

Quality Education News

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Do you know the answer?

Dear Friend of Quality Education

Imagine that you're a contestant on the TV show 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' The question for the million is, 'What is the greatest business book of all time?' It was published in 1982 and three million copies were sold in the first four years.

Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman's iconic **In search of excellence** is still on business bookshop shelves almost thirty years after its first printing. Perhaps the sub-title of the book gives a reason why the book has been such a bestseller. Its sub-title is: Lessons from America's best-run companies.

Teachers and school leaders are wary of reading business-based books on leadership and management. A major reason is that a school is not a traditional business. A school deals with an ever-evolving human being; a typical factory deals with an item on a production line. True. Yet there are ways in which a business and a school are alike. Both deal with motivating people; both have sets of core values and both should be in a state of continuous improvement. Similar quality practices and principles apply wherever true success is achieved.

Peters and Waterman identify eight basic principles that successful businesses do to 'stay on top of the heap'. However, if you're in a school or education department office, the same principles apply. When there's organisational failure, one or more of the principles have been ignored.

A bias for action is the first basic principle. Do something – anything – rather than have endless committees, meetings and reports. Move from all the talking and writing to action. Secondly, stay close to the customer. Learn about the customer's preferences and cater to them. Quality organisations need to listen to all its members. Decisions are made on that basis.

Thirdly, successful businesses believe in autonomy and entrepreneurship. Huge corporations are broken down into smaller companies. Individuality and initiative are encouraged. Compare that approach with education departments which micro-manage schools. Their officials resent 'free spirits'. Such officials use their authority to stifle initiative. Their motto seems to be: Big brother or sister knows what's best for your school!

A fourth principle is acknowledging that productivity is achieved through people. Treat staff with dignity and respect. Reward commitment. They are your partners if you want your organisation to be a success story. Closely aligned with the fourth principle is the fifth which deals with values. Everyone understands the core values. Everyone strives to abide by them personally and with each other.

'Stick to the knitting' is the next principle. Stay with what you know best and do that exceptionally well. In a school context, identify your areas of expertise. Focus on them. Excellent companies display the seventh principle of a 'simple form and lean staff structure'. There aren't layers and layers of administrative staff checking on the people below. Top management posts are kept to a minimum.

How many teachers and school leaders today have their enthusiasm crushed by the deadening hand of bureaucracy? Rigid compliance to circulars and handbooks are deemed more important than creativity and innovation. The eighth principle is one of 'simultaneous loose-tight properties'. Yes, adhere to the core management practices and organisational values. Yet those at the top respect those individuals who use their initiative, who continually ask: 'Is there a better way of doing things?' Outstanding organisations encourage 'blue sky' thinking.

Why don't we do far more adapting and adopting of successful business strategies to improve South African education? Study what successful businesses and corporations do. If others have made Quality happen elsewhere, let's make it happen in education too!

Sincerely

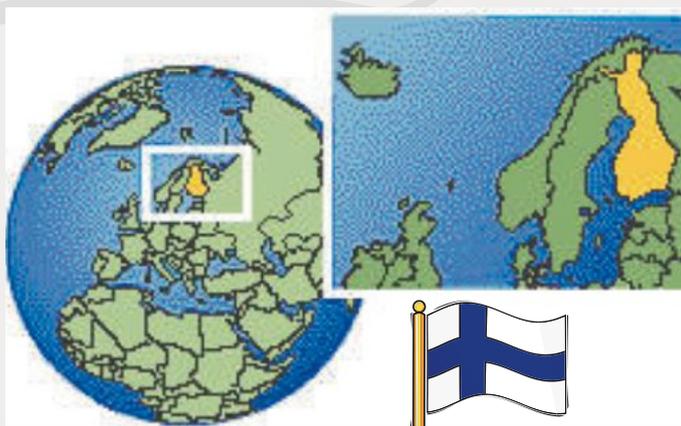
Richard Hayward



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.



Is Finnish education of finest quality?



Finnish education in 2011 is arguably the best in the world. Statisticians like to present the data to back up the opinion. The PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) tests are done world-wide. In the 2006 PISA tests, Finland came first in Reading and Science across the world. The country came second in Maths, losing out to the teenagers of South Korea.

