

Quality Education News

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Quality Education alphabet:



is for Accountability

Dear Supporter of Quality Education

There was much hugging and back-slapping when the 2012 National Senior Certificate (NSC) results were given to the media. The pass rate was 73.9% ... an improvement of 3.7% from 2011. Pass rates in Maths and Science had also gone up. Yet in the midst of the celebratory shouts, voices of disquiet were also heard.

Three of the more familiar concerns raised were:

- Where are the missing Grade Ones of 2001? Only 45% of the original learners enrolled in Grade One sat in a Grade 12 class in 2012.
- The pass mark of 30% for a subject is unsatisfactory. Not enough academic rigour is required to meet the pass requirements.
- Although there was a 54% Maths and 61% Science pass rate in 2012, many of the marks were very low. The marks would be insufficient to gain entry into a number of tertiary institution courses, diplomas and degrees.

A staggering R179.8 billion is allocated from the national budget on education. Yet of 144 countries surveyed, the quality of South African education was ranked in position 140. (*Financial Mail*, 16 January 2013, page 12).

When we look at our Grade Twelve results, there are core questions that need to be answered: Are we getting good results for all the billions spent on education? Is the money being spent sensibly, optimally and with minimal wastage? Are the people in the education system deserving of their salary packages?

No doubt there are the dedicated thousands who deserve their salaries and actually more. Yet what about those who discredit the profession with their poor work ethic, high absenteeism rate and lack of ability? How are such people held to account? What levels of accountability are there in every school and every education office?

The 2012 Independent Education Board indicated that the pass rate was an outstanding 98.2%. Most of the schools that wrote those exams were private ones. A small number of commentators

made sour grape observations between the public and private school results. They asserted that the excellent achievements of private schools were due to factors such as having better qualified teachers, more resources and lower teacher: learner ratios. Those advantages do apply to some but not all schools that wrote the IEB exams. Other factors also come in to play. The teaching corps is disciplined; there are low levels of absenteeism. Strike action is almost unheard of. Add in another critical factor ... accountability.

The staff members of such schools are made accountable to the communities that they serve. Boards of Governors deal decisively with underperforming teachers. Virtually all the schools have frequent evaluations. The member schools of ISASA (Independent Schools of South Africa), for example, are required to have a quality assessment within a six-year cycle. The quality audits are done by professionals who have personal track records of educational excellence. They help ensure that standards are maintained and continually improving.

If we are committed to improving the quality of education for all learners – whether in public or private schools – there's a need for accountability. Teachers need to be answerable for what they do or don't do in the classroom. The same applies to those who are more desk-bound in their school or education department offices.

At the ANC national conference in Mangaung, President Jacob Zuma stated that he wanted to re-introduce an inspection system for schools. Do likewise for district, head, provincial and regional education offices. This newsletter has an article which suggests conditional criteria for such evaluations. It makes sound sense to put in place the means to ensure that the education budget is spent well. At present that's not happening across the whole country. Bring in the quality assessors and evaluators if we really want to improve education. The Quality Education alphabet starts with an A ... A for Accountability.

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.





“Inspectors aren't welcome!”

SADTU (South African Democratic Teachers' Union) is one teacher union opposed to school inspections. The opposition goes back to the inspection style prevalent in certain schools prior to 1994. Magwena Maluleke, general secretary of SADTU, observed (quoted in *Mail & Guardian*, 21 December 2012, page 3) that:

They (the inspectors) were just there to find fault, policing teachers without playing a developmental role.

At a personal level as a school principal, I came across the odd inspector who had such a negative mind-frame. Yet I was also fortunate to interact with very many inspectors who gave sound advice, praised staff when it was due and who one regarded as 'critical friends'. Good inspectors guided schools on their roads to never-ending quality improvement.

If we are to re-introduce any form of inspection, *six of the more basic guidelines are:

1 Avoid the word 'Inspector'

In the history of our country, the word 'Inspector' definitely has unpleasant memories. Think of Bantu Education and how unacceptable policies were thrust on schools. The 1976 Soweto Uprising was one tragic outcome.

There's a need to find an alternative word to 'Inspector'.

In quality management theory and practice, there's been much progress beyond mere inspection. Yes, there will always be the need for every school to comply with certain basic requirements such as correct teaching timetables, sufficient physical and teaching resources, professionally qualified teachers and sound financial management.

Yet the quality assessor or auditor shouldn't think that the criterion for a good school is blind adherence to policy manuals and regulations. Evaluation is not a clipboard ticking-items-off-a-list exercise. Fine schools use their initiative and encourage creativity and innovation. Teaching should be a thinking person's profession. The evaluators should acknowledge and applaud such schools.

2 Be academically and professionally competent

Every member of a school evaluation team should have the academic and professional track record to be of meaningful developmental guidance. The assessor should be someone who's personally taught the subjects being evaluated in the classroom or sat in the principal's chair. Every assessment team should include people who have been high achieving, successful principals themselves. The team will then be better able to interact with principals in an empathic manner. There will be a greater understanding of the complexity of school leadership as well as the stress levels.

3 Be emotionally intelligent

As Magwena Maluleke commented above there have been inspectors who have taken a sadistic delight in breaking down teachers and principals. They don't belong in the 21st century education system. Such people have no part to play in an evaluation team. When they behave in such a manner, they should be rooted out. Evaluators need to be emotionally intelligent and sensitive in their interactions with learners, parents and staff. They read and understand body language; they know when to speak and when to remain silent.

4 Analyse data and documentation sensibly, not obsessively

Results in ANA (Annual National Assessment) tests and NSC exams are good barometers of the quality of education in a school. They give strong indicators but there's far more to an excellent school. A school might have comprehensive and beautifully bound and decorated policy files. That doesn't mean though that they are 'lived out' every day. Have the paperwork in place but not in mind-numbing detail.

5 Remember: 'What cannot be counted often counts the most!'

The above epigram belongs to Albert Einstein. A quality school is imbued with values such as caring, cheerfulness, honesty, kindness, perseverance and ubuntu. It's very hard to measure such values. Yet any visitor (and remember that an assessor is a visitor) will quickly sense whether the school is imbued with values. A quality school is a happy, hard-working place. The organisational climate or 'vibe' is warm and supportive.

6 Act decisively on poor quality

Whole School Evaluations will be meaningless if it's only 'sweet talking' by the evaluators. There will be occasions when poor quality is observed. Decisive, prompt action needs to be taken to assist schools with poor physical and teaching resources. Underperforming teachers need to given professional support or even dismissed. An evaluation team needs to have the 'clout' to have their recommendations implemented by the school and the education authorities.

Much has been done since 1994 to give education access for many more millions of learners. That's to be highly commended. Sadly, very much more can and still needs to be done to further improve the quality. A positive and professionally competent quality assessor helps you bring about such improvements. Therefore, welcome the quality assessor when that person knocks on your classroom or office door. That person is your critical friend.

* More guidelines on the criteria for Whole School Evaluation team members were contained in the February 2010 (Issue 13) of Quality Education News. For free downloads go to www.MySchool.co.za (click on Services) or www.saqi.co.za (click on Education).



Evaluating the evaluators

All public schools are subject to some form of evaluations. District officials and subject advisors visit schools to assess the work being done. Only a tiny fraction of the approximately 26,000 schools have a full-scale Whole School Evaluation. Such an evaluation consists of a team that looks at every single aspect of the school.

One criticism made of some assessors or evaluators' going into schools is their lack of professional competency. They 'talk the walk but themselves have never walked the talk'. One school principal who was told to carry out a meaningless instruction given by a district official growled, "I'm told to do something that's totally pointless by someone who hasn't even run a spaza shop, never mind a school!"

There are those who owe their position not so much on their professionally ability but rather because of criteria such as political affiliation, membership of a particular teachers' union or being a deployed cadre.

A possible way to ensure that all school evaluators are professionally competent is to adapt an idea from the school inspection system in England. From January 2013 all school inspectors have their professional backgrounds put on the OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) website.

Stephen Exley (*Times Educational Supplement*, 12 October 2012, page 12) commented:

... schools and colleges will be able to find out exactly who is passing judgement on them. Most significantly, they will know in what sector an inspector gained experience at the chalk face, how high up the managerial ladder they progressed and, potentially when they last taught a class themselves.

More curious school leaders may even be able to use the information to discern whether the inspector sitting on the other side of the desk has first-hand experience of running an outstanding school. (Inspection reports in England are in the public domain; they can be viewed on the school website.)

