

Quality Education News

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

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A word or two from the Editor

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Dear Supporter of Quality Education

Teachers know the truth of, "No lesson plan survives contact with the learners." The teacher might have done excellent written learning preparation. Stunning visual aids might be on hand. The lesson itself might be a great success. Yet the lesson seldom goes exactly according to the written plan. Classroom reality intervenes. The class might have a handful of skilful red-herring throwers. These learners can (if the teacher is not classroom-wise) lead the teacher along a path that wasn't in the written lesson plan!

Quality teachers and quality schools plan ahead. Not everything works out perfectly. Some plans need to be changed *en route*. Others need to be thrown away. Planning is vital to ensure continuous improvement. Plans give schools goals. A school without goals will stagnate, decline and as has happened, might be forced to close its doors.

In this issue of QEN the focus will be on the third pillar of the Quality school model. That pillar is the School Improvement Plan. Too often improvement plans have been confined narrowly to capital work projects. A school might need to build new classrooms or a science lab. Yes, these projects are important. There are, however, many more areas to an improvement plan. It's not only the physical resources that need continual improvement. There's a need for ever-evolving improvement in every aspect of the school. That means every learner and every staff member.

I'd like to thank MySchool and Woolworths for their generous support of QEN. Michelle van Rensburg of MySchool ensures that 2500 schools receive this email. The email list is growing with every issue! At SAQI itself, there's a wonderful threesome of Hilda Ndala, Rosaria de Peniche and Vanessa du Toit who work on the newsletter. Thanks so much!

Sincerely

Richard Hayward

"The trouble with not having a goal is that you can spend your life running up and down the field and never scoring".

Bill Copeland

Champion Planning

The South African nation was on a high on Saturday, 20 October. The Springbok rugby players were crowned world champions. Many factors accounted for this never-to-be-forgotten night.

One such factor was the coach, Jake White. Four years ago, he told his rugby players that they would play in a World Cup Final in France. Brilliant planning was put in place. He made the seemingly impossible possible. Jake White helped John Smit and the team achieve rugby's ultimate prize.

The Amabokoboko



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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Turning a plan into reality

If only every brilliant plan could be turned into stunning reality! There is a gap between the two. Some schools achieve virtually all their goals. Five tips from such schools are:

- ◆ **Get 'buy in' from everyone** For a plan to become reality, support is needed. Tell learners, parents and staff about the goals. Make sure that the planning phase is a participative process. Welcome ideas and input. Make the goals the dreams of the whole school community, not only those of the principal and a favoured few.
- ◆ **Adapt or die!** A plan should not be cast in stone. As the plan is being implemented - where necessary - adapt it. Staff members leave the school, better building material comes on to the market and the list of challenges goes on. Be prepared to make changes. Avoid doggedly insisting on staying with the original plan.
- ◆ **Set boundaries of authority, money and time** People should know their boundaries regarding decision - making and responsibilities. Have a cost budget for different stages of the project. Time schedules should be in place. Everyone should know the expected dates by which different stages of the project are to be completed.
- ◆ **Encourage and motivate** No matter how exciting a plan might be, apathy and exhaustion can set in. The project might be more difficult than anticipated. Obstacles appear. Project leaders need to encourage team members. Praise the achievements at the different stages. Get eyes focussed once more on the winning line at the end of the race.
- ◆ **Be fearless about failure** Create an organisational climate that accepts that anyone can make a mistake. There should not be an attitude that a person is fearful of admitting to faulty planning and implementation. Jonty Rhodes, the former Protea cricketer, remarked that the secret of success is feeling free to fail.

"The tuck shop robbed me, sir!"

Nine-year old Tristan was sitting on a bench at break time. He was examining closely a sandwich that he had bought at the tuck shop. Displeasure was written all over his face. At that moment the principal walked past. Seeing the unhappy face, the principal sat down next to Tristan.

"What's wrong, Tristan? What's upsetting you?"

"The tuck shop robbed me, sir!"

"How did they do that?"

Dramatically, Tristan held an open cheese-and tomato sandwich in front of the principal's face.

"Look, sir. I paid R4 for this sandwich. There's so little cheese and only a tiny piece of tomato. It's not fair!"

"Yes, Tristan. I agree. That's a bit rough for what you paid. Let's go to the tuck shop and see what we can do about it."

Tristan was given another sandwich. This time it was brimful of cheese and sliced tomatoes. Tristan was a satisfied young customer. The principal learnt something. There was no policy at the tuck shop of how to make the different food snacks. The tuck shop moms had a meeting to decide on the contents of the various snacks. There were three positive results. The 'value for money' quality of the food improved; there were more customers and tuck shop profits soared.

The incident with Tristan highlighted an aspect of school improvement plans. Before going ahead with plans, know the present situation. Do a baseline assessment. Describe and understand the present situation.



