

Education, transformation and the role of school-based management in the Western Cape

Address by Ron Swartz, Head of Education in the Western Cape Province, South Africa

Conference chair
Delegates from all over the world
Colleagues, friends and partners in education

Thank you for inviting me to address you today. This is indeed a great honour.

Thank you for your welcome and kind hospitality. In fact, we have to thank you for many things – especially the partnership we have forged over the past three years to share best practice in school management and leadership.

The National College of School Leadership already reflects best practice in training world-class school leaders through your various programmes.

We are deeply grateful to you for sharing your insights with us as we develop school leadership and management skills in the Western Cape and beyond with the help of a range of partners.

We look forward to sharing ideas and experiences with you at this forum as we engage, as learning organisations, in developing best practice further.

I represent the Western Cape Education Department, or WCED, which is one of nine provincial education departments in South Africa. We report to our provincial governments as well as to the national Department of Education in Pretoria.

As you may know, the WCED launched a pilot School Business Management project in Cape Town a year ago, in April 2007, with partners in the United Kingdom and South Africa.

My task today is to describe what we have done so far jointly to get this project off the ground.

I would like to present the context in which we are working, to give you an idea of the bigger picture in which we are working and the contribution this project must make towards transforming education in South Africa.

Context

Commentators often describe South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy as a miracle. We are certainly proud of what we have achieved, but we are careful when we use the word "miracle".

Unfortunately, the word "miracle" often suggests a lucky break, a fluke.

If fact, our miracle is actually the result of hard work, of people applying their minds, to working together to make a difference in a difficult situation.

The word “miracle” may also imply that we have arrived, that the job is finished, and that everything is OK. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We have made huge progress in rebuilding the country. But we still have a long way to go before we have redressed the legacies of the past. We talk about building a Home for All in the Western Cape.

Our task in education is to build a Quality Learning Home for All, where everyone has access to quality education. We are under no illusions about what it will take to achieve this objective.

Background

Nevertheless, we are proud of what we have achieved so far in education.

During the apartheid era, South Africa had 19 different education departments, each with their own expectations for their learners and teachers.

The education system prepared children differently for the positions they were expected to occupy in the social, economic and political life of the country. The government of the day allocated resources accordingly.

Key characteristics of the system in those days included exclusion, discrimination, disadvantage, and a lack of basic respect for human rights.

Over the past 14 years, we have built a new, single education system with a new curriculum designed to prepare all learners for the 21st century, in a democratic, just and caring society, based on the values of a democratic constitution.

This has taken a long time. The complexity of the task has been enormous. We will reach a key milestone this year when Grade 12s write their school-leaving examinations based on the new, national curriculum for the first time.

The foundations are in place. Now we have to focus on building our Quality Learning Home for All.

Key statistics

At this point, I would like to give you some key statistics on the scope of our work in the Western Cape.

We currently have 1,452 public schools in the province, that accommodate about 936 100 learners. We have 72 schools for learners with special needs. We employ about 30,000 teachers and 8,000 public servants. We operate in eight education districts in the Western Cape.

We have 6 further education and training colleges that provide vocational and technical education at 39 campuses. We provide adult education via 112 community learning

centre operating on 301 sites, and we subsidise early childhood development at 446 sites pre-primary schools.

Human Capital Development Strategy

Our plan for building a Quality Learning Home for All is called the Human Capital Development Strategy for the Western Cape, which acknowledges that the most important resource of our province are our people.

The strategy is a key component of the shared growth and development strategy of the provincial government of the Western Cape, which in turn supports national strategies to achieve the same objectives.

We are well aware of the fact that we have to build our people to build the future of our country.

Our Human Capital Development Strategy, or HCDS, looks at what must be done at every stage of education and on every level to meet the considerable challenges we face to realise the potential of the people of the province.

We face many challenges. I will mention just two.

- Firstly, children in primary school battle to perform in literacy and numeracy at levels required by the curriculum.
- Secondly, about 50 per cent of learners leave high school before completing Grade 12.

The two issues are related. Many factors play a role, most notably poverty. Almost all of our learners who struggle with literacy and numeracy and who drop out of high school live in our poorest communities.

We cannot talk of social transformation until we have successfully addressed these issues.

Our mission is to ensure that our learners acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to realise their potential and to participate meaningfully in society.

We have conducted extensive research into our challenges and we are implementing a wide range of interventions to address them.

For example, our latest study of Grade 6 learners shows that their performance in literacy improved by 9.8 per cent from 35 per cent in 2003 to 44.8 per cent in 2007. While the improvement is encouraging, this is still far from satisfactory.

The research has shown that learners continue to struggle with maths, with a pass rate of only 14 per cent in 2007.

We have implemented a comprehensive strategy to improve literacy and numeracy. The literacy results show that interventions do work, but we still have a lot to do to improve maths performance.

We have various programmes in place to address the throughput rate in high schools. Our biggest challenge in all of these programmes is to ensure that we replicate success in our poorest communities and that these efforts are sustainable.

Role of leadership and management

Our research and experience has shown that many factors play a role in ensuring sustained, effective curriculum delivery. Chief among these is effective leadership and management in our schools.

Other factors include teacher development, relevant teaching and learning materials, infrastructure, technology and safe school environments. We need effective leadership and management to bring all of this together to ensure effective education.

The WCED has been well aware of this issue for some time.

Lessons we have learned in recent years include that short, weekend courses do not make much of a difference in the classroom. We therefore started the Cape Teaching Institute, or CTI, in 2002 to provide in-depth, in-service training for teachers over six to eight weeks.

We have also looked closely at the issue of school leadership and management, and started introducing programmes for school principals and managers at the CTI in recent years.

