

UPHUHLISWANO LWEZIKOLO ZASERHINI
(Developing Rhini/Grahamstown Schools Together)

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Department of Education Grahamstown District Matric Awards

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P J Olivier High School

The Department of Education District Director, Mr GM Naidoo, district officials, Principals of local schools, and especially the Principal, of our host school, teachers, scholars and colleagues

Thank you for the privilege of being here today and the opportunity to deliver the keynote address.

Although the sun is not shining on us, it is nonetheless a special day on which we today through this ceremony honour the performance and celebrate the achievements of our schools and learners during 2006.

Honouring and celebrating exceptional and outstanding performance is in order for at least two reasons.

First, I often think that as a people, and perhaps also as a nation in the making, we tend to be unduly hard and severe with ourselves. We focus only on the negatives, the problems, weaknesses and shortcomings. We become the prophets of gloom and doom. We depress and demoralise ourselves and others. We become guilty of a failure to maintain perspective. (Example of loose talk about the quality of 'A' symbols received by students).

Certainly, there are many ills and shortcomings in our schooling system and there must be open and public criticism of these. We must not be afraid of critique – it is an essential feature of what it means to be a democracy and a very necessary feature for finding adequate interventions for social problems.

So today's ceremony then is an opportunity to maintain perspective – without shying away from acknowledging that we have challenges, to recognise that there are also positives, strengths, areas of some progress, better foundations on which to build.

The second reason to honour and celebrate progress, good performance and achievements is that through such celebration we acknowledge and publicly signal that which we value and we seek to motivate and inspire learners and schools to also strive and continue to for outstanding performance.

And so thank you to the District Office for holding this ceremony and the efforts that have gone into bringing us together this afternoon.

Introduction

Basic education, however defined, is a fundamental human right. But we will agree that it is also a powerful determinant of the economic and social prospects of individuals. Yet, the reality is that many South Africans, and particularly those that were disadvantaged under apartheid, continue to be denied equity of opportunity in basic and secondary education, and as a consequence are denied the possibilities of economic and social advancement through education.

I have the privilege of being a member of the Development Bank of Southern Africa think tank that is chaired by Dr Mampela Ramphela and includes a number of prominent educationalists. At our last meeting we were informed that about 10% of the previous Model C schools produce 60% of our matric exemptions. Another 10% of black schools, including the Dianledi schools, generate a further 20 % of our matric exemptions. What this makes clear is that the remaining 80% of secondary schools contribute only 20% of matric exemptions. This is, of course, a huge and shocking failure on our part as a society to provide equity of opportunity to black secondary school students and a tragic waste of the potential and promise of thousands of students. It should be noted that even our private schools do not perform as well as schools in Kenya, Uganda and elsewhere in Southern and east Africa.

And yet the situation is little different in Rhini/Grahamstown or in the Grahamstown District as a whole; indeed, the district is a microcosm of South African schooling as a whole. In 2006, Victoria produced 41 endorsements and Graham 38 endorsements. Kingswood produced 68 and St Andrews and DSG and respectively. In contrast, the 7 historically disadvantaged schools together produced only 41 exemptions. 38 of the exemptions were produced by 3 of the 7 schools. Let's acknowledge that is an improvement on 2005, when there were only 29 matric endorsements, and hope that this could be the beginning of a positive trend.

Grahamstown tends to be described as education town. The truth as the statistics indicate, is that it is half an education town, with outstanding performance on the one pole and less than desirable performance on the other. For a variety of reasons a number of schools, perhaps the vast majority, that serve historically disadvantaged South Africans operate far from optimally with respect to a number of indicators related to effective schooling.

Developing Rhini/Grahamstown Schools Together

What is to be done?

For one, I believe that we must acknowledge that this situation is unacceptable, that we have major challenges and we must declare and demonstrate a willingness to change the status quo. For another, we need to be imaginative, creative, and bold and begin to give serious attention to the possibility of an initiative - **Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini (Developing Rhini/Grahamstown Schools Together)** - that brings together the local historically disadvantaged secondary schools, the other public and private secondary schools, Rhodes University, non-governmental organisations, the district Department of Education, teacher unions, business, and other formations or individuals to address the challenges of developing effective secondary schools in the historically black areas of Rhini/Grahamstown.

A conversation on addressing the challenges of developing effective secondary schools in the historically black areas of Rhini/Grahamstown begun last year with the principals of all the local secondary schools, Deans of Rhodes University, and the district Department of Education. Within Rhodes it has been extended to colleagues in the Faculty of Education, academic departments at Rhodes University, the Rhodes SRC, various clubs and societies, and various groups and individuals.

This ceremony is a wonderful opportunity to extend the conversation by introducing some ideas and allowing them to be mulled by those who are here today and have great expertise and experience related to schooling. I want to therefore set out my own thinking to provoke critical discussion, deepen the conversation, and take it forward.

To begin with, there are a number of points I wish to make regarding my contribution and, more generally, any initiative to address the challenges of developing effective secondary schools in the historically black areas of Rhini/Grahamstown.

