Institute for Childhood Education (UJICE)

including the

Funda UJabule Foundation Phase School

on the

Soweto Campus of the University of Johannesburg

www.uj.ac.za/ujice
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First, early childhood education has great educational and social benefits and must be a policy priority. The Nobel Prize-winner for economics, James Heckman, writes that “it is a rare public policy initiative that promotes fairness and social justice and at the same time promotes productivity in the economy and in society at large. Investing in disadvantaged young children is such a policy”.

(Saleem Badat, VC Rhodes)
1 A new partnership: The Funda UJabule School in the UJ Institute for Childhood Education and the GDE

The Faculty of Education at the UJ is launching a new Institute on its Soweto campus at the beginning of 2010. This is part of its brief to contribute to innovation in school education. One such innovation is the forging of partnerships with public education, which has become a worldwide trend.¹ The charter school movement in the US is one such an example.

The UJ’s hybrid of a ‘charter school’ is the Funda UJabule School, a foundation phase school on the Soweto campus. This is a public school in the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) system, the main educational partner of the UJICE. The school will serve more than the purpose of educating young children. It will be an inherent part of the Institute and integrate various functions of training, research, and service.

2 Research, teacher education and training, and service

At the Institute researchers will conduct studies on childhood education and child development, utilising its school as main source of data. The school will thus be both a training- and a research site, while providing innovative early grades education for children of the area.

Education degree programme students will do their practical training at this school. The 2010 intake of such students will be the first in the new B.Ed Foundation Phase

¹ See the January 2010 Education issue of “Focus” – the journal of the Helen Suzman Foundation, guest edited by Dr Gillian Godsell (Public and Development Management School, University of the Witwatersrand).
Degree Programme at the UJ. Coupled with this research/training school we are also planning for education and training programmes for practising teachers, and for families and caregivers of the pupils of the school.

The ultimate objective is not only the establishment of one school in this part of the city, but a replication of the teaching model which we hope to have refined after a four-year period of comprehensive research. We aim to disseminate whatever is developed and learned widely.

*The South African Journal of Early School Education*, published by the UJ, will be one of the vehicles for the dissemination of the findings of our research. The focus of the UJICE inquiries will be the detailed tracking of the children’s learning and development over four years in longitudinal studies, using, among others, standardised instruments.

Apart from the research, we will also make resources at the school and the Institute available for all teachers in the vicinity and from further afield. We will thus share material and human resources in both the University and the School. The Teacher Knowledge newsletter, to be published on the UJICE website, will be one such source of usable knowledge for practice.
3 Why create such an Institute?

Education in the early years of school is vital and success at grade three level is a significant indicator of entry into university. According to Barber and Moursheed (2007), the available evidence suggests that even in good systems students who do not progress sufficiently during their first years at school stand very little chance of recovering the lost years and their failure is perpetuated throughout their school career.

This is why we chose to focus on this complex and multifaceted topic of education in the early years. In order to study it in depth, researchers and practitioners will design integrated programmes of education. This will be in tandem with both shorter term and longitudinal research projects around the theme of learning and psychological and social development of young children. This could prove to be more reliable and fruitful than the large local and international surveys and small case studies that are usually conducted on an ad hoc basis, and which are often used to inform policy.

In addition to studying the children the teacher education programme as well as the service programmes will also be studied. The main programme of research with regard to teaching will comprise studies in the use of language as medium of instruction. Teams of researchers will investigate the relationship between children’s use of multiple languages in learning to read and write and in learning to be numerate.

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2 This research was based on a 10-month study of the best-performing school systems as defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development’s (OECD’s) Programme for International Student assessment (PISA); a survey of the current literature and interviews with more than one hundred experts, policy makers and practitioners in 18 different systems representing over 13 countries.
4 Why is the Soweto campus ideal for such an Institute?

There are physical or geographical reasons, as well as socio-ideological ones, but, most importantly, also economic reasons why education in Soweto is so important. This area is the most populous metropolitan and multi-lingual township in the country, serving as an example on which other urban initiatives (national and international) can be modeled.

