

South African Extraordinary Schools Coalition

Meeting Highlights February 2020

Meeting held at Holy Family College, Johannesburg



WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

At the first South African Extraordinary Schools Coalition Community of Practice (SAESC CoP) of 2020, members were reminded of the importance of the SAESC meetings. These meetings are held with the purpose to learn, share and engage as much as possible - the outcome being transformation from ordinary to extraordinary. The coalition was informed of the knowledge management role that BRIDGE plays - BRIDGE has a commitment to manage, distil and share knowledge.

John Gilmour began with this provocative question to teachers: “who is responsible for you as an educator?” He explained that each teacher is responsible for their teaching and outcomes and they are accountable for themselves in their work. Professional development is about changing behaviour which includes changes in how we see ourselves, education, curriculum, our thoughts about teaching and our styles of teaching etc. The system should also encourage social and emotional learning.



GETTING TO KNOW HOLY FAMILY COLLEGE

Franc Sobriera the head of Holy Family College welcomed the guests to his school. He has been a member of the coalition for the past 5 years since he began at HFC the school has applied some of the learnings

from previous coalition meetings. It is important to share the successes and challenges that are faced by the school. The school is moving towards inclusivity by introducing ECD (Early Childhood Development) in their school. In addition to this they are also catering for both able and special needs learners. This however, does require a wide range of resources so the school has decided to start small with two blind students joining the school. Holy Family College also offers a whole day school programme and an after-school programme for 3-6 year olds for foreign learners in surrounding communities of Johannesburg.

Holy Family College is a diversified Christian School that comprises of pre-primary, primary and secondary school based in Parktown. The school offers grade R to grade 12 in a variety of subjects such as English, Mathematics, Religion and Commerce amongst others.

REFLECTION ON THE SCHOOL WALKABOUTS

The principal of Holy Family invited all the attendants to join on a school walk-about which included all three campuses – the ECD centre, the Primary School and the Secondary school. Attendees were given an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the school, the classroom structures and the facilitation styles applied by the teachers in the classroom. Teachers were encouraged to observe the teaching styles for the subjects that they teach. These are some of the themes which emerged from the school walkabout:



EMERGING THEMES FROM THE REFLECTIONS

- The move away from prefects to councillors in the school, which will ensure that the school is aware of the challenges in and out of the school.
- The principal's forthrightness in acknowledging their internal school challenges and trying to find solutions.
- The learners are engaged in the classroom and teachers encourage participation from learners.
- The Integration of ICT in the classroom.
- Including the society in the different aspects of the school.
- Embracing the concept of being a part of a bigger community through inclusivity:
 - Blind learners have been easily integrated into the school.
 - Refugee children are being provided with free education through an after-school programme.



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experiential learning is the process of learning by doing and listening. It allows schools to embrace the challenges of the 4IR. Nkosi Mthembu and Aubrey Mnisi are two teachers who demonstrated their creativity in teaching children.

Nkosi Mthembu (St Davids)

Nkosi is a grade 8-9 Robotics teacher and a grade 10-12 IT teacher at St David's. He is also involved in a variety of other work around robotics. Nkosi led participants through an activity

which involved building a circuit on a breadboard with a 220 Ω resistor and an LED. Participants were essentially being taught to build a robot and to troubleshoot through a computer. This activity provided participants with hands-on experience and exposure to the world of 4IR. One participant described their experience as frustrating and confused at the outset but as the building continued they became excited and motivated. He thought that the activity was a great learning tool which inspired everyone to engage.

Teaching Robotics in school is important because technology can make daily activities easier but children are also over stimulated by this technology and can get bored in a normal classroom environment – teaching robotics has a more practical approach and embraces the use of technology in an educational way. Examples like this group activity demonstrated the problem solving skills which can be taught through robotics.

Click [here](#) to see Nkosi's full presentation.

A robotics course is available at St Davids to grade 8s and grade 9s and they enjoy it so much that they often choose this as a subject later on.

Aubrey Mnisi (LEAP 6):

'Robotics and 360-degree storytelling at my school'

Aubrey Mnisi is a teacher at Leap 6 and he presented on "*Robotics and 360-degree storytelling at my school*". He proposed the question: How does explorative digitisation affect how we teach and learn? He started his presentation with an inspirational quote: "For our children to be successful in the 21st century, it requires educators to start learning new things". We are digital immigrants. Kids are affected by this every day and we need to learn how they work.

