-cognitive in nature and, if they included both cognitive and non-cognitive elements, whether the cognitive elements could be properly defined as skills. In the end they opted to use the term 'competencies' to cover the range of attributes that they identified and chose the term '21st-century competencies' to describe these.

What are 21st-century skills?

- deeper learning
- college and career readiness
- next generation learning
- student-centred learning
- new basic skills
- higher-order thinking
- creativity
- innovation
- critical thinking
- problem solving
- collaboration
- effective communication
- motivation
- persistence
- learning to learn
- ethics

21st-century competencies as a concept

As part of their reflection on the concept of 21st-century competencies the committee noted the following:

- Terms associated with the 21st-century skills label reflect 'important dimensions of human competencies that have been valuable for many centuries rather than skills that are suddenly new, unique and valuable today.'
- 'The important differences across time may lie in society's desire that all students attain levels of mastery – across multiple areas of skill and knowledge – that were previously unnecessary for individual success in education and the workplace.'
- '... the pervasive spread of digital technologies has increased the pace at which individuals communicate and exchange information, requiring competence in processing multiple forms of information to accomplish tasks that that may be distributed across contexts that include home, school, the workplace, and social networks.'

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In addition, there is an article that examines some research findings from Australia on the roles and responsibilities of deputy-principals, which is a follow-up to the article in our previous edition that focused on the relationship between deputy-principals and their heads. There is also some news about a new course for principals being launched by the Graduate School of Business of the University of Cape Town.

Bundled with this edition is a 2013 year-planning calendar that includes guidelines for the planning process and a checklist. We made the decision to distribute the calendar with this edition rather than the next edition because we realised that to be a useful tool in the planning process the calendar needed to be made available to schools well before the start of the process. ■

Based on their research the committee identified three broad domains of competence that they thought it necessary to include in the 21st-century competency set. The three domains and their respective subsets, which they termed 'clusters', are listed below.

- Cognitive: This domain is further divided into three clusters of competencies, which include competencies such as critical thinking, information literacy, reasoning and argumentation and innovation. The three clusters are labelled as:
  - Cognitive processes and strategies
  - Knowledge
  - Creativity
- Intrapersonal: The competencies grouped in this domain include competencies such as flexibility, initiative, appreciation of diversity and metacognition (which is the ability to reflect on one's own learning and to make adjustments accordingly). The competencies are also grouped in three clusters, which were labelled as:
  - Intellectual openness
  - Work ethic and conscientiousness
  - Positive core self-evaluation
- Interpersonal: The competencies associated with this domain included communication, collaboration, responsibility and conflict resolution. They are grouped in two clusters, which are labelled as:
  - Teamwork and collaboration
  - Leadership.

In response to the question: 'Are 21st-century competencies important for success in education, work, health and other life contexts?' the committee concluded that: 'The available research evidence is limited and primarily correlational in nature; to date, only a few studies have demonstrated a causal relationship between one or more 21st-century competencies and adult outcomes.' Put more simply they found that the available evidence shows that some of these competencies may influence future success in education, work, health and in life generally but that the evidence was not able to show whether these competencies were the cause of this success.

The committee was, however able to reach three conclusions in relation to some of the competencies that they had identified. These conclusions were:

1. 'Cognitive competencies have been more extensively studied than interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies' and that they show 'consistent, positive correlations (of modest size) with desirable educational, career, and health outcomes'. They also found that 'early academic competencies are positively correlated with these outcomes'. Put in layman's terms, they found that intelligence matters.
2. 'Among interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies, conscientiousness (a tendency to be organised, responsible and hardworking) is most highly correlated with desirable educational, career and health outcomes.' By contrast, anti-social behaviour, which they noted has both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions, were found to be negatively correlated with these desirable outcomes. Again in layman's terms being conscientious is good while being anti-social is bad.
3. Educational attainment – the number of years a person spends in school – was found to 'strongly predict adult earnings' and it also predicts 'health and civic engagement'. It was also evident from their findings that individuals with higher levels of education appear to gain more knowledge and skills on the job than those with lower levels of education, and that these individuals were also able, to some extent, to transfer what they learn across occupations. Because it was not possible to determine what mixture of cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies account for the labour-market benefits that these individuals gained, they suggested that additional years of schooling and the promotion of educational attainment may be the most appropriate strategy for improving student proficiency in these 21st-century competencies. Simply put, the more years of schooling and of post-school education, the better for the individual.

It is important to recognise the relevance of these findings to the way in which schools in this country approach the teaching of 21st-century skills and what they suggest about the manner in which teaching is transacted that may have the greatest influence on the extent to which students acquire and become competent in the application of these 21st-century competencies.

The value of schooling

Research findings cited in the report of the committee on the link between educational attainment and the world of work show that:

- Each additional year of schooling generates an additional income of about 10%.
- The estimated effect of schooling on earnings retains about 82% of its value over time.
- The earning advantage for individuals with a college qualification relative to those with a high-school qualification has increased from 50% higher in the mid 1970s to twice as high in 2005.
- Workers with higher educational attainments gain more non-monetary employment advantages than their less-qualified peers, including a higher sense of achievement, more prestigious occupations and greater job satisfaction. They are also more likely to be selected for further training than their less-qualified peers.
- One person with more years of schooling benefits others in the workplace by raising their level of productivity irrespective of their level of education.
- Conscientiousness is the 'big five' personality trait that best predicts overall job performance but that it is less predictive than measures of intelligence.

The table below is based on a similar but more comprehensive table drawn up by the committee. It summarises the clusters of competencies that were identified.

Competencies	Cluster	Terms used for 21st-century skills	O*NET skills[2]
Cognitive competencies	Cognitive processes and strategies	Critical thinking, problem-solving, analysis, reasoning/argumentation, interpretation, decision-making, adaptive learning, executive function	System skills, process skills, complex problem-solving skills
	Knowledge	Information literacy (research using evidence and recognising bias in sources), information and communication technology literacy, oral and written communication, active listening	Content skills
	Creativity	Creative innovation	Complex problem-solving skills (ideas generation)
Intrapersonal competencies	Intellectual openness	Flexibility, adaptability, artistic and cultural appreciation, personal and social responsibility (including cultural awareness and competence), appreciation for diversity, adaptability, continuous learning, intellectual interest and curiosity	None
	Work ethic/ conscientiousness	Initiative, self-direction, responsibility, perseverance, productivity, grit, Type 1 self-regulation (metacognitive skills including forethought, performance and self-reflection), professionalism/ ethics, integrity, citizenship, career orientation	None
	Positive core self-evaluation	Type 2 self-regulation (self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-reinforcement), physical and psychological health	None
Intrapersonal competencies	Teamwork and collaboration	Communication, collaboration, teamwork, cooperation, coordination, interpersonal skills, empathy/perspective talking, trust, service orientation, conflict resolution, negotiation	Social skills
	Leadership	Leadership, responsibility, assertive communication, self-presentation, social influence on others	Social skills (persuasion)

The committee's perspectives on the concept of 'deeper learning'

The committee defined 'deeper learning' as 'the process through which an individual becomes capable of taking what was learned in one situation and applying it in a new situation', and noted that deeper learning often involves shared learning and interaction with others in a community.

The great value of deeper learning in their view is that it involves the individual in the process of developing expertise in a particular domain of knowledge and/or performance and that this expertise is then transferable to other domains. This transferability makes it possible for individuals to answer questions and solve problems in new and differing fields and circumstances and to achieve greater success in education, in work and in life as a result.

The committee, in its report, suggested that there is a need to promote those teaching practices that create positive learning communities in which students gain content knowledge while simultaneously developing intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. They noted that the level of deeper learning necessary for 'expertise' in a particular domain of knowledge requires 'months or even years of sustained, deliberate practice'. This they suggest in their report is only possible if an individual also acquires the intrapersonal competency of conscientiousness. The individual will also need a reasonable level of interpersonal competency if they are to obtain the feedback they need to reflect on, evaluate and deepen their understanding of the subject, a process that is usually described as metacognition.

Based on their findings, the committee made a number of recommendations about the kinds of teaching strategies that are most likely to help students acquire the 21st-century competencies that they identified. They emphasised the importance of research-based teaching methods in this regard and suggest that these should be included as part of all subject curricula.

The examples of research-based teaching methods they proposed include:

- The use of multiple and varied representations of concepts and tasks, including diagrams, numerical and mathematical representations, simulations, and guidance that helps students to understand the link between the various representations.
- Instructional practices that encourage students to ask questions, to elaborate on their answers and to explain what they have read or have understood.
- Setting students challenging tasks while also providing them with support to guide their understanding, and encouragement to persist with the efforts to the point where they have mastered the task.
- The use of models, case studies and worked examples to help students to understand the processes involved in problem-solving.
- 'Priming student motivation'[3] by helping students to make links between the contents and concepts of the subjects that they are dealing with and their own lives, interests and ambitions. Collaborative problem-solving was also seen as an important element of this process.
- The use of formative assessment. Formative assessment, whether formal or informal, is a vital part of any teaching process because it provides students with the important feedback that they need to understand how their learning is progressing. It also helps them to develop their ability to reflect on this feedback and to use it to further develop their understanding and skills.

In one of their recommendations the committee makes it clear the best way for students to learn the various competencies that they have identified is through subject-based teaching. They also emphasised the importance of the kinds of instructional practices that teachers adopt in teaching a subject and noted that certain practices contribute more effectively to the development of 21st-century competencies than others. They are against the use of stand-alone courses that attempt to teach these competencies in a way that is unrelated to a one or other subject discipline. They also make it clear that 'sustained instruction and effort is necessary to develop expertise in problem-solving and metacognition' and that 'there is no simple way to achieve competence without time, effort, motivation, and informative feedback'.

