

Launch of the Rhini/Grahamstown Schools Partnership

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Introduction

Mr. Vetha, Mr Stamper and officials of the district office of the Department of Education, school heads, principals, teachers and students, teacher union officials, Rhodes University DVC's, Deans, academics, members of the SRC and clubs and societies, ladies and gentlemen, molweni, good afternoon

In March 2007, walking along one of the wide Manhattan, New York, avenues to attend a meeting at the Ford Foundation, my eyes fell upon a sign on a board within a church yard.

The sign read: "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire". The quote is, of course, from William Butler Yeats, the great Irish poet, writer, dramatist and the 1923 winner of the Nobel Prize for literature.

Educating is indeed "the lighting of a fire". But to light this fire, learners and teachers have to be brought into a relationship of learning and teaching, teachers must be equipped to teach and

learners have to be supported to learn. At the same time there has to be a culture of learning and teaching in which knowledge is valued.

Yet, in many instances such a culture of learning and teaching is absent, and there is a regrettable absence of a love for and valuing of knowledge. Not surprisingly, in these conditions many South Africans, and particularly those that were disadvantaged under apartheid, continue to be denied equity of opportunity in education, and as a consequence are denied the possibilities of economic and social advancement through education.

This is certainly the case in Rhini/Grahamstown. For a variety of reasons a number of secondary schools that serve historically disadvantaged South Africans operate far from optimally with respect to a number of indicators related to effective schooling.

One indicator of the challenges that face local historically disadvantaged secondary schools in particular is the National Senior Certificate results. Last year, only 50 students out of many hundreds at historically disadvantaged secondary schools in Rhini/Grahamstown succeeded in obtaining a pass that allowed them to enrol at universities. Still, this was an improvement on the 2005 results when 29 students passed at a level that enabled them to attend universities.

In contrast, last year the local Model C schools, Victoria and Graham, each graduated some 60 to

70 students with matric endorsements, while St Andrews, DSG Kingswood and SP Olivier together graduated over 200 students.

It is in this context that Rhodes University has sought a comprehensive and respectful partnership with the historically disadvantaged secondary schools, the Department of Education, and teacher unions to address the challenges of developing effective secondary schools in the historically black areas of Rhini/Grahamstown.

Our conversation on addressing the challenges of developing effective secondary schools in the historically black areas of Rhini/Grahamstown began in 2006 with the principals of all the local secondary schools, Deans of Rhodes University, and the district Department of Education.

At my inauguration as Vice-Chancellor in September 2006 I stated that Rhodes needed to consider whether we were not working on too diverse a front with the result that our energies were being dissipated and our effectiveness was being compromised.

In this regard, I proposed a few focused long-term initiatives and partnerships that could be more rewarding.

One such partnership proposed was an iRhini/Grahamstown schools partnership that involved Rhodes University, the historically disadvantaged schools, the 'Model C' and private schools, non-government organisations, the

Department of Education, the teacher unions and donors. I suggested that such a schools partnership could have as its goals systematically building the capabilities of the historically disadvantaged schools so that they could realize the potential of their students, and graduate significantly larger numbers of students that could attend universities, including and especially Rhodes.

Within Rhodes the idea of such a partnership was raised with colleagues in the Faculty of Education, with academic departments, the Rhodes SRC, various clubs and societies, and various groups and individuals. All around there was a commitment to contribute and a willingness to get involved.

Thereafter, idea of a schools partnership was pursued through the creation of a Steering Committee comprising of representatives of the historically disadvantaged secondary schools, the Department of Education, the South African Democratic Teachers Union and Rhodes University. A grant of R250 000 from the Office of the Vice-Chancellor was placed at the disposal of the Steering Committee as initial seed funding to support the development of the Schools Partnership.

It has been an ongoing conversation and working together over the past two years in a mutually respectful partnership that has brought us to this day and to the launch of the Schools Partnership.

The launch is, however, merely an important event in a long journey. It reminds one of Bertolt Brecht reference to the 'struggle of the mountains' and the 'battle of the plains'. If a democratic Constitution, democracy and citizenship for all are the mountains, they have been largely won. It is now the infinitely more arduous and protracted 'battle of the plains', of creating an equitable, just, and humane society that must be joined and won. A fundamental part of such a society is education and schools that develop the talents and potential of learners and create opportunities for economic and social advancement.

The launch is also an event in a long journey in an important further sense. The Schools Partnership is not and has never been conceived as an exclusive partnership between the historically disadvantaged schools, the DoE, SADTU and Rhodes. Rather, from the outset it has been conceptualised as an inclusive partnership that embraces all schools – the other public secondary schools and private secondary schools, non-governmental organisations, all teacher unions, the business sector, and other institutions, organisations and individuals.

The Schools Partnership had, however, to begin somewhere, to clarify principles, purposes, goals and needs, objects and strategies and the like and build a relationship of mutual trust among the key actors. This afternoon, however, the Schools Partnership extends an open invitation to all institutions, organisations and individuals that share the goal of building the historically

disadvantaged schools as effective schools imbued with a culture of learning and teaching to join the original institutions and organisations in this important endeavour.

The success of the Schools Partnership depends on drawing in and harnessing the contributions of various and diverse institutions, organisations and individuals.

Beyond this, there is need for clarity of thinking and agreement on *purposes, aims, and objects*, for shared core premises, values and principles and an overall *enabling framework*; for an effective drawing on knowledge and experience to fashion the *appropriate strategies and methodology*, methods and techniques for pursuing the defined purposes and aims; for *effective organisation and implementation*, and for deep attention to *sustainability* in terms of people and finances, and a shaping of goals, strategies and methodology by the availability of people and finances.

1. Finally, we should 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. 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.

One obviously looks here to the knowledge, expertise and experience of the 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, one way of imagining these could be as follows:

- A principled partnership comprising in the first instance all the secondary schools in Rhini/Grahamstown, Rhodes University and the District office of the Department of Education constituted in a Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini **Alliance** that meets regularly
- A Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini **Forum** that comprises the Alliance, non-governmental organisations, teacher unions, business, other committed formations and organisations involved in initiatives geared towards building effective schools and meets intermittently
- A Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini **Office**, staffed, to begin with, a knowledgeable, skilled, sensitive, and dynamic full-time **Co-ordinator** who is charged to give effect to the purposes, aims and objects of Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini, however they may be formulated, and

to function in accordance with the overall framework of the initiative.

Ultimately, structure and organisation will, of course, be shaped by the framework and methodology.