Educationalists throughout the world want to know more about their system. How do they achieve such superb results? How do they do it without school inspections, a small national curriculum and huge teacher professional autonomy? Michael Gove, education secretary in England, has often praised Finland. He described it as, “the most educationally impressive nation in Europe.”

The Finns take education very seriously even before a baby takes its' first steps. When a mother leaves the maternity home, she's given a 'maternity package'. Included in the parcel are three books ... one for mom, one for dad and one for baby! There is an amazing emphasis on reading in Finland. It has the highest number of books published by any country. Reading for pleasure is encouraged. One in five Finnish pre-school children is able to read. Television programmes flight films in their original language. Sub-titles are used. While the children are watching the Harry Potter movies in English, their home language sub-titles provides excellent reading practice.

High-quality early childhood education is in place. Day care starts at about eight months and lasts until the age of five. Children are guided towards the development of social and interactive skills as well as caring and paying attention to the needs of others. Learning happens through playing with formal teaching being virtually non-existent. Six-year olds go to pre-school/kindergarten for one year. Although early childhood education isn't compulsory, virtually everyone uses this free service.

By the time a child is seven, it is likely to be eager to start formal schooling. The education department has a policy of inclusive education. Most teachers have assistant teachers to help those children needing remedial and special attention.

Basic compulsory education lasts ten years and starts from the age of seven. The children stay in the same school until the age of fifteen. There is no switch-over from a primary to a different secondary school as usually happens in South Africa. At least two distinct advantages have been identified. Teachers get to know the children's developmental stages better over this much longer period of time; the disruption of changing schools is avoided. The fifteen-year olds write exams which are marked by their teachers. There's a pass rate of 99%.

Finnish education is virtually free. There are no school fees. Free lunch is given every day. Also free are books, materials and school trips. If a child lives far from school there is free boarding.

What's the discipline like in Finnish schools? International visitors have noted how relaxed the classroom climate is in comparison to their own school systems. Teachers are friendly but firm. There's no school uniform. The schools are so clean that children walk around in their socks. Students have rights but three responsibilities are emphasised from a very young age:

- Attend all classes
- Obey disciplinary instructions
- Complete courses and programmes

Hard work is expected. The Finns are very time conscious. Punctuality is extremely important not only for lesson attendance but also for due dates for assignments and homework.

Once the ten years of compulsory education are over, voluntary upper secondary education begins. It starts at either 16 or 17 and lasts three or four years. About 87% of students do further studies. Two routes are offered. Students may choose to do occupational training to develop vocational skills and/or prepare for a polytechnic institute. The second route is to enter an academic upper secondary school which prepares them for university entrance. Again, tuition is free and also lunch! However, students have to buy their own materials and textbooks.

Finland has an exceptional education system. They have much to both show and tell the world about what top-of-

So, should we copy the Finns?

Yes and no. We can learn much from the way that Finns educate their children. Yet South Africa is a vastly different society. If Finland has two official languages, we have eleven. South Africa has 49 million people; Finland has a population of 5, 4 million. South Africa has to deal with the consequences of four centuries of colonialism and apartheid in a heterogeneous society. In contrast, Finland is a young country which became independent from the Soviet Union in 1917. It's a far more homogeneous society which has always subscribed to the principle of equality of educational opportunity for all.

Teacher training in Finland is rigorous. The selection process aims to attract the best candidates into the profession. If a young person is not accepted into the education faculty, they can then aim for faculties such as law or medicine. (Compare this to South Africa.) The Finn teacher has at least a Master's degree. When a teacher qualifies, that person is put on a lifelong learning programme.

In South Africa, SACE (South African Council for Educators) is introducing a system for the continuous development of teachers. It will be known as the CPTD (Continuing Professional Teacher Development). Teachers will need to have on-going training throughout their careers.

The ability to read is a critical factor in education success. Finnish schools have libraries; in South Africa 79% of schools have no libraries. Finland has a 100% literate school-going population. The February, 2011 the ANA (Annual National Assessment) tests showed that literacy in the different provinces ranged from 19 to 43%. By 2014, the aim is to push the figure up to 43%.

