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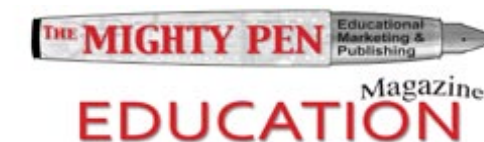
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Our front cover

Snippets of some of our exciting and informative stories for this issue.



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Editor's column

Admissions regulations in Gauteng schools – the Concourt ruling

This month saw the Constitutional Court deliver a verdict regarding the admissions regulations in Gauteng schools. Some would say it is a controversial ruling, others would declare it a victory for human rights and equality.

I guess it depends on how you interpret the term, *public schools*? Does this mean that it is literally the public (parents, school governing bodies and communities) who “own” the schools and have the right to make all the decisions affecting the school, or does the term *public* mean that it is an entity administered by government on behalf of citizens?

And it would be prudent to reflect on (not only in this matter but in all cases involving government and public administration) whether “the people” should be running things or whether it should be managed by a small group of elected officials. Is this not why we have a system of electing officials? We put them there to make decisions and manage issues and institutions on our behalf.

In the latest *Special “Admissions” edition of Undercurrents*, a Governing Body Foundation (GBF) publication, they summarise the ruling as follows:

- On the powers of parents and governing bodies, the judgment states that “it is now settled that even though there are certain powers entrusted to the governing bodies of schools, the power does not exist in a vacuum, and should be exercised in accordance with the applicable provincial law.” Going forward, public schools will more and more be expected to “take into account the ... disparities in the education system characterised by the legacy of apartheid”; to “help reform the public education system”; and to be governed in a manner that caters for more than only the interests of the current parents and learners.
- In respect of children, they need to be “[protected] from unfair discrimination, and (schools must ensure) that the right to education extends equally to all learners”. The judgment suggests that it should be part and parcel of schools’ admissions policies to achieve “an even distribution of learners of various intellectual ability and behavioural dispositions amongst public schools” – i.e. there can be no justification for leading schools to “cherry-pick” only the top-performing and best-behaved children, and to consign a mass of poorer-performing and troublesome ones to less-well-resourced schools.
- In short, “the power of the school governing body to formulate admissions policy is clearly subject to limitations...” and the power to “determine learner enrolment capacity and declare a school full or not . . . falls on the HOD.”

It will be interesting to observe how this spills over into other provinces and how soon it will become nationally binding. Ask yourself the question: what is in the best interest of development?

Editor

Banning technology from the classroom improves academic performance

An article published on Inside Higher Ed titled Leave It in the Bag by Carl Straumsheim refers to a study by faculty members at West Point which found that students perform better academically when laptops and tablets are banned from the classroom.

When faculty members at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point took away students’ computers and tablets in an introductory economics course, their students’ grades jumped.

The study of those faculty members’ findings, published by the *School Effectiveness and Inequality Initiative at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology*, suggests that male students and students with high grade point averages at the beginning of their college careers are most susceptible to their grades suffering from device-induced distraction.

Susan Payne Carter, Kyle Greenberg and Michael Walker, three faculty members in economics at West Point, last year separated students in the course into three sections to determine the effect Internet-connected devices have on academic performance. One section was strictly technology-free, while a second allowed students to use laptops and tablets (though professors were free to discipline “blatantly distracted” students). A third section struck a compromise, allowing students to use tablets as long as the devices lay flat on the desk so that professors could see what was on the screen. The study does not address cell phone use.

The different formats had a marked effect on device use. Students in the third section, which the researchers created to mimic an ideal example of how devices should be used in the classroom, used tablets much less frequently than those in the technology-filled classroom. While 80% of the students in that section said they used a device at some point during the semester, only 41% in the tablet-only class did.

However, the percentage of students who brought their laptops and tablets to class didn’t make a difference in their sections’ academic performance. On a computer-based final exam, students in the sections that allowed some form of device use scored 18% of a standard deviation lower than students in the section where devices were banned.

On a final exam that accounted for 25% of students’ grade in the class, such a difference can tip a score from pass to fail.

The findings carry implications for higher education broadly. By some measures, the use of devices in the classroom is on the rise, and while the occasional

study has found beneficial uses, there is plenty of literature that argues the contrary.

The report presents a handful of potential reasons why using a device in the classroom might lead to lower grades. It could be that digital note taking isn’t as effective as writing by hand, which other studies have sought to explore. Perhaps professors change the way they teach courses when laptops and tablets are introduced to their classrooms. Or it could just have something to do with the endless distractions that are available to students online.

“We further cannot test whether the laptop or tablet leads to worse note taking, whether the increased availability of distractions for computer users (email, Facebook, Twitter, news, other classes, etc.) leads to lower grades or whether professors teach differently when students are on their computers,” the report reads.

“Although many aspects of West Point differ from typical four-year undergraduate institutions, there are many reasons to believe that permitting computers in traditional lecture-style classrooms could have even more harmful effects than those found in this study,” the report reads. “Students at West Point are highly incentivised to earn high marks, professors are expected to interact with their students during every lesson and class sizes are small enough that it is difficult for students to be completely distracted by their computer without the professor noticing.” ▲



Technology centre for foundation school

Sparrow Foundation School, a non-profit organisation (NPO) based in Melville Johannesburg, officially opened its Natural Sciences and Technology Centre on 10 May 2016. The project was made possible through generous contributions by Provantage Media Group and General Electric.

Pupils who attend the Foundation school are now able to take advantage of a fully functional Remedial Learning Centre (RLC), which will now provide the space and equipment to greatly assist in advancing their education. The RLC comprises of three parts, namely; a Literacy Enrichment Centre, a Maths Enrichment Centre and the newly built Natural Sciences and Technology Centre.

Once fully furnished, the Natural Science and Technology Centre will be equipped with multimedia teaching equipment that enables the teaching of lessons using content of any format. This may include online content, audio, video or digitally displayed lesson content. Screens and displays will also be located in the classroom to enable teaching from multiple positions, while also ensuring that learners can access the information no matter where they are in the class.

Digitally enhanced online learning – the future of education

Developments in innovation bring affordable higher education solutions through the use of technology, blended learning and the connected campus concept to the masses.

As South Africans from all walks of life become more connected, technology is increasingly being harnessed in the field of tertiary education. It is however vital that technological innovation in higher education does not simply add a digital component, but rather that it enhances the entire learning process. Dr Felicity Coughlan, Group Academic Director for the ADvTECH group, says the connected campus concept provides a visionary new way for prospective students to access quality higher education opportunities through distance learning.

“We can now develop campuses that will circumvent some of the biggest obstacles students face, including overcrowding, geographic restrictions or excessive commuting. The aim is to use connected campuses to bring high-volume quality education to thousands more South Africans at an affordable price,” says Coughlan.

Studying through a connected campus introduces students to the idea of blending face to face learning with technology. Concepts are introduced during face to face lectures, while activity-based distance learning is then undertaken on the learning management system.



Learners using their new facilities

Provantage Media Group’s HR Manager, Katinka Beeslaar says, “Provantage has always been committed to education and after we did our research on Sparrow Schools, we knew that it was the obvious choice. We knew where our money was going and we can definitely see the results.”

General Electric representative, Mariana Jacobsz also adds, “General Electric is always willing to help Sparrow Schools where they can. It is great to see the difference that is happening in the school. I have also really grown to care for the school and the children.”

Lecturers work online with the students in this period and student collaborative groups offer peer support and feedback. This can then be followed by an extended face to face lecture consolidating the personalised and group learning that has taken place. This cycle is repeated throughout the course.

Lecturers are consistently provided with insights into each student through an online reporting tool, with a view of student engagement allowing them to respond and intervene accordingly.

“It is this collaboration that we believe creates a superior learning experience, allowing learners to take their education into their own hands,” says Coughlan.

It is estimated that today South Africa has 25 million active internet users, 79.1 million mobile connections and 30 million active mobile internet users, all using their various devices to consume news, weather information, traffic updates, social media, reading, and entertainment. It is within this space that the IIE plans to enhance education in South Africa through the development of these connect campuses.



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“Our platform is a ‘one stop shop’ for educators”, continues Joseph. “Catering for schools wanting to sign-up a group of teachers, as well as individuals furthering themselves. And our extensive course offering of 14 courses and counting, appeals to educators, management teams, as well as individuals in other corporate sectors requiring professional development,” says Joseph.

With time being a scarce commodity in the lives of educators, **The Eduvation Network** exists to change the way individuals further themselves and sharpen their professional edge. Their training offering is not only affordable, time-effective and easy to use, but the cutting edge content is sure to leave educators feeling freshly empowered, equipped and motivated to be the best professionals they can be.

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three6five “pops up” Wi-Fi at school sports tournament

Networking and communications expert, three6five, has sponsored and deployed a successful Wi-Fi solution for Bryanston Primary at the school's annual soccer and netball tournament, held at the school's premises in Bryanston, Johannesburg in May 2016.

The Wi-Fi network covered an area just over 26 000 square meters (slightly more than two rugby fields) and was installed for the two days covering the event, 20-21 May. During the course of the tournament, which attracted approximately 3 000 players, supporters and other visitors, three6five's network comfortably handled over 350 logins, with an average usage per client of around 100Mb.

“We are delighted and grateful to have received this sponsorship from three6five,” says Leon Botha, headmaster at Bryanston Primary School. “It provided a unique element to our sports day as parents were able to go online from all fields and courts and follow their teams and schools progress on an online scoreboard, as well as enjoying social media and video streaming.”

Three6five provided onsite technical support for the duration of the event. “The team was professional, courteous and very capable,” adds Botha. “We were very impressed with the level of service provided throughout the event.”

According to Andre Druyts, technical head of three6five's Wi-Fi engineering team in charge of this project, the Wi-Fi network was provided with just six Ruckus ZF7982 high capacity access points (APs). Each AP was capable of providing up to 450Mb/s with up to 500 concurrent clients.

“The backhaul was provided by two high capacity LTE radios fitted with high gain LTE

antennas,” says Druyts. “Each of the two LTE radios provided a maximum capacity of 30Mb/s on the day of the event, and the average usage per LTE radio was around 10Mb/s - thus we were well within our operating limits of the backhaul.”

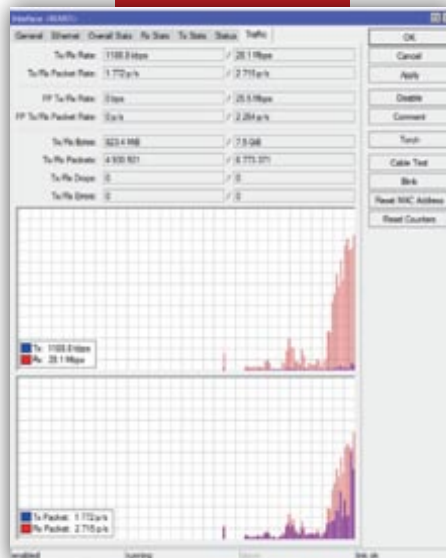
The two backhaul radios were fed into two separate core routers. These routers ran the hotspot and client's registration database for the event. More than 350 clients registered within the two days for the free service and total internet usage for the two-day event was 37.7Gig.

“Each client was given 3Mb/s unshaped traffic for general usage,” adds Druyts. “This was generally used for mobile updates, social networking and video streaming, as well as accessing the scoreboards for both the soccer and netball in real time.”

three6five designed the login page and integration in-house, which also includes the development of the on-site client database that captured all required client information for the school.

“We are proud to have sponsored this exciting event, which gives young athletes the opportunity to experience competition at a consistent level,” says Tyrone Carroll, CEO of three6five.

“The event was vibrant and it was a pleasure to watch the children enjoying themselves in the spirit of competition and good sportsmanship.”





6 QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE IMPLEMENTING AN E-LEARNING SYSTEM IN YOUR SCHOOL OR CAMPUS

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Flipped Learning – turning workforce education on its head

While traditional training methods put teaching at the centre of education, Flipped Learning is an innovative approach that puts learning at the forefront. Dennis Lamberti, the Development Director of Media Works, explains how Flipped Learning is revolutionising education, particularly for the South African workforce.



Traditionally, the training of adults in the work place has taken the form of routine teaching in a classroom setting. These individuals are often being taught with outdated PowerPoint lectures and bulky training guides. In this set-up, the staff become passive consumers of the course material, rather than active participants.

This might have worked for past generations, but to survive in today's competitive marketplace, these old-fashioned methods need an uplift in content and delivery methods, so that companies can upskill their staff effectively and efficiently. That's where Flipped Learning comes in.

What is Flipped Learning?

A relatively new concept in South Africa, Flipped Learning is defined as a teaching approach that reverses the traditional 'classroom' scenario and moves direct instruction from the group learning space to the individual learning space.

As such, students engage with the course material individually, at their own pace, and then come together to work through the material in a group learning environment.

Through Flipped Learning, the group learning space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides the learners and delves deeper into the subject matter. In this space, the students apply the learning concepts and engage creatively with the course material.

How does it work?

Media-rich, interactive lessons are created by education providers, and placed onto a Learner Management System (LMS). These lessons are accessible via a desktop computer, laptop or a mobile device, and are available anywhere, at any time.

The students work through the lesson at their own convenience, and then, on completing the lesson, they will put the learning into practice by completing the workbook exercises. These exercises can be self-marked by downloading the model answer sheets.

Throughout this process, they have access to support via forums, where fellow learners can discuss related topics and the online facilitator can help with any queries. The staff will then come together for regular 'classroom' lessons. It is in this environment that they will put their learning into practice. This is a chance for in-depth discussion of the material, as well as around the more difficult concepts. There will be an experienced facilitator present to guide the discussions and assist students with anything they might be struggling with.

The benefits

• Retain your Millennials

Young adults, the Millennials, are a tech-savvy generation that are constantly connected and focused on their laptops, smartphones and tablets. Their loyalties are known to fluctuate and they are more likely than past generations to jump ship if they are not satisfied with their current work culture. The Flipped Learning model is a great way to keep young adults in the workforce engaged; teaching and upskilling them in a way that is appealing and effective.

• Improve efficiency

By replacing the class instructional time with online instructional modules

(e-learning, embedded videos, downloadable course notes) the trainers can maximise their in-class session by having a prepared group of students who can contribute, with knowledge, to the discussion. This results in far more meticulous learning.

• Improved company profitability

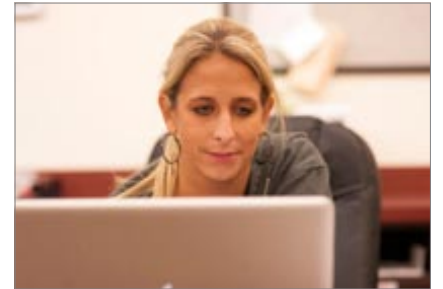
Traditionally, in-class sessions waste precious company time and are far more expensive due to the printed learning materials and extended lecture time that is needed. Flipped Learning minimises this time and because your workforce is constantly learning and improving, and are able to refer back to their online training with ease, they will be far more effective in the workplace. This empowered, well-trained workforce improved the company's bottom line.

• Anytime, anywhere

Employees can access the learning materials on-demand, whether at work or at home. This allows them to digest the information at their own pace. This also fosters independent learning, allowing for the individualised attention that they wouldn't get from a traditional lecture or classroom-style learning environment.

Technology has changed the way we work and play, and it is now changing the way we learn. Flipped Learning is a multifaceted, highly-effective approach to

learning that is set to become common practice in classrooms, lecture halls and workplaces across the country. ▲



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Department of Basic Education partners with TEACH South Africa to deploy maths teachers nationwide

The Minister of Basic Education, Mrs. Angie Motshekga has highlighted the importance of offering mathematics in all schools, however, a shortage of qualified mathematics teachers in the system has been a challenge. In a bid to address this, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with TEACH South Africa to place "TEACH Ambassadors" in schools that do not have qualified mathematics teachers. This forms part of the DBE's national strategy to address the shortage of mathematics teachers, as well as ensuring the promotion of mathematics as a subject necessary for the growth of the South African economy.

TEACH South Africa recruits and selects top performing young graduates in the field of Mathematics, Science and English from universities across the country and places them in disadvantaged and rural schools for a minimum period of two years. TEACH South Africa is committed to providing a platform for young graduates, who have excelled academically, who have demonstrated leadership skills and are committed to giving back to their communities through teaching.

Since its inception in 2009, TEACH South Africa has placed 382 TEACH Ambassadors in eight Provinces and in 228 schools impacting about 25 000 learners. To date, 57% of TEACH Ambassadors remain in the teaching profession, thereby increasing the pool of teachers in these scarce skills. In this partnership the TEACH Ambassadors will be placed in schools that are located mostly in rural areas where it is often difficult to attract qualified mathematics teachers. TEACH South Africa will provide on-going support to the TEACH Ambassadors throughout the two years.

"This large placement enables us to achieve a greater impact across the country. We are proud to partner with the Department of Basic Education to improve the quality of education for children irrespective of their economic background by increasing the pool of quality mathematics teachers in South Africa. School districts in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo had the lowest number of students who passed matric in 2015, we applaud Minister Motshekga for addressing this by ensuring quality mathematics teachers are placed specifically in these areas," says TEACH South Africa Executive Director Richard Masemola.

He says his organisation has recruited and selected graduates from the finest South African Universities who are not only top achievers but who are committed to being Change Agents in South Africa.

"In order to build a prosperous, equitable and competitive South Africa, we must invest in high quality education. This is aligned with the goals of the National Development Plan for Education, Training and Innovation," says Dr. Futhi Mtoba, TEACH South Africa President and Co-Founder.

Minister Motshekga has welcomed the implementation of this initiative as an important step in the right direction. "We need to continue to work with our partners in civil society to ensure that we begin to see improvements, not only the numbers of learners who take up mathematics as a subject, but we also



Fostering a passion for teaching

want learners to come back into the system as qualified mathematics teachers one day. We come from a past where not all learners have had the opportunity to take mathematics as a subject in school, hence the shortage of qualified mathematics teachers today. We need to work hard to ensure that all learners, no matter their social-economic background have every opportunity available to take up careers of their choice without any limitations," said Minister Motshekga.

TEACH South Africa recruitment team is currently visiting universities around the country and calls on all young graduate leaders who are passionate about developing South Africa to apply to become a TEACH Ambassador in 2017. ▲



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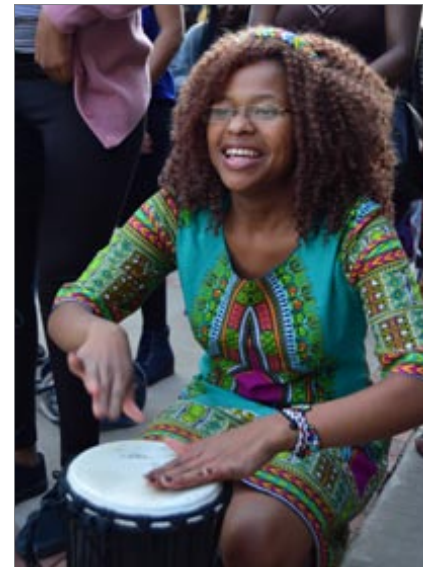
Higher education institute Monash South Africa (MSA) celebrated Africa Day on 25 May 2016 with an eclectic Africa Day festival on its Roodepoort campus. The theme *Africa Rising: #Leaders4Growth* emphasised the importance of leadership and inspired students to grow their leadership skills in order to support Africa's growth.

The festival paid tribute to the cultural melting pot of over 60 nationalities on the campus and also recognised the great potential of MSA students as leaders. The day saw students dressed in traditional attire adding to the festive atmosphere on the campus, while attending thought leadership discussions and cultural activities.

As part of the line-up, noteworthy guest speakers Kojo Baffoe and Noni Gasa were invited to address students, academic leaders and guests on the importance of embracing their African heritage and developing creative collaborations across the continent. Kojo Baffoe spoke passionately on the topic of: *What makes (us) Africa?* Baffoe summed up with the powerful conclusion that each of the MSA students has a duty to be an active citizen within their community and should exercise their power to contribute towards the sustainable development of the country and continent.

Noni Gasa inspired the audience with her discussion on creative collaborations and the importance of Africa using innovative solutions to solve its problems. Her call to action was for students to look beyond their current areas of study and identify inventive solutions that are beneficial to the continent and that foster bilateral trade. Gasa purported that one of the key solutions to Africa's problems is creative partnerships. Young attendees were encouraged to step out of their comfort zones and actively pursue the vast opportunities that exist and can help develop the continent.

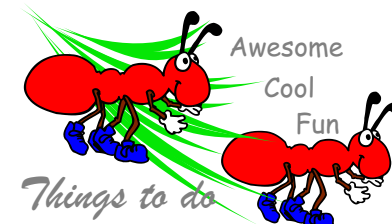
MSA's Student Representative Council (SRC), with the support of MSA students, organised powerful music, dance and poetry exhibitions and ended the event with an interactive drum circle that reverberated across the entire campus. MSA's Lekgotla Square was transformed into a cultural food and lifestyle market;



the aroma of traditional foods and the sounds of native languages being spoken is testament to the diverse student community.

Leadership and unity were strong themes throughout the Africa Day Festival. CEO of Monash South Africa

>> to page 14



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and CEO of Africa Operations for Laureate International Universities, Esther Benjamin and fellow academic leaders showed their support and celebrated the day with the students. Monash South Africa also used the occasion to mark their 15th anniversary of providing quality education to students from all over Africa.

Rise Africa

Written for the event by Busi Khaba, Political Studies Lecturer

Africa, you were once labelled a ‘dark continent’; a people of a forgotten region isolated and fragmented. Africa we now boast of your natural majesty and share with the world your incredible resources from gold, diamonds and agricultural wealth.

You, Africa lent the world your wealth and shared your resources generously. You on whose grounds, battles which were not even yours, were fought.

Let us now rise, Africa let’s celebrate your uniqueness and diversity and embrace your qualities. There is no pride when we as the people of Africa fail to recognise ourselves reflected in others. How can we progress when we attack each other? Xenophobia is a reeling evil seeking to divide the people of Africa. We are all foreigners in other countries. I want to call Africa my home regardless of where I am, from Algeria to South Africa, from Somalia to Senegal – we are a people of the African soil and Africa is home. The borders that separate us hold no power over the precious human life that occupies the land within. Let us unite, dear Africa.

Africa, who has armed you with such destructive weaponry? Where did you bury the concept of Ubuntu when our sons have turned into soldiers and our daughters’ bodies a ground to fight war? Our people driven by fear displaced across the world, dwelling in refugee camps as though they do not belong to this continent. What has become of our humanity, where have we buried our conscience? Africa, too much blood has been spilled on your corridors. How did we become intolerant of each other as Africans? When we are unable to unite in our diversity, we draw ethnic lines separated by languages, creed, race and religion. It is the very essence of our diversity that embodies our uniqueness as a people of a continent. Our borders are merely geography defining spaces between us. Africa shake off the shackles of the past and stride forward. Rise from the dust of the past. Rise up and pace forward.