In looking to the future, the committee identified challenges relating to the assessment policies and systems that are currently in use in the USA and that primarily focus on the recall of facts and procedures (*sounds familiar. Ed*). These tests are mostly standardised year-end tests that are simple and quick to mark and to quantify. They go on to note that this kind of standardised testing, which is essentially summative in nature, has been designed for purposes of accountability and ease of administration, rather than as a means of measuring the kinds of competencies that learners need to acquire for success in 'education, work, health and other life contexts'. They also make the point that because the results of these tests are used as a measure of the performance of teachers, schools and education districts, teaching strategies are directed at improving learner performance in the narrow and less valuable band of competencies – the recall of facts and procedures – that these tests measure at the expense of teaching for the deeper learning that is associated with long-term success. They see this as a major shortcoming of the current system of assessment and make a number of recommendations aimed at addressing this problem. They acknowledge, however, that developing new assessment models to deal with these problems will require further research and included in their recommendations are the following:

- the need for support for the development of valid, reliable and fair assessment of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies.
- the need to design tasks and situations for purposes of assessment in mathematics, English language and the sciences, which require the application of a range of '21st-century competencies'
- the importance of including, in teacher education programmes, training in those teaching and assessment practices that promote the development of 21st-century competencies.

A great deal of what this committee has identified in their report is of relevance to our South African situation. The failure of most of our schools to help learners acquire the kinds of competencies that the committee has identified and labelled as 21st-century skills, goes a long way to explaining why even those learners who perform well in their NSC examinations are unable to find jobs or succeed in their tertiary studies. Our assessment system, like that of the USA, is largely designed to measure content and process knowledge and, as a consequence, most teachers devote insufficient time to the kinds of instructional strategies necessary to help their students acquire the deeper learning necessary for knowledge transfer and the other competencies that are closely associated with future academic success, and with success in the workplace and in life. ■

The 'big five' model of personality

The so called 'big five' model of personality is a widely accepted way of characterising personalities in the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains and is based on the 'lexical hypothesis' that proposes that language evolves in response to the most significant dimensions of human behaviour. Based on this assumption it is possible to analyse language and the way we use language to describe ourselves and others to identify the fundamental ways in which individuals differ from one another. The process of analysing languages using techniques based on the lexical hypotheses has been applied to many languages and in each instance has produced results that support the classification of human personality into five distinct major categories and it is these categories that have become known as the 'big five' personality dimensions. They are:

- openness to experience: the tendency to be open to new aesthetic, cultural or intellectual experiences
- conscientiousness: the tendency to be organised, responsible and hardworking
- extroversion: direct one's interests and energies toward the outside world of people and things rather than toward the inner world of subjective experience
- agreeableness: the tendency to act in a cooperative, unselfish manner
- neuroticism/emotional stability: the dimension that relates to one's emotional stability (predictable, consistency in emotional reaction, an absence of rapid mood changes) or neuroticism (chronic emotional instability and proneness to psychological distress).

The table below shows some of the words that are used to describe these five personality dimensions.

Dimensions	Descriptors
Conscientiousness	Competence, order, dutifulness, achievement, striving self-discipline, deliberation
Agreeableness	Trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty, tender-mindedness
Neuroticism/emotional stability	Anxiety, angry hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, vulnerability
Extroversion	Warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement seeking, positive emotions
Openness to experience	Fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, values.

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The relationship between each of these dimensions of personality type and school success has been widely researched. A study by Almlund et al.[4] in 2011, which is cited in the committee's report, looked at the extent to which each of these personality dimensions could be seen as a predictor of 'educational attainment'. Their findings showed that conscientiousness best predicts overall attainment and achievement at school and college level and that openness to experience is positively linked to educational behaviours such as regular attendance and a willingness to select more difficult courses. ■

Notes

1 This article is based on a prepublication copy and uncorrected proof of the committee's report. The report, 'Defining Deeper Learning and 21st Century Skills', Centre for Education; Division on Behavioural and Social Sciences and Education; National Research Council, can be downloaded from http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13398.
2 These are skills identified through 'expert consensus' in the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) project. O*NET is a large database of information on 965 occupations which is organises around a model that describes occupations using several dimensions including worker characteristics and requirements.
3 This is a direct quotation from the text of the report that we used as the basis for the article and we were delighted with the use of the word 'priming' in this context because it so aptly articulates that motivation is driven by intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors.
4 Almlund, M., Duckworth, A.L., Heckman, J.J., Kautz, T. 2011. Personality psychology and economics. IZA Discussion Paper 5500.

SM&L comment

The aspect of the Committee's report that we found most surprising was the extent to which their findings mirrored many of the traditional elements of the curriculum, of schooling and of classroom practice.

In terms of the curriculum, they emphasise the importance of subject-based teaching and the need for students to master not only the content knowledge but also the framework of rules, conventions and terminology that govern its use. Their definition of 'deeper knowledge' and the processes required to acquire deeper knowledge emphasise this point. They suggest that it is about developing a level of expertise in a particular field and that the development of expertise requires persistent hard work over extended periods of time.

Besides their emphasis on subject-based teaching with a focus on deeper learning, they also emphasise many of the traditional values associated with the teaching and learning process. Conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and emotional stability (the dimensions of personality identified in the 'big five' model of personality) are all seen as important attributes. The importance of teamwork can be added to these because although it would not normally be viewed as a traditional learning strategy in the classroom, the importance of teamwork has a long association with traditional forms of schooling and particularly with school sport.

If we were to attempt to draw out the 'new' competencies that the committee identified we would point to competencies such as the ability to communicate across multiple platforms, research and problem-solving skills, both as an individual and as part of a team, and creativity, particularly in relation to using existing knowledge and skills to solve problems in unique and constructive ways.

So if we were to provide a word of advice about teaching 21st century skills it would be to first make sure that the children you teach have mastered the basics of language and number and that they understand the importance of persistence and disciplined effort. Once they have mastered these competencies, set them a range of challenging tasks within your school's subject offering that stretch their thinking and test their skills in new and unique ways.

Early College High Schools – a novel alternative for at-risk high school students

Early College High Schools, introduced into the education system in the USA in 2002 to offer at-risk students in public high schools an alternative pathway to post-school education, are proving to be a successful bridge between high school and college education.

Early College High Schools are hybrid institutions that make it possible for high school students to complete their schooling in a college-style environment with the option of obtaining credits for college courses while they are finishing their schooling. The first three Early College High Schools were opened in 2002 but their success has been such that there are now more than 230 similar colleges spread across 28 states in the USA serving more than 75 000 students.

Initially the Early College High Schools were established in an effort to encourage at-risk students in high schools to persevere with their education beyond high school to the point where they could exit the system with a diploma or degree and better employment prospects. Research undertaken in the USA suggests that two years of college is the minimum requirement for employment prospects and the opportunity of becoming 'middle class' at least in economic terms. The highest attrition rates in the USA are between high school and college with the majority of young people who exit the system at this point typically coming from groups categorised as one or more of the following: low-income, African-American, Hispanic, 'Limited English proficient/English language learners' and 'first-generation college goers'. Typically, they are individuals who struggle academically, who may not be able to afford college fees and who may not understand the long-term economic benefits that a college diploma or university degree can provide.

The success of these colleges in achieving their purpose, particularly in relation to the groups that they target, is at least partially due to their ability to design courses that students see as relevant and that are perceived to be directly linked to the world of work and to future employment prospects. The Early College High School webpage[1] suggests that they are effective in achieving their purpose because they use 'a bold approach, based on the principle that academic rigor, combined with the opportunity to save time and money, is a powerful motivator for students to work hard and meet serious intellectual challenges' and that they 'blend high school and college in a rigorous yet supportive program, compressing the time it takes to complete a high school diploma and the first two years of college'. The Early College High School website is a product of the Early College High School Initiative, which is an organisation established to support designated Early College High Schools. The website provides resources and support for teachers and school developers of these schools.

Although for the purposes of this article we have used 'Early College High Schools' as a label for these schools, the schools are not all the same and are not defined as a school type in the literature that we perused in our research for this article where they were mostly described as 'early college high schools'. There are, however, a number of characteristics common to all of these schools. These include:

- a vision and learning environment that represents community interests and student needs
- the opportunity for students to earn an Associate's degree or up to two years of transferable college credits while at high school
- reward for students who do well in the form of an option to enrol for and complete college-level courses and earn up to two years of college credits for free. This makes it possible for students to complete college diploma and degree courses in fewer years.
- a learning environment that provides extensive academic and social support in smaller classes but that is also academically demanding and rigorous
- a simplified transition to the school's partner college eliminating the need for students to apply for admission to the partner college and for financial aid.

In addition to the above the early college schools also offer their students a college-style social environment

False Bay College in Khayelitsha: Converting FET colleges like False Bay College in Khayelitsha, shown here, to 'early college high schools' is one way of providing opportunities for the many over-age learners currently in the schooling system to gain employment skills while completing their schooling.

treating students more as young adults than as adolescents. For students from early college schools, college life is therefore familiar terrain and they are better equipped to cope with the college lifestyle and academic approach than their peers who enter colleges directly from traditional high schools. Perhaps the most important attraction of these early college high schools to students and their parents is the fact that the courses that they offer, including the college level courses, are free.

Colleges and their associated early college schools use a number of strategies to support the partnership and ensure that there is good coordination between the work of the two institutions with administrators and lecturers from the college participating in the work of the early college schools on both a formal and informal basis. Their participation includes involvement in the planning processes of the schools, including curriculum planning; in the provision of tutors and mentors; by serving on the schools' governing boards; and by providing appropriate bridge courses to assist students in making the transition from school-style courses and teaching to college-type offerings.

The funding model used to fund early college high schools is the same as that for the USA's public schools where schools are funded from public money allocated to each education district by the state fiscus.

The cost of early college high schools has been estimated to be between 5% and 15% more than the cost of more traditional public schools. Start-up funds for the early college high schools that are part of the Early College High School Initiative come from a number of foundations including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. This involvement of some of the USA's largest corporate benefactor organisations suggest that they hold a positive view about the value of the early college high schools.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the early college high schools are achieving their purpose. Preliminary data shows that of the 5 414 students who 'graduated' from early college high schools in 2010:

- 23,3% graduated with an Associate's degree or technical certificate
- 77% proceeded to post-secondary education of some type with 52% enrolled in four-year colleges, 23% enrolled in two-year colleges and 2% in technical programmes
- 80% of the schools had pass rates equal to or better than the pass rates of the school district in which they are located with an average graduation (pass) rate of 84%, which compares favourably with the school district average of 76%. ■

SM&L comment

In SM&L Volume 6 Number 3 we included two articles about the challenges of over-age learners in our public high schools, the challenges that they pose for their schools and the opportunities that are available to them. Most of these learners are likely to either drop out of school at some point before their Grade 12 year or to exit the system at the end of Grade 12, without a National Senior Certificate, to join the growing number of poorly educated, jobless and increasingly disaffected youth of this country. Although some may go on to find employment or further their education, most will not, not only because the schooling was inadequate but because it did not equip them with the skills they needed and the process they needed to follow if they hoped to find a job and/or to gain admission to an FET college or to an apprenticeship programme.

