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RETHINK. REINVENT.



Editorial

This, the third issue of EduBrief in 2015, is entirely devoted to the development and inauguration of Funda UJabule School on the Soweto Campus of UJ. Funda UJabule School is a unique school in South Africa's education environment and is representative of the innovation and commitment of the Faculty of Education. As a place of both practice and research it is an ideal teaching and learning environment in which to develop effective, critical and creative teachers.

This issue of EduBrief provides insight into the purpose and history of the school, as well as acknowledging the support – both financial and community-based – that has led to the school becoming an ever-more significant centre for research into childhood education in the South African community. The presence of international researchers underlines the interest that the school has generated in countries far beyond our borders.

Prof Sarah Gravett, the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education, provides an historical overview of the development of the school. Prof Elizabeth Henning provides commentary on the research focus of the school, as well as prospective research matters. Prof Nadine Petersen provides insights into the school as a teaching institution, relating to the management of the school and practical aspects of running an academic programme in a teaching and learning environment.

Both of these articles are edited versions of speeches made at the opening of the school.

The editorial team thanks the speakers for the right to print their speeches. In addition, we thank Herman Esterhuizen for the right to print his statement about the school being a milestone in education.

In addition, there are comments from several of the sponsors and funders of the project.

The Faculty of Education acknowledges the support and commitment of these organisations and individuals and thanks them for their time, funding, and effort. Without these supporters the school would not have been established.



UJ's Funda UJabule School a milestone for teacher education

Nestled beneath the hill where it is believed Reverend Enoch Sontonga penned, in 1897, the great hymn for Africa, "Nkosi Sikele'iAfrica", the Funda UJabule School at the Soweto Campus of the University of Johannesburg (UJ) is one of the most exciting developments in South Africa's teacher education landscape.

In what is another historic moment in the University's Soweto Campus development history, the new facilities at the Funda UJabule (isiZulu, meaning "learn and be joyful") School, a pioneering teacher education and research school that bridges the divide between theory and practice in teacher education, were officially opened by the University's Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Ihron Rensburg on Thursday, 20 August 2015.

As one of UJ's flagship initiatives, inked to Childhood Education, the Funda UJabule School where students learn to teach, and where they learn about children's development in a live-site over four years of their degree programme, is the first of its kind in South Africa and is set to become a best-practice school.

Speaking at the opening of the new facility, Prof Sarah Gravett, Executive Dean of the University's Faculty of Education, pointed out that the teacher education and research facility for students who study towards becoming primary school teachers, is an ordinary public school, but also a practice site for student teacher development in the foundation phase and intermediate phase of schooling. "The School is also a "social laboratory" enabling research in childhood education," she said.

Herman Esterhuizen



A Brief Historical Overview of the Founding and Development of the School

Prof Sarah Gravett, Dean of the Faculty of Education, first presented the idea to establish a primary school on the Soweto Campus to the University Members of the Executive Committee (MEC) in October 2008. The document presented to the MEC was compiled after a consultation with Prof Ihron Rensburg who gave Prof Gravett the go-ahead to explore the idea. This document referred to the establishing of an “experimental/ research school” on the SWC.

On 13 November 2008 Prof Gravett submitted a progress report to the MEC. The following was stated in the report:

“We have had several meetings with the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) to solicit their support for the Foundation Phase Teacher Education programme and the envisaged School and we are now ready to move towards a formal statement of intent/agreement. The initial meeting was chaired by Mr MaLlele PeTje (Head of Education in Gauteng). Subsequent meetings have involved Mr Albert Chainee and Ms Reena Ramparsad. The GDE has indicated their support for the “experimental” UJ/GDE school that we want to establish in 2010 (commencing with 2 Grade R classes), and it was confirmed that we will be given the freedom to experiment with the curriculum and to use the school as a training and research site. We also discussed these plans with the MEC of Education last week. Ms

Motshekga pledged her full support and she expressed her excitement and appreciation.”

The progress report also referred to the Foundation Phase Teacher Education programme that was developed to incorporate the school as teaching practice site. The Dean highlighted:

As a model of exemplary childhood education, special attention will be paid to

- the growing knowledge of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of the developing child, and
- the current best practices in the field.

The name of the school: Funda UJabule was approved by the MEC on 17 April 2009. The name captures the spirit of education at the school: learn and be joyful. But it also encapsulates the UJ association in the name.

