

Quality Education News

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A word or three from the Editor

Dear Supporter of Quality Education

If you're a new reader to Quality Education News (QEN), welcome! A special welcome goes to the five hundred schools in the Dinaledi project of the Department of National Education. Whether a teacher's involved at nursery or senior secondary school level - or anywhere in between - there's the same classroom aim. It's to ensure that every young person gets a sound education.

The quality school is in a state of continuous improvement. What was regarded as excellent and trend-setting ten years ago could be seen as ordinary today.

Warmest congratulations go to the 2007 Most Improved Schools Awards winners. These schools were given the red carpet treatment (figuratively and literally) at a glittering ceremony at the Pretoria Sheraton Hotel. Mrs Naledi Pandor, Minister of Education, honoured them for their continuous improvement over a three-year period. Many of them serve very poor communities. Lack of money didn't stop them from creating quality schools.

This newsletter focuses on the fifth pillar in the Quality in Education model, namely, 'Tools and Techniques'. Schools use them to turn their improvement plans into reality. It costs virtually nothing to use these tools and techniques. Some of them have been adapted from the legal profession and the health sector. They've also been adapted from those used in business, commerce and industry.

Certain tools and techniques are complex. A high level of statistical ability is sometimes needed. Yet most of them are easily understood. Primary school children apply them with ease. Four techniques used in classrooms and staffrooms worldwide are briefly described in this newsletter.

In the Quality school everyone's invited to make input. Tools and techniques belong to everyone. School leaders encourage the children, parents and staff to use them. Edward de Bono made the comment:

Every individual in the organisation should be able to come up with new, better ways of doing things. The organisation should have a process in place which recognises these and acts on them.

Once the plans have been made, choose the best-for-purpose tools and techniques. Add enthusiasm and effort. Persevere when there are the inevitable hiccups. The outstanding Quality achievements follow...for sure!

Sincerely

Richard Hayward



This newsletter is edited by SAQI and distributed by Woolworths to schools nominated to benefit from their unique MY SCHOOL project. The project aims at improving the quality of learning in South Africa through a network of partners and supporters.



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A, B and C of tools and techniques

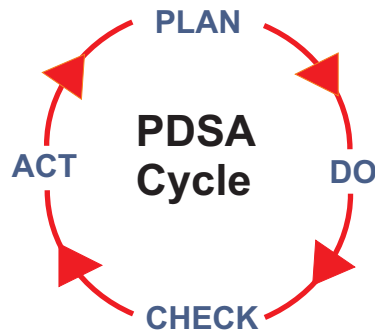
Here are four of the many available tools and techniques. They're easy to use.

1 **Action research**

There's the mistaken belief that research belongs only in places such as universities and technikons. The fact is that much WOW!-response research is done outside tertiary institutions. Isaac Newton, for example, discovered the Law of Gravity when an apple fell while he was sitting under a tree.

The teacher is in an excellent position to do ground-breaking research. That person is able every school day to observe the behaviour or learning problem of a child. Also, the teacher is able to experiment and hopefully rectify the situation. This improvement technique is known as 'action research'. It's a continuous cycle of: Plan ~ Do ~ Study ~ Act.

Figure 1 **PDSA cycle** (Bonstingl, 1992 in Schools of quality: an introduction to total quality management in education, page 60)



One example of the PDSA cycle being used was when a teacher noticed that only a handful of children in her class were voluntary readers. Most of them read only when she instructed them to do so.

The **planning** stage of the cycle involved thinking of setting up a classroom library in one corner. Her targets were to get a carpet, comfy cushions and a selection of books. In the **doing** part of the cycle, the children donated books from home that they no longer wanted. A bookcase, a carpet and cushions were bought. Every month a few children went with the teacher to buy three age-suitable paperbacks. These young 'book selectors' were allowed to read the paperbacks first. Then they gave a short report-back to the class.

In the **studying** of the situation stage, the teacher noticed that more children were becoming willing readers. There was a slight improvement in the reading-age level across the class. However, she could see that most of the boys were still reluctant readers. In the **acting** stage, she made the class library more relevant to their interests. Cricket, soccer and rugby magazines were put in the library. The daily newspapers which included sports reports were new additions too.

Continuing with her classroom-based research, she started the PDSA once more. With every cycle, the number of voluntary readers went up. So did the reading-age level of virtually every child. By the end of the year, the teacher had a class of avid, enthusiastic readers.

2 **Benchmarking**

Benchmarking involves making comparisons. The person doing the benchmarking looks at what other people and organisations are doing. The aim is to find 'best practice'. Benchmarking involves more than looking at what happens in one's own and other schools. It also includes observing what is being done outside the education sector.

Schools that strive to improve their standards often do benchmarking. When their teachers visit other schools, they are all 'eyes' and 'ears'. They look and listen. There's a willingness to learn from others. They note what the competition is doing...especially those schools that perform better.

When a school benchmarks, these sorts of questions are asked:

- ~ Is there a better way of doing something than the present way?
- ~ Which other schools or companies could be role models?

