



SYMPHONIA



# School @ the Centre of Community

**Mobilizing citizens and communities to partner with principals  
and teachers to educate our children**

**Guide to the S@CC Leadership Development process**

**An invitation to Active Citizenship**



## Introduction

The **School at the Centre of Community (S@CC)** project creates opportunities for business, government and civil society to collaborate in dealing with the significant educational challenges in South Africa. It is the project's commitment and contribution towards realising the third Dinokeng scenario: **Walking together**.<sup>1</sup>

**Business leaders are requested to bring their skills, knowledge and experience into a partnership with principals to mobilize the community around a school to take responsibility for the wellbeing of the school, the learners at the school, and therefore the fabric of our society.**

This project is an innovation in the field of leadership development. International research has shown that the most powerful and effective leadership development processes are those where leaders are taken out of their comfort zones and given difficult challenges to grapple with. Organisations are increasingly looking for alternatives to traditional classroom-based development processes.

Instead of throwing more money at the problem, the **School at the Centre of Community** initiative provides an opportunity for organisations to have their business leaders actively involved in solving the education challenges in South Africa. It is our responsibility as citizens to bring the brightest and most talented minds together to help create a culture of learning, where every citizen knows that they have a contribution to make with regard to raising our children and helping them thrive.

Through formal leadership development sessions and community building workshops, experiential learning, community of practice sessions and coaching support, the partners will mobilise active citizenship in the community surrounding the school. Their joint task is to facilitate stronger partnerships between teachers and parents, the school and other members of the community, thereby creating an environment that is conducive to achieving the learning outcomes in the school.



"I long so much that we will become the country we have it in ourselves to become, a caring, not hugely successful, but one in which every South African feels they matter."

*Archbishop Emeritus  
Desmond Tutu*

<sup>1</sup> - The purpose of the Dinokeng discussions and scenario building, conducted from August 2008 to April 2009, was to engage citizen leaders from all corners of South Africa in a discussion about the future

“Being Ridwan’s partner was without any doubt the most powerful leadership development experience that I have ever participated in. It was for me more powerful than doing an MBA or a Doctorate. I learned so much about myself and what it means to be leader in a situation where I don’t have direct control or authority. It created an opportunity for me to contribute in a very practical way to one of the most critical issues facing our country. In addition to developing my leadership skills, I also discovered something about a community I had very little knowledge about. Imagine if every leader in South Africa could get the opportunity to immerse themselves in a community other than the one in which they normally find themselves? I believe this is how we will strengthen the fabric of South African society.”

*Louise van Rhyn, founder/CEO of the Symphonia group of companies and PFP with Ridwan Samodien, principal at Kannemeyer Primary School in Grassy Park, southern suburbs of Cape Town*

## Vision

The S@CC vision calls for the school to be at the centre of a community – and speaks to the idea that the quality of education, the improvement of the school environment and the increased engagement of parents and teachers provide an upward spiral for real change and inspiring possibilities. The collective impact of all the changes on the children is multiplied and will result in improved learner outcomes and safer, stronger communities.

One of the keys to the success of this programme is the collaborative approach, tapping from and reaching into vital entry points in the system. Through intentional design, learners become the direct beneficiaries of community energy, talent and commitment channelled to the school.

Our goal is to contribute to the improvement of learner outcomes by providing a significant systemic shift in the culture in and around schools. This will be achieved by recruiting business and community leaders in a creative partnership with school principals. Such partnerships are designed to strengthen the capacity to build vibrant communities around each school, mobilising gifts and talents to support the quality and effectiveness of the educational environment.

## Partners for Possibility: A leadership development innovation

With the S@CC project experienced business and community leaders are given the opportunity to partner with principals in a Partner for Possibility (PFP) role. By pledging to jointly create a community building event for the school community, the principal and PFP also commit to develop their leadership capacity and create an opportunity to mobilise citizens and members of the school community to become actively involved at the school.

The PFP is not a coach or a mentor, but rather a thinking partner to the principal. The PFP’s role is to work with the principal to mobilise and engage talents and assets in the surrounding community. Together they will enroll citizens around the school to become actively and meaningfully engaged in the challenges of their school.

The activities at each school will depend on the needs of the principal and that particular community. Through the support of structured training as well as group and individual coaching, the PFPs will develop their own leadership skills, while working with the principal to craft creative solutions to challenges at the school. This role provides an opportunity for leaders to develop their capacity to lead change in a complex and ambiguous environment. It is an opportunity for active citizenship whilst making a meaningful contribution.



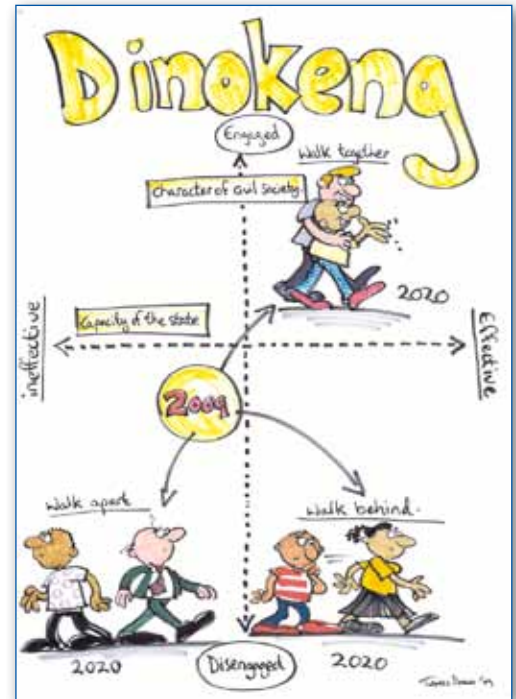


## Active citizen engagement

Active citizen engagement is embodied in the call by the Dinokeng scenarios and government for collective engagement and community mobilisation. South Africa's national minister of basic education, Angie Motshekga, has repeatedly made progressive appeals for community involvement in education. In announcing the matric results in January 2010, she said, "We will continue to mobilise our communities to involve themselves in the education of our children throughout the year." President Jacob Zuma has said, "Education is a societal issue... I call on parents and communities to truly place education at the forefront of our national agenda."

The Dinokeng scenarios project has highlighted the potential cost of being locked into the status quo for the future of South Africa and underscores the risks associated with the current levels of citizen apathy. The challenge of catalysing citizen engagement in the education sector is clear.

The S@CC vision is to pursue the goal described in the Dinokeng scenarios report: "Towards an educated nation: In education, business is asked to work more closely with the education department to help develop the skills the economy needs."



## Shifting and customising CSI practices

In South Africa corporate social responsibility or investment has sought to uplift people who were disadvantaged during and as a result of the apartheid regime. Finetuning this, many role-players in the private sector are re-evaluating how they can make a real difference in education, according to Anne Bernstein and Margie Keeting<sup>2</sup>. In order to contribute to nation building, S@CC believes that the nature of corporate giving could have greater impact if the messages of the Dinokeng scenarios were given more weight and practical expression on grassroots level.

Our research indicates that billions are being spent on education-related initiatives every year. Most organisations are disappointed with the return on investment from these efforts and are consequently becoming disillusioned about the amount spent on a range of fragmented projects which often lack coherence and impact. In the education sector, little of this commitment and expenditure has "produced much traction".<sup>3</sup>

As a result, companies need to find a way to design different opportunities in order to optimise active involvement on the part of executives and employees (rather than involving them once a year in a PR effort). "Many firms are now placing a greater emphasis on employee volunteering and pro bono services to nonprofit and charity organisations."<sup>4</sup>

"The greatest gift has been to develop a strong relationship with Anthony. It started as a business relationship and evolved to partnership and friendship. We have both learned and grown through working together this last year. The community is already getting the benefit from Anthony's involvement in the programme."

*Justin Kiley, PfP with Anthony Adams, principal at Zwaanswyk High School in Retreat, southern suburbs of Cape Town*

“Children spend only 20 percent of their waking hours in school... If we're serious about closing the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged kids, we need to attack the time issue and find ways to make much better use of some of the 80 percent that is now largely wasted.”

*Eric Schwartz, founder of Citizen Schools*



Companies instinctively know that it will be more meaningful to create an opportunity for their executives to be actively involved in an area where the executive can learn something while making a contribution<sup>5</sup>. Businesses can affect change beyond sending a cheque by sharing skills and expertise in carefully selected initiatives such as S@CC.

The S@CC model is calling for **meaningful engagement by corporate executives and leaders, with schools and communities**. Such corporate responsibility, which draws on the leadership skills and creativity of business leaders, could be integrated and amplified by a financial contribution.

## How the programme works

### Leadership development for principals and business leaders

This project seeks to build the capacity of business leaders and school principals through leadership development and community building strategies. In this sense, the project provides an alternative approach and context for a unique kind of leadership development.

The project introduces carefully selected development methodologies, community events and learning processes that are specifically designed to be implemented in each participating school. While there will not be a prescribed one-size-fits-all approach for schools, the underlying values and methodologies will remain the same. In this way, stakeholders – from teachers to surrounding community members – will be aligned with the vision emerging from community building events.

We have defined four aspects of the project that will contribute to the development experience: Structured development processes, Experiential learning, Communities of practice sessions, Coaching and reflection and Documenting and celebrating the journey.

### Structured development processes

School principals and PfPs are expected to attend five days of structured development, including a:

- **Community building workshop** based on the philosophy of Peter Block, about the nature of real transformation and the kind of leadership that is required to achieve it. (Two days at the end of February each year.)
- **Time to Think and S@CC methodology workshop**, giving an understanding of how the programme is structured and capacitating participants with the tools to co-create solutions to complex problems and to work and communicate effectively. (One day in March each year.)
- **Flawless consulting training course**, giving participants access to information on how influence across boundaries and create generative partnerships. (Two days in September each year.)

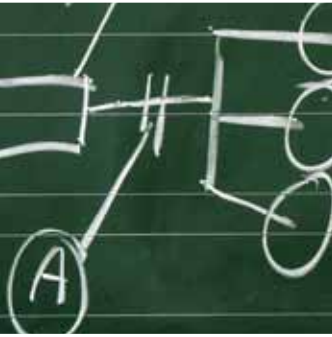
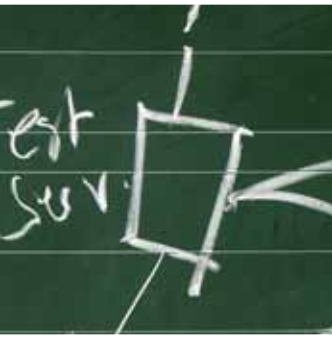
2 - Bernstein & Keeton, Corporate Social Investment (Business Day, 2 June 2010). Bernstein is the executive director of the Centre for Development and Enterprise. Keeton is a trustee of Epoch & Optima

3 - Bernstein & Keeton

4 - Citizen You: Doing your part to change the world (Jonathan M. Tisch)

5 - Citizen You: Doing your part to change the world (Jonathan M. Tisch)

School @ the Centre of Community - Programme for 2011



Month	Activities	Notes
Feb	Formal Training (5 days per PFP) Community (2 days) Building	All 10 PFPs & Principals in a cell to meet every 6 weeks for a community of practice meeting (What are we learning?) 12 hours = 1.5 days per PFP
Mar	S@CC Methodology (1 day)	Learning Process Facilitator to meet monthly (virtually) with each PFP (coaching / support / Time to Think) [+/- 12 hours = 1.5 days per PFP]
Apr		PFP & Principal to meet a few times a month (1:1 as thinking partners) [+/- 32 hours = 4 days per PFP]
May		
Jun		Madiba Day (+/4 hours) Community building event at the school
Jul		
Aug		
Sep	Flawless Consulting (2 days)	
Oct		PFP & Principal to do presentation to sponsoring organisation
Nov		
Dec		Recognition & commitment ceremony

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela

“It takes a village to raise a child.”

