

Quality Education News

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The Editor asks ...

Who is the Biggest Loser?

Dear Friend of Quality Education

If only the 2010 public sector strike was a gruesome TV reality show! As the school year ends, one looks at the impact of the strike had on South Africa. Who were the losers? What can be done to ensure that future public sector turmoil (inevitable in a democratic country) can avoid the trauma of the last few months?

So, who was the biggest loser in the strike action? Millions of children were losers. Unless the matric marks are adjusted, the matric results could drop further from an already unsatisfactory pass rate (60% in 2009). South Africa has about 195 school days a year – one of the lowest in the world. There have been schools that have missed up to 21 of those days this year. A day away from school is a learning opportunity lost forever.

Teachers have been battered emotionally and in some cases, physically. They have become demoralised and demotivated by the demeaning need to beg for fair salary packages. Certain staffrooms have become bitter verbal battlefields. There were those teachers who supported and those who opposed strike action. When reasoned debate was kicked out the door, vitriol and even physical violence stormed in.

The image of the profession has been savagely shredded in the media. Abbey Makoe in an article titled **Once upon a time, teachers cared** (*The Star*, 20 August 2010) wrote of the 'revolutionary mindset' of so many teachers. He also made this blunt comment:

Today's calibre of teachers is a far cry from the once highly esteemed men and women who served selflessly.

What image do parents have of the profession? They see their children not being taught for days on end. They see their matric daughters and sons losing crucial exam revision time. And what do the children think of their teachers who should be role models of attendance, behaviour, hard work and selfless service to others?

It needs to be stressed though that there were thousands of teachers who continued to give selflessly to the children in spite of the intimidatory climate. Then there were those teacher unions who forcefully reminded their members to behave professionally. Members were to refrain from any form of intimidation or violence.

How do the teacher training institutes and universities view their graduates? Their former students have gained valuable knowledge of educational law, financial management and the like. Yet what core values about what it means to belong to the teaching profession have been instilled?

What has the strike done to the image of teacher unions? Of course, the unions have the absolute right to campaign for improved conditions of service. Together with the right, however, comes the responsibility to do so in a certain manner. The behaviour of certain union members makes an obscene mockery of what it means to be a teacher.

The Department of Basic Education has an honorable campaign to improve the quality of education. Yet one of their slogans, 'Quality education for all' has become an almost meaningless mantra uttered by many. Millions of rands have been spent on awareness campaigns. If there was a true understanding of quality leadership and management practices and principles, it would – I humbly submit – have been impossible for the strike action to have been so devastatingly damaging.

In the long term, the strike action will produce other losers. There will be 2010 matric students who will be denied the results that they deserve. Their choice of career or faculty at university will thereby be curtailed. Then there are potential teachers who will find the strike action a 'switch off' as a career. Since 1994 there has been a huge growth in the number of private schools, both meagrely and well-resourced. The state is losing the confidence of the nation in its ability to provide quality state education.

What can be done to undo damage? Bosberaads, lekgotlas and think tanks will help. They need to analyse the issues with brutal candour. Then they need to act decisively.

During Barack Obama's presidential campaign, he exhorted his supporters with the slogan, "Yes, we can!" Indeed, they believed Obama and voted him into the White House. We could South Africanise his slogan and make this a 2011 resolution: "Yes, we can make quality education happen!"

Sincerely

Richard Hayward



This newsletter is edited by SAQI and distributed to those schools benefiting from their participation in the MySchool programme. MySchool acts as a conduit which raises and delivers essential funding for education and social development on a sustainable basis. This enables members of the community to participate in the future development of our nation.



Celebrate the Quality in YOUR school!

SAQI has been privileged to have been invited to do leadership and management programmes in all nine provinces. The differences amongst schools as regards facilities have been staggering. There's the non-fee paying school with over a thousand learners which doesn't have a single overhead projector. Then there is the school where the oak-panelled walls of the principal's office have original works of prominent South African artists. Yet there are two common characteristics of these schools. They're all committed to continuous, never-ending Quality improvement. Most of these schools serve their communities with distinction.

These Quality-focussed schools make maximum use of whatever resources they have to benefit others. There's the school in Soshanguve where the Chairman of the School Governing Body personally maintains a vegetable garden. The produce is given to child-reared households where both parents have died. Then there is the well-resourced school where every class from Grade One upwards has an outreach project. The classrooms are used after-hours for enrichment programmes for disadvantaged communities. Every single child is encouraged to be a caring and giving person.

Increasingly, there is an awareness by adults in education of Quality issues. Are children? Absolutely! Ask a chatter of children where's the best place for take-away burgers! Invite them to make a choice from Mc Donalds, Spurs, Steers or Wimpy. Much animated discussion will follow on size, taste, value-for-money, speediness of service and friendliness!