Some of the challenges that these learners face could well be addressed if the education establishment of this country were to introduce early college high schools of the kind that we have described in this article. The early college high schools were established in the USA to address problems that are very similar to the problems encountered by many of our own rural and township children who are second-language learners, who are poor and whose parents are mostly poorly educated or illiterate. Early college high schools modelled on those described in the article would provide learners who struggle at school with several important benefits that are not currently available to them in their schools, including:

- *a curriculum that is more aligned with their needs and with the world of work*
- *an institutional environment that is more appropriate to their social status as young adults*
- *opportunities to choose and complete college-level courses that are aligned with their personal and career interests*
- *a simpler transition from school to college to employment and the world of work*
- *free access to linked colleges.*

It is possible to argue that the early college high schools are similar to our technical high schools or to our current FET colleges but this would not be true as they differ in a number of important respects. The technical high schools in most instances will only admit learners who are strong in mathematics and the sciences and the FET colleges generally only accept students after they have exited from schools. The only example of an early college high school-type institution that we are aware of is the forbearer of the College of Science and Technology (COSAT) in the Khayelitsha township in Cape Town, which grew out of a 'school' started in the False Bay College situated in Khayelitsha. COSAT's founders established the school, which catered for learners in Grades 10–12, in an effort to provide quality instruction in science and mathematics to children from Khayelitsha who showed promise in these two subjects. COSAT is now a fully fledged public school but had many of the characteristics of an early college high school during the period when it was situated in the False Bay College. The majority of the students who graduated from COSAT during this period went on to further their studies either at the False Bay College or at other colleges, technikons or universities in the region. Some of these students went on to complete tough degree courses qualifying as doctors, engineers and architects at one or other of Western Cape's prestigious universities. COSAT provides good evidence that the model can work in this country. What we need therefore is a greater commitment to looking at alternatives that better meet the needs of what is probably the largest and most troubling socio-economic group in this country.

Note

1 http://www.earlycolleges.org/overview.html#basics5

Programme and promotion requirements – helping school management teams to unlock the power of the NCS

Erich Cloete

The implementation of the National Protocol for Programme and Promotion Requirements (NPPPR) will have a number of implications for schools and for primary schools in particular.

The National Protocol for Programme and Promotion Requirements (NPPPR) forms part of the National Curriculum Statement for Grades R–12. This is a document that is organised into the four phases of schooling. Policy is established for each phase with regard to the following:

- the approved subjects
- the programme requirements for the grades, which is an indication of which subjects or combination of subjects must be taken
- the promotion requirements
- assessment, which indicates the ratio between school-based assessment and the final examination mark, if any
- recording and reporting, which describe the scale of achievement and the way in which teachers must record and report. The scale indicates the achievement levels, descriptors as well as marks (%)
- time allocation, which stipulates the instructional time for each subject.

The FET section further deals with duration, entrance requirements, provisos that relate to conditions, stipulations or limitations with regard to programmes and/or subjects for the National Senior Certificate, concessions to accommodate immigrants and barriers to learning, changing of subjects, certification requirements and supplementary exams.

The purpose of policy is to regulate how we operate in a particular environment and the policy is linked to the objectives of that environment, in this instance education. It must be noted that a policy is worth nothing if there is no equivalent action in the places that need it most. The effective implementation of the NPPPR is therefore important to ensure consistency in all schools. To support principals and SMTs we decided to explore some aspects of the NPPPR and give directions with regard to the practical implementation of the policy, specifically from a primary school's perspective. However, please note that the NPPPR is phased in according to the CAPS implementation policy, which sees Grades R–3 and 10 being implemented in 2012, Grades 4–6 and 11 in 2013, and Grades 7–9 and 12 in 2014.

Foundation Phase (Grades R–3): programme and promotion requirements

In the Foundation Phase, compared to the three learning areas previously offered in Grades 1–3, learners need to offer three subjects – previously called learning areas – in Grade R and four in Grades 1–3. A learner in Grade R must offer one official language at Home Language level, Mathematics and Life Skills, while a learner in Grades 1–3 must offer four subjects, namely one official language at Home Language level, one official language at First Additional Language level (this must be a different language from the language that is taken at Home Language level), Mathematics and Life Skills.

Principals must also take note of the new promotion requirements. The ideal would be for learners to progress with their age group as they obtain the promotion requirements but there may be learners who are unable to perform at the next level. These learners should be thoroughly assessed to determine the level of support they need. The NPPPR suggests that learners may be allowed to progress even if they have not complied with all the promotion requirements to prevent learners from being retained in the phase for more than four years. Grade R is not included in this definition and it is only applicable to Grades 1–3. The policy informing the Foundation Phase does not make it clear whether progression may be used where a learner failed to achieve the promotion requirements and where the learner has not been detained previously. The suggestion would be that it may happen only to prevent a learner from remaining in a phase for more than four years.

The guidelines in the NPPPR make provision for promotion requirements of a higher level than in the past, which is an improvement. A Grade R learner needs to obtain 50% or level 4 in the language taken at Home Language level and 40% or level 3 in Mathematics. Previously, in Grades 1–3 most districts regarded 35% (a level 2 achievement) in languages and Mathematics as adequate for a learner to progress to the next grade. This was low and not good practice as it contributed to knowledge and skill gaps in future years, which were difficult to turn around, especially in poor socio-economic areas where resources and parent support are limited. The new guidelines in the NPPPR specify that a learner needs to achieve 50% (level 4) in one official Home Language or 40% (level 3) in the First Additional Language and 40% (level 3) in Mathematics. It is interesting to note that the Annual National Assessment (ANA) is written to monitor and improve levels of performance in Home Language among other things, and the NPPPR supports this by allocating most instructional hours per week to teaching the home language, but then the same policy document states that a learner can achieve less than 50% in Home Language, even 10 % and still be promoted to the next grade.

Assessment

The NPPPR reports briefly on assessment and we would like to refer you to the National Protocol for Assessment Grades R–12, which was discussed in SM&L Vol. 6 No. 1 of 2012. The NPPPR states that for learners in Grades R–3 the school-based assessment mark as determined during the school year will make up 100% of the total mark.

Recording and reporting: seven achievement levels

Seven levels of competence have been described, which is one of the more significant changes to the previous curriculum. These achievement levels and descriptions, as shown in Table 1, are used to report and record and will assist teachers to grade learners at the correct level. They are used for all the subjects listed in the NCS Grades for R–12.

Table 1: Achievement scales and descriptors

Achievement level	Achievement description	Marks (%)
7	Outstanding achievement	80–100
6	Meritorious achievement	70–79
5	Substantial achievement	60–69
4	Adequate achievement	50–59
3	Moderate achievement	40–49
2	Elementary achievement	30–39
1	Not achieved	0–29

Although the implementation of the seven-point achievement scale must make it easier to grade learners at the correct level, some teachers in the Foundation Phase are still struggling with it, especially when they have to assess certain aspects of Grade 1–3 learners' performance. One suggestion would be to simplify the assessment in terms of the mark given and then convert the mark obtained to the seven-point scale. Time must be set aside for educators to meet regularly to discuss challenges and findings and to seek solutions. The head of department must make provision for this in the Foundation Phase management plan.

Time allocation

The instructional time is 23 hours for Grades R–2 and 25 hours for Grade 3. This makes provision for the First Additional Language (FAL), which is formally introduced in Grade 1 and with a stronger focus on the FAL in Grades 2 and 3. Table 2 shows the required hours of instruction stipulated for Grades R–3 as set out in the NPPPR.

Table 2: Time allocation

Subject	Grade R (hours)	Grades 1 and 2 (hours)	Grade 3 (hours)
Home Language	10	7 to 8	7 to 8
First Additional Language		2 to 3	2 to 3
Mathematics	7	7	7
Life Skills	6	6	7
Total	**23**	**23**	**25**

We would also suggest that schools utilise the maximum hours for English, whether it be as Home Language or First Additional Language. Principals and heads of department must realise that the time allocation does not make provision for breaks, assemblies, extramural activities, computer lessons or any other subject during the school day. Many schools have computer rooms but principals need to know that the NPPPR does not make provision for schools to utilise them during the school day, unless there is a direct link between the information taught and CAPS.

The NPPPR further instructs principals to make time available within the instructional time to support learners who experience barriers to learning, but gives no indication of how this should be done. One suggestion would be to maximise the use of ability groups in the Foundation Phase and to organise additional support within the subject allocation time as per time slot. As it is important for learners to have a positive and exciting learning experience throughout their time at school, School Based Support Teams will have to develop a workable strategy to support these learners.

Intermediate Phase: Grades 4–6

The NCS for Grades R–12 is phasing in Grades 4–6 and 11 in 2013. One of the major changes apart from the reduction of learning areas in Grades 4–6, their becoming subjects and the new promotion requirements, is the extension of the school day to 27,5 hours to increase instructional time. The time allocated to breaks, assemblies, extramural activities, computer classes and so forth is excluded from this time allocation. The effective implementation of the new time allocation of 27,5 hours could be challenging to some schools if they have not complied fully with the policy that set the current time allocation of 26,5 hours contact time. Many primary schools participate in school sports leagues on weekday afternoons and the extension of the school day will have an effect on the amount of time available for these activities. Another factor is the instructional time for Grade 7 learners, which will still be 26,5 hours in 2013. Schools should consider the practical implication if the Grade 7 learners continue with the status quo of 26,5 hours of teaching and how this would affect the timetable and extracurricular programme of the school. Principals must remember that what really matters to improve academic achievement is to maximise academic learning time. If the longer school day is not used productively, the chances for improvement are slim. The suggestion in this instance would be to extend the school day of the Grade 7 learners to equal the 27,5 hours of the Intermediate Phase. Firstly, it will prepare the learners for the extended school day that is to follow in their Grade 8 year and secondly, it will make valuable time available within the curriculum allocation for support and assistance.

