Consequences of punishing
Learning about distance learning
Staying sane in an insane world

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Contents

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2 Contents and editorial
3 Letters
4 Reflections on education during Covid-19
5 Check with Maslow first before coming down hard
6 We’ve been in education since the 1800s
7 An intercom announcement that changed my life
8 I started teaching when I was ten
9 Learning about distance learning
10 Staying sane in an insane situation
11 A thing of beauty is a joy forever
12 Everyone needs Science
13 A friend in a crisis
14 The happy child will thrive
15 Why I love teaching
16 Consequences of punishing high school students
17 Showing appreciation
18 The triple package
19 Last laugh

Editorial

Dear Friend of the NAPTOSA family

Change is the only constant

As the years go by, one year can blur into another. Yet 2020 is a distinct and unforgettable year in our lives. This is the year of Covid-19; the year of the coronavirus pandemic. In so many ways – albeit they large or small - our lives have changed forever. We’ve been made bluntly aware of never presuming that anything remains unchanged and stays in a routine. Change is the only constant. It applies especially to education.

With the nationwide lockdown came the closure of schools. As I’m writing this, there’s a gradual reopening and return to the classroom for certain Grades. One day, all our schools will be open once more. Yet even when this does happen, it won’t be a return to the old familiar ways.

One huge result of Covid-19 is that we’ve had to look at the way that we teach. Distance learning is a new reality. If teachers can’t do it already, they’ll need training so as to have it in their professional skills toolkit. Face-to-face teaching as in the past, cannot always be guaranteed. (Medical experts predict that the world can expect more virus-type pandemics in the future.) Teachers will need computer technology skills to do online teaching.

The lockdown has highlighted the disparities between poorly and richly-resourced schools. For some learners, education continued during lockdown with a momentary pause. For many millions more, it came to a shuddering halt. There were those teachers who enthusiastically embraced the new teaching methods as against those who didn’t know where one should begin.

Right now, there’s an urgency about revisiting national and provincial education budgets. Changes need to be made to adapt to deal with totally unexpected new realities.

In the midst of it all, these have been times for reflection. One teacher told me that the lockdown has caused her to change the way that she thinks about not only about her own children but also those that she teaches. Having to spend far more time at home with her children has been a reminder of her first priorities – her two daughters, son and husband. Yes, the school is a priority but not the top one. Change is happening in the way that she allocates her time.

The same mother confessed to having a bit of an ‘A-type’ personality in her relationships with her students. She focussed on performance; she drove them hard so as to achieve high academic standards. Covid-19 has changed her relationships with them. She has felt their vulnerability and fear during the pandemic. When she spoke to them online, she realised that they wanted to hear more words that reflected care, empathy and kindness — and less words discussing quadratic equations. When the students next meet her face-to-face, they’ll notice a change in emphasis about the way that she treats them.

As we all deal with the inevitable changes that confront us, may we not be overwhelmed. May we do what we can but within reasonable limits. There’s only so much that we can do if we are to avoid being emotionally, mentally and physically burnt-out. Gently accept and adapt to change, the only constant.

Richard Hayward

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Online teaching is the way of future

In the wake of Covid-19, the government has taken some drastic but needed steps to stop the spread of the virus. The closure of schools and the lockdown were timely but they have meant disruption for teachers, pupils and to the school year.

Regrettably, the necessary closure of learning institutions has a devastating effect on content delivery as it interrupts learning and teaching.

Taking the lockdown and the long periods of absence from school, schools are moving into unfamiliar and new methods of teaching by using electronic technology, so that learners can complete the term uninterrupted.

Covid-19 has brought home the reality. I had to take lessons and brush up my technical skills on online teaching and digital learning.

Although the online method of teaching has yet to be employed because of the ‘talk, chalk and board or traditional’ methods of teaching, it is the future.

Online studying is found to be a rapidly emerging knowledge tool today by researchers. E-learning enables learning and teaching to take place without interruption to the school’s almanac during unforeseeable challenges.

Teachers and parents need to develop e-learning spaces to prevent any future delays in curriculum completion as evidenced by the virus.

Online education is a complex venture and it does have its constraints but necessity compels a revisit to many things in our daily lives.