In establishing the Funda UJabule School the Faculty learned from the Shirley Moore Laboratory School (University of Minnesota), the laboratory school at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and the School for Children (Bank Street College, New York). Prof Gravett and colleagues visited these schools. Prof Virginia Casper from Bank Street College played an important role as partner. During this time the Faculty also made initial contact with the University of Helsinki. Universities in Finland have teacher training schools

attached to them and the Department of Childhood Education was keen to learn from the Finnish experience. Since then Prof Jari Lavonen and colleagues from the University of Helsinki have become firm partners of the Faculty of Education.

The School opened its doors in January 2010 with two Grade R-classes, two foundation phase teachers and an acting school principal; and the first year of the Foundation Phase teacher education programme commenced simultaneously.

Currently the school has 377 learners (up to grade 5). The Faculty started offering the Intermediate Phase teacher education programme in 2014, coinciding with the learners in the Funda UJabule School moving into the intermediate phase of schooling.

Prof Gravett indicates that establishing Funda UJabule as a “teaching school” presented a steep learning curve. The term “teaching school” (TS) was coined after the promulgation of the “Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa” (2011), which makes provision for the establishment of schools associated with universities to strengthen the teaching practice component of teacher education programmes and serve as education research sites at all universities in South Africa.

The School as a Site for Research

(This article is adapted from a speech by Elizabeth Henning)

Professor Elizabeth (Elbie) Henning addressed the audience at the inauguration of the school, and she focused specifically on the research that is being, and will be, conducted at the school.

When the opportunity arose to study a school, literally on site, the Faculty had to make a choice. Then we searched the South African literature to try and find knowledge vacuums.

The research team decided that there was a need to address young children's learning, ability, acuity, and competence. It was further decided that there was the need to develop a local test to gauge acuity for mathematics at a young age – prior to children's development of the ability to read, write and use mathematical symbols. The research group found a test named the Marko-D mathematics test in Germany, which formed the basis for the research process that would follow. The test has now been standardised and is able to be administered in four languages.

The research group is continuing to extend their knowledge on developmental neuroscience, and future work will include addressing the following questions:

When is it optimal to learn the English terms and sentence structures of science and mathematics, including the infamous "word problems"? When is it optimal to convert informal language of science phenomena to the formal structures that high school learners will need? How best can we prepare learners in the intermediate phase to read and write science,

mathematics and technology? How can we make a contribution to the intermediate phase curriculum by, possibly, designing a STEM + language integrated curriculum?

So, the research that was conceived in Funda UJabule school, where many of the pilot studies were done, and where it is now used to train early grade teachers in the timely identification of learning difficulties relating to mathematics, has gone back to the home where it was born.

At this school Ms Fikile Simelane (one of the teachers) is doing her Masters degree on researching the impact is on children's performances on the test if the teachers are educated in the theoretical knowledge of numerical cognition and remediation.



Prof Elizabeth Henning addresses the audience



Prof Annemarie Fritz-Stratmann, from the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany, and Dr Antje Ehlert from the University of Potsdam, Germany, both of whom are involved in research at Funda Ujabule.





The School as a Site for Teacher Education

(This article is adapted from a speech by Prof Nadine Petersen)

There was a clear vision for Funda UJabule as a teaching school: it would be a school of excellence, where student-teachers could experience schooling and the education of young children at its best. The Funda UJabule teachers' roles were to inspire excitement about teaching and dispel

the fallacy that teaching in the primary school is akin to babysitting. In short, it would be a place where students could learn about the virtues and qualities of excellent primary school teachers. This vision was also my (and others') inspiration to work in this programme on the Soweto campus;

we wanted to be part of educational-history-in-the-making.

Five years after the inception of the school, we are in a position to reflect on how far we have come in meeting the purposes we originally set and to identify what still needs to be achieved.



The Teaching and Management Staff at Funda UJabule

Firstly, I will address how the teaching school contributes to primary school teacher education. I see so many young students enter our classrooms at the SWC, wanting to become teachers who know about young children and how to teach them effectively. Funda UJabule serves as an educational laboratory: it provides prime opportunities for these prospective primary school teachers to study the development of young children focusing on how they learn, change and develop over time.

The school also serves as a practice site for bridging the so-called theory-practice divide in teacher education. Student-teachers in the UJ primary school programmes get first-hand experience of an ordinary public primary school from their first year. Student observations

and concerns from the school environment are 'transported' to the university classroom, interrogated and then taken back to the school classroom. In the process students' university coursework serves as a lens for examining practice and in turn practice becomes a lens for interrogating theory.