Timetable calculations for Grades 4–6

A time allowance of 27,5 hours a week equals contact time of 1 650 minutes per week. We recommend dividing the time into 30-minute periods and this would allow for 55 periods per week. This would enable teachers to have 60-minute block periods where necessary, for example in Home Language, which is allocated 360 minutes per week. Every day could have one 60-minute block period and every other day an additional half an hour not running concurrently with the block period. Table 3 gives a possible breakdown of the time allocation for Grades 4–6.

Table 3: Suggested breakdown of time allocation for Grades 4–6

Subject	Time (minutes)	Periods (30 minutes)
Home Language	360	12
First Additional Language	300	10
Mathematics	360	12
Natural Sciences and Technology	210	7
Social Sciences	180	6
Life Skills • Personal and Social Well-being • Physical Education • Creative Arts	240 (90) (60) (90)	8 (3) (2) (3)
Total	**1 650 (27,5 hours)**	**55**

Programme and promotion requirements

A learner must complete and offer six subjects for each of Grades 4–6. Two different official languages from the approved subjects must be selected of which one must be at Home Language level and the other at First Additional Language level. One of the languages must be the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT). The other subjects are Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Technology, Life Skills and Social Sciences. The NPPPR further provides relevant information for learners who would like to offer an additional language.

The new promotion requirements are much more specific than they were previously, which is good, as it will enable the school and parents to provide the necessary support and assistance in advance. The accepted norm is still age-group progression unless a learner displays a lack of competence to cope with the following grade's work. To be promoted a learner must achieve 50% (level 4) in the Home Language, 40% (level 3) in the First Additional Language and 40% (level 3) in Mathematics. Furthermore, a learner needs a moderate achievement – 40% (level 3) – in any other two of the remaining three approved subjects.

A learner may be allowed to progress despite not meeting these requirements only once in the Intermediate Phase in order to prevent the learner being retained in this phase for longer than four years.

Assessment, recording and reporting

School-based assessment (SBA) makes up 75% and the final exam 25% of the promotion mark. The recording and reporting scale is as currently implemented and will make use of the seven levels of competence. Teachers must record results in marks and report them as percentages. ■

References

1 National Policy Pertaining the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12

Defining and refining the role of the deputy principal

In the most recent edition of SM&L (Vol. 6 No. 3) we carried an article that examined the factors influencing the relationship between deputy-principals and principals. This led to more delving about the roles and responsibilities of deputy-principals and the extent to which how these are defined may affect their effectiveness and job satisfaction.

In an article published in *Educational Management and Administration*, Michael Harvey from the Department of Educational Policy and Administration at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia proposes 10 strategies for 'empowering' deputy-principals.

Harvey's article was based on data drawn from a survey conducted by the Western Australian Primary Deputy Principals' Association to obtain information about the 'career characteristics, the ideal and actual responsibilities of the role, and the level of job satisfaction' of practising deputy-principals. The survey, in the form of a questionnaire, collected data from 403 deputy-principals, 179 principals and 138 teachers. One of the interesting factors to come out of the survey was that many of the deputy-principals surveyed appeared not to have a professional identity. Evidence of this perception was provided by comments written on the questionnaire by some of the respondents who variously described themselves as 'dog's bodies', 'roustabouts', 'jack of all trades, master of none' and 'morning tea ladies'. Harvey suggests that these negative perceptions are a consequence of:

- unrealised expectations of being a member of an executive team where there was collegiality rather than hierarchical control
- lack of say in the duties that are assigned to them
- the reactive nature of their work day
- insufficient recognition for the work that they do from colleagues and parents
- limited opportunities for professional development
- unfulfilled career aspirations for promotion to a principalship.

The responses of the deputy-principals, just under half (44,2%) of whom expected to remain deputy-principals for the remainder of their careers, to survey questions about their ideal versus their actual set of duties and responsibilities indicated that most would prefer to have a job description that includes more leadership and development tasks and fewer organisational and administrative tasks. Preferences included greater involvement in some of the following:

- planning and policy-making type tasks, including budgeting
- staff management (programme for new teachers, staff professional development)
- curriculum management (curriculum development and implementation, programme innovation)
- programmes that involve the orientation and development of learners.

The deputy-principals survey indicated they would prefer to reduce their involvement in tasks of the following kinds:

- administrative routines (assemblies, teacher duty-schedules)
- management of substitute and relief teachers
- routine tasks involving learners (learner attendance and discipline).

Harvey suggests that the best way to 'empower' deputy-principals is to increase their level of authority within their designated areas of responsibility. Less control and a greater freedom will provide them with the space they need to not only grow professionally but to bring about improvements in their spheres of influence. He also suggests that deputy-principals themselves can contribute to their own 'empowerment' by reflecting on their own practice and working with the principal and teachers to redefine their role in a way that will increase their job satisfaction. Harvey suggests 10 strategies that could be used to 'empower' deputy-principals and lead to greater job satisfaction. We have provided a brief summary of eight of these strategies below.

Strategy 1: Use reflective practice to develop a high level of awareness of your own view of the purpose of your role and how this guides your daily practice and routines. Clarification of your own view of the purpose of your role will help you to refine your role in a way that will enhance your contribution to the effective running of the school and the achievement of its goals. It will also lead to increased job satisfaction.

Strategy 2: Shape the role by increasing your involvement in and taking greater responsibility for those facets of your job that involve leadership issues such as planning and policy-making while reducing involvement in basic operational and administrative routines. One way in which a deputy can reduce his/her administrative load is by delegating some of her administrative tasks to heads of department or even post-level 1 teachers. This kind of delegation helps grow the management skills of more junior members of staff while helping the deputy to develop his/her delegation and supervisory skills.

Strategy 3: Develop a network of social relationships and shared communication within the school. The manner in which principals deal with their responsibilities and perform their duties is heavily influenced by the high levels of accountability that are attached to their role as head of the school. The accountability factor makes it far more difficult for them to engage teachers in an informal and collegial manner about things that may affect them. This need not be true of deputies, who can enhance their own standing and effectiveness as a leader within the school by developing a network of social relationships within the staff that allow them to exert influence outside of the formal hierarchical structures of the school. This influence can then be used to help staff to better understand the school's priorities and to focus their efforts on those priorities and tasks that will help the school to achieve its goals.

Strategy 4: Focus your efforts on those administrative and curriculum processes that will lead to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. While instructional leadership should be the key priority of principals, the multiple demands on their time mean that they are often not able to devote as much time and energy to instructional leadership as they should. Deputy-principals can enhance their status within the school by increasing their involvement in leadership and management processes linked to classroom practice and the professional development of teachers.

Strategy 5: Develop your capacity as an initiator, facilitator and advisor. The authors of the article suggest that many of the deputy-principals in the study preferred to retain authority for the traditional responsibilities assigned to them, including student discipline, emergency procedures and the day-to-day management of physical amenities and resources because of the power that resides in the control of these high-profile activities. They suggest that this is because they view their schools as hierarchical structures with leaders exercising authority and influence through superordinate–subordinate relationships. They suggest that deputies may be better off adopting the 'un-heroic' leadership model described by Murphy in a critique of 'heroic' leadership. 'Un-heroic' leaders, according to Murphy, display the following characteristics:

- They work to develop a shared vision rather than promoting a personal vision.
- They ask questions rather than offering answers.
- They are able to cope with weakness as well as display strength.
- They listen and acknowledge rather than talk and persuade.
- They depend on others rather than exercise power.
- They let go rather than take charge.

The authors suggest that this may be a better way for deputies to approach their role and responsibilities because it is an approach that empowers other and helps build a culture of reflection and professional growth.

Strategy 6: Promote the concept of team-leadership and shared accountability. This strategy grows out of strategy 5 and suggests that deputy-principals should work at moving the school's leadership model away from the traditional hierarchical approach with clearly defined layers of leadership to one in which the focus is more team-based with fewer layers and greater levels of collegiality and shared responsibility for all aspects of performance.

Strategy 7: Seek opportunities for 'authentic' professional development. Authentic professional development involves more than simply increasing your array of skills and includes greater emphasis on active learning, on more reflective practice and on developing new ways of thinking about how you approach your work. It also includes the more difficult task of turning away from old ways of thinking and established practices.

Strategy 8: Look to get the right balance between your teaching load and your administrative load. The administrative and teaching load that many deputies are forced to carry can impose unreasonable demands on their time and many find it difficult to do justice to all of the tasks that are assigned to them. Lesson preparation and the quality of their marking is often the first casualty of the overload, which is not an ideal situation because individuals who occupy leadership positions within the school should also be setting an example in terms of the quality of teaching and learning that takes place in their classrooms. While it is important that deputies teach, they should try to negotiate a lesser teaching load so that they can devote themselves more fully to the classes that they do teach.

Deputy-principals play an important part in managing the operational efficiency of good schools but are unlikely to realise their full potential as leaders and future principals if they are not provided with opportunities to grow professionally and the space to reflect on their practice. Providing deputies with opportunities to explore, develop and grow their talent will not only benefit the schools in which they serve but also the broader schooling system by ensuring that there is a ready supply of future school leaders who are fully equipped for the demands of principalship. ■

References

1 Michael Harvey, 1994. Empowering the Primary School Deputy Principal, *Education Management and Administration* 22: 1

Minimum requirements for teacher educations qualifications – reimagining teacher training in South Africa

Erich Cloete

With a new national policy on minimum requirements for teacher education, educational institutions have to take a fresh look at their teacher-qualification programmes.

Mr Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education, has determined a new national policy on the minimum requirements for teacher education, which is stipulated in *Government Gazette* 34467 of 15 July 2011[1]. The aim of the policy is to ensure that the Higher Education systems produce the teachers the country needs to increase throughput rates, achieve better pass rates and have a greater number of learners who pass with a Higher Certificate and Bachelor's pass. All institutions providing teacher-qualification programmes are therefore required to develop new and compliant teacher-qualification programmes.