Mohamed Saeed, Pietermaritzburg, The Star, 31 March 2020

Judging matric performance will be tough

Amid the disastrous Covid-19 effects, the Department of Basic Education must not expect the percentage of passes to be a true reflection of this year’s matrics.

With three boring months at home with no inspiration, no one-on-one lessons, matric results will be the worst in many years, unless the department lowers the pass percentage or sets easier papers. They could be detrimental to their class results for university entrance.

The half-baked opening of schools does not auger well for many rural disadvantaged and borderline learners.


Pensions are for the people

Our president has advocated the bailout of Eskom using R 250bn of government workers and pensioners’ retirement savings. This is not a good idea.

The pension savings in the Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF) belong to its 1.7 million members and not COSATU nor the ANC government.

By law, the GEPF board of trustees has to manage the fund in the best interests of its members, in accordance with which it provides a mandate to the Public Investment Corporation (PIC) as its investment vehicle.

Contrary to the rosy picture painted about the R 1.8 trillion in assets in the recent GEPF annual report, the fiduciary condition is not healthy. This was demonstrated by an independent actuarial evaluation. Hiving off R 250bn will seriously hurt the fund.

It is naive to think that this proposed loan will save Eskom or SAA. The only thing that will save both from economic disaster is an about-turn from the disastrous course the government is pursuing with its national democratic revolution in which the state tries to centralise all economic power under its wings.

Theo Stehle, Knysna. Sunday Times, 8 March 2020

Appreciate the value of schools

It’s a travesty that schools have become easy targets for criminals. According to reports, more than 962 have been vandalised and equipment stolen. With the need for protective supplies to create a safe environment at schools, having to replace stolen resources and repair vandalised schools is going to compound the economic strain.

Schools are supposed to be prized possessions of communities. The challenge is to change the mind set of communities.

One solution is to inculcate appropriate values in communities with special emphasis on school-going learners. This will develop into an inter-generational attitude of collective community responsibility. Covid-19 has taught us many lessons, one of which is that, in adversity, positive attitudes must remain supreme.


What’s your opinion?

Emails are most welcome. Send them to rpdayward@yahoo.com

The maximum length is 300 words. Please include your name, postal address and cell/ telephone number.

Anonymous letters aren’t published.

If you’d like to write an article for NAPTOSA Insight, please submit them to the editor at the above email address.

Authors of published articles receive honoraria.
Reflections on education during the Covid-19 pandemic

Basil Manuel

“It was the best of times it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity.” How true this quotation from Dickens rings today.

Who would have believed just a year ago that today the entire world would in the 21st century be held ransom by a virus? We thought that this was impossible in the 21st century with artificial intelligence and the knowledge boom. Yet we have been humbled by a simple virus. Incredible indeed!!

Covid-19 has exposed that ugly underbelly of our unequal past and reminded us that inequality cannot be legislated away. In fact, it cannot be air-brushed. The stark differences were no clearer than in education. With lockdown and the lack of understanding about what was happening, many schools were closed. People pictured a day in the not too distant future when schools would reopen. Little did we know that after three months, there would be no normality with little chance of that for the remainder of the year.

Covid-19 laid bare – much to the embarrassment of the Education Ministry and government – the failures of the past 26 years. There’s bad crumbling infrastructure, lack of basics such as water supply, proper sanitation, overcrowded classrooms as well as lack of electricity. Yes, this is the lot of many thousands of schools. Add to this the corona virus and we’re heading into a slaughterhouse.

NAPTOSA refused to pretend that these problems would solve themselves. Together with other unions, we took the route of applying pressure by refusing to support the reopening of schools. We were met with howls of anger, ridicule and accusations of not caring about the children.

At the same time, thousands applauded – albeit cautiously – that we were eventually noticing their plight. The caution had to do with years of empty promises and campaign rhetoric with little delivery.

With a little pressure, 3000 schools were in less than three weeks supplied with water – water that could not be delivered for 26 years. Uninhabitable schools were abandoned. Toilets were supplied to thousands of schools that had languished forgotten with their pit-latrines. Not quite the best of times but they were small victories that changed the lives of millions. Tragically, these port-a-loos may be a permanent replacement for the pit latrines if we don’t sustain the pressure.