In 2019 Aubrey led a team of learning on Robotics and before acquiring much practical experience he was asked to participate in *The World Robotics Colloquium*. His team started with two robots and they were provided with support and space to practice for the tournament. In addition, *Team for Tech* assisted them with their services. Three learners were to do the Lego command prompts (EV3 commands). There were 100 schools at the World Robotics Challenge and Aubrey's team and placed 3rd in the competition.



MAKING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT A FOCUS

Speaker 1: Raphael Mukachi (LEAP 5)

Raphael spoke about how SDGs relate to our lives and affect not only us but will affect generations to come. In 2015 UN members adopted the SDGs. At LEAP 5 they have made SDG number 13 (Climate Change) their focus. There is global concern around climate change and the resulting fires and flooding being

"It's like working with a school in your pocket." – A learners' perspective on working with a robot.

experienced around the world. The school is looking at the contribution it can make to support the combatting of climate change.

What can schools do about it? Schools can promote awareness among learners of global challenges such as sanitation and air pollution and how these impact the environment. This may get learners to start to think about it and get involved. It can also create a sense of wonder about what the coming years will look like and inspire learners to consciously seek solutions to these challenges. This will result in learning that is meaningful.

Projects that promote the SDGs: LEAP 5 has recognised that the land around them was not being used effectively so they chose to embark on a garden project. They planted fields of spinach and they have shared this with communities, surrounding areas and the supermarket. They have also made use of organic manure since fertiliser can damage the soil.

The benefits of being involved in the process of farming:

Raphael has identified a number of benefits which the learners and the community have yielded from this process:

- Children have learned to be patient as they wait for harvest time to eat the food.
- They learn more about nutrition, sustainability, and ecology.
- It has increased environmental awareness.
- With the life skills they have acquired they may be able to start their own business, take these skills into higher education learning and use it in their homes as well.

Educational benefits

Interdisciplinary teaching and learning - during the farming process teachers can integrate different subjects that can contribute to farming. For instance, Geography, Mathematics and English are all connected in the process of a deeper level of understanding and it makes learning easier by being practical. Therefore, learning to care for the environment becomes authentic.

Environmental Benefits

Learners can create environmental stewardship by staying committed, hardworking and

setting goals. The school can sell these products to the local markets and supermarkets. The community can also come to the school to buy the vegetables.

School Funding

These kinds of projects allow for easy and unlimited access to resources. They can easily link the different subjects and it exposes learners and encourages the same subject stream in higher education. This will ensure that the relevant sectors feel more confident about offering students bursaries in agriculture and other subjects as learners will be more skilful at farming, managing and maintenance.

Lessons learnt

This project will produce entrepreneurship; create employment, healthy lifestyles, farming with meaning (the fruits of hard work) and reducing poverty in the school. It has also created work for three old people who did not qualify for the Expanded Public Works Programme.

Click [here](#) to see Raphael's full presentation.

Speaker 2: John Gilmour (LEAP maths and science schools)

John addressed the commitment which the SAESC has to making the SDGs the focus for 2020: teachers cannot be comfortable with the status quo but rather be agents of change in order to shift reality and prepare learners for anything.

"We need to teach SDGs through real action." – John Gilmour

The Spekboom Challenge

Spekboom is a succulent plant which is indigenous to Southern Africa. It has small bright green leaves with a contrasting red stem found. It is also extremely fast growing. This plant can assist to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere by acting like a carbon sponge, improving the quality of air we breathe. More specifically, spekboom can absorb between four to ten tonnes of carbon per hectare – a plant that can fight carbon emissions at a faster rate than the rainforest. The plant can be found in the Karoo and the Eastern Cape.

Using the example of the Spekboom, schools can teach learners about the carbon cycle, alkalinity, nutrition etc. The Spekboom can be a whole school in a pocket as it can offer more advantages in sustaining the environment. Children may then be inspired to plant their own Spekboom and realise the importance of recycling and reusing.

Spekboom

(Portulacaria afra)

South Africa's miracle plant

Here are **6** reasons why we love our Spekkies!

- It's a carbon sponge**
It removes more carbon dioxide from the air because it stores solar energy to perform photosynthesis at night.
- It's very water-wise**
It survives droughts effectively and needs almost half the water other hardy plants do.
- It's edible**
It's highly nutritious and a firm favourite of animals and humans. It not only adds flavour to stews, but also has beneficial medicinal qualities: from the treatment of sore throat to combating fatigue.
- It's easy to grow**
It can be grown almost anywhere and is easily propagated. It is a great soil binder for preventing soil erosion. They make beautiful hedges and are fire-resistant (i.e. firebreak).
- It can live up to 200 years**
It has the ability to adapt to its surroundings and can grow up to 5 metres. There are different varieties available from dwarf plants, to ones with giant leaves, variegated leaves, drooping branches and prostrate creepers. They make superb bonsais.
- It's pretty in pink!**
When in full bloom, it is covered in rose pink flowers that attract birds, bees and butterflies.

Join #SpekboomChallenge and plant a spekboom to combat climate change

Visit www.lifesagarden.co.za or scan this QR code, for more gardening inspiration.

Life is a garden
www.lifesagarden.co.za

Source:

https://www.instagram.com/p/B9Ekcd0JP_1/



Lizwi Dube (Leap 3)

Lizwi is a Science and Maths teacher at Leap 3 Linbro Park, Johannesburg and also a part of TRAC, an organisation working in Physical Science Intervention programmes. Lizwi shared on how TRAC is assisting their schools with improved performance of grade 12 learners: Grade 11s are taught grade 12 content. This gives them momentum for the beginning of the grade 12 year and they are able to boost their confidence. As the content is re-taught they have a better understanding and improved performance. It keeps them motivated. They also ensure that all learners have applied and are registered with institutions of higher learning and they assist with applications for NSFAS funding. The school has achieved a distinction pass in Physical sciences.

James Malope (Principal at LEAP 4)

James described how the Leap 4 teachers connect with learners by working with them. Teachers come into the school and need to understand their learners. He introduced Mqabuko Dube a new teacher, with a different approach to teaching - he spends time connecting with the learners, understanding who they are, the challenges they face and proposes possible solutions. He has achieved 22 distinctions in his class of 23 learners and here he shares his winning strategies.

Mqabuko Dube (Grade 8-12 History teacher at LEAP 4)

Mqabuko believes that “learners are different and need to be treated as such”. He does not believe in using the teacher-centred approach as this reinforces the one size fits all model which does not work. Teachers need to motivate their learners by supporting and understanding them individually. They should not be tied to the prescriptions of the GDE. Mqabuko prepares his students by assisting them to work on their strengths and answer questions that reflect what they can do better in the subject. For instance, in History, learners can choose either two sources or two essays to write depending on their strength.

Click [here](#) to see Mqabuko’s full

Here is a list of some of the most notable strategies that he applies in his classroom:

- **Topic specialisation** which topics are the learners dominantly good at? Encourage them to work on those. Encouraging a focus on strengths and weaknesses of learners.
- **Teaching methods** differentiated models of teaching that cater for individual learners.
- **Assessment techniques** giving clear constructive feedback that the learner understands. Feedback must be learner specific to address their area of performance and always assess specific concepts.
- **Motivate for your subject** the teacher needs to be able to motivate why their subject is good. This will instil enjoyment of the subject and self-confidence in learners.

Nosipho Sithole (Siyavula)

Siyavula is an online Maths and Science practice platform which aims to improve Maths and Science performance. It began as an organisation which sources textbooks and has recently rolled into the digital space. Their services include Maths practice activities for grade 8 to 12 and Physical Sciences for grade 10 to 12. Learners have the opportunity to practice as many

times as possible allowing them to gain mastery through practice. The questions become incrementally difficult as they continue to practice and the questions are aligned to their strengths.

The CoP participants were taken through the dashboard and could see how teachers are able to view their learners' online assignments, mark them and compile a report of results. For further information you can go to the Siyavula website (<https://www.siyavula.com/>)

**The services are zero rated for MTN and Vodacom learners.*



GOOGLE CLASSROOM AND TLaC

Peter de Lisle (Inanda Seminary)

Peter de Lisle from Inanda seminary presented on Teach like a google champion - a google classroom idea that was initiated in the coalition.