The last date for the intake of students into the old National Qualification Framework (NQF) levels (eight-level structure) will be July 2014. This migration of qualifications from the old eight-level NQF to the new ten-level NQF comes after the former Minister of Education Naledi Pandor proclaimed 1 June 2009 as the date the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008[2] would come into operation. The NQF Act makes provision for a ten-level framework. It is therefore important that prospective students, those who are presently studying and teachers who want to enrol for further studies know what the new policy entails.

The policy replaces the norms and standards for educators (NSE, 2000) and describes qualifications pertaining to initial teacher education (ITE), including Grade R, and continuing development of practising teachers and educators. The new Grade R qualification is important against the background of the final version of the National Development Plan (NDP), which recommends two years of compulsory schooling before Grade 1. The policy retains the seven roles of a teacher described in the NSE 2000, but emphasises that the roles must be interpreted as functions carried out by the collective of teachers in a school. The policy document refers to professional educators and teachers where the term educators includes classroom teachers, education practitioners, teaching and learning specialists, heads of departments, deputy-principals, principals, curriculum advisors, education specialists, teacher development officers, and district and regional managers. A teacher is defined as a school-based educator whose core responsibility is that of classroom teaching at a school.

The document further identifies three broad qualification routes that teachers may follow to enhance their careers, namely:

- a teaching and learning route
- a management and leadership route
- an educational planning research and/or policy development route.

The document goes further to provide examples of appropriate qualification routes. Only students who have completed the requisite accredited teacher-qualification education programmes will be employed in public education. The policy also provides the process for the up-scaling of the qualifications of those teachers who currently do not meet the prescribed qualification requirements or teachers holding historic qualifications, into the new set of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF).

The policy provides information about the entry requirement, which is a National Senior Certificate (NSC) with endorsement for university entrance, as well as the various professional and academic qualifications selected for teacher education. These qualifications are listed below:

Qualifications for Initial Teacher Education:

- Bachelor of Education degree (NQF level 7)
- Advanced Diploma in Teaching (NQF level 7)

Qualifications for the continuing Professional and Academic Development of Teachers:

- Advance Certificate in teaching (NQF level 6)
- Advance Diploma in Education (NQF level 7)
- Postgraduate Diploma in Education (NQF level 8)
- Bachelor of Education Honours degree (NQF level 8)
- Master of Education degree (NQF level 9)
- Doctoral degree (NQF level 10)

Qualification for grade R Teaching:

- Diploma in Grade R Teaching (NQF level 6)

The Grade R specification is a specialised qualification and its focus is on one specific grade in the Foundation Phase (FP). All new entrants intending to become Foundation Phase Teachers should register for a Bachelor of Education (FP) rather than for a Grade R Teaching Diploma, although those only wanting to teach Grade R may complete a diploma, which is a new qualification. Grade R is the first year of the Foundation Phase where children aged five years are prepared for formal schooling. The focus is on learning through play, developing physical coordination, and developing spoken language competence and fundamental ideas that will form the basis for the further development of numeracy and literacy.

Table 1 gives an indication of where the qualifications for teacher education fit into the NQF levels as well as the minimum credits necessary to obtain the qualification. The volume of learning required for a particular qualification is measured in notional study hours, specified in terms of a total minimum number of credits. For example, the minimum number of credits necessary to obtain a Bachelor of Education degree is 480, which should then be multiplied by 10 in order to calculate the number of notional hours, in this case 4 800 hours, which should then be planned for by the student and the institution. It should be noted that there is no automatic advancement through the qualification types. Progression to higher levels implies that cognate learning is in place to enable successful engagement with the contents of the qualification programme at higher level.

The minimum qualification for Grade 1–12 teachers is a Bachelor of Education degree or an Advanced Diploma in Teaching. The Bachelor of Education degree provides opportunities for students to specialise in the Foundation Phase (FP), Intermediate Phase (IP), or the Senior Phase (SP) and the Further Education and Training Phase (FET) of schooling. The Advanced Diploma in Teaching will be a qualification which caps an undergraduate Bachelors degree such as a BA, BSc, BCom or BSocSci. As the IP and SP are often taught in one and the same school, the learning programme leading to BEd (Intermediate Phase Teaching) will prepare IP teachers to teach Grades 4–7. For continuing development of teachers, an Advanced Certificate (Teaching), Advanced Diploma

Table 1: Teacher Education Qualifications

Note: The minimum credits are indicated in brackets.

NQF level	Teacher Education qualifications		
	Degrees	**Diplomas**	**Certificates**
10	Doctoral degree (360)		
8	Bachelor of Education Honours degree (120)	Postgraduate Diploma in Education (the policy does not specify the minimum credits)	
7	Bachelor of Education degree (480)	Advanced Diploma in Teaching (120) Advanced Diploma in Education (120)	
6		Diploma in Grade R Teaching (360)	Advanced Certificate in Teaching (120)

Improved teacher training with a focus on subject content knowledge and pedagogy offers the best long-term solution to schooling woes.

(Education), Postgraduate Diploma (Education) in Teaching or a Bachelor of Education Honours degree is required as a first post-initial professional qualification. The policy provides for students in possession of a postgraduate diploma or a BEd (Honours) degree to progress to a Masters (MEd) qualification. Holders of Postgraduate Diplomas may be required to undertake additional modules to meet the HEQF research requirements of at least 30 credits in order to obtain admission to a Master of Education degree. One of the important implications of the policy is that no prospective student who currently holds an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) will be allowed to progress to any BEd (Honours) degree. According to the new policy, all prospective students wanting to continue with a BEd (Honours) degree must have either a BEd or a B degree capped with the Advanced Diploma in Teaching.

One of the important implications of the policy is that no prospective student who currently holds an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) will be allowed to progress to any BEd (Honours) degree.

With regard to Fundamental learning, which, in the South African context, refers to learning to converse competently in a second official language, the following applies. All FP and IP teachers must specialise in First Language teaching, which is, according to the policy, the mother tongue or the language of choice on a level at which it may be used as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), together with First Additional English language teaching. The implication of this is that a teacher who selects Afrikaans as First Language must also study an African language in order to meet the language requirements relating to conversational competence.

Overall, the policy provides clear guidelines and ample information to Higher Education institutions to support them in their process to redress and develop the various education qualifications as described in the policy document. ■

References

1 The policy can be downloaded from www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=148017.

2 National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008, policy on the minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications

News

New course for principals from UCT

The Graduate School of Business (GSB) of the University of Cape Town plans to launch a new training programme for principals using teaching strategies modelled on its business courses.

UCT's Graduate School of Business, situated in Cape Town's V&A Waterfront, will host the students during the four residential components of the executive leadership course.

The course is the brainchild of Mr Rick Haw, a successful business man and former MBA graduate of the GSB. Mr Haw, who initially qualified as a civil engineer, and who served for a number of years on the school counsel of Herschel Girls School, readily acknowledges that the MBA course that he completed radically changed the way he approached his work and the way he ran his businesses. Like many South African corporates, particularly those in the engineering sector, the recruitment of sufficient black engineering graduates was a constant challenge. Over time he came to realise that a significant part of the problem lay at school level with many principals lacking the leadership and management skills they needed to run effective schools and mathematics teachers who were poorly qualified.

Now semi-retired, Mr Haw approached the GSB about the possibility of introducing an MBA-style course for principals together with an offer to find sufficient funding for the full course costs of at least a first pilot course for 25 principals. Realising that he needed to get a better understanding of the work of principals, he approached a number of people involved in schools and schooling for advice. Those he approached included current and retired school principals, district officials and academics from university faculties involved in the training of teachers and of principals. This proved useful when the GSB finally agreed to take up his offer to develop an executive leadership course for principals as it meant that he had ready access to a diverse group of knowledgeable individuals who could provide ideas and suggestions for course content and structure. This group, together with a number of additional invitees, were brought together at the GSB on 16 August 2012 to share ideas about course content and expected outputs. This structured discussion, led by Ms Mandy Lebides of the GSB, provided a host of useful ideas that the GSB plans to use in the design of the course. We have provided a list of some of the suggestions that came out of this discussion, which we were fortunate to have been able to attend, on page 22.

Although the course structure has still to be finalised, the draft proposal is for a course that extends over 18 months and that includes three seven-day intensive residential components, and one final two-day residential component when students will be expected to present their final technical reports and action-learning projects. The main phases of the programme and their component elements are set out below.

1. Initial pre-programme assessment: The pre-programme assessment will be used to select applicants and to determine whether they have the experience and competence necessary to complete a course of this kind.
2. Module 1: Personal Mastery and Managing Complexity (This is the first of the seven-day, full-time residential components. Students will stay at the GSB.) Topics covered will include:
   - 2.1 Introduction to the tools and techniques for unravelling complex human population systems
   - 2.2 Personal Mastery (Workshop 1): Developing emotional intelligence and the ability to embrace diversity
   - 2.3 Developing servant leadership characteristics.
3. Module 2: Business Acumen and Personal Mastery (This is the second seven-day, full-time, residential component at the GSB.) Topics covered will include:
   - 3.1 Developing financial acumen and responsibility
   - 3.2 Developing technological skills
   - 3.3 Developing data management skills
   - 3.4 Exposure to the regulatory environment (of education).
4. Module 3: Managing people, teams and change. (This is the third seven-day, full-time residential component at the GSB.) Topics covered will include:
   - 4.1 Negotiation skills
   - 4.2 Mediation skills
   - 4.3 Managing, monitoring and developing staff
   - 4.4 Personal Mastery (Workshop 2)
5. Module 4: Technical reports, action-learning presentations and final closure (This is a final two-day, full-time residential component.) Students will be required to present their final technical reports and action-learning projects as part of this module. The programme will include:
   - 5.1 A briefing for the final technical reports
   - 5.2 Presentations of action-learning projects
   - 5.3 A final Personal Mastery workshop.

Between modules students will be expected to work on the action-learning projects and assignments that they will be set during the residential periods. The proposed major, overarching action-learning project would require students to consider how one would design a 'relevant African school for the 21st century'. During the inter-modular periods students will be supported in their work by carefully selected and trained mentors/coaches who have previous experience as heads of schools. Students will also be expected to undertake at least one community project between each of the residential modules and to attend school/community sessions on a rotational basis, which will involve visits to the schools of their course colleagues and discussions about their policies and practices.