We may have changed some fortunes but we haven’t changed the will of the powers-that-be to do the right thing. Now is the time to make bad good by building better.

Foolishness seems to rule the roost whenever we talk about the curriculum. This applies to those who try and force primary schools into a catch-up mode which stresses parents, learners and teachers. The education department simply neglects to see the opportunity created by the pandemic. Opportunities are there. We have been catapulted into using online virtual teaching methods. Webinars are the order of the day. Then why are they not in the curriculum?

The opportunity to address the greatest weaknesses in the schooling system has fallen into our laps. Yet dinosaurs who have never walked in the passages of a school, fail to see that fixing the two biggest challenges in the system – namely, reading with understanding and Mathematics - could be addressed in the entire Foundation and GET phases. By so doing, many more children could be given a leg-up in the education system.

Wisdom has certainly eluded our curriculum department. It’s unable to embrace an opportunity that has smashed it in the face because of a lack of ability to challenge the norm, to innovate and to think outside the confines of comfort. Survival mode just isn’t good enough.

Yet what a wonderful time to be alive, to contribute, to fight the good fight, to challenge and be challenged, to moan because civil liberties are being juxtaposed to what’s in the best interests of the masses. Truly, these are the best of times. However, the burden of poverty banging on the door, starving children, the unfed homeless, the dead unable to be buried with dignity, make these times the worst of times.

Today, more than ever, we need the knowledge to know that a tomato is a fruit but also the wisdom to know not to put it into a fruit salad.

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Check with Maslow before coming down hard on students

Callum Jacobs

It’s worth remembering just what it is that we’re asking students to do when they step into the classroom. They’re expected to sit still, to stay quiet, to control the urge to go to the loo, to control the urge to shout at someone who might be repeatedly flicking their ear, and all the while listening to something it’s quite possible they have zero interest in. Add to that the fact that half of them didn’t get to sleep until gone 2am and may only have eaten a bag of chips for breakfast. And then we get angry with them because they’re not giving their full attention.

According to Maslow, before a student can hope to tackle demanding cognitive processes such as learning new skills or acquiring knowledge, they must first fulfil their basic physiological needs. It’s just no good trying to get a kid who’s tired or hungry to learn that the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides. (To be honest it’s probably hard enough to get a peppy, well-fed student to pay attention to that.)

If you’ve ever wondered why thinking about that tray of muffins in the corner of the staffroom is making it hard to knuckle down to your marking, it could be time to reacquaint yourself with the work of Abraham Maslow.

Maslow was a pioneer of humanist psychology. The psychology focussed on the positive aspects of the human mind rather than focussing on why things went wrong. In short, it was about how to be your best self.

In Maslow’s most famous contribution to psychology, The Hierarchy of Needs, we might also find the key to helping the children in your classes become better students.

Maslow believed that human behaviour could best be understood by recognising that we’re all constantly trying to satisfy a number of needs. They range from basic survival needs all the way up to finding deep-seated psychological fulfilment. Maslow ordered these human needs into a neat pyramid with five tiers. It started with physiological needs such as warmth and hunger, moving up through needs of safety, love and esteem, to the apex of self-actualisation.

What we’re ultimately all shooting for is to become the person we feel destined to be. This end point of self-actualisation will be different for different people. As Maslow states: “In one individual, it may be the desire to be an ideal mother; in another it may be expressed athletically and in still another, it may be expressed in painting pictures or in inventions.”

These needs were arranged in what Maslow termed a “hierarchy of pre-potency”, meaning that until you had satisfied the lower needs, it would be difficult to achieve anything higher up the list. Regardless of where the end point lies, what’s vital to recognise is Maslow’s suggestion that the first needs will “monopolise consciousness” until they are satisfied.

As teachers, we’re faced every day with a group of people whose needs are different and who are at different stages of having those needs met.

Spot the problems early

So, how do we use this knowledge? As far as possible, we have to spot the problems as early as we can. This might come with having a good background knowledge of our students: of whose parents are going to have made sure their kids get to sleep by 10pm the night before and packed them off to school with oat bran and blueberry granola. In contrast, are those parents who are going to let them stay up playing computer games till dawn and then send them out to greet the day with a can of Red Bull and a clip around the ear.

If we already suspect who the students are who may not be having their basic physiological needs met, then we probably need to get some fundamental interventions in place. This can be tricky but regular reminders regarding the importance of sleep and eating breakfast will help. Try anything that might work.
Beyond physiological needs, students’ safety needs have to be met. This means that they should feel emotionally and physically safe within the classroom to have much chance of making any intellectual progress in lessons. This too, can be a problem in the rolling emotional cauldron of the schoolyard. A student who’s being bullied or who’s worried about what might be awaiting them in the playground at break time, is going to find it hard to concentrate on much else.

Similarly, too often a student is worried about something going on at home: a parent who’s ill, a sibling with depression, a friend with an eating disorder. The fundamental issue is that if a student is worrying about something, they may have little psychological or cognitive space left over for anything else. It’s hard enough for adults to be able to compartmentalise all the different things that might be floating around in their heads at any one time and still focus on their work. So, it’s no wonder kids find it so tough.

In his later years, Maslow refined his theory to recognise that the hierarchy is not as rigid as he first assumed. One can make progress without necessarily passing through all the stages in order – although it will doubtless be more of a slog to do so. He also admitted that there were significant individual differences in how we managed progression up the hierarchy. Some people cope with unmet needs better than others. This is now what we refer to as having “resilience” or “grit”.

Maslow also points out that such are the drives to create and fulfil these deeper, more abstract needs. Some people can achieve them even when their more basic needs remain unfulfilled. Think of starving artists who keep working towards the elusive masterprice or musicians who keep plugging away in pubs and clubs for nothing more than a free pint and a few tips.

Herein lies a final way we can use Maslow’s ideas to help our students. If we can find what it is that will lead a student to the top of their own pyramid – the thing that drives them, the spark that ignites their educational fire – we can help them to recognise this and work for it. This can allow them to overcome all manner of other disadvantages and obstacles.

As a teenager, Maslow had wanted to be a philosopher rather than a psychologist but says he gave up after becoming frustrated “... with all the talking that didn’t get anywhere”. Take note of his work on the hierarchy of needs and you might save yourself and your students from the same frustrations.

**Shortened. Callum Jacobs is a supply teacher in the United Kingdom. The article was first published on 20 March 2020 in Times Educational Supplement. Reprinted with kind permission.**
We've been in education since the 1800s!

Landie Diamond

I see myself as a social agent of change with the best interest of the child at heart. Teaching is an inherent passion for me. It comes naturally and I do not think that I chose teaching but that it chose me. I come from a family rooted in the education profession, I am in the 8th generation of teachers in my family. The first teacher is Gershom Koyana from the 1800s whom we grew up hearing stories about.

My siblings and I used to play “school” when growing up and I would always play the role of the teacher. Unknowingly, teaching has always been part of me. My innate desire to teach developed into the love to make a difference in the socio-economically challenged areas which is where most of my work is centred. I believe that poverty does not determine intelligence and it’s my passion to inspire and support children growing under challenging contexts to thrive and rise above those circumstances.

The work I do enables me to make long-lasting impacts on the Westlake child and the school community. That keeps me going. I make a difference in the lives of my Westlake children. As little as that may be, it fulfils me. When I look back and see how much their situations have improved, I get a sense of triumph within me.

Some children enrol at our school not being able to utter a single word in English. Yet when they exit, one will not say they had to learn how to learn before they actually learnt anything. Seeing anxious parents when enrolling their children in Grade One and seeing them leaving proudly at the Grade Seven graduation, spikes joy within me.

I am a good administrator and I constantly keep up with current legislation. As a professional, I take a leading role in my development and I seek to cultivate others at all times by modelling the expected behaviour. As the school principal, I create opportunities for growth within the school and nationally.

My intention is to develop my career along my vision of improving lives and making a difference to the school community and to others at large. Winning the NTA award is an acknowledgement of the hard work and effort that I put in to enhance the effectiveness at my school and beyond. This means that I have to continue touching lives and adding value to the cause of education in our country. I embrace the acknowledgement and will continue to serve and impact education one learner at a time. I believe that I cannot change the direction of the wind but I can always adjust my sails to reach my destination.