Celebrate the Quality in your school or education office. In a school, let the children be judges of Quality. They might even like to select a Quality Kid for their class according to set criteria. At least one primary school uses the SAQI Quality Kid pledge as a guide for selection. The children vote by secret ballot for one of their classmates. Once each class has chosen a Quality Kid, that child is entered as the possible winner for the entire school. That final decision is agreed on by the staff. The pledge is:

Quality Kid Pledge

I'm a Quality Kid because I ...

- give of my best in all that I do
- do things right the very first time
- show caring, honesty, kindness and respect
- strive to keep on improving all the time
- care for our beautiful South Africa

There are about 28000 schools in the country. No two are alike. Sadly, not all of them are quality institutions. Yet quality schools know that they're good schools. Their achievements in and outside the classroom reflect excellence. There's goodwill and teamwork (almost all the time!) across the whole school community. Children and staff are delighted to talk about our school. So are the parents. There's even a bit of boasting! These schools usually have a huge demand for enrolment.

There are many ways to celebrate the Quality in your school such as:

- ◆ Talk about it at Assemblies and in the classroom.
- ◆ Write about it in the weekly newsletter and the annual magazine.
- ◆ Display it in the entrance foyer and on class/ whole-school notice boards.
- ◆ Acknowledge it publicly when it happens
- ◆ Tell the world on your website (if you have one)
- ◆ Advertise through posters and slogans ('A Quality school for Quality children')



World Quality Day,
Thursday 11 November

The second Thursday in November is recognised across the world as World Quality Day. Green and white are the official colours. Celebrate the reasons why YOUR school has plenty of quality reasons to wave flags and blow vuvuzelas!

A true tale of ethics

As the school year races to an end, Prize Givings and Valedictions loom. Children, parents and staff wait excitedly to hear who will receive awards. On these occasions, it's not only the prize-winners who are being scrutinised as to whether they truly deserve the accolades. The staff members who make the choices are under the microscope too. Have they made fair choices? Have biases such as 'teacher's pet' or 'prizes for the Governing Body members' children' influenced the choice of winners?

Keane was a high achiever at his school both in the classroom and on the sports field. He was a natural leader in a range of sports. When his class had to choose a leader, Keane was the class favourite. In his final year at the school, there was the expectation that Keane would be walking on to the stage on Valediction night to receive awards.

There was one ethical issue though. Keane's mother was the Deputy Principal. She automatically sat in on all meetings where prize-winner selections were made. The principal was aware of this fact and obviously Keane's mother too. Accusations could be

made that the selection process had the potential to be biased. Before the principal needed to discuss the issue, Keane's mother spoke to him at the start of the year.

She made a simple statement. For the duration of that year, she wouldn't attend a single selection meeting. The easy 'cop out' in so many schools where a teacher's child is being considered for an award, is for the teacher to leave the meeting while the child is being discussed. Once a decision has been taken, the teacher returns to the meeting. Such an arrangement can compromise frank and honest discussions about other possible prize-winners.

The school let it be known that Keane's mother would have no part to play in any Award selection meeting that year. For the children it was a statement that the school wanted to be scrupulously fair. On the Big Night Keane did walk across the stage. Yes, he won awards ... but totally on merit. What made the occasion so special was they way in which the audience reacted. Keane was given sustained, thunderous long applause. Dad looked chuffed and glowed while Mom smiled as she furtively wiped away tears of elation.

Two Quality reads

Eggs to lay, chickens to hatch by Chris van Wyk
Picador Press Exclusive Books: R199

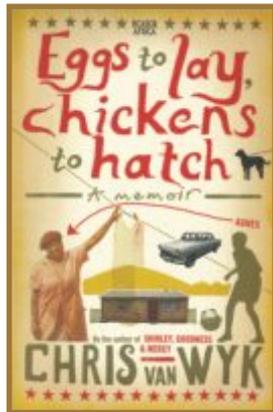
Here's a delightful read for the school holidays. If you enjoyed **Shirley goodness and mercy**, this new book by Chris van Wyk is in the same amusing tradition. It's a nostalgic autobiography set in Riverlea, Johannesburg. There will be times when you'll chuckle and maybe even laugh uproariously. Growing up in Riverlea in apartheid South Africa wasn't a joke but a survival kit was to laugh at what life hurled at you.

The humour comes over through the eyes of a school-boy. Here's a snip:

Once while Mr Barnes was cutting my hair, I said to him, 'Mr Barnes, you have two Alsatians ...'
'Ja,' he said, 'the best dogs in Riverlea, my boy.'
'But the sign on your gate says, "Beware of the dog".'
'So?'
'It should say: "Beware of the dogs".'
I can feel by the way the clippers have begun to move slower that Mr Barnes is thinking of an explanation.
'You know what I'll do,' he says. 'I'll get another sign and put it next to that one.'

Although the author was taught at a school with poor resources, he had teachers who cared. Mr Garson, his English teacher, was one who nurtured his budding creative writing skills. In a way, the book is a gentle reminder that quality education doesn't depend on fine resources. What quality education depends on is fine minds doing the teaching whatever the resources.

