

News / [Book tells story of powerful partnerships in education](#)Like 33 8+1 0**BOOK TELLS STORY OF POWERFUL PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATION**

By Gary van Dyk

Photo : gary van dyk

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Celebrating the Western Cape launch of the book were, seated from left, Sabelo Makubalo, Professor Brian O'Connell, Mandy Collins, Ridwan Samodien and Denzil van Graan. Standing from left, Trevor Manuel, Irené Raubenheimer, Sharon Rohm, Debbie Schafer, Louise van Rhyn and Professor John Volmink. PHOTO: gary van dyk

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The positive power of a partnership of business and school principals is now available in a publication that highlights how radical change is coming about in education.

Partners for Possibility is an organisation that had its humble beginnings in 2010 as a project of the Symphonia organisation that has brokered groundbreaking partnerships between business leaders and schools, and is still reaping astonishing results.

Last week the organisation hosted the Western Cape launch of the book written by Mandy Collins and it chronicles the story of a community building process and leadership project that has the potential to change and empower education in South Africa.

The book details its beginnings at Kannemeyer Primary School in Grassy Park when one of the founders of the organisation Louise van Rhyn approached the principal, Ridwan Samodien, with the idea of how business could partner with the school to improve conditions for the learners.

Fast forward to 2015 and that partnership and the school is flourishing and spread to 200 schools across the country.

It has been an exciting time and some of those founding members were part of a panel that discussed their experiences at the launch which also included the author along with Trevor Manuel, Samodien, Denzil van Graan (principal of Perivale Primary School), Sabelo Makubalo (principal of Sophakama Primary School), Professor Brian O'Connell, Irené Raubenheimer (business leader from Rogz and partner to Makubalo), Sharon Rohm (Lewis Stores), Debbie Schafer (MEC for education in the Western Cape) and Professor John Volmink.

The book details, among others, ten case studies where the partnerships have made a major difference.

At The Valley Primary in Durbanville, principal Priscilla August was partnered with Ansonette van der Merwe of Capespan, a fruit export company, where the school faces problems that included poor parent and community involvement, poor pupil discipline and unmotivated staff.

In the first year they started their plans that started the changes at the school.

Parents were given incentives to start taking an interest in the school. Pupils were taken on day trips to show them life beyond their farm environment.

One of the highlights of this partnership is realising the need for a school readiness and literacy programme. Now they have volunteers from the community and surrounding areas who give their time to ensure the improvement of the literacy skills at the school.

The success of the partnership between Perivale Primary in Grassy Park and Direct Axis also comes under the spotlight with Denzil van Graan, principal, pointing out the far-reaching influences of the partnership.

The school faced a number of issues that related to drug and alcohol abuse in the surrounding area, poor academic results and unpaid school fees.

Maria Hill explains how her approach to helping was three-pronged by listening, giving hope and steering.

One of the aspects that is highlighted in this case-study is how discipline has changed with the introduction of simple incentive measures.

Van Graan, who was one of the panellists at the launch, pointed this out at the launch by saying the results were nothing less than remarkable.

"The school has tuned itself around on so many levels," he said.

Attendance has improved dramatically and our Grade 7's are being accepted at high performing schools.

"We've also introduced more extra-mural activities and this has empowered our learners."

Gerard Mohamed from Multisol's partnership with Holy Trinity in Elsies River is very close to his heart.



"I come from a very strong family background and my mother was very determined that her children would not fall into the same rut as some of our peers," he said.

"She pushed us to study and read. As a family we really stood out because we helped the community with reading and understanding official documents and writing letters on their behalf.

The area that I grew up in was rife with social problems like gangsterism and crime so I chose a school that had the most difficult challenges like teenage pregnancy and gangsterism. The fact that it is a township school, made me feel at home because it was like going back to my roots."

Unemployment was also high and absent parents were also an influence where without the proper support, children had very poor reading skills.

Nutrition of the pupils was also hampering children because there was not enough to eat in too many homes.

This case study then outlines how working with principal Gary Faulman, workshops were held to make the staff realise their strengths.

A number of projects have been started at the school to enhance the pupil's education experience, but Faulman feels that so far this partnership has had a major effect.

"First and foremost is the faces of the teachers. You can see that there is a big change in their morale, they feel more supported and confident about their role now that they have identified the most important issues and are able to look at it in a more holistic way."

Valda Clarke from Prudential Investment Managers was inspired to join the programme after seeing the sad state of her alma mater in Retreat. But, with that school not part of the PFP project, she chose to partner with Heathfield High.

Here her partnership with principal Mark Engelbrecht has seen a marked increase in results, and the school has even become part of a neighbourhood watch to reduce crime.

Clarke pointed out that this partnership has given her insight into the unique problems that principals face.

"They do not have the resources that business has to call on," she says.

"It is expected that they run the school like a business, but with limited expertise in IT, HR and finance. In the business world we are exposed to a variety of networks and training that enhances our knowledge and skill. This is where these partnerships work when we assist with passing on this knowledge to schools."

Another major partnership is at Sophakama Primary School in the Dunoon informal settlement where Irenè Raubenheimer from Rogz, a pet gear company, teamed up with Sabelo Makubalo, the principal of the school.

When the partnership started Makubalo had been principal for three years, but with limited leadership training he felt overwhelmed by the number and level of responsibilities that he faced.

There were many problems, like the school was not in a permanent structure, there was no phone or data line, there were no extra mural activities and issues of the language of learning with children learning in Xhosa from Grade R to 3 and then switching to English.

Discussions and planning led to them working on their strengths, which was developing their arts and culture department with a choir that has been impressing at national competitions. Their has also been a move to radically improve reading and literacy skills.

Makubalo said that since this partnership he has learnt to listen and respect other people's ideas.

"I used to be impatient and just wanted to give orders. The listening skills that I learned from the program has helped me to listen all the time and changed the way that I interact with my staff."

Raubenheimer feels that she has also learnt a lot in this process.

"We got into this because we really wanted to help change the way our clients view our business and they have started asking how they can also become involved.

"I make a point of telling people that I also do this for my children because I want to mitigate the risk of them being in an unstable environment created by the gap in education.

"I learnt that the school didn't need what I thought they needed, they needed something different. It was for more important to offer a listening ear and treat them with dignity, and not just drop stuff off.

"As an outsider I had to learn to engage and find out a lot more. I have also become a lot more tolerant with our staff and I understand their challenges of having spent time in their communities."

There are many more stories of these positive partnerships in the book, and at the launch there was an overwhelming understanding that it was still growing.

Trevor Manuel from the National Development Programme (NDP) put it perfectly when he said that the project was an example of active citizenry which was at the epicentre of the NDP.

"Active citizenship is what is going to drive change in education in South Africa," he said.

"This book proves that the meat of the issue is that the partnership needs to grow bigger to support education."

For more information about the book and Partners for Possibility go to [www.symphonia.net](http://www.symphonia.net).

- TygerBurger



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