Principals and school managers have responded excellently to this training, and for this reason we decided to change the name of the CTI to the Cape Teaching and Leadership Institute, or CTLI, last year.

About 2,000 teachers and 750 school leaders took part in CTLI programmes last year. Institute courses for school managers currently include:

- the principal as manager of the curriculum
- roles and responsibilities of deputy principals
- roles and responsibilities of heads of department
- women in and into management and leadership positions
- An induction programme for newly appointed principals
- An induction programme for newly appointed deputy principals
- A course for aspiring principals
- school management team (SMT) training

HCDS and school leadership

Our Human Capital Development Strategy includes an emphasis on effective school leadership and management.

The section on school management and governance quotes a paper published by the Institute of Education Leadership called “Re-inventing the Principalship”, which reads as follows:

“Schools nationwide are grappling with serious problems ranging from random outbreaks of violence and crumbling facilities to staff shortfalls and chronically low academic expectations for students. But many people believe that a scarcity of capable education leaders ranks among the most severe of the problems. Without strong leaders, schools have little chance of meeting any other challenges.”

Our strategy document notes that our analysis of school performance, based on matric results and various systemic evaluations, including our Grade 3 and 6 studies, give a clear indication of the roles that school management and governance play in the growth and development of schools.

To quote the report: “While access to resources obviously makes the job of management easier, it is the leadership and management skills displayed by school managers that make the biggest difference.”

It is true that apartheid education, as well as campaigns against that system, have undermined the leadership role that principals can play in the development of excellence at school level.

However, our Human Capital Development Strategy states, that it is now essential that we re-establish the leadership position of principals and that we give them more powers of management.

School-based management programme

Given this context, it is therefore not surprising that we are taking this initiative to establish a school-based management training programme so seriously.

The programme marks one of the most important steps we have taken so far in our efforts to develop the management capacity of our schools, to make it easier for principals to take up their positions as leaders in education and in social transformation.

I would now like to talk about the origins of this programme, and our progress to date.

The WCED is working with five key partners to develop a certificate course in School Business Management at Level 4 for administrative staff at all schools in the Western Cape. Our partners are:

- The Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)
- The National College for School Leadership (NSCL)
- The Institute of Administrative Management (IAM)
- The South African Bursars Institute of South Africa (SABISA)
- The Independent Schools Association of South Africa (ISASA).

Cameron Dugmore, our Minister of Education in the Western Cape, visited the United Kingdom in 2004 to learn more about what you are doing to develop the knowledge and skills of school-based managers and leaders.

He was very excited about what he learned here. You are addressing very similar issues, including the extent to which administration, accounting procedures and discipline issues distract from the core business of curriculum delivery.

Many hours of discussion and networking by various partners resulted in the pilot programme we have introduced this year for school-based managers and administrators.

The SBM course

Thanks to the input of our various partners, our FET colleges will provide a pilot, certificate course 150 school-based managers this year that will equip them for administering and managing school operations and resources effectively, in a safe school environment.

The programme will adhere to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and will be ratified by the appropriate Standards Generating Body (SGB) and accepted by the relevant certification body, the Education and Training Quality Assurance Body (ETQA).

This is a new qualification and will count for 120 credits. It will be accredited internationally by the IAM. The certificate course will open doors to a diploma course and eventually, a degree course offered by the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

The certificate course will include the following modules.

1. Financial Management
2. Human Resource Management
3. Risk Management
4. Facilities Management
5. Office Systems
6. ICT

In due course, we hope to include an environmental sustainability module, similar to that available in the UK.

Over the past year, our partners have been deeply involved in training the trainers needed for this programme at a variety of workshops.

The focus of the workshops has been to develop clear facilitation skills to ensure that our tutors in the colleges will be able to manage the effective delivery of the certificate course. All the trainers completed the training successfully and received certificates as trainers for the course.

We appointed The Learning Network, or TLN, in March 2007 to develop the certificate course for school-based management, in conjunction with WCED staff and FET College representatives.

The team adapted material from the UK for the South African context and developed six modules and a school-based management module over five months in 2007.

TLN has submitted the qualification to the South African Qualifications Authority, known as SAQA. We hope to hear from SAQA shortly on the outcome of the application.

After registration, the next challenge will be to have the qualification approved and quality assured.

Pilot programme

Our team is in the final stages of selecting the 150 delegates who will begin their training in June 2008. The requirements for selection were as follows.

- All candidates must be WCED staff.
- Must have matric with mathematics (or accountancy or business economics).
- Language proficiency in English.
- Must be computer literate.
- Medium to high level of experience in different modules.
- Must be active in school finance.

The WCED received about 240 applications for the course. Of these, about 60 met the requirements for the pilot. We decided to make special allowances for those who met some of the requirements, or who received special recommendations from our district offices.

We have also considered candidates who have at least Grade 10 with maths, accountancy or business economics and have relevant experience in school administration. However, our team has stipulated that these candidates will have to undertake a test at an FET college to evaluate prior learning.

The first pilot group will complete their certificate course in August this year. We plan to offer the programme to 300 candidates in 2009.

Challenges

The WCED and our partners have worked excellently together to fast-track this programme. The job has not been easy – it normally takes longer to develop a qualification such as this, to create new unit standards and to steer the whole programme through the necessary registration processes.

Nevertheless, we have succeeded thanks to the hard work and cooperation of all concerned. For this we are extremely grateful, and we are now well on track towards adding a whole new dimension to school-based management our province, and hopefully, in due course, elsewhere in South Africa.

We thank all of our partners for playing such a crucial role in addressing such a crucial issue in South Africa. You are making an importance difference to transforming our education system and to building the people and the future of our country.

For this we thank you.