If you liked the **Spud** series of books by John van de Ruit, this is a definite buy.



Leadership in the African context by Ebben van Zyl (editor)
Juta Exclusive Books: R273

This book is not the ideal bedside or beach read. It's academic but it's not written in a ponderous style. The book is an excellent reference book on leadership issues. The writers do not deal specifically with educational leadership. Rather, the book studies aspects that are generic to leaders in any field.

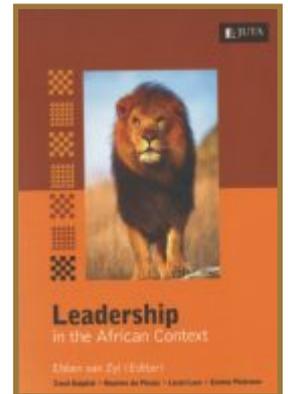
Each chapter deals with a different dimension of leadership. Case studies or 'spotlights', as the editor describes them, are given for each dimension. Here are a few chapter headings and the leaders under the spotlights:

- Emotional intelligence and leadership (Nelson Mandela)
- Leadership power and influence (Desmond Tutu)
- Team leadership and motivation (Maria Ramos)

Occasionally the choices of role models of leaders are strange. One chapter deals with the need for ethics in leadership. Another deals with the character traits of effective leaders. If the authors emphasise ethics and traits to be expected of those in leadership positions, why do they write about leaders who don't meet their own criteria?

There are two bonuses to the book. Firstly, there are a number of self-assessment questionnaires. So, one can get a measure of one's EQ (emotional intelligence), self-leadership or even charismatic appeal! A further bonus is that leadership is being discussed from South African and African perspectives.

The book belongs in the staff library as an impetus to professional development. It's a good buy for anyone wishing to better understand leadership principles and wanting to improve their own leadership behaviour.



How Quality education happens



Quality doesn't simply happen. It needs sacrifices of effort and time. During the recent short September break, Moriting Primary School in Tembisa gave up three days of the holidays. They wanted to make their good school an even better one. Julie Hlahle, the principal, together with her staff and School Governing Body workshopped a range of issues. A number of guest speakers from schools, the Department of Education and SAQI were invited. If the guest presenters had something to teach, they also learnt something. The Moriting Primary teachers reminded them that quality education happens when you're prepared to give generously of your time ... even during the school holidays.

Unsung heroes and heroines

Good deeds do get noticed even if folk don't make much comment at the time. The recent public sector strike brought out quality values in so many teachers. They

realised that they were there to be of service to the children. They weren't to compromise the children's education. At the 2010 Valediction of Parktown High School for Girls, the Head Girl reminded the audience of the commitment to service by their teachers. There was spontaneous applause from the very grateful parents. Let's applaud those teachers and parents nationwide who supported their children through the strike action. Let's also applaud the hundreds of thousands of pupils who never gave up. They committed themselves to hard work, perseverance and mutual support throughout the strike.

Whether in the classroom, on the sports field or in an office, we lead and inspire others. Here are words of wisdom about leadership from Robin Sharma of **The monk who sold his Ferrari fame**:

Being a leader isn't about being liked. It's about doing what's right.

You don't need to have the biggest title to do the best job.

Remember, every great leader (or visionary or brave thinker) was initially laughed at. Now they are revered.

This world was built by people who felt some discontent with the way things were and knew they could do better.

Real leadership is not about prestige, power or status. It's about responsibility.

Thanks so much

From tiny beginnings in 2006 with a circulation confined mainly to Gauteng, this newsletter will reach thousands of Quality-focused people in all nine provinces. A huge Thank You goes to those folk who forward it on to others by email or by printing hard copies. Also, thank you to the education department officials, schools and teacher unions that have extended invitations to do programmes. Every visit is a learning experience for SAQI and a reminder of the wonderful folk in the profession:

High-fives are due especially to these four Quality supporters:

- Vanessa du Toit who does a huge amount of behind-the-scenes administration in such an efficient, professional manner;
- Paul Harding, Managing Director of SAQI, who enthusiastically supports this social responsibility initiative;
- Aubrey Jansen, a master magician of computer graphics, who creates the visually eye-catching pages of the newsletter;
- Michelle Janse van Rensburg of the My School project who puts all issues of the newsletter on their website.

If you would like to download copies of back issues of Quality Education News, kindly go to either the www.Myschool.co.za or www.saqi.co.za sites. SAQI conducts leadership and management workshops in all nine provinces. Poor schools are sponsored. Please contact Vanessa du Toit (012-349-5006; vanessa@saqi.co.za) or Richard Hayward (011-888-3262; rdphayward@yahoo.com) for the details.

Quality Education News wishes you happy December holidays. Should you be celebrating religious holidays, may they be Blessed days filled with Peace, Joy and Goodwill.