There are some challenges:

At the level of operations, working across multiple systems, each with its own understanding of education and with its own process, practices and discourses, is complex. For the Funda UJabule teachers, nothing could have prepared them beforehand for the expectations of working in a very different kind of public school. This process takes patience, resilience, tenacity and incredibly hard working and dedicated staff.

We can learn much from our Finnish colleagues who tell us that in Finland the various stakeholders consider the education of children to be paramount. Neither political affiliations, fiscal limitations nor academic interests take precedence: the teaching school, the university, teacher unions and the education department work together to ensure that the educational enterprise in the teaching school is not compromised.

These are the kinds of matters that we need to deliberate on carefully. If we want to create teaching schools as sites of excellence to serve teacher education and research and still yield world-class public primary school education it simply cannot be educational business-as-usual.



Excerpts from some of the funders

Prof Ihron Rensburg, Vice Chancellor (VC) of the University of Johannesburg delivered the opening address at the celebration. Prof Sarah Gravett, the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education, expressed her deep appreciation to the VC for the strong support he has been giving to the Funda UJabule School. It was also a privilege to have had the Chancellor of the University, Prof. Njabule Ndebele present at the event.

The Faculty of Education is deeply grateful for the support of collaborators and funders. Some of the funders and collaborators made brief remarks at the event.

Messages were delivered by Ms Gail Campbell (Zenex Foundation), Ms Clare Digby (Oppenheimer Memorial Trust), Ms Vuyiswa Ncontsa (Elma Foundation), Mr Graham de Vries (MTN), Ms Charlotte Shirindi (Gauteng Department of Education), Ms Cheryl Anderson (USAID), Dr Whitty Green (Department of Higher Education and Training) and Ambassador Roeland Van de Geer (European Union).

All the speakers referred to the innovation that Funda UJabule School brings into the teacher education landscape. Dr Whitty Green from the DHET also highlighted the important research conducted in the field of childhood and teacher education at the UJ.

Ms Gail Campbell (Zenex Foundation):

"This represents a ground breaking innovation for both teacher practice and research. With respect to teaching practices, there is wide acknowledgement that we need to find new ways to provide pre-service teachers with quality opportunities for undertaking and reflecting on teaching practice. However, there are many challenges of doing this within the current schooling context. This School offers pre-service teachers this opportunity. With respect to research, the school provides an opportunity for both students and academics to systematically study teaching and learning, specifically in relation to literacy and numeracy.

We take this opportunity to salute the team at UJ under the leadership of Professor Sarah Gravett for the dedication and consistent professionalism in the delivery of this project. The Zenex Foundation is proud to be associated with Funda UJabule in marking this auspicious occasion. We wish you every success in your continued efforts to improve teaching and learning in the country."

Ms Charlotte Shirindi (Gauteng Department of Education):

"The practical learning experience that will be afforded to the student teachers will go a long way in ensuring the teachers released into the Education System contribute positively towards Better and Happy Citizens. Funda UJabule!"



Above: Prof Ihron Rensburg welcomes the audience.

Ambassador Roeland Van de Geer (European Union):

"The European Union (EU) commends the University of Johannesburg, the Gauteng Education Department, the staff of Funda UJabule School and the community of Soweto, not just for providing children with a loving and nurturing environment but for generating a living example of best practise which can be emulated in other parts of the country and beyond."

"The on-going research being carried out at this school through the collaboration between the University of Johannesburg, the teachers and the community is a valuable element which will support the possibility of more schools serving as training ground for student teachers. Evidence such as the excellent performance here will demonstrate the value of replication of this initiative."

Ms Cheryl Anderson (USAID):

"USAID is pleased to be supporting the University of Johannesburg to offer future teachers the unique combination of theoretical knowledge, and practical hands-on experience in the classroom."

"I am humbled by standing on this education campus in Soweto today, the site of the Uprising of June 16, 1976, when children planned and carried out a mass protest. It is moving to be part of a project that will help to further correct [education] injustice, by creating greater access to quality education for all South African children."



Left to Right: Ms Clare Digby (Oppenheimer Memorial Trust), Prof Njabule Ndebele (Chancellor of UJ), Prof Ihron Rensburg (Vice Chancellor of UJ), Prof Sarah Gravett (Dean of the Faculty of Education, UJ) and the Choir



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