Africa, you are capable of producing quality leaders, visionaries, men and women of integrity who understand that leading is being servant to the people. Leaders who look beyond their position of power and do not manipulate systems to stay in that power. Africa, it was you who produced great leaders, the likes of Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, profound thinkers; Chinua Achebe and Mariama Bâ. Leaders who were prepared to lay down their lives to realise the liberation of your people.

Africa, let’s embrace and remember the sincere values of Ubuntu, sharing the pain and gains of our people. Acknowledging that “Umuntu ngu muntu ngabantu” (I am because you are). Africa let us rise and continue to stride forward in good faith and in a spirit of unity. The time is now. Rise Africa. Today, and every day, let your brightness shine across the globe.



The higher education institute recently added an MBA degree to its School of Business and Economics and remains dedicated to producing quality graduates equipped for the African and global workplace. ▲



“I keep things interesting with a mix of different activities that learners can draw out of a hat.”

– C Frank, Chatty Senior Secondary School, Eastern Cape.

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Maths champ has a bright future ahead of him

"If it wasn't for the Siyanqoba Regional Olympiad Training Programme I wouldn't be here. When I went to the University of Pretoria training centre, I met people who are like minded. Had it not been for the extensive training I received I wouldn't have gotten a bronze medal at the PAMO" explained Mpho.

Well spoken, hardworking and talented – those are some of the words that describe Mpho Nkwana, a grade 12 learner from Clapham High School in Pretoria. He hails from Soshanguve and is so much inspired by his community that he felt it was his obligation to represent them in a field that he felt most young black people are underrepresented. Mpho was the only black learner in a team of six who represented South Africa at the 2016 Pan African Mathematics Olympiad (PAMO) in Senegal. The South African team came out with flying colours ending up as winners in both the overall competitions as well as PAMO-G (the competition for girls).

Being in Senegal and outside the country for the first time was a bit scary for Mpho as he recalls being in disbelief about representing South Africa. "I actually came to my senses and said to myself – Mpho this is what you have wanted all along. I realised that all my hard work and planning finally worked out and all I had to do was enjoy the moment," said Mpho.

One aspect of the PAMO that Mpho recalls as the main difference between Senegal and South Africa is the level of mathematics education. "We might have won the PAMO but they are miles ahead in terms of mathematics education," he explained.

At home Mpho plays soccer with his friends to refresh his mind. He looks up to his parents due to the fact that they have been through so much and yet still managed to overcome difficult challenges that they were faced with. He values the role of his mathematics teachers as they believed in him. Mpho hopes to change the mindset of the learners at Clapham High School regarding mathematics. He is currently helping other learners at his school in mathematics and encourages his peers to be persistent. "They should switch to a positive mindset and tell themselves that this subject is not that difficult and that it just needs time, hard work and asking the relevant people for advice. Learners should be willing to make a lot of sacrifice if they want to achieve their set goals, sleeping for 8 hours a day is something I had to sacrifice," explained Mpho.

Mr Edward Pause, mathematics teacher at Clapham High praises the Siyanqoba Regional Olympiad Training Programme "The Siyanqoba Programme is a terrific programme and without it we would not be able to coach learners for the Maths Olympiad". He emphasises the need for Siyanqoba as the Olympiad questions are a bit harder than school mathematics and thus learners need an advanced programme to train them to answer such questions.

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) has sponsored the programme since its inception in 2011. "We are excited to see the excellent progress made by Mpho. However, we are sure that there are hundreds of other learners out there with the same ability, interest and dedication to excel in mathematics," said Bersan Lesch, Deputy Director: Science Promotion at DST.

About the South African Mathematics Foundation

The South African Mathematics Foundation (SAMF) is registered as a non profit organisation aiming to advance the mathematics development and education of South African children and young people through improved quality teaching and learning of mathematics as well as through public awareness activities. The company was founded in 2004 by the Association for Mathematics Education of South Africa (AMESA) and the South African Mathematical Society (SAMS).

The SAMF serves as a national office for mathematics to promote the effective co-ordination, administration and advancement of mathematics in South Africa. ▲

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(From Left) Loraine Mathibedi, Ellie Olivier, Mpho Nkwana and Edward Pause

Technical skills not enough to make it in the world of work

With SA's unemployment figures at their highest in eight years, and in an ever more competitive job market, technical proficiency in a chosen field is no longer enough to help a graduate land a job and be successful in the workplace, an education expert says.

"Students and higher education institutions understandably spend the vast amount of their time on ensuring a sound technical understanding and subject expertise, however too often the skills that will make a student stand out and ensure resilience in a volatile environment are not given due consideration," says Wonga Ntshinga, Senior Head of Programme: Faculty of ICT at The Independent Institute of Education (IIE), SA's largest and most accredited private higher education institution.

Ntshinga says it is important that colleges and universities devote sufficient attention to cultivating those skills which will leave graduates more well-rounded and able to operate effectively in the workplace.

"Communication is perhaps the most important skill a human possesses. It encompasses a wide range of skills such as building relationships, listening carefully, influencing and building empathy," he says.

"Yet poor communication skills are often cited as a major workplace challenge for technical staff. For instance in the case of IT experts, they work with systems that are predictable and that do as they are told. However when dealing with people, a logical approach will not always be effective, and many technical professionals and students become frustrated with colleagues in other sectors when there is a failure to do 'the obvious' thing."

Ntshinga says that such a situation could cause someone who is at the top of their game technically, to lose out on career opportunities because they don't get along with their colleagues and superiors.

It is therefore incumbent on higher education institutions to enable an environment in which empowering skills are given due focus, he says, adding that the following could serve as guidelines for students and institutions:

1. Encourage students to read. Prolifically. "Reading is essential – be it the daily newspapers or a variety of fiction and non-fiction. The curriculum of technical programmes is composed of technical reading, and very few students take the time to read something outside their domain. However this causes for a blinkered outlook to life which will limit a student's opportunities."
2. Expose students to their peers in other disciplines or academic programmes. "This will help the students to understand what the communication norms are and what will be effective," says Ntshinga.



Communication skills are important



Learn an additional language

"It creates the opportunity for them to learn from others and participate in meaningful conversations not restricted to their own subject matter, and builds engagement, collaboration, and value-based leadership skills."

3. Additionally, students will learn how to adjust their communication approach depending on the audience, he says.
4. Encourage students to learn an additional language. Whether a local or foreign language, being able to at least converse with and understand people from another culture will always broaden horizons and understanding, and will serve as a valuable addition to a graduate's CV.
5. Give students a thorough understanding of the real-life business environment. "Institutions should train and up-skill students to understand the business area that they will be working in together with



Reading skills



Social media skills

- has become public, and even sharing of the wrong kind of content can cost you your reputation or career. Students need to understand the power of social media, and also the great degree of responsibility required when interacting online, where mistakes last forever."
7. Develop an understanding of the rules of engagement. "Students should be encouraged to learn at least rudimentary debating skills, as well as the main techniques of reflecting," says Ntshinga. "It is often reflection that results in optimal communication, thinking and learning."

the type of customer they will be dealing with, to empower them with workable solutions to communications issues that commonly arise in their field," says Ntshinga.

6. Develop a solid understanding of social media. "Social media is no longer just a social thing, and even a cursory glance at many students' profiles reveals the precarious position in which they find themselves. The personal

Finally, a solid understanding of ethics and about right and wrong behaviour will stand any graduate in good stead, particularly in our South African context. ▲



Debating skills

Chess in education – make your move

The award-winning program, MiniChess, has been presented at numerous international conferences as education-innovation – including WISE (World Innovation Summit on Education) where it was nominated for a prestigious award. It utilises creative-play, focussing on young minds of 5 to 9 year olds, to empower critical thinking, numeracy-understanding, as well as the inner world of visualisation and socio-emotional awareness. Chess Grandmaster Garry Kasparov endorses the program, calling it "the most scientific program in the world, linking chess with education".

It is not chess-coaching – but utilises the complexity of the game to develop critical skills for 21st century success. In a world of black & white squares, mathematical concepts are learned interactively – with movement, colour, social-interaction, touching and talking – starting in the real concrete world before moving to abstract concept and application.

Kings, Queens and their men implement ideas of attack and defence, strategic planning, risk-management, problem-solving and the ultimate beauty of creative thought, brilliancy and flair – inside a world of objectivity and fairness. Playing fun-filled mini-games with friends, like Monster-King, Pawn-Soccer, Crazy Queen and more, lays the foundation for confident decision-makers of the future... young minds who understand consequence and purposeful result, while interacting with co-players and friends over the borders of age, gender, culture, language and physical ability.

The MiniChess program's well-structured curriculum, with 4 levels of learner workbooks, teacher training, age-appropriate materials and equipment, benefits all seven areas of early childhood development, with proven results in correcting all early developmental-backlogs (University of Pretoria Study). MiniChess allows for education-revolution in the hi-tech age, away from solitary screen-time, content-driven parrot-learning and rigid assessment-standards, to allow the young

mind playful experimentation at its own pace, in a fun-filled social environment and within its own set of abilities. Young children's language of learning is play – therefore the age-old game, with story-telling and role-play, still has excellent value in building a solid foundation for a new world of ideas . . . moving our children into the fast-changing 21st Century with confidence.