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An intercom announcement that changed my life

Wendy Horn

1st position: 2020 National Teaching Awards
Category: Excellence in Secondary School Leadership

“it’s not about what it is, it’s about what it can become.” – Dr. Seuss

If I am ever asked to describe myself, I will say, “I’m a teacher.” This is my calling and my first love. For the last five years I’ve been a principal and now I am a district director in the Western Cape Education Department. Yet fundamentally, I’m a teacher.

So here I am, grey haired, somewhat wise and experienced. I’ve been a National Teaching Award (NTA) winner in 2013 (Excellence in Science Teaching), in 2020 (Excellence in Secondary School Leadership) and a Global Teacher Prize finalist in 2018.

When I started my teaching career in the early 1990s, I would never have guessed that I’d end up in this position.

Teaching was not my first choice as a career. If I have to be honest, I didn’t even consider it. I wanted to be a scientist. However, like many young people in South Africa, I needed funding for my tertiary studies. One day in my Matric year, while sitting in a Maths class, a notice came over the intercom that any learners interested in applying for the Funza Lushaka teaching bursary should come to the office. This was my chance. I grabbed it with both hands. Little did I know this would be the start of the most exciting and rewarding journey - my teaching career.

Once I stood in front of that class so many years ago, I knew that I had found my place in the world. For me, being a scientist will never compare to being a teacher. And anyway, I am a Science teacher which is the coolest kind of teacher!

But it was not just about introducing science to these young minds. As a young teacher, I did everything in the school. I organised matric dances, coached sport, gave intervention lessons, drove the school bus and organised school tours. In this way, I could provide learners with the best school experience possible.

In those early years, I failed more times than I succeeded. When I look back on my first few years of teaching, I am sometimes amazed that my matrics managed to pass (I knew so little) and that I didn’t get into more trouble with the principal.

Failing and making mistakes is part of the learning process. I received support and guidance from the more experienced teachers. There were principals who inspired me and allowed me to do my thing, live my passion fully and embraced me with my flaws and all. I am passionate about paying this forward. All teachers should be allowed to make mistakes in a safe environment and learn from their experiences.

As in most professions, once you’re a qualified teacher, you cannot stop learning. When I started out, rote learning was very much the accepted way of teaching and learning. It’s also what I knew, so following that way of teaching was familiar. Soon, however, new curricula and new ways of teaching were introduced. We had to adapt.

In 2015 I was appointed principal of a brand-new school. We began with 200 learners and ten teachers. Of the ten staff members, seven were beginners with little or no teaching experience.

Where do you begin when you get an empty building with limited grounds? Do you just replicate what successful, established schools around you are doing? Or do you trying something new? Something innovative? We decided to find our own unique place in the world of education.

Our vision was to create a place where young people would graduate as global citizens, who could meet the skill requirements of a job market centred on the Fourth Industrial Revolution. So we decided to follow the Maths, Science and Technology path.

We’ve achieved so much in such a short time. We’ve created a space where all learners are accepted and embraced. They are doing coding, robotics, taking part in the Science Expo in the engineering categories, and learning how to be lab assistants to mention a few. Yet they are also making sandwiches together with an NGO. They are reaching out to those who are less fortunate.

A few months ago I left my school and moved into the district office – just in time for the Covid-19 pandemic. We are facing unknown challenges every day and we have no past experiences to guide us. Yet we do what teachers do when faced with a new challenge. We face it head on and make it work. Our learners deserve nothing less.

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I started teaching when I was ten

Constance Kgomotso

1st position: 2020 National Teaching Awards
Category: Excellence in teaching Mathematics (GET phase).

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.
The only way to learn Mathematics is to do Mathematics.

From the disadvantaged community in Chaneng near Rustenburg in the North West Province, I am a proud Mathematics teacher. I chose to be a teacher because teaching is not just a profession but it’s a mission.

As the time approached for me to set my personal and professional goals, I decided to enter the field which would provide me with a sense of achievement and at the same time produce a positive impact on mankind. It became apparent to me that a career in teaching would fulfil these goals.