Politics don't determine who runs the education system or how the curriculum is taught in Finland. Appointments are based on professional merit. Teachers have the autonomy to teach the curriculum as they deem fit and to choose their own textbooks.

South African education is rife with incidents of teacher-union affiliation determining appointments. The most professionally capable individuals aren't always appointed. Unfortunate consequences include low teacher morale, rejected teachers leaving the

profession or going to the rapidly growing number of private schools. The state-educated children, of course, are hugely disadvantaged by this outflow of often excellent professional competence.

Finland is able to keep its' teacher: pupil ratio very low. In primary school it is 1:16 and in the senior classes it is 1:12. Then there are the teacher assistants as well! The teacher: pupil ratio is a huge challenge for the South African school system. It's common to have 35 or more pupils in the normal state primary school. The figure can rise to 40 and more. The bigger the group, the less chances there are for meaningful teacher-child interactions in the classroom.

A staggering 99% of Finnish schools are connected to the internet. Technology including e-learning is used to excellent effect to enhance the quality of teaching. The society is not preoccupied with magnificent school buildings and huge spacious grounds. The focus is on the educational stimulation to be found in every classroom.

South Africa spends billions on education but we are still not getting 'bangs for our bucks'. Why is there such under performance? Some of the solutions such as solving the teacher: pupil ratio will cost billions. Yet there are other solutions that don't cost a single cent. We need to copy (if we're personally not doing it already) a few aspects of Finnish culture. The Finns are a punctual, efficient and hard-working nation. The quality of the children's education is paramount. The Finns will not allow politics to interfere with staff appointments nor would they tolerate teachers not being in the classroom because of strike action. We can and should learn from the Finns.

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CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

There's cause for celebration on Thursday, 10 November 2011. It's World Quality Day. Across the world there will be businesses, corporations, factories and schools celebrating 'the ordinary things that they do extraordinarily well'.

South African educators might be a little cynical about celebrating excellence in our school system. Yes, there are those schools and education department offices that shame the nation. They don't know the basics of Quality 101. Yet there are also thousands of those that provide quality education and give millions of children a sound foundation for their futures.

Celebrate the true Quality that's found every day in your classroom, school or education office. Let others see it. In a school there are so many ways in which Quality has been shown: achievements in and outside the classroom done by the children, parents and staff. Then there are those people from tiny tots through to top management who radiate Quality. Give them public praise.

A practical problem with a concept such as Quality is the meaning of the word. An eleven-year old boy was taken by his dad to buy a new pair of soccer boots. Inside the sports shop was a wide range of boots. Dad didn't know what pair his son wanted. Son told dad to buy either Adidas or Puma brands. When dad asked why he should choose only from those two brands, he replied, "Well dad, you're always telling me I'm a

brave quality striker of the ball. Quality strikers need quality boots!" The youngster didn't have a theoretical understanding of the word Quality but he had a very good intuitive grasp of what the word meant.

A few quotes that fit in with World Quality Day are:

Quality is doing what's right when nobody is looking. Henry Ford

Quality is never an accident; it's always the result of intelligent effort. John Ruskin

The civilisation of a country consists in the quality of life that is lived there. AJ Nock

Professionalism means consistency of quality. Frank Tyger

To celebrate World Quality Day, have displays of how Quality is evident in so many different ways in your organisation. Have poster one-liners such as, 'Quality is ...!' Decorate foyers in the official World Quality Day colours of green and white.

Being humble is an admirable trait but there are times when it's OK to have quiet pride. One such occasion is Thursday, 10 November as you celebrate World Quality Day!

'Special price for you ... mahala!'

Free downloads of back numbers of Quality Education News are available. Please go to www.MySchool.co.za You can also download from the SAQI site which is www.saqi.co.za Click on the Education section.



What's on you staff development programme?

SAQI has a range of staff development programmes. The most frequently requested one is Five pillars of a Quality school. Most programmes focus on leadership and management issues. Vanessa du Toit (012-349-5006; vanessa@saqi.co.za) or Richard Hayward (011-888-3262; rpdhayward@yahoo.com) will gladly provide you with further details. Poor schools are sponsored.