Adding Quality to Tristan's sandwich

Four means of getting baseline assessments are:

- 1 **Data analysis:** An analysis is done of data such as examination results in the different learning areas (subjects). What, for example, are the learning areas with the lowest aggregates? Do the learners need extra resources? Does a teacher need guidance regarding teaching methodology? Learner and staff attendance statistics can be analysed to determine patterns. Do certain Grades/staff members have higher absenteeism rates than the norm? Why? What is to be done about it?
- 2 **Listening and looking:** The story of Tristan and his sandwich is an example of listening and looking by the principal. MBWA (Management by walking around) is an excellent way of getting an understanding of the present situation. Sport and social functions are times when casual comments are made amongst parents and staff. Take note of those comments that-if implemented-could add quality to the school.
- 3 **Market research:** Questionnaires can be issued to learners, parents and staff. In the questionnaire, don't confine questions only to rating aspects of the school such as incidents of bullying or amount of daily homework. Also ask open-ended questions which encourage more than a single-word response. Two examples are:
 - * What aspects of the school do you think need improvement?
 - * What new ideas do you have to further improve the school?

A school might be wary of sending out questionnaires. It could be concerned that there could be too much negative feedback. There will obviously be a level of criticism but remember that the aim is to identify improvement areas. Yet the vast majority of questionnaire respondents will be grateful for the school efforts to improve quality. They will also appreciate being asked for their opinion.
- 4 **Minutes of meetings:** Minutes of meetings of the Governing Body, Parent-Teacher Association, senior management team and learning areas record areas in need of improvement. Refer to these and other minutes to identify these areas.

Quality help from the Governing Body Foundation

The Governing Body Foundation is a non-profit organisation. It is committed to improving the quality of education in state schools. They have professional advisers in the fields of financial and legal management. More information can be obtained from their Executive Officers: Mr Roger Milson on 011-678-0035 (Gauteng and central provinces), Mr Trevor Bennison on 084-403-7886 (Kwa-Zulu Natal) and Mr Mike Kessel on 083-375-1066 (Cape).

A school improvement plan check-list

State schools are required to have school improvement plans. These plans need annual revision and update.

OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) does inspections and quality audits at state schools. It is based within the provincial Departments of Education. Should an OFSTED panel visit a school to do a Whole School Evaluation, it will evaluate nine broad areas. These areas are crucial to a meaningful improvement plan.

Typical questions around the nine areas are:

- 1 **Basic functionality of the school:** On a day-to-day basis does the school function effectively? Are there high percentage attendances by both learners and staff? Are the class and teacher timetables in place? Is there sound financial management?
- 2 **Leadership, management and communication:** Do the principal, staff and School Governing Body (SGB) work in harmony for the benefit of the school? Is the leadership style appropriate for a post-1994 South African school? Are verbal and written forms of communication efficient and effective? Are all stakeholders (learners, parents and staff) well-informed? Is there a participative style of communication between and across the different stakeholders?

- 3 **Governance and relationships:** Are all stakeholders represented on the SGB? Does the SGB carry out its functions well? Is its rapport with educational authorities and others, positive?
- 4 **Quality of teaching and learning:** Does every teacher have a Personal Growth Plan? Is every teacher involved with the IQMS (Integrated Quality Management System) to ensure evaluation and individual improvement? Do the teachers have the requisite knowledge and skills? Is the teaching of high quality?
- 5 **Curriculum, provisioning and resources:** Does the school adhere to the Revised National Curriculum Statement? Are there sufficient human and physical resources to make sound teaching possible?
- 6 **Learner achievement:** Do the learners achieve their full potential in literacy, numeracy and life skills? Are they making good progress in the different learning areas? Is the participation and achievement level high in the extra-mural programme?
- 7 **School safety, security and discipline:** Are the learners safe and secure at school? Is there a disciplinary code which outlines the responsibilities and rights of everyone?
- 8 **School infrastructure:** Are the buildings well-maintained and sufficient for the needs of the learners? Are gardens, playing fields and yards attractive and neat?
- 9 **Parents and community:** Is there a good relationship between the parents and the school? In what ways does the school interact with the wider community? Are the parents and the community involved in school activities? Are there support partnerships?

School improvement plans that work

There can't be many rural schools with the success rate of St Camillus Primary School in Hammanskraal outside the City of Tshwane. Founded in 1921 it has never had huge resources, yet the school has a vision and it's successful track record can be linked directly to its ongoing improvement plans over the years.

For example, last year the New Zealand High Commission donated the erection of a library building at the school. At the start of the 2008 school year the shelves were only 10% full. Through the school's constant networking and good communications, a Church community in Pretoria became aware of the school's need for books. Three months later with the help of their congregation, Christ the King Church in Queenswood—some 40km from St Camillus—had collected more than 2000 books, quality magazines and a computer for the library. It was a joyous occasion when the whole school gathered together and welcomed the book delivery with song, dance and speeches. The Librarian, Mrs. E Pasha, being a professional, wanted to categorise the books according to the Dewey Chart, which is an internationally recognized classification system used by libraries world-wide. The Dewey Chart was obtained. St Camillus School has a model library which is used by its eager learners and well looked after by the Grade Seven Library prefects.



Official presentation of library to Principal Mr. Simon Maphae and Librarian Mrs. Emily Pasha from one of the volunteers from Christ the King community in Pretoria



Learners at St Camillus lined up to welcome the library books



Grade Seven boys unloading boxes of books for their school library