African proverb



## Experiential learning

Experiential learning puts participants at the centre of their own learning, immersing them in a process of inquiry that begins with the participant’s own knowledge and shows them how to find answers to their own questions. In this model, participants must think for themselves, work collaboratively with others and create new knowledge by following their own curiosity.

School principals and PFPs are thinking partners with a job to do. Their task is to engage the community and grapple with how best to do this practically. They then arrange a large group community building event at the school and maintain momentum following that event.

The partner and principal are asked to create solutions together to questions neither partner may have the answer to by themselves. The opportunity to be a thinking partner along with the principal provides possibilities for growth and for making a meaningful contribution to the communities they engage with.

- Principals and PFPs will meet a few times a month (to be determined by the participants) with the focus on exploring how to engage the community. This will take up an approximate 32 hours over a period of 10 months.
- The PFP may be asked to join the principal and teachers for parent engagement activities.
- Half-day community event: A community day will be organised and hosted by the principal and the PFP close to International Mandela Day (17 July). The event will be focused on community and citizen engagement.

## Communities of practice

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Members of the group value their collective competence and learn from each other. They engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other and share information. Participants of a community of practice share a repertoire of resources, including experiences, stories, tools and ways of addressing recurring problems.<sup>6</sup>

School principals and PFPs will receive guidance from a learning process facilitator (LPF) connected to and responsible for a group of principals and PFPs. In this way, participants stay connected to the outcomes of the project and have the opportunity to connect to other partners going through the programme.

Communities of practice are critical for transformation in the leadership development process. Transformation happens by becoming aware of what you learn, and that occurs by having the opportunity to reflect on and articulate the experience. PFPs and principals will meet every six weeks for a community of practice meeting to share what they are learning.

## Coaching and reflection

Coaching will be provided to the PFPs and the principals to support them on their learning journey. The role of the coach will be to ask questions to the individual as a way to help them reflect on their process. Cultivating the capacity to reflect provides opportunities for the partners to find their own answers and to be conscious of their learning.

- The learning process facilitator (LPF) will have a monthly virtual coaching meeting with each PFP.
- The purpose of the session is to help the PFP integrate their learning, make use of their experience and deal with any challenges they may be facing. This works out to about 1,5 days.

6 - Etienne Wenger, Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction



## Documenting and celebrating the journey

The principal and PfP will be expected to document their journey as part of the process. They will be encouraged to take photographs & videos, keep meeting notes, copies of emails and journal entries so that they have a record of their 'story'. The principal and PfP will be asked to arrange a meeting with their sponsoring organisation (typically in October or November) where they will tell their story and celebrate their successes and learnings. Our experience shows that this is a powerful learning process and opportunity for sense-making and appreciation.

## Commitment

Partners for Possibility are asked to commit approximately 96 hours over a period of 10 months. During this time they will be attending training sessions, community of practice session, coaching conversations, working with the principal to engage the community and documenting their journey.



## Investment

The cost of participating in this leadership development opportunity is R30,000 (and is typically paid by the PfP's employer or another sponsoring organisation). This covers the cost of training sessions, coaching and community of practice facilitation and support (through learning process facilitators in different regions of South Africa).

The S@CC project seeks active engagement from sponsoring organisations and asks that leaders from these organisations bring their creativity and experience in crafting solutions to meet the needs of the school and the community, and to make a real connection with the people involved.



