

CHANGING EDUCATION, ONE PRINCIPAL AT A TIME

According to United Way (Research Supporting The Education Volunteer Call To Action), children spend on average 80% of their waking hours at home and in the community, and only 20% at school. Until recently, responsibility for poor academic results of learners has been placed solely on the shoulders of principals and teachers. The emphasis is now broadening to include the role which parents and the greater community can play in supporting education.

Symphonia for South Africa strongly believes that principals should be leading change at their schools, but understands that principals are often over-burdened and unsupported and not equipped to lead social change at their schools. The Partner for Possibility (PIP) programme was launched to address the challenges that these principals face, by inviting business leaders to partner with school principals to deal with the challenges of the school together. 47 schools across the country are now a part of this world first initiative, which is supported by business leaders across South Africa.

The programme forms part of a vision to strengthen the fabric of society through mobilising citizens and community building, which was built on the ethos of Benjamin and Rosamund Zander's book, *The Art of Possibility* and forms part of the School @ the Centre of Community project.

The project was initiated by Louise van Rhyn, who believes that of about 14 million children at school, less than 20% are getting the education they need to secure an economically sustainable future. Based on this belief, she decided to put her theory to the test, and partnered with Ridwan Samodien, principal of Kannemeyer Primary School in the Western Cape.

"Principals are expected to lead major turnarounds at their school which requires them to think strategically. But very few of our principals are equipped to do this effectively. I've learnt from experience that it's not enough to put people who need to lead change through training programmes. Change leaders need to be supported with extra resources and capacity. Everyone wants to look at a systems and policies, but large scale

change doesn't just happen through changing systems and policies, but through local projects where knowledge is shared and used to unlock possibility," explained Dr Van Rhyn, who has extensive experience in organisational change.

The business leader is therefore seen as a thinking partner whose key role is to support and assist with the change process and work together with the principal in a co-learning and co-action partnership.

"I was always aware of the need for community and parental involvement, but I was anxious to bring the parents more closely on board. After I attended one of Symphonia's community building workshops, I hosted one at my school and what a massive success it was! For the first time, the community felt involved and valued. They discovered they too had a role to play within their child's education process" Ridwan said.

"Our school was considered one of the problem schools in the Western Cape, but that didn't hinder my PIP to take the time out to get to know our community and try to understand the challenges we face. Through this journey, we have learnt to trust one another and established a lasting relationship. This programme has been life changing," said Quentin Newman, principal of John Ramsay High School in Bishop Lavis about his business partner, Rene Wright from Sanlam.

The project has received international recognition with Dr Van Rhyn winning the Blue Dart Global Corporate Social (CSR) award for Social Entrepreneurship in Mumbai, India recently.



Education that changes lives



Thembinkosi* is a 27-year-old Capetonian who lives in his own home, earns a salary and is studying for a tertiary qualification while supporting his parents financially.

His future is promising and he's a happy man who walks with a lightness in his step, yet 20 years ago the odds were stacked heavily against his success. Thembinkosi spent his days herding cattle, not attending school. He stayed with his grandparents in the Eastern Cape and only occasionally visited his parents living in Langa, Cape Town's oldest township.

In 1994, aged 11, Thembinkosi moved permanently to Langa and started school for the very first time. Painfully shy and older than his classmates, he developed a stammer and was teased relentlessly. They were difficult years. "I cried a lot, I really didn't want to go to school," he recalls.

Taking the LEAP

Things changed in 2004, when a friend encouraged Thembinkosi to enrol at the newly founded LEAP Science and Maths School, where he was accepted into the first class of Grade 11 learners.

LEAP's long-term vision is to transform disadvantaged communities in South Africa through maths and science focused education. Endorsing this vision from its inception, the Old Mutual Foundation has invested R14.7 million in LEAP, which has subsequently opened schools serving Langa, Gugulethu and Crossroads (Western Cape); Alexandra and GaRankuwa (Gauteng); as well as Jane Furse (Limpopo). Dr Pandelani Mathoma, General Manager of Old Mutual (SA) Corporate Affairs, says "The Foundation's commitment to investing in the future of our country through education is supported by the work of schools such as LEAP."

LEAP Science & Maths Schools are independent schools registered with The Independent Schools Association of South Africa and draw their full-time learners from within township communities; typically children who come from economically disadvantaged households,

living in informal, non-permanent houses, where one or more parent is deceased. Learners' educational deficits are addressed through a rigorous and holistic programme, which includes an extended school day, double contact time in key subjects, small classes, increased contact time with teachers, value based life orientation and family-style interaction within the school community.

In the eight years since it opened, LEAP has achieved a remarkable 95% Grade 12 pass rate, with 74% of graduates pursuing tertiary studies. "The aim," says LEAP founder and director John Gilmour, "is not only to achieve academic results, but also to develop positive, caring young adults with a healthy work ethic who will become future leaders in their communities."

Achieving success

Thembinkosi needed to re-write two subjects before passing Grade 12, but tenacity and perseverance are qualities that LEAP encourages in their learners.

In April 2011, he graduated with his National Diploma in Public Management and already has plans in place to obtain his degree. "I feel proud because I'm the only one in my family who has passed Grade 12 and gone on to university. Now the children in my community say to me, Thembinkosi, you are an example to us. Thanks to Old Mutual and LEAP, my school made a huge difference in my life," he says.

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