The draft programme proposes that students be assessed on the basis of the following reports and assignments:

- the three inter-modular position papers and three reflective papers that they will be expected to present at the end of each inter-modular period
- group assignments
- coaching reports (prepared and presented by the mentor/coach that is assigned to them)
- action-learning projects

We believe that this course represents an exciting opportunity for principals to master the leadership and management skills they need to excel as school leaders irrespective of the context in which they work. Principals who are keen to develop their skills should consider applying for admission to the course. Courses of this kind are usually very costly but there is good news for prospective applicants in this regard as Capitec Bank has agreed to support Mr Haw in his generous offer to fund the cost of the course and successful applicants will as a result receive financial support for both their tuition costs and the costs of their accommodation at the GSB when attending the residential components of the course.

For further details contact the programme co-ordinator Robyn Nefdt at UCT's Graduate School of Business (telephone: 021 406 1374, fax: 021 406 1166, e-mail: robyn.nefdt@gsb.uct.ac.za). ■

Sharing ideas: Some of the 'stakeholders' who gathered at the GSB on 16 August 2012 to share ideas about the possible structure, content and expected outputs of the proposed executive leadership course for principals.

Collated responses from participants to the structured discussions on the roles and responsibilities of effective principals and on measures that could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the course

1 The characteristics of a responsible leader

- Upholds a code of conduct
- Creates a happy energised atmosphere in the school
- Regulatory knowledge
- Curriculum knowledge
- A role model – displays integrity, honesty, respect, sincerity and ethical values
- Good discipline in both learners and staff but also learner-centred
- Develops, monitors and evaluates both teachers and staff
- Attends to his/her personal growth and believes in lifelong learning
- Is a person of vision, drive, passion and energy
- Has a sense of the broader community and establishes networks within the broader community and with other schools
- Has good soft skills, communication skills and shares leadership responsibilities
- Has a proven record of success and is presentable, personable and accessible
- Displays business sense, financial acumen and responsibility
- Has a clear vision, game-plan objective and purpose
- Distributes leadership and responsibility
- Has the courage to stand his/her ground and make decisions that are in the best interest of the school and learners
- Adopts a modern approach to technology
- Is a servant leader

2 The skills that such a principal leader would need to acquire

- Communication skills (writing, speaking, listening and networking skills)
- Emotional intelligence (able to reflect and learn, uses criticism constructively, is mindful and calm, displays assertiveness)
- Survival skills (delegates tasks, is able to screen out 'noise', has technological skills)
- Relationship management (negotiation skills, conflict resolution/mediation skills, motivational and inspirational skills)
- Instructional skills (able to teach teachers to teach, displays evidence of staff development skills)
- Cultural competence (embraces diversity)
- Organisational mastery (displays financial skills, time-management capability, data-analysis capability, project-management skills)

3 Course evaluation

The course could be considered to have been successful in achieving its goals on the basis of the following measureable changes in the participants and/or their schools:

- Paradigm change in self and in staff
- Improved staff satisfaction levels
- Improved retention rates and learner outcomes
- Ability to reflect and learn
- Willingness to risk
- Ability to leverage networks of peers for support and problem solving
- Ability to create a strong support team
- Acquisition of business acumen skills
- Improved self-confidence
- Better skilled to be an effective activist in institutional and community context
- Ability to create a more inclusive school with a diversity of students and stakeholders

Management

Monitoring teaching quality

In a comprehensive review of the literature, Kaplan and Owings[1] identified 'teaching quality' as the factor that has the greatest influence on learner performance. They also make a clear distinction between 'teacher quality', which essentially represents that package of qualities that a teacher brings to the classroom, and 'teaching quality', which represents the application of these qualities and the impact that they have on the learning process.

It should be self-evident, given the strength of the evidence supporting the link between teaching quality and learner performance, that the promotion of teaching of the highest possible quality should be the core focus area of any school improvement strategies. It also suggests that schools need to develop processes to monitor and report on teaching quality on a regular basis. One way of doing this is through the use of regular classroom observation using the 'Walk-through' model that we have reported on in the past. For the uninitiated, classroom walk-throughs are brief lesson observation visits – they usually last about 10 minutes – that collect data using a purpose-designed template on various aspects of the teaching and learning process.

To be effective, walk-throughs need to take place on a regular basis and they need to be conducted by more than one person as this will produce data that is quantifiable rather than merely descriptive.

The decision on what data to collect is likely to influence teacher classroom behaviour and it should therefore be possible to design a classroom observation instrument in a way that will encourage teachers to adopt those teaching practices that are indicators of teaching quality.

General Editor, Alan Clarke, has designed such an instrument in an effort to help a group of principals that he is working with to prod their teachers into adopting teaching strategies and classroom practices that will hopefully improve the quality of teaching and learning that takes place in their classroom and ultimately result in improved learner performance. The instrument has been reproduced on the following page.

To be effective, walk-throughs need to take place on a regular basis and they need to be conducted by more than one person as this will produce data that is quantifiable rather than merely descriptive. Using more than one person for the 'walk-through' process also helps reduce concerns about perceptions of prejudice by those whose lessons are being observed.

Once the data from a sufficient number of classroom visits has been collected, it is a simple process to capture, collate and analyse it using a spreadsheet such as Excel. An example of the kinds of information that this analysis can provide is presented on page 25 in the form of a number of graphics and represents the kind of data that could be captured from two teachers with very different ways of doing things. This kind of information, if properly used, provides principals and subject heads with pertinent data that they can use to engage individual teachers in constructive dialogue about their approach to teaching and their classroom practice.

References

1 Kaplan, L.S. & Owings, W.A. 2001. Teacher quality and student achievement: recommendations for principals, *NASSP Bulletin* Vol. 85, No. 628 (November).

Betterschools: Good practice classroom walk-through

Teacher: ____________ **Venue:** ____________ **Class:** ______ **Period:** ______
Subject: ____________ **Observer:** ____________ **Date:** ____________

1 Teacher activity

1.1 Teacher activity on entry to venue
- a. The teacher was not present.
- b. The teacher was sitting at his/her desk.
- c. The teacher was standing in front of the class.
- d. The teaching was writing on the board.
- e. The teacher was walking around the class.
- f. The teacher supervised while learners entered.

1.2 Teacher activity during observation period
- a. The teacher was not present.
- b. The teacher sat at his/her desk working.
- c. The teacher stood in front of the class giving instruction or making a presentation.
- d. The teacher walked around the class checking learner work/books.
- e. The teacher asked questions and engaged the class in discussion.
- f. The teacher supervised while learners worked on their own or in groups.

2 Teacher questioning technique

2.1 Frequency of questions
- a. The teacher did not ask any questions.
- b. The teacher asked five questions or less.
- c. The teacher asked more than five questions.

2.2 Directing of questions
- a. Questions were mostly directed to the whole class who answered as a group.
- b. Questions were mostly directed to the whole class but answered by an individual nominated by the teacher.
- c. Questions were mostly directed at an individual.

2.3 The purpose of the questions
- a. The teacher mostly asked questions to elicit answers about administrative, organisational or disciplinary issues.
- b. The teacher mostly asked questions to elicit specific answers about the lesson topic (lower-order, closed-ended questions).
- c. The teacher used a mixture of closed, lower-order questions and open, higher-order questions in a way that encouraged learners to think more deeply about the lesson topic.

3 Learner behaviour

3.1 Learner discipline
- a. The flow of the lesson was repeatedly interrupted by learner misbehaviour.
- b. Learners were attentive but passive.
- c. Learners were attentive and actively involved in the lesson.

3.2 Learner activity
- a. For most of the observation period learners worked on their own at tasks set by the teacher.
- b. For most of the observation period learners responded verbally to questions put to them by the teacher.
- c. For most of the observation period learners were actively involved in a dialogue and discussion with the teacher about the lesson topic.
- d. For most of the observation period learners listened passively and silently to the teacher.

3.3 Learner grouping
- a. Learners spent most of the observation period working on their own.
- b. Learners spent most of the observation period working in groups.
- c. Learners spent most of the observation period in whole class activity.

4 Use of textbooks and/or workbooks

4.1 Textbook availability
- a. Every learner has the correct textbook/workbook.
- b. Five or less learners did not have the correct textbook/workbook.
- c. More than five learners did not have the correct textbook/workbook.

4.2 Textbook/workbook use
- a. The teacher made use of the subject textbook/workbook during the course of the observation period.
- b. The teacher and learners made use of the textbook/workbook.
- c. The textbooks/workbooks were not used.

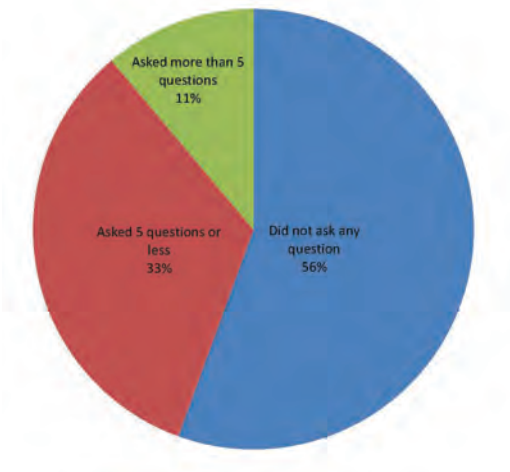
5 Use of exercise books

- a. Every learner had the correct subject exercise book open on his/her desk.
- b. All learners wrote in their books during the course of the observation period.
- c. The exercise books were not used.

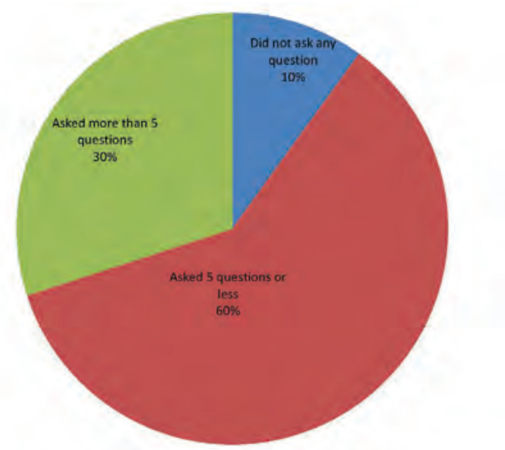
feedback that the data captured from the lesson visits can provide. The charts present the data for two different teachers on the three aspects of item 2: 'Teacher questioning technique', from the 'Betterschools: Good practice classroom walk-through' template. Illustrating patterns of teacher behaviour in this way helps teachers to reflect on their practice and makes it possible for subject heads and mentors to engage with them on their practice based on real data. ■

For more information, contact alan@betterschools.co.za.