I discovered the love of teaching at the age of ten when I started taking classes with my cousins where I took on the role of being the teacher. I chose this profession because of the passionate conviction that in it lies my special destiny.

As a dedicated, resourceful and goal-oriented professional educator with a solid commitment to the social and academic and developmental of every child, I am an accommodating and versatile individual. I have the talent to develop hands-on lessons that will capture the child’s imagination and breed success.

I instil knowledge, skills, and values to my learners by using different learning and teaching styles. They include games, creative thinking, group work, problem solving, critical thinking, conceptual understanding, strategic competency, reasoning and technology.

I enjoy making a difference in the lives of as many learners as I can by shaping the destiny of the nation in my classroom and building the learners’ personalities. Thereby, they are equipped to face the challenges of a competitive world in the throes of transition and change.

Being passionate about teaching, I trust myself by believing in my abilities, love what I’m doing and don’t lose faith. I produce excellent results and help learners thrive, appreciate my struggles and learn from them. I have always been fascinated by the amazing computation of numbers.

My experience and involvement in AMESA, working with departmental officials, sharing ideas with colleagues, helped open my eyes to the beauty of Mathematics around us. This has motivated my drive for excellence and I have learned so much about Mathematics from teaching the subject. I firmly believe in change and believe that it starts with passion, commitment and service. I am able to take different approaches to problems relating to Mathematics. I think these perspectives will make me a better mathematician and professional.

Balancing the different learning needs of learners and building their confidence are challenges. I encourage questioning and make space for curiosity. I emphasize conceptual understanding over procedural fluency. I make sure that I provide authentic problems that increase the learners’ drive to engage in Mathematics. I share positive attitudes about Mathematics. I motivate my learners by analysing their weak areas. I teach them how to construct formulas rather than having to remember them. I give them real-life examples to which they can relate and help them expose their values in education that are essential to their holistic development.

A career in teaching Mathematics is not for the light-hearted. The requisites of hard work, creativity, certain failures and challenges can only be successfully sustained by one attribute: passion. It’s passion that fuels the desire for experimental excellence, communication, collaboration of the phenomena as well as a certain penchant to ask questions such as “How?” and “Why?” Mathematics is not about numbers, equations, computation or algorithms. It is about understanding.

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What we’re learning about distance learning in South Africa

Mark Potterton

The coronavirus has caused a major disruption to education around the globe. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) reported that nine out of ten of the world’s children were out of school at the start of April. This is huge. We remember that the purpose of school closures is to try to prevent further transmission of Covid-19 through isolation and physical distancing. The challenge around the world is how to ensure that the effect on children’s learning is minimised.

The disruption of schooling by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005 provides some clues to what the effect of Covid-19 might be. Researchers at Tulane University tracked children when they returned to New Orleans and found that it took two years for them to catch up with their schoolwork. They also argued that it is likely the negative effect was worse for low income and African-American children. Interrupted learning wasn’t the only problem; the researchers said the economic effect and emotional trauma were probably just as important.

As soon as it became clear that the Covid-19 pandemic would affect schooling, we at Sacred Heart College in Johannesburg discussed how we would continue classes. In the high school and in Grade 6, the teachers were familiar with Google Classroom and that’s the technology they went with.

In the preschool they had used a platform called Seesaw but in the end, mainly used WhatsApp. In the primary school, study packs and workbooks were sent home and teachers made use of email, the school’s app, phone calls and WhatsApp. We decided from the outset that we would make it personal and include weekly phone calls to the parents, as well make the services of the school counsellor available.

Communicating with parents on WhatsApp was effective. In reviewing our programme, one teacher said, “I really got to know our parents and our families ... we have become so close.” A parent said, “Thank you for handling the class’s transition to online study so effectively. What could have easily been ‘remote’ schooling was a very connected and vibrant experience for Tim.” Feedback from the children, parents and guardians during the first three weeks was that many of the students missed the structure of school, as well as the sport and other activities.

While distance education – particularly online learning – was appropriate for older children, it wasn’t always the best way for younger children. Not all children have their parents at home throughout the day which meant they didn’t have regular adult supervision. Some people may argue that children might have better spent the day cooking, doing household chores, exploring...
nature and participating in meaningful play. Yet our Grade 1 teachers were creative and even assessed the children’s reading over the phone. We’ve all learned a lot more and teachers across the primary school are now very comfortable with the distance platforms.