## Programme Benefits

The **School @ the Centre of Community** programme offers a variety of benefits for the Partners for Possibility, sponsoring organisations, school principals, learners, teachers, and the school community:

- Improves leadership skills of school principals and PfPs (i.e. ability to engage stakeholders, build community, and deal with challenging issues).
- Strengthens communities by building relationships with teachers, learners, parents, principals and other people and organisations involved at the school.
- Creates opportunities for the business leaders to engage with communities outside of their current experience. These kinds of engagements will strengthen the fabric of South African society.
- Increases self-esteem of principals as they re-discover their gifts and capacity to lead the school community.
- Strengthens organizations by developing leaders who discover their capacity for citizenship through actively engaging with one of the toughest (and most critical) issues facing our country.



- Engages parents as active partners in education so that children are more supported and have a better chance to do well at school.
- Generates a strong sense of community and connection to the school, which leads to improved safety and improved opportunity for the children of the community.
- Makes a meaningful contribution to one of the biggest challenges facing our country.

## Endorsements

*"It is clear that we all underestimate just how deeply our history has hurt people and institutions, but if our country is to have any chance of transcending that hurt and if our people are to take full ownership of our future then our schools must lead the way. I believe that Symphonia has it right and that partnership with our leaders in this critical venture, our principals, will create a new environment and release the kind of positive, confident energy, supported by knowledge that will put us on a new path. I support this project unconditionally and hope sincerely that the project will be supported: for all of our sakes"*

**Brian O'Connell, Rector and vice-chancellor, University of the Western Cape**

*S@CC appeals to all South Africans to become citizens and to become actively involved in the education of our children. Education is the key to secure a bright future for all our children.*

**Ridwan Samodien, Principal, Kannemeyer Primary**



## Contact details:

The project is being managed by **Symphonia for South Africa** (Incorporated Under Section 21) Company Reg : 2008/029018/08 NGO Registration Number: 072-323 NPO PBO Number: 930029675

**Symphonia** means 'the sounding together of all the voices' (creating opportunities for all the voices to make a contribution to South Africa) Symphonia for South Africa's **purpose** is to strengthen the fabric of South African society. [www.Symphonia.net](http://www.Symphonia.net)

For more information about the leadership development programme, please contact one of the following people:

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*"S@CC speaks to the urgent and fundamental need to fix South Africa's school system; and also speaks to the energy that exists in all sectors to work together on this national priority. Schools provide a unifying point to bring together parents, donors, religious teachers, pupils, to help our young people to fly and for our nation to be the best. Education is the tried and tested route out of poverty."*

**Graeme Bloch (Education Expert)**

*"I identify fully with the aims and objectives of the School @ the Centre of Community project. In my view it addresses one of the critical success factors in education in a practical and meaningful way. I am confident that this worthy project will, over time, improve the quality and effectiveness of education in South Africa."*

**Brand Pretorius (CEO, McCarthy)**

*"We are happy to endorse the Schools at the Centre of the Community project: As a business we focus on connecting schools to parents using technology, we have seen the actual benefits of what happens when parents are made aware of what is happening in a school, and how that improves the education of the learner. Your project takes this to a new level, and enables not only parents but all the people involved in a school community (learners, parents, educators and the local community) to come together and make a difference."*

**Salah Elbaba (CEO, smsWeb)**

*"I would like to take this opportunity to state my support for the "School at the centre of Community" project. This goes to the very heart of some of our most pressing social concerns and tackles them in a realistic, sustainable and results-driven fashion. So often in our modern world we see well meaning projects spring up that have neither the wisdom nor the focused intentionality to have lasting impact. This project is not one of those. It is founded on excellent thinking, broad vision and hard work and I believe that it can and will play a significant role in the future development of our communities. By placing schools, our children and youth at the epi-centre of the process of healing and transformation this project is acknowledging that change must happen, not only from the top down, but from the inside out"*

**Justin Foxtton (Founder and Director of national awareness campaign "Stop Crime Say Hello")**

*"Through their passion for community building in South Africa and their belief that South African citizens can create a caring society, Symphonia is inspiring and energising thousands of people to make a positive difference in their personal and professional lives. I fully endorse their S@CC initiative and feel honoured to be involved."*

**Dr Alice Ashwell (CEO, EnviroEds)**