Currently there are considerable developments taking place there in general, but the UJ’s campus is part of a move to establish an intellectual public space there over the next few years in joint investment by the University and the Department of Education. The socio-ideological reasons have to do with the striving of the University to realise its vision to be “a premier, embracing African City University”. This proposed development will unite those involved in this project around a shared vision of eradicating past injustices together with the upliftment and empowerment of young citizens through education. The goal is thus to embrace social development as primary requirement for economic development and for the nurturing of democracy. Ultimately, the city of Johannesburg cannot be a true global role player if the Soweto area is not optimally productive.

5 The components of the Institute

The Institute, including its research programme, will comprise three components:

- The school in partnership with the GDE. The school will be an integral part of the training and teaching of student teachers who enroll in the newly developed B.Ed Foundation Phase Degree programme
- The University’s academic programmes, including the new degree
School and University-initiated service/outreach programmes aimed at involving the families and care-givers of the pupils. Such services include assistance for families to support the children in doing their homework, family counselling, basic health and optometry assistance projects, professional development courses for teachers, and so on.

The diagram below shows this structural relationship and flow:

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6 The school and its curriculum

The school will be characterised by the image of a “craft studio” of learning, in which language and literacy will be the basis on which the rest of the curriculum will be designed (from the National Curriculum Statement). The reference to a craft studio indicates a focus on creative, conceptual productivity, made visible by the crafting of artefacts. Children will thus learn by optimal “doing” and will be producing artefacts of a wider variety than is usual in schools. The learning of mathematics, for instance, will be approached as the developing of a craft initially, made observable by pupils’ making of objects and not limited to decoding and writing of mathematical symbols.

The school’s curriculum will also emphasise literacy and multilingualism in the pedagogy. This is also reflected in the teacher education programme at UJ in which students study English, isiZulu, and Sesotho at different levels of proficiency.
In addition, teachers who have been selected to work in the school will participate in stringent professional development programmes that will be custom-designed and also researched. Student teachers and practising teachers will share a close learning space and inform each others' work constantly.

Another aim is to develop exemplary teaching and school management practices in the Foundation Phase of schooling. The school management team will be involved in the Education Leadership Institute that the UJ offers in collaboration with the Harvard Graduate School of Education. An advisory committee consisting of an equal number of GDE and UJ representatives oversees the UJICE project.

7 Research and teacher education partnering

- Research methodology specialist Max Bergman from the Institute of Sociological research at the University of Basel (Switzerland) comes to UJ for two months per year as adjunct visiting professor whose role will include advising the research development and methods at UJICE.
- We are in discussion with Bank Street College of Education, New York, which was identified as one of the top schools of education in terms of elementary school teacher training in the USA. This College also has a training school attached to it.

8 Type of investment opportunities

There are a number of ways in which a donor may want to invest in the Institute, or specifically in the school. The donor who is interested to fund this venture will find a niche for a long-term or a once-off opportunity to contribute to the revitalisation of our school education in a scientifically sound way. For more information, please visit our website: www.uj.ac.za/ujice
9 Conclusion: Raucall Secondary School and the success of University-School Partnerships

Our country’s educational shortcomings are well documented in the media and elsewhere. The need for well educated foundation phase teachers has also received much attention lately. We at UJ believe that we have come up with a concept that addresses some of the crucial issues of early school education. Ultimately our goal is much more encompassing than an effective and efficient school. We see our intervention as a contribution towards education as fundamental to economic development.

The pupils who have graduated form UJ’s first school, the Metlife Raucall Secondary School that was founded in 1992, have moved on to successful higher education and promising careers. In 2008 this school was rated the top state school in mathematics in South Africa, while it was rated fourth in science and seventh in overall performance (Sunday Times, 18 October 2009).

Partnerships between a university, the provincial government, and the private sector hold much promise for the future of our economy and our democratic state in a global arena.

10 Reference: