

Launch of the Cape Foundation Phase Research Programme

13 October 2011

Dr Peter Clayton - DVC: Research & Development

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Deans and HODs

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

Molweni, good evening, and welcome to the launch of the *Cape Foundation Phase Research Programme*.

Before we proceed any further, permit me to first and foremost recognise a number of colleagues who are the key actors in the Programme that we launch this evening.

Dr Whitty Green - Director: Teacher Education, DHET

Prof Denise Zinn - Dean: Education, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

Prof Sidwell Ngubentombi - Executive Dean: Education, Walter Sisulu University

Dr Di Wilmot - Dean: Education, Rhodes University

Prof Jean Baxen - Deputy Dean, RU and the Programme's Principal Investigator

Dr Noluthandi Toni, the Institutional Co-ordinator for NMMU

Prof Cyril Julie, the Institutional Co-ordinator for UWC

Dr Christabel Mantlana, the Institutional Co-ordinator for WSU

Research Programme team members at the four institutions
Participating Foundation Phase PhD and Masters Students

A warm welcome to you all, to Rhodes University, to Rhini/Grahamstown and the Makana region of the Eastern Cape

In South Africa, social inequalities were embedded and reflected in all spheres of social life, as a product of the systemic exclusion of blacks and women under colonialism and apartheid. The education system was no exception. Social, political and economic discrimination and inequalities of a class, race, gender, institutional and spatial nature profoundly shaped, and continue to shape, South African education. Given this, the new democratic government committed itself in 1994 to transform education as well as the inherited apartheid social and economic structure and to institutionalize a new social order.

In 1996 our *Constitution* declared the right of all 'to a basic education' (Republic of South Africa, 1996). It also committed us to the assertion of the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of non-sexism and non-racialism and the human rights and freedoms that the *Bill of Rights* proclaims; and to 'respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights' embodied in the *Bill of Rights*.

The 1995 *White Paper on Education and Training* entrusted the state to 'advance and protect' citizens so that they 'have the opportunity to develop their capabilities and potential'.

It also directed the state to 'redress of educational inequalities among those sections of our people who have suffered particular disadvantages' and established the principle of 'equity' so that all citizens have 'the same quality of learning opportunities' (DoE, 1995: 21-22).

A year later the *National Education Policy Act* of 1996 stated its goal of 'the democratic transformation of the national system of education into one which serves the needs and interests of all of the people of South Africa and upholds their fundamental rights' (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

The *South African Schools Act* of 1996 asserted that a new schooling system will 'redress past injustices in schooling provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners,...advance the democratic transformation of society,...(and) contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society' (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

It should be clear that the *Constitution* and an array of laws and policies direct us to realize profound and wide-ranging imperatives and goals in and through education and schooling. It is assumed that their progressive substantive realization will contribute immeasurably to the transformation and development of education and society.

Seventeen years into our democracy the apartheid legacy of structural inequalities persist, and in some cases – as in the case of income distribution - have gotten worse.

But nowhere is this more evident than in our education system, where we continue to be plagued by schooling that is in perennial crisis and tragically thwarts the realization of the talents and potential of the youth of our society.

Despite almost universal formal participation in schooling, South Africa's schools evince significant problems related to drop outs, retention, progression and successful completion. As has been noted, 'the simple reality is that enrolment is not the same as attendance and attendance does not imply learning' (Sayed, 2007:8). South African school students perform extremely poorly on a range of international assessment tests, in terms of which '65% of school leavers...are functionally illiterate' (ibid.:6).

There remains a powerful link between the social exclusion of disadvantaged social classes and groups, and equity of access, opportunity and outcomes, and achievement in schooling. Currently, 60% of African children in South Africa come from families that earn less than R800 a month; conversely 60% of white children are from families whose income is more than R6 000 per month. The consequences of this are manifest in differential school performance and achievement.

Without appropriate and extensive interventions on the part of the state to significantly improve the economic and social circumstances of millions of working class and rural poor (and primarily black) South Africans, the experiences of school drop-outs, poor retention, restricted educational opportunities and poor outcomes will be principally borne by these social classes.

One measure of the formidable challenge is that currently 10% of some 7 000 secondary schools – independent schools and public schools previously reserved for white students - produce 60% of all senior certificate endorsements (the entrance requirement to higher education). Another 10% of mainly historically black schools produce a further 20% of all senior certificate endorsements. Thus, 80% of senior certificate endorsements are generated by 20% of secondary schools, while the remaining 80% of secondary schools produce a paltry 20% of senior certificate endorsements. It is clear that a fundamental challenge is to improve the quality of education in schools.

Improving the quality of provision and the achievement levels of South Africa's Foundation Phase learners is a necessary condition for meaningful individual and socio-economic development.

It is these challenges that brought together Rhodes University, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, the University of the Western Cape and Walter Sisulu University to establish what has become known as the Cape

Consortium, and to jointly present to the Department of Higher Education and Training, a Foundation Phase Research proposal.

As is known, and the reason we are gathered here this evening, the Cape Consortium was awarded R20.6m over a three-year period to assist with the development and implementation of the “Quality teaching and teacher education research programme” in the Eastern and Western Cape.

More will be said shortly by colleagues who are directly involved with the programme both nationally and regionally.

I wish to acknowledge and applaud the foresight, commitment and generosity of intellect, effort and time involved in the decision of the different partner universities and colleagues to collaborate on this research programme defined and to seek innovative and sustainable interventions. It is heartening to witness cooperation predicated on common and complementary research interests and expertise.

I wish to also recognise the welcome cooperation on the parts of the Department of Higher Education and Training and Department of Basic Education to fashion a foundation phase research and development programme and to strengthen the capacity of the higher education system to provide more and better Foundation Phase teachers.

The development and implementation of the national plan has been made possible by a R156 million European Union grant for Foundation Phase work, as part of the EU Primary Education Sector Policy Support Programme.

Over the next three years the Programme and the partners are required to realise very specific outputs:

- The initiation of new Foundation Phase Initial Teacher Education programmes at UWC and WSU.
- A strengthened Foundation Phase programme at NMMU.
- Revival of the BEd programme at Rhodes.
- Teacher education support materials comprising a set of three thematic guides focused on Literacy, Numeracy and Lifeskills, and a video package.
- 11 PhD and 11 Masters scholars and theses.
- Two monographs.
- Four to six peer-reviewed articles in applicable accredited journals.
- At least two papers presented at annual DHET project seminars.
- Contribution of a chapter by the project team to the DHET published book.
- Contributions to forums, seminars, conferences and workshops on FP education.

This is a challenging agenda and I wish Prof. Baxen and all the teams and colleagues at the four partner universities and all the masters and Doctoral scholars well in their endeavours.