If we were to adopt such a policy in South Africa, there are obvious advantages. People applying for posts as evaluators will know that their track record is open to professional scrutiny. Hopefully, most of the incompetents won't submit applications! The policy would help lift the quality of professional advice given to schools. A greater level of empathy might be shown by those who personally know how demanding it is to teach well and lead effectively in an excellent school. Best school practice would spread quicker across the country.

Partner for Possibility programme



SYMPHONIA
for South Africa

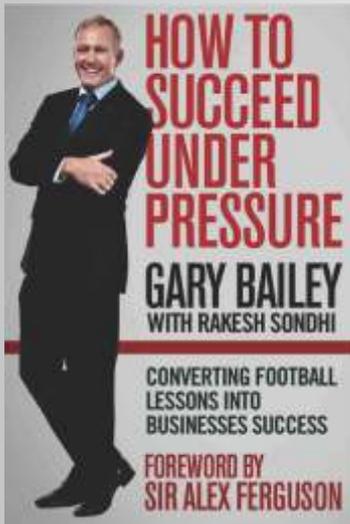
Great achievements are the end results of great teamwork. That applies in every sphere of society. An ordinary school cannot become a quality school in splendid isolation. It needs the support of the wider community. The achieving school values the community it serves. By partnering with the community, together they can do so much more.

Symphonia for Africa has a programme to bring the school and the community together. According to the National Planning Commission there are about 19,000 underperforming schools.

The Partnership for Possibility programme gives an opportunity for principals to interact with business and community leaders. Since February 2011 Symphonia has had very successful Leadership Circles and other initiatives. Schools have been transformed through these partnerships.

If your school or business would like more details about this most worthwhile programme, please contact Louise van Rhyn on 021-913-3507 or louise@symphonia.net
The website is www.symphonia.net

Handle pressure like a pro!



Whatever your position in a school or education department office, you have to handle pressure. That pressure can be in forms such as tight deadlines, work overload, change management, negative criticism from colleagues, the media, parents and even – on occasion – the learners. Handle pressure well and you become an achieving survivor. Crumple under the pressure and your physical as well as mental health will collapse. So will your work performance.

South African Gary Bailey was a legendary goalkeeper for the most famous soccer club in the world – Manchester United. He had been between the posts for more than 370 games. On match-winning days he had been deified; on match-losing days, vilified. Bailey had experienced intense pressure on and off the soccer field. He was therefore very well qualified to be the co-

author of *How to Succeed under pressure: converting football lessons into business success*. (Zebra Press: Cape Town, Exclusive Books: R 206).

Bailey wrote the book after the completion of his MBA degree. In the book he gives an absorbing account of his football career and insights into many of its famous characters. Bailey also shows the parallels of his football experiences to those encountered in the business world.

The book is co-authored by Professor Rakesh Sondhi, a specialist in leadership issues. Where Bailey finishes off in his explanations around leadership and management issues, Sondhi goes into greater depth. Insight is given around issues that are common to any dynamic organisation. The book includes chapters on Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Adaptability and, of course, Performance under Pressure.

This is an enjoyable book to read about an iconic sportsman. Beyond the story line though, is a wealth of insight into universal quality leadership and management practices. Be on-side in dealing with not only your own work pressures but many other challenges found in your school or education department office. Buy the book, apply its sage advice and you'll definitely avoid the red card!



Smile ... you're in education!

I was teacher's pet. She kept me in a cage at the back of the class.

Ken Todd

My school report said that I was every inch a fool. Fortunately I was not very tall.

Sir Norman Wisdom

Education isn't everything. For a start it isn't an elephant.

Spike Milligan

He has glaring faults and they have certainly glared at us this term.

Principal's report on Stephen Fry

The only reason I always try to meet and know the parents better is because it helps me forgive the children.

Louis Joannot, teacher



Look who joined us at the Amohelang Intermediate School workshop!



SAQI has Continuous Professional Development programmes. Many programmes focus on Total Quality Education (TQE) practices and principles. There are also workshops on topics such as bullying at both learner and adult level, change management, conflict resolution, discipline and emotional intelligence. Poor schools are sponsored. If you'd like more details, please contact either Vanessa du Toit (012-349-5006; vanessa@saqi.co.za) or Richard Hayward (011-888-3262; rpdhayward@yahoo.com)