A, B and C of tools and techniques (continued)

There are two types of benchmarking: external and internal. External benchmarking looks beyond the school gates. A school, for example, wishing to introduce tracksuits as part of the uniform would do external benchmarking. It would look at tracksuits worn by other schools, clubs and organisations. Benchmarking would be done around factors such as colour, cost, design, quality of material and weather protection.

Internal benchmarking occurs within a school. Think of the teacher who has classroom discipline problems. That teacher could be mentored by a colleague who has an excellent rapport with learners and maintains sound discipline.

3 **Brainstorming**

Brainstorming encourages creative and original thinking. Everyone in the group is welcome to put forward ideas and suggestions. All the ideas are written down on a big sheet of paper or blackboard. While the ideas are being recorded, nobody makes any comments.

Once all the ideas have been noted, the group discusses the merits of each one. No idea is considered too wacky or zany for discussion. In fact, 'out of the box' thinking is most welcome. In the discussion certain ideas come to the fore. Action is then taken to carry out the major ideas.

At one school there was much concern about the bullying amongst the learners. The staff had a brainstorming session. They came up with these possible solutions:

- ~ Different types of bullying to be discussed at weekly Assemblies;
- ~ Anti-bullying poster competition;
- ~ Teachers to discuss bullying in Life Orientation lessons;
- ~ Classes to produce plays on bullying and how to deal with it;
- ~ Parents invited to a meeting to discuss bullying;
- ~ Weekly newsletters to remind parents to tell the school if their children are bullied;
- ~ Banning of cell phones to reduce cyber bullying;
- ~ Suspension and expulsion of persistent bullies;
- ~ Bullies suspended from extramural activities;
- ~ Bullies not allowed to go on educational tours;
- ~ Circle time with class/homeroom teacher on a weekly basis with a focus on bullying;
- ~ Counselling sessions for the bullies, the bullied and the respective parents;
- ~ Police to give a talk to learners about the legal consequences of violent behaviour;
- ~ A lawyer explains to learners the consequences of character defamation - both legal and financial - in character Defamation court cases;
- ~ Anonymous surveys in which learners indicate whether or not they've been bullied. They identify other learners that have been bullied. The learners write down the names of bullies.

Obviously, not all of the brainstormed ideas were accepted by the staff. Nor could all the decided-on ideas be immediately carried out. Yet thanks to this technique, levels of bullying were drastically reduced within ten weeks. No school, however, completely stops all forms of bullying.

4 **Circle time**

Toyota, the car manufacturer, uses this quality improvement technique. In this process people sit in a circle. The factory workers discuss ways to continually improve their production lines. They recommend ways to improve efficiency, effectiveness and thereby save money for the company. The ever-improving quality of Toyota cars can be traced back to ideas first mentioned in circle time sessions.

Schools use circle time sessions to improve every facet of the organisation. Teachers in the same Grade or Learning (Subject) Area can use their meetings as forms of circle time. Every class could have a weekly session included within the Life Orientation programme.

Incidents of classroom indiscipline are reduced when teachers use circle time on a regular basis. The learners get to know what 'bugs' the teacher and vice versa! Items raised at circle time have included issues such as ways to improve the extramural programme and reduce levels of theft.

A, B and C of tools and techniques (continued)

In a circle time session, it's important that it does not fall under the control of a 'superior' (for example, the teacher or senior management team member). There's a need for a facilitator but not a dictator! Circle time listens to and respects everyone's viewpoints.

Thousands of British primary schools have successfully used circle time. The concept has been described thus (Mosley, 1997 in Quality circle time in the primary classroom, page 7):

Circle time provides the ideal group listening system for enhancing children's self-promoting moral values, building a sense of team and developing social skills. It is a democratic system, involving all children and giving them equal rights and opportunities. It offers children a practical opportunity to discuss concerns, consider and debate moral issues, practise positive behaviour and work out solutions and action plans in an enjoyable and fun context which is highly motivational.

Many articles and books have been written by teachers worldwide about circle time. Teachers have used the technique at all age levels. Two websites that give information on possible classroom material are:

www.circle-time.co.uk (Jenny Mosley's material is highly recommended)

www.amazon.com (Go to 'books'. Search 'circle time in education')

Debbie talks about the family divorce

Circle time doesn't actively encourage discussion of home issues. Yet it will happen. In one Grade Six circle time session, Debbie described her sense of heartbreak around her parents' impending divorce. She had a deep sense of guilt. As she was the oldest child, she felt it was especially her fault. She could, she claimed, have been better behaved. Her classmates - many of whom had been in the same situation - gave advice that was sensible and wise beyond their years. Her sense of guilt disappeared. Debbie was helped to cheerfully manage a changed family dynamic.

Wise words for leaders of schools

Alan Clarke is the retired principal of an esteemed Cape Town high school. In his busy retirement he edits School Management & Leadership (SM&L). It deals with governance, leadership, management and policy issues for leaders of South African schools. SM&L is published ten times a year. The annual subscription fee is R300. More details can be obtained by contacting him on 021-683-2899(tel) or 086-689-5971(fax). The email address is editor@ednews.co.za

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