

Quality Education News

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Issue 9

March 2009

A quarterly publication issued
by the South African Quality
Institute in the interest of
promoting educational excellence.

The Editor gets a word in ...

Dear Supporter of Quality Education

Before you criticise someone, walk a mile in his shoes. Then when you do criticise that person, you'll be a mile away and have his shoes! Anonymous

How does one handle criticism? Laugh it off? Take it on the chin? Take it with a pinch of salt? Criticism can be hard to handle. The knives were sharp and stabbing when the 2008 matriculation results were released in December. Certain teachers were criticising the education departments. The education departments were criticising some of the schools. Parents and sections of the media were savaging Outcomes Based Education as well as the school system in general ... and so on ... and so on.

When the matric results were announced, the main focus was on what had been happening in Grade 12 classes in the past twelve months. Indeed, there are challenges to be faced when only 62,5% of the students meet the promotion requirements. Yet to bring about improvements, there's a need to look at what's happening across the entire school system. The starting points are the pre-and primary school stages.

'Zero defect' is a quality management principle. This principle states that a product or service should be flawless. So, for example, the car that rolls off the manufacturer's production line should have no defects. '100% correct' is the target. Learners in a school must not be reduced to being viewed as products-in-the-making in an education assembly line. True education is infinitely more than a 'full house' of examination results. Yet an important aspect of that education is to strive for a 100% pass rate.

However one views the matric results, another quality management principle applies. Every school should be in a state of continuous improvement. What happened last year is history. This is 2009. Our schools – even the very best ones - need to strive to be even better.

Schools can be blamed unfairly for poor results. Whose fault is it if a school is unable to appoint suitably qualified teachers? Many schools, for example, find it very difficult to find teachers with the necessary skills to teach in the Foundation Phase (Grades One to Three). There's also a critical shortage of Maths, Science and Technology teachers.

Given the history of our country, thousands of schools still lack adequate physical resources. There are still schools where children are crammed into desks in hopelessly overcrowded, small classrooms. So many schools lack halls, laboratories, library/media centres and sport facilities. How much more difficult it is for sound education to take place in such schools.

This newsletter revisits the Quality in Education model. SAQI asks one question around each of the five pillars (Values, Leadership, Improvement plans, Communication and Tools / Techniques). How can this pillar be applied to improve education?

Everyone has a part to play in bringing about improvements. Everyone needs to be an active player. Education isn't a spectator sport!

Whatever the overall matric results, there were still many reasons for hearty cheers.

Certain schools showed huge jumps in their pass rates from previous years. There were schools, for example, which obtained pass rates in 2007 that were in the sixties. They upped their averages to the seventies and eighties last year. The traditionally highest achieving schools of the past maintained their outstanding records. There are newcomers to this band of schools providing excellent education. Congratulations to all these schools! These schools have been walking the Quality talk! Keep walking forward and upwards!

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.



How to improve education

How do we add Quality to our schools in 2009? The Five-Pillar Quality in Education model provides a winning solution.



Values: the first pillar

In December 2008 a small number of matric achievers were interviewed on national TV stations. The interviewers would often ask them the reasons for their success. Their answers were very similar. These achievers stated that hard work, perseverance and focus were part of the winning ingredients.

Values Education can help hugely in making children aware of what brings about achievement. School Assemblies and Life Orientation lessons are starting places to focus on values.

Yet every classroom lesson is a chance to make children aware of timeless values. The studying of novels, plays and poetry, for example, makes students conscious of ethical issues. Even the Grade One can be imbued with lifelong values. Little Jack learns to share his wax crayons with Jill, to persevere with his daily reading exercises (even if the book isn't as exciting as he'd like it to be!) and show kindness towards all his classmates. When instilled young enough, value-imbued behaviour becomes natural. Out on the sports fields youngsters should be learning values such as courage, honesty and teamwork.

Bullying, drugging, gangsterism, stealing and other forms of anti-social behaviour are minimised in a school where there's a culture of kindness, respect of others and oneself.

Values don't apply only to the children. They apply as well to every staff member and education department official. Diligence, helpfulness, punctuality, respect and a strong work ethic are characteristics of everyone in the Quality organisation.

Leadership: the second pillar

Another question posed to the 2008 matric achievers by the TV interviewers was their choice of careers. The answers were usually in fields such as accountancy, engineering, law and medicine. Personally, I didn't hear of anyone wanting to go into teaching. Why is there virtually no interest in the profession? Teachers are critically needed. We need to make teaching the 'profession of first choice' for young people of fine character and academic leadership.

Assertive leadership is crucial in every classroom. Teachers are expected to teach well and get all their learners to achieve. As the leader, the teacher relentlessly encourages students to give of their best every day.

President Barack Obama has chosen as his top advisers, "...probably the most intellectual fire power you have ever had in a cabinet" (quoted by American University presidential historian Allan Lichtman). Obama has chosen the brains that he believes can bring about the changes that he wants for the USA. He's courageously selected political opponents. He's crossed over racial and gender lines to select his five-star team. Obama knows that only the best is good enough.

In South African education, the Minister and Deputy Minister as well as the Provincial MECs are selected from the ruling party. The Employment Equity Act stipulates that in the employment process, affirmative action appointments need to be made to address our cruel past. Once these legislated criteria have been met, how are appointments made in the education sector? Are the most suitable people always appointed as educators and departmental officials? There's no place for cronyism, ethnicity, nepotism, political allegiance and teacher union membership in making appointments. Appointments need to have openness and total integrity as core criteria.