1. First, my thinking must be viewed not only as *one* contribution, but also as a *socially located* contribution. That is to say, the nature of the thinking is shaped by the office I hold at Rhodes University, the institutional values, goals and interests of the University, the opportunities and constraints that exist, and the resources that are available and can be potentially mobilised.
2. Second, the nature of the involvement and participation of Rhodes University (as opposed to individual academics and students) will be ultimately determined by the University through its internal governance structures (committees, boards, Senate and Council).
3. Third, the success of any initiative to address the conditions in secondary schools will be conditioned by the extent to which
 - There is clarity of thinking and agreement on *purposes, aims, and objects*
 - There are shared core premises, values and principles and an overall *enabling framework*
 - There is effective drawing on knowledge and experience to fashion the *appropriate strategies and methodology*, methods and techniques for pursuing the defined purposes and aims
 - There is *effective organisation and implementation*
 - There is deep attention to *sustainability* in terms of people and finances, and a conditioning of goals, strategies and methodology by the availability of people and finances.
4. Fourth, in my view, at this juncture the actual content of the thinking that I set out below is less important than the issues that I consider must structure the thinking – purposes, aims, objects, an overall enabling framework, and questions especially of approach and methodology.

A schools initiative will have to *first and foremost* explicitly and clearly answer the questions of purposes, and aims, and alongside this elaborate a guiding framework.

Only thereafter, can the specific and concrete objects begin to be defined.

The objects themselves, of course, only alert us to the issues and areas that will require attention. They do not provide answers to the question of *how* – methodology – the precise strategies, mechanisms and instruments to be used to pursue the aims of the initiative.

5. Finally, I do not and Rhodes University does not assume that we have any great or special *knowledge* and *understanding* of the critical issues and challenges that confront the historically disadvantaged schools and the specific conditions in which they are rooted. Listening and obtaining *knowledge* and *understanding* of the conditions and challenges is a necessary condition of defining aims, objects and methodology.

Purposes

One way of defining purposes, is that Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini must

- Create effective secondary schools in the historically black areas so that students are provided an education that nurtures their talents and helps them fulfil their potential
- Enable increasing numbers of students from historically disadvantaged secondary schools to achieve results that enable them to access higher education and through this enhance their possibilities for economic and social advancement.

Aims

In relation to the above purposes, the specific aims of the Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini initiative could be:

- To support secondary schools that are unable to function optimally with respect to teaching, learning, curriculum, governance and management and administration, and also experience challenges related to facilities, resources and a general culture of learning and teaching
- To enhance the knowledge, competencies and skills of teachers, students, and managers and relevant stakeholders that are vital for the effective functioning of the schools
- To increase the numbers of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds that achieve matriculation results that enable them to gain entry to universities and universities of technology
- To increase the numbers of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds that achieve matriculation results that enable them to gain entry to Rhodes University
- To increase the numbers of students that are offspring of Rhodes University workers to achieve matriculation results that enable them to gain entry to universities and universities of technology, including Rhodes University
- To mobilise the financial resources that can facilitate historically disadvantaged students to attend Rhodes University.

Objects

In pursuance of the above aims, the objects of the initiative could be *to develop sustainable strategies and mechanisms*

- For building effective secondary schools

- To support teachers at these schools to enhance their professional knowledge, competencies and skills and qualifications
- To support Grades 10-12 students at these schools to develop the knowledge, competencies and skills that are necessary to achieve matriculation results that enable them to enter universities and universities of technology, including Rhodes University
- To support school managers to enhance the governance and management and administration of schools
- To support schools with respect to the mobilisation and maintenance of the necessary facilities and resources that are required for effective schooling
- To enhance the knowledge, competencies and skills of relevant stakeholders that must play a vital role in the building and maintenance of effective schools
- To facilitate students accessing higher education and making choices with respect to choices of universities and universities of technology, and fields and disciplines
- To encourage and inspire students to strive to excel and access higher education
- To mobilise the financial resources that can facilitate historically disadvantaged students to attend Rhodes University.

Framework

In developing and implementing any Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini initiative, the premises, core values and principles of the initiative would need to be clearly articulated. These could include

- The challenges of effective schooling in local disadvantaged schools are a problem of the entire Rhini/Grahamstown community and must be embraced as such
- The building and maintenance of effective schools is the collective responsibility of, the Rhini/Grahamstown community, its institutions and organisations, the district Department of Education and the provincial Department of Education and government
- The building and maintenance of effective schools requires collective commitment and effort and bold and imaginative action on the part of the entire Rhini/Grahamstown community, its institutions and organisations, the provincial government and other key actors
- The development of strategies and mechanism for building and maintaining effective schools must be an inclusive programme that draws on the knowledge, expertise, skills and resources of all Rhini/Grahamstown institutions, organisations and actors, and other pertinent actors
- The recognition that any serious developmental effort requires long-term and sustained commitment and endeavour, and requires such commitment and effort on the part of key institutions, organisations and actors
- An acknowledgement and recognition that a number of actors are already engaged in a range of interventions that seek to contribute to the development of effective secondary schools.
- That there should be no unnecessary duplication or competition with existing interventions as much as the co-ordination, expansion, deepening, complementing, enhancing and, where necessary, introduction of new thinking and initiatives that can contribute to the overall aims that are identified above
- There has to be a commitment to the constitutional values of non-racialism, non-sexism, educational and social equity and redress, and democratic practice
- There has to also be a commitment to co-operation, accountability, integrity, good governance, effective management and administration, and responsible conduct.

Methodology

Methodology – the precise and concrete strategies, mechanisms, instruments, methods, and techniques through which the aims will be pursued – is, of course, a hugely important issue.

One obviously looks here to the knowledge, expertise and experience of the DoE, the schools, the Rhodes Faculty of Education, local education projects, initiatives in other provinces, and bodies like JET for guidance and assistance.

Structure and Organisation

In so far as structure and organisation are concerned, these are, of course, vital issues that have a strong bearing on the success or otherwise of any initiative. For the moment, however, they are secondary to the vision and it is this that we must forge and shape together.

Conclusion

Imperatives behind vision

- Constitutional imperative
- Economic
- Social
- Moral

Translate – imagination, boldness and hard work!