

Quality Education News

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

A word from the Editor

First Quarter, 2007

Dear Supporter of Quality Education

Everyone likes words of encouragement. Thank you to those folk who made comments about the first issue of Quality Education News (QEN). We truly welcome your input. Schools across the country are brimful of strategies to create Quality schools. Certain of those ideas will be shared with QEN readers.

In November 2006, the Department of Education held its annual National Teaching Awards ceremony. The glittering occasion acknowledged teacher and school excellence. Prominently displayed in the President's banquet hall were banners containing a powerful yet simple message. The message boldly stated, "Quality education for all".

Quality education can be an exciting reality in any school anywhere. Superb results can be achieved with minimal physical resources. This reality was graphically illustrated in the 2006 matriculation results. A number of schools in severely deprived communities obtained pass rates in excess of 90% while the average for the country was 66,6%.

Enjoy this issue of QEN. May 2007 be a year filled with class achievements!

Sincerely

Richard Hayward



Dr Richard Hayward, editor of QEN and Vuyi Segoo of the South African Quality Institute.

The ever-renewing organization (or society) is not one which is convinced that it enjoys eternal youth. It knows that it is forever growing old and must do something about it. It knows that it is always producing deadwood and must for that reason attend to its seedbeds. The seedlings are new ideas and new ways of doing things.

- John Gardner in *On Leadership*



A Quality school celebrating diversity

Schools across the country are brimful of strategies to create Quality schools. Certain of those ideas will be shared with QEN readers, starting with The Mountain Cottage School in the Magaliesberg mountains. Mrs Sue Woods, a director of the school, said that their school follows the Quality principles. On the left, children are holding posters depicting different religions. Respect for religious diversity is one of the values in the philosophy of the school.



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



Five pillars of a Quality School



The South African Quality Institute (SAQI), together with a team of educationists, have designed a Quality-In-Education model. The model has adapted best management and leadership practice found in the business, commercial and professional sectors. The model consists of five pillars. Each pillar focuses on a core dimension of a school. Every pillar makes a crucial contribution to supporting a Quality school. Here is a brief outline of each pillar. In future editions of QEN, each pillar of the model will be discussed in greater detail.

Pillar 1 – Values

Ethical values are at the core of a good school. Such values underpin the school and serve as beacons in turbulent times. They give the school both focus and direction. What values characterise school management and leadership? A few commonly found values are: trust, openness, honesty, respect, empowerment and perseverance.

Who decides on the values for a school? Everyone! At a whole-school level, the staff determines which values are to define the school. Children also decide on the values which they would like to see characterizing their school days. Class and school rules should be negotiable. Rules are the end result of discussion and consensus (most of the time!) based on core values.

Pillar 2 – Leadership

In a Quality-focussed school, leadership does not reside exclusively in the principal's office.

Different situations require different leaders. The principal is not viewed as the fount of all knowledge and insight. So, for example, a Sports Day function might be coordinated by one teacher while the formulation of an anti-bullying policy might be under the leadership of another colleague.

Leadership roles are not confined to the teaching staff. Administrative, maintenance and secretarial staff also take on leadership functions. Likewise, the parent community through committees such as the School Governing Body and the Parent-Teacher Association, provide leadership in their areas of expertise.

Children can (and should!) be taught leadership skills. Class and sports team captains, children's councillors, monitors and prefects have excellent opportunities to display these abilities.

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The thinking behind the model

At SAQI we asked ourselves:

Is it possible to make every South African school a place that provides Quality education? Can every school provide the opportunities for its learners to achieve their full potential?

A minority of schools have excellent human, financial and physical resources. They are first-world institutions. The vast majority of schools are not so privileged. They have limited resources and often serve desperately poor communities. In spite of these disadvantages, some of these self-same schools perform daily miracles. They provide education that is sound – and in certain instances – of excellent quality.

The availability of money is not crucial to create quality schools. In 2003, a team of educators, Departmental policy makers as well as Quality practitioners started designing a Quality education model. They studied Quality models designed for the business and industrial sectors, as well as models found in American, Australian, British and Canadian schools.

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Pillar – 3 School improvements plan

“Have no goals and you will be goalless,” is a familiar management one-liner. The Quality school is in a state of continuous improvement. It is important to discuss what needs to be done to improve the school.

In drawing up such plans, there should be different time-frames. Certain plans might need to be addressed immediately and the improvements effected within a short time-frame. An illustration would be the wearing of the correct uniform by all learners. Other plans might have much longer time-frames. This is particularly evident in capital work projects such as the building of a hall or library.

Improvement plans need to include all facets of the school. Attention should be given not only to the obvious areas such as capital works. There is also a need to give, for example, attention to areas such as staff development and transformation issues.

Often, worthwhile plans are discussed, debated, drawn up...and discarded! Improvement plans need to be continually reviewed. These plans should be living, vibrant documents that turn words into actions.

Pillar 4 – Communication

A school has a number of stakeholders – the children, parents, teachers, education department officials, the local community...and more! Stakeholders need to listen to each other. They need to appreciate different viewpoints. “Buy in” is a crucial aspect of effective communication. When stakeholders are interacting with each other, there is often a willingness to work together to create a Quality-driven school.

A wide range of techniques are available to ensure effective communication. Face-to-face meetings are common. If meetings are focused and attention paid to obviating time wastage, they can be meaningful encounters. Many types of meetings can be held besides the traditional staff, senior management and subject (learning area) meetings. Administrative, maintenance and secretarial meetings are important. Children’s Council, Student Representative and Circle Time meetings are further opportunities for worthwhile communication.

Besides the traditional weekly newsletters and termly report cards, there are other effective means of communication between the home and the school. It is to be noted that communication is more than the simple

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Changing the mindset about Quality in Education

*From Vuyi Segooa of the
South African Quality Institute*

We at the South African Quality Institute believe that every school in South Africa has the potential to become a Quality school, irrespective of its socio-economic background. It is this premise that propelled us, together with other stakeholders, to develop what we call The Five Pillars of a Quality school... a model that when used correctly can change the attitude of both learners and educators towards learning, teaching and managing a school.

As each pillar is unpacked it becomes a tool that can be applied right away – and you don't have to wait for all the five pillars to be unpacked before implementing. The journey towards becoming a quality school begins with every little, positive step taken. To bring about change at our school we should all be willing to become agents of change. However, willingness alone without tools could be frustrating and hence the model. Look upon it as your tool kit.

Change your mindset and enjoy the journey towards becoming a quality school. Remember the words of author and writer Earl Nightingale: ***you become what you think about.***



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conveying of facts. The actual tone of the communication often reflects the organisational climate of the school. Ideally, the communication should reflect, integrity and professional friendliness.

Pillar 5 – Techniques and tools

To ensure that improvement plans are implemented, there is a need to use techniques and tools. Frequently used strategies in a Quality school are: action research,

benchmarking, brainstorming, De Bono thinking skills, flowcharts and Deming's PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle.

Once the concepts of the different techniques are understood, they are easy to apply in the school situation. Primary school children have successfully used most of these selfsame strategies in their own lives.

The secret of success lies in not doing your own work but in recognising the right person to do it.

- Andrew Carnegie

How to contact us

Do you have any suggestions or comments? They would be most welcome. Please contact:
Richard Hayward rpdhayward@yahoo.com Tel: (011) 888-3262
Vuyi Segooa vuyi@saqi.co.za Tel: (012) 394-3415
For more information on SAQI and membership application, visit www.saqi.co.za