Improvement plans: the third pillar

Schools are expected to draw up school improvement plans. Goal-setting helps achieves goals. It's not only the school itself that should have improvement plans. So too should every staff member. That planning needs to include both a professional and a personal dimension to the person.

Learners can be helped to set their personal goals. There are Life Orientation teachers who get the students to set goals for the year. The goals are in areas such as Academics, Sports, Cultural and

Leadership. Every term the learners reread their goals and note their progress.

The Education Department itself has improvement plans. A current one is that of the range of courses for under-qualified teachers. Also, the Department has stated that it will get rid of principals who are not up to the task. This approach should include teachers and departmental officials of similar ilk. Dead wood allowed to float unimpeded in the system blocks and could even sink improvement plans.



Communication: the fourth pillar

Organisations with management styles of the 1950s have a top-down communication style. The boss gives instructions; the underlings carry them out in a spirit of blind obedience. Sadly, this is still evident in some of our schools. Teachers speak and there's total uncritical acceptance by the passive learners; principals tell staff what to do and they do so unquestioningly; departmental officials give instructions to principals who fawningly comply.

Sometimes the teacher, the principal, teacher union member or departmental official is wrong. That person refuses to listen to positive criticism, no matter how well-intentioned. The individual insists that things have to be done with a mind frame of 'my way or the highway'. An arrogant, uncompromising attitude makes quality education that much more difficult to achieve.

Quality communication involves being an active listener to whoever is speaking. Obviously there will be instances where communication needs to be top-down in style. Yet communication has to be down-up (that is, junior to senior staff member) as well as across to others holding equal job-level positions. When a school, district or provincial head office is improving itself, everyone's listening respectfully to each other.

Every communication is a type of relationship. A teacher, for example, has a warm and friendly relationship with her students. The circuit manager/district director is welcoming and participative when interacting with principals. In contrast, these people could treat others with a lack of courtesy and an overwhelming sense of superiority. Quality organisations reflect a cooperative, participative and warm communication style.

Effective communication is imbued with openness and a willingness to learn from each other. Nobody knows it all!

Tools and techniques: the fifth pillar

It's easy for a school to say that it's committed to quality improvement. The tough part is to turn the words in to reality! There's a range of tools and techniques that can help. Benchmarking is one example. This involves looking at 'best practice'. An instance would be the teacher who wishes to improve the learners' exam results. Benchmarking involves studying methods used by a colleague who gets students to excel.

A few other strategies are brainstorming, circle time, de Bono thinking skills and partnerships. (These and other tools and techniques are explained in the free book, **Making Quality Education happen**. Details about the book are on page four of this newsletter).

In 2009 much still needs to be done to improve our South African school system. The good news though is that a growing number of schools are getting it right. Dedicated teachers and officials are using quality principles to create quality schools.



Hot chocolate



A group of graduates, well-established in their careers, were talking at a reunion. They decided to go visit their old university professor, now retired. During their visit, the conversation turned to complaints about stress in their work and lives. Offering his guests hot chocolate, the professor went into the kitchen and returned with a

large pot of hot chocolate and an assortment of cups – porcelain, glass, crystal some plain-looking, some expensive, some exquisite – telling them to help themselves to the hot chocolate.

When they all had a cup of hot chocolate in hand, the professor said, "Notice that all the nice-looking, expensive cups were taken, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones.

While it is normal for you to want only the best for yourselves, that is the source of your problems and stress. The cup that you're drinking from adds nothing to the quality of the hot chocolate... in most cases it is just more expensive and in some cases even hides what we drink.

What all of you really wanted was hot chocolate, not the cup: but you consciously went for the best cups ... and then you began eyeing each other's cups.

Now consider this: Life is the hot chocolate; your job, money and position in society are the cups. They are just tools to hold and contain life. The cup you have does not define, nor change the quality of life you have. Sometimes, by concentrating only on the cup, we fail to enjoy the hot chocolate the Lord has provided us.

The Lord makes the hot chocolate, man choose the cups.

The happiest people don't have the best of everything.

They just make the best of everything that they have."

Anonymous

Moral: A quality school makes the best of what it has, no matter how limited the resources.

See our sites

Back numbers of this free newsletter can be viewed and downloaded on two sites. Firstly, they are on the My School site of www.MySchool.co.za. Click on *Quality Education News* on the homepage. Otherwise, go to the Education section of www.saqi.co.za which is the SAQI site.

The SAQI site has a range of CDs, DVDs, books and pamphlets on school issues. The most recent addition to the range is Richard Hayward's book titled **Making Quality Education happen: a 'how-to' guide for every teacher**. This free book has been generously sponsored by Caxton and CTP Group as a social responsibility project. There is a R30 fee to cover packaging and registered/tracker posting. Also on the site is a review of the book by Alan Clarke, Editor of *School Management & Leadership*.

SAQI visits schools and organisations. The Institute focuses on quality leadership and management issues. Schools are expected to pay the basic costs of the programmes. Poor schools are sponsored. For more details, please speak to Vanessa du Toit on 012-349-5006 (vanessa@saqi.co.za) Otherwise, contact Richard Hayward on 011-888-3262 (rpdhayward@yahoo.com)