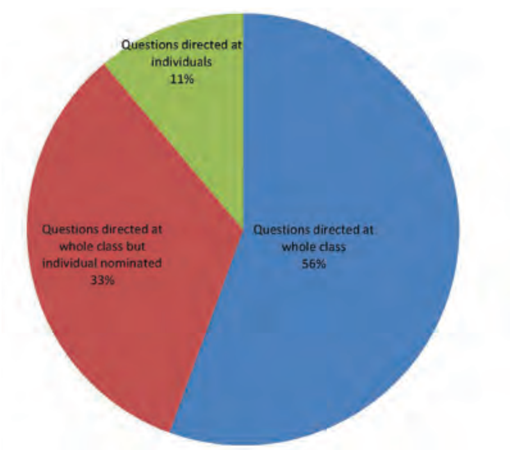
Teacher 1: Frequency of questions



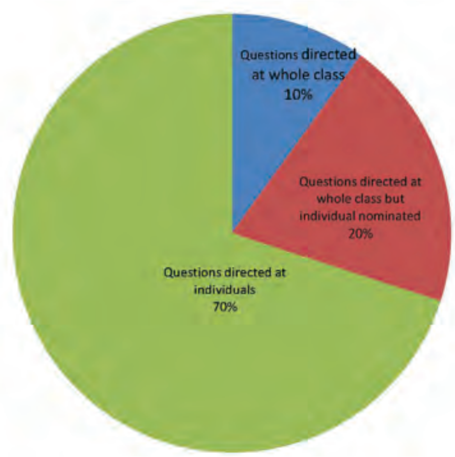
Teacher 2: Frequency of questions



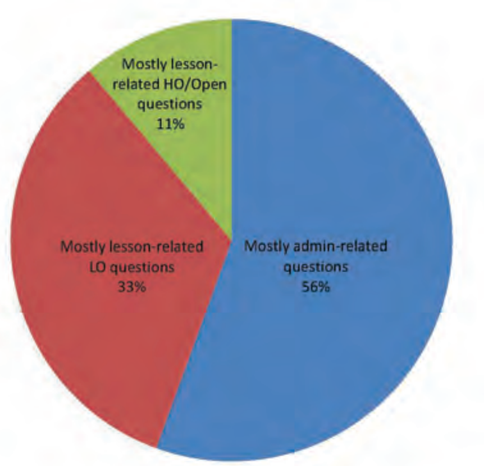
Teacher 1: Directing of questions



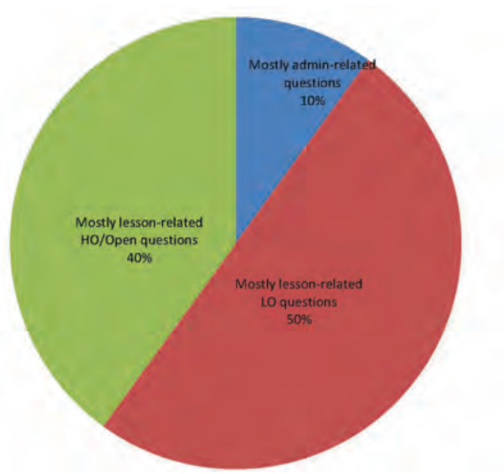
Teacher 2: Directing of questions



Teacher 1: Purpose of questions



Teacher 2: Purpose of questions



School fundraising initiatives

This article is based on notes from a workshop presented by General Editor Alan Clarke on behalf of the Umlambo Foundation to representatives from four rural schools and one township school. The schools are all reasonably successful given their circumstances but the challenges that they face in terms of accessing additional funding are exceptional. We publish the article in the hope that other schools in similar circumstances may find the advice he provides helpful.

Principals, together with one teacher and one SGB member, from each of the four schools work at their fund-raising strategies. The schools represented were Rasila Secondary School (Rural, Limpopo), Mampuso Primary School (Rural, Limpopo), Jikindaba Secondary School (Rural, Eastern Cape), Buhlebemfundo Secondary School (Township, Gauteng).

Lesson 1: Get your house in order

1.1 Treat donors ethically

Potential funders and donors that you may approach in your fundraising campaigns, including parents, face increasing demands for additional funds from a wide range of charitable organisations. Disappointingly many are also increasingly reluctant to make donations because of their past experiences of recipients who abused the generosity by using their donated funds for purposes other than those for which they were intended (including theft of the funds and the fraudulent use of funds for personal expenses). All donated funds should be fully accounted for and used only for the causes for which they were intended.

1.2 Be aware of donor fatigue

Many donors are tired and disillusioned by the constant barrage for donations that they face and as a result are becoming increasingly reluctant to donate money to causes unless they are certain that the money they donate will make a measurable difference. In the case of schools, that means they need to see improved results.

1.3 Provide proof that you are making a difference

Donors are more likely to make donations to schools that can show that the resources that they do have are well cared for and properly maintained. They are also more likely to fund schools that can provide proof that the performance of their learners is better than that of other similar schools.

Lesson 2: Identify your priorities

Before approaching a donor make quite sure that you have a very clear idea about your goals for the school and what you require to achieve these goals. The goals, and the strategies needed to achieve them, must have been agreed to and supported by all stakeholders (staff, parents, SGB members and if possible the broader community that the school serves). If you have more than one goal, the list of goals and the strategies to achieve them must be prioritised either in order of importance or in logical sequence if they are goals that build on one another.

Lesson 3: Review your budget

Your school budget must reflect your school's priorities. You must be able to demonstrate to donors that your operational budget, which is the part of the budget that shows how you plan to spend the money needed to cover the school's day-to-day operational costs, is tightly controlled and monitored. You must also be able to show that any additional funds that are not required for essential operational expenditure are directed towards those items that you have prioritised.

Donors are becoming increasingly reluctant to donate money to causes unless they are certain that the money they donate will make a measurable difference.

Lesson 4: Make savings

Carefully check every line item on your budget to see if you can make savings, and redirect the money that you save towards the cost of those items that you have prioritised. Your ability to demonstrate to donors that you have been able to use the little money that you do have effectively and efficiently, will help convince them that you will be equally careful with any funds that they may donate.

Lesson 5: Be clear about what you will use the money for

Donors need to know exactly what you intend to do with the money you are asking them to donate to your school. Be as specific as possible about what it is that you want, how it will be used, and why you think it will help bring about the changes and improvements you expect. So, for instance, if you are asking for funds to purchase 10 computers you need to be able to explain to them exactly why you need the computers, how they will be used, where they will be used, and who will use them, together with the reason why you think their use will improve learner performance.

Lesson 6: Get buy-in from stakeholders

As far as possible, everyone involved in the school should support your plan and understand the priorities that you have identified. Funders will be far more likely to provide the funds that you ask for if they know that the proposals are fully supported by all stakeholders. This is because this support provides a form of insurance that any funds that are donated will be used for the purpose for which they have been requested and not squandered or misspent.

Lesson 7: Prepare a detailed and accurate statement of the costs involved

Providing donors with a detailed and accurate statement of costs makes it easier for them to assess the validity of your request, whether it is viable and sustainable, and whether it is likely to deliver the intended outcomes. The detail, accuracy and quality of the statement that you present to them will enable them to evaluate your own commitment to the project or intervention that you are proposing. If your presentation is shoddy or filled with errors they are likely to reject it because they will assume that you run your school in the same way and that the funds they provide will be equally poorly utilised.

Lesson 8: Identify potential funders/sponsors

Once you have determined your school's priorities and identified the resources that you need to achieve these, you will be in a position to start your search for suitable potential funders and/or sponsors. If you are in the fortunate position of having a developed a positive relationship with an entity (company, NGO or individual) that may have provided you with additional funding in the past, then they are probably the best people to approach first. If not, you need to begin to search for potential funders.

A good way to start the process is by asking yourself the following four questions:

- 'Who would want to fund my school and why?'
- 'Who may be interested in funding one or more elements of this project and why?'
- 'Who may derive benefit from this project and why?'
- 'Who derives benefit from their relationship with the school that we could use to gain their funding support?'

Answers to the first question should help you to identify organisations and individuals who may be willing to fund your school. Examples may include businesses that employ large numbers of learners from your school and would like to see them better skilled or NGOs who provide funds to schools of specific types, such as rural schools, or with specific deficiencies such as schools without electricity or libraries.

Answers to the second question should help you identify organisations and individuals who provide products or resources that they are trying to promote or market and who may therefore be willing to donate items or services to your school to demonstrate their effectiveness.

Funders will be far more likely to provide the funds that you ask for if they know that the proposals are fully supported by all stakeholders.

Answers to the third question should help you to identify organisations or individuals who may benefit either directly or indirectly from the project. Parents belong in this group and may well be willing to make donations to the school for a specific project if you can convince them that it will be of direct benefit to their child. Local companies may also be willing to make donations to your school as part of their social responsibility programme. Remember also that organisations and individuals who make donations to schools may be able to set off at least some of the value of these donations against their tax, provided you issue them with a Section 18A tax certificate.

Answers to the fourth question should help you to identify local suppliers from which the school purchases the materials and services that it needs. Examples include book sellers and the companies from which the school obtains its cleaning materials, as well as those that service and/or lease the school duplicators and photocopiers.

Once you have a list of names of these suppliers you can start working on the strategies that you will use to convince them that there are advantages to be gained by investing in your school.

Lesson 9: Plan how you will reward funders for their investment

For each funder you plan to approach you need to think of creative ways to thank and reward them for the contribution that you are hoping that they will make to your school. Most funders would like to receive at least a letter of thanks and some publicity as acknowledgement of their contribution. Try to think of ways to thank and reward them that are appropriate and that will make them feel that their contribution was not only appreciated but that it also improved the image of their brand within the school and wider community. A big thank-you sign or poster prominently displayed at the entrance to the school is one example of this kind of acknowledgement. Perhaps you could offer the services of your choir or orchestra to perform at a mall or shopping centre if they have supported your school. The social media such as twitter also make it possible to send out messages of thanks that will be seen by all members of the school community. You could post a letter of appreciation on your school website, thereby making public your acknowledgement of their support.