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For more information go to:
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MINICHES
Empowering young minds for a bright future

Collaboration between UJ and the Direct Selling Industry delivers outstanding results and curbs graduate unemployment

While South Africa's unemployment rate continues to rise, a programme taking place at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) is proving to be hugely successful, preparing marketing and retail students for the modern workplace and providing them with both valuable practical skills and job opportunities.

The programme, a collaboration between UJ and the Direct Selling Association of South Africa (DSASA), began 14 years ago in 2002. To date it has benefited more than 14 000 students who have earned a combined total of R8.8 million. In addition, part-bursaries totalling R600 000 have been awarded.

The programme ensures that students gain practical personal selling and sales management experience by exposing them to direct selling. It teaches them the basics of business and how to sell, equipping them with skills they can use immediately to earn an income and demonstrate that they have acquired practical sales experience whilst at the University.

The programme is a compulsory element of their marketing and retail course work.

"The initiative has a positive impact on students, by imparting sales, finance and business management skills, as well as giving them increased confidence," says Dr Marius Wait, Head of UJ's Department of Marketing Management.

"Marketing carries with it somewhat of a glamorous connotation and many students and prospective employees lack an in-depth understanding of what lies ahead in the real world. This programme enables students to be exposed to the Direct Selling Industry and gain practical work experience."

This collaborative project has proven so successful that some UJ students are now choosing to continue with their direct selling endeavours after graduating. The project has also been well received by industry, with many companies approaching UJ directly to employ their experienced third-year students. This competitive advantage that the UJ students have over other students is evident by the number of final third-year students finding employment.

"We are incredibly proud of the success of our collaboration with the DSA. Together we are creating well-rounded, competent marketing and retail students who are going out boldly and strengthening the South African economy," said Dr Wait.

From health and beauty options to financial products – the direct selling industry contributes a massive R8-billion a year to the economy, and has created income opportunities for approximately 1.4-million people, either part or fulltime, making it a significant contributor to the job market.

By partnering with a tertiary education institution, like UJ, the DSA – the leading ambassador for the local Direct Selling Industry – is further boosting its contribution to the country by upskilling graduates, generating employment and providing new sources of income.

UJ graduate, Tsidi, says that she learned to put into practice what she had learned in the classroom, and that learning about direct selling taught her people skills, communication skills, how to think on her feet in a real-life sales environment as well as important persuasive skills. "One of the advantages of direct selling is that it's simple for anyone to do, even with full-time jobs".

"Few people realise the massive contribution that the direct selling industry brings to our economy, as well as its ability to empower South Africans with valuable sales and business skills, as well as interpersonal skills, confidence and the ability to build their own small and medium sized businesses," says Ernest du Toit, Chairman of the Direct Selling Association.

"We are extremely proud of our collaborative efforts at UJ and remain committed to the programme. We foresee that this sustainable initiative will continue to create skills, experience and outstanding results, well into the future, and provide real and credible job opportunities for graduates." ▲

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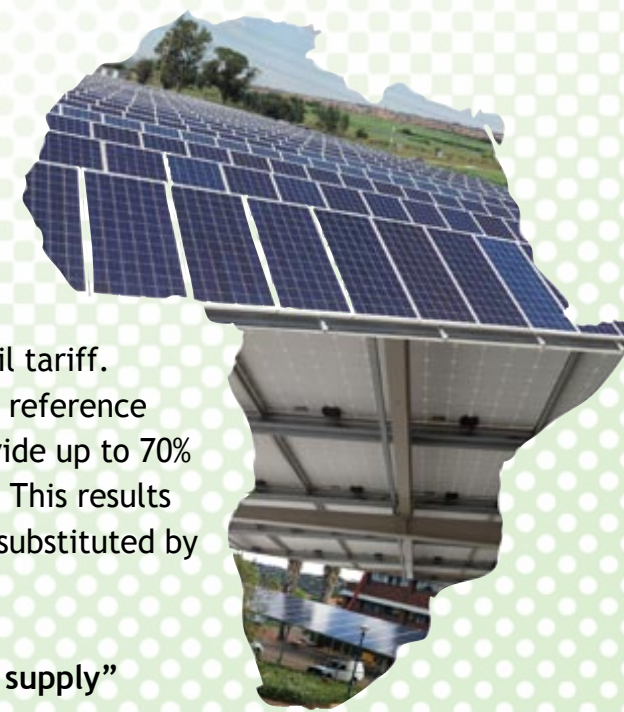
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