The classroom activates public activity and it makes learning extraordinary because learners can share ideas, engage and collaborate. It permits for 'front writing' which is writing before talking about it. It gets the lesson going and everybody writes. It is also useful for teachers because it allows them to create their own rubrics and templates to assess learner performance and it encompasses sharing with a partner and reviewing each other's work. **TLaC** is teacher controlled, organised, content driven and achievement is equivalent to high marks. Teachers can track learner activity by reviewing assignments as they are done. It also has a plagiarism check system that checks for the originality of the written content.

Google allows for a more student centred approach through project based learning. It works because learners are responsible for their learning through critical thinking and problem solving. Teachers should be aware of their needs and the support they require.

Click [here](#) to see Peter's full presentation.

CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

Noloyiso Lange from St Davids led an activity aimed at having open, critical and honest conversations amongst teachers and personnel in more senior positions.

"It was interesting to hear the range of perspectives which are at times different from what we know. What we do in class should be a bit gentler." – Meeting participant

The conversation began with teachers in the inside of a 3-layer circle, middle management (HOD, SMT etc.) comprised the second and senior managers (Head, CEOs, Directors) the third. Each group was given an opportunity to occupy the inner circle and they responded to the following 3 questions. In each round, the group occupying the inner circle were asked the questions and were the only ones allowed to respond while the 2 outer circles looked on silently. The table below captures the outcome of this activity:

Q 1. What do you like the most about your school or organisation:		
TEACHERS	MIDDLE MANAGEMENT	SENIOR MANAGEMENT
A management that does not control	A team that encourages us to do better	The people in the school (teachers, principals, learners and other stakeholders)
A management that gives teachers an opportunity to contribute to solutions	Discipline among the team	The space that we work in
Managements expect people to work harder	Everyone has a chance to grow	
Giving teachers a platform to give input that is taken seriously and into consideration	There is a chance for development for all	
The learners		
Opportunities for teacher development		
Q2: What do you wish they understood about your job that they don't understand?		
TEACHERS	MIDDLE MANAGEMENT	SENIOR MANAGEMENT
That we are doing enough	The heaviness of our workload	At times I need to stand by a decisions that I make
We do our best and give enough effort in teaching	The fact that I am doing enough in my role	Time management and how it impacts the performance of learners and teachers
We invest a lot of time and energy teaching our learners	The chain of pressure that we face	Teachers would understand that I am like them, I have tough decisions to make
	The responsibility of decision making	If they are not participating, as a part of the discussion then some decisions may not be effective
	The responsibility of implementing strategies	Everyone knows their role, and whatever they do affects the unit
	Multitasking	People forget we are human and that we make mistakes
	Having to contact others in order to make decisions.	We make decisions for the school and we seek support and sharing decisions
Q3: what do you like about your department?		
TEACHERS	MIDDLE MANAGEMENT	SENIOR MANAGEMENT
It is a safe space to work in	We make space for interns	Transitions or changes in the school
We are given a chance to fail and try again	The teachers are doing their best	Children who come back to the school
We can share resources with our colleagues	Responsible teachers that you do not need to chase around	My job keeps me on my toes and I am able to learn, unlearn and relearn
We can exchange ideas and there is a collaborative work effort	They are accountable	It is a space where there is growth and space to learn for everyone
		There is support
		Able to tackle challenges
		Collaboration among team members in the department
		Seeing teachers develop.

CONCLUSION

John concluded the meeting with the question, asking participants “What makes your school extraordinary?” and reminded members of the themes that emerged from the meeting, namely: understanding the learners, responding to learners as individuals, and that you can make a difference in the world even from within the confines of the school.

“It is not just the big things; it is the little things that you can use tomorrow in your classroom.”— John Gilmour

Remembering ANNE GORDON



Anne Gordon was the principal of Harvest High School in Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal and one of the pioneers of the SAESC. Anne had been battling cancer for a couple of years and sadly lost her fight in February. Anne is remembered with fondness by the Coalition family and will be dearly missed.



RIP Anne

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