Lesson 10: Prepare a strategy with your funder in mind

Before you approach a sponsor you need to do some homework on them so that when you approach them you do so in a way that will improve your chance of success. Start by finding out as much as you can about their values, and their vision for their business or organisation. These days most businesses and NGOs have websites and these are often a good source of information about an organisation, its values and its mission. You need to use this information to guide the way that you approach the organisation and the kind of funding proposal that you prepare to submit to them. In drafting your proposal, work to produce a document which, as far as is possible, links your school's values and mission with theirs. You need think like a salesperson because your purpose is to sell them the idea that they or their organisation will derive some form of benefit from supporting your school. It could be the goodwill of your parent body, or your learners, or the community; it could be loyalty or greater support for their business; or it could be an opportunity to advertise their goods and services or the extent of the community outreach or corporate responsibility programmes. The mere fact that you have taken the trouble to learn more about the company's or organisation's own values and mission in your preparation is likely to make them more sympathetic to your request.

As part of this preparation you also need to identify the individual or department in the company or organisation that deals with funding requests. If you are in the fortunate position of having a parent who is employed by the company, ask them to obtain this information for you. Alternatively you may need to obtain the information from the company's website or by approaching them directly.

It is far more difficult to find a potential funder than to retain a funder that has supported you in the past.

Lesson 11: Be professional in your preparation and presentation

In drafting your request, make sure that the finished product is grammatically correct and neatly formatted, if it is a written document. Get the language checked by a language teacher and ask several people whose opinions you value to read and provide critical comment on both the content and the quality of presentation. Written documents should be brief and to the point. A summary in point form at the start of the document is always helpful because it will ensure that whoever reads the document is quickly able to assess, from their perspective, whether your proposition has merit. Your priority is to get them to read the document but it may well end up unread in their recycling bin if it is too wordy or it takes too long to get to the point.

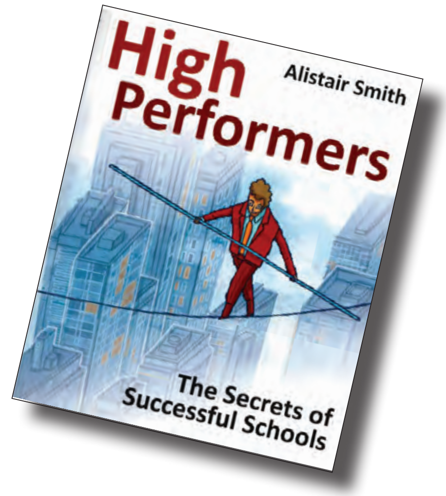
Wherever possible, make an appointment with the person who deals with the kind of funding request that you are asking for. It is far better to present the document in person because it provides you with an opportunity to make some verbal input and to answer any questions that they may have. Once you have made the appointment prepare thoroughly for it, dress appropriately and make sure that you are punctual. Remember that you are there to make an impression and to convince them that any investment in your school will represent money well spent.

Lesson 12: Work to develop a long-term relationship

It is far more difficult to find a potential funder than to retain a funder that has supported you in the past. This is why it is so important to give any funder that has supported your school plenty of feedback on how the project they are funding is progressing and more importantly the benefits that the school is deriving from their support.

We have provided some suggestions in the discussion of lesson 9. Other suggestions include an official thank-you event such as a school assembly or parents meeting, an invitation to present the prizes at prize-giving and special mention in school newsletters, on the school's website and in the school magazine. Remember that you are trying to build a positive relationship with your funder and one that will endure over time. The extent to which you are willing to invest in the relationship will to a large extent determine the extent to which your funding partner is willing to reciprocate with future investments. ■

Book review



High Performers: The Secrets of Successful Schools
By Alistair Smith
Price: R320
Published by Crown House Publishing, Wales, 2011
ISBN: 978 184590687 0

This is an excellent book, carefully structured and filled with practical ideas and tips derived from successful strategies implemented in real schools. The book is based on work undertaken by the Specialists Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) in the UK, which investigated the leadership cultures of some of the most successful non-selective state schools in England. The study was conducted at 20 schools, 15 of which were schools identified by SSAT for the purposes of the study and an additional five 'high performance' schools added by the author and which he considered as his 'outliers'.

SSAT made its selection of 15 schools based on a set of criteria that included:
- non-selective admission policy
- outstanding Ofsted reports (Ofsted is the equivalent of our National Education Evaluation and Development Unit, which has still to become fully operational and is effectively a kind of school inspectorate that visits schools and publishes reports on its findings.)
- low internal variability (i.e. the range of performance of learners within grades or age cohorts was consistently good)
- high 'Contextual Value Added' scores (These are performance measures that take into consideration the context in which individual schools operate, making comparisons between the performances of schools more fair.)
- at least three years of progress (improving performance).

The process of identifying common characteristics of the original 15 schools identified by the SSAT was based on a carefully structured school visit that involved four elements with approximately 45 minutes set aside for each:
- a school walk-through with a member of the school leadership team (SLT)
- an interview with a member of the teaching staff who is relatively new to the school and has at least two years of experience at the school
- an interview with two 'representative middle leaders'
- an interview with the principal.

The interviews were intended to gather information on 10 broad categories of school culture and performance. These were:
1. core purpose
2. student outcomes
3. student learning
4. classroom learning
5. curriculum offering
6. professional development
7. staff roles, responsibilities and profile
8. the school as a community
9. engagement with parents and careers
10. engagement with the wider community.

While it should be clear that a short visit of this kind cannot provide comprehensive and in-depth data about the functionality of each of the schools, this was not the purpose of the exercise. Rather Smith and his team aimed to identify those factors that were both common to the schools and that contributed to their overall success. A brief summary of his findings in each of the categories is provided in the adjacent box.

In the preface the author uses a troupe of high-wire performers called the 'Flying Wallendas' as a model for the kind of approach that he suggests those who seek to be consistent high performers need to adopt. The troupe, which has been performing since the 1920s, is named after the Wallenda family who form the core of the troupe. The troupe gained 'notoriety' for the risks they take and over the years a number of the troupe have been killed as a result of falls from the high wire during the course of some of their stunts, which are often performed without the protection of a safety net! Author Alistair Smith admires the troupe for their commitment to what they do, for their complete dedication to acquiring the strength, skills, teamwork and mental toughness that they need to perform at the level that they do, and to their great optimism that they can achieve what they set out to achieve despite the risks that it may involve.

The book is structured around the 'Flying Wallendas' theme and is divided into three sections:

- 'One: The high wire – leaders inspiring', which looks at leadership issues and includes chapter titles such as 'The first 10 steps', 'Staying the course' and 'Exacting self-scrutiny';
- 'Two: The trapeze – teachers performing', which includes chapters with titles such as 'Build from the basics' and 'Stretched through challenge'.
- 'Three: The human pyramid – managers supporting', which includes chapters on 'The middle leader role' and 'Challenging: ask the right questions'.

In each chapter of the book Smith unpacks the common factors that he has identified from his visits to the schools and uses data he gathered, including anecdotes from the interviews, to describe and clarify the processes that were involved in getting the schools to the performance levels they have achieved. He then uses this information to make recommendations and suggest strategies that schools seeking to emulate their achievement could adopt. So, for example, in Chapter 2 ('The first 10 steps') he makes the following recommendation for leaders: 'Recognise that the journey to high performance may take five to seven years and plan accordingly'. This is followed by 10 steps, with a recommendation linked to each step. The 10 steps and associated recommendations are:

- Step 1: Be visible and use five Cs.

Recommendation: Ensure that the leadership team are visible and have a strong 'presence' around the school.

- Step 2: Take early action.

Recommendation: Obtain quick wins and initiate important slow fixes.

- Step 3: Get the basics in place.

Secure a framework for discipline and standards, and strive for consistency of response from all staff.

- Step 4: Make learning more engaging:

Recommendation: Insist on lessons that engage, have pace, structure and challenge. An effective school is full of effective classrooms.

- Step 5: Review the curriculum offering.

Recommendation: Ask hard questions about what's on offer in the curriculum and how it is accessed.

- Step 6: Build the school as a community.

Recommendation: Build a sense of community through shared successes, symbolic moments and interventions.

- Step 7: Provide challenge and support.

Recommendation: Let staff know that if they do their best for students you will support them provided their best is good enough and, if not, you will act.

- Step 8: Get on top of data.

Recommendation: Get on top of data, tighten monitoring and accountability and be open and honest to take staff with you.

- Step 9: Build productive partnerships.

Recommendation: Start to build productive partnerships but focus down to 20%, which will give you the 80% return.

- Step 10: Make it safe for learning to occur.

Recommendation: Build a safe environment with strong school values where students and staff can focus on and enjoy learning.

Each of the chapters offers similar sets of recommendations, together with useful ideas and suggestions linked to the topic that it addresses. The book is stimulating and thought provoking and offers a wealth of practical leadership and management advice about school improvement strategies that work. It would make an excellent addition to the professional library of school leaders and is a useful source of ideas for staff professional development workshops. ■

Summary of findings

1. Core purpose: High performers are very clear on core purpose and on seeking consistency and coherence in its pursuit.
2. Student outcomes: High performers strive to balance academic achievement with 21st-century learning skills.
3. Student learning: High performers actively engage students in being relentlessly optimistic about possibilities and their capacity to learn.
4. Classroom learning: High performers progress from performing orientation to learning orientation.
5. Curriculum offering: High performers relentlessly focus on what's best for their students.
6. Professional development: High performers utilise both tacit and formal learning opportunities in perpetual support of functional and personal development.
7. Staff roles and responsibilities: High performers provide support, challenge and opportunity based on shared understanding of evidence.
8. The school as a community: High performers celebrate successes and build a strong coherent team ethos with internal 'collaborative competition'.
9. Engagement with parents and carers: High performers align with but are not dictated to by parental aspirations.
10. Engagement with the wider community: High performers use partnerships to significantly extend their capacity to deliver an imaginative and enriching offering.

High Performers: The Secrets of Successful Schools is available from Juta bookshops at a cost of R320.

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