In a newly published UNESCO report the authors argue that learning away from school can be effective. They contend that there is no one-size-fits-all distance learning. Some subjects are more easily translated into online environments than others. Subjects such as science and biology require special equipment and are not easily replicated outside the school.

Distance learning can involve a combination of synchronous learning where children work with the teacher at the same time, and asynchronous learning where they work at different times. Asynchronous approaches are more appropriate with older children than with younger children. The authors believe that a quick mini-lesson or assembly at the start of the day adequately serves to connect children with their peers.

The UNESCO study notes that distance learning doesn’t have to mirror learning in school. The authors argue that in trying to replicate the pace and type of work that would be done at school is unrealistic. Schools must decide on a daily structure, a timetable and a to-do list. The authors say that less is more when it comes to the scope of work teachers set in distance learning. This applies especially in times of uncertainty and instability.

The original three weeks which have now turned into months of teaching from a distance, have shown us what works and what doesn’t for both the children and parents. They have also allowed us to better understand the pace at which work gets done.

The UNESCO study provided an example of managing time in the primary school where children have the same teacher for most of the day. The authors suggest that a good structure might include a check-in online, a checklist for the day and five 30-minute periods. Teachers can stay in touch with parents and children using texting, apps, emails and phone calls.

To summarise, over this period we have learned that:

- Personal contact is important to ensure that children feel connected to their teachers and classmates.
- Most teachers are flexible and can learn new technologies and approaches quickly.
- Teachers are able to do the best with the platforms they know. The familiarity and ease of WhatsApp groups worked well for quick, short communication between teachers and parents.
- Teachers must be empathetic and assign reasonable amounts of work and realise that children have other classes and other things to do at home.
- Children of different ages and abilities participate differently. Children who struggle in class have difficulty concentrating and don’t submit work. They tend to do the same when learning online.
- Different approaches are needed with different age groups. Younger children appear to thrive more with more immediate contact (synchronous learning).
- Getting feedback from students, staff and parents is important to understand what works and what needs changing.

The real question we need to ask is, “How effective is distance learning?” Stronger children who are fairly independent anyway do exceptionally well. However, children who would require a lot more support in the classroom are stumbling. These are unprecedented times and we must respond as best we can. It’s crucial that in addition to worrying about the effect on teaching and learning, we think about the psycho-social needs of children too.

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Distance learning doesn't have to mirror learning in school … trying to replicate the pace and type of work that would be done at school is unrealistic.
Empowering the educator to transform lives

The welfare of the educator is of supreme importance to the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) and this duty is fulfilled through the core services offered by the Council, **Dispute Resolution Services and Collective Bargaining Services.**

The Council has, over the past few years, developed its programmes to enhance its service offering to educators. One of these key developments is the digitisation of the Council’s dispute referral system. The Council has streamlined the process of referring disputes to ensure efficiency and that disputes are resolved within the shortest space of time.

The **DMS Application** is an end-to-end system that will define the Council’s dispute management processes for the next decade.

In embracing the fourth industrial revolution and responding to the issues of the day, the Council’s cases are heard through virtual video conferencing, while still providing the option of face-to-face hearings in compliance with set regulations.

In terms of Collective Bargaining, Parties to the ELRC finalised a very significant agreement for the public education sector in September 2019, Collective Agreement No. 2 of 2014: *Quality Management System (QMS) for School-Based Educators.*

The Agreement is revolutionising the entire system on performance management and not only gives effect to the mandate of the Council to maintain labour peace in the public education sector, but also seeks to fulfil the vision of the National Development Plan on accountability within the system.

In adapting to a changing world that brings with it a ‘new normal’ in education, the Council’s motto remains, to provide “Quality services for excellence in education”.

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Staying sane in an insane situation — survive and thrive

Judy Jaye

Adrian Gore, chief executive officer of Discovery Health, stated, “There are decades when nothing happens and there are weeks when everything happens.”

How appropriate are these wise, poignant words which sum up the insane situation of the Covid-19 pandemic which has caused disaster in every corner of the world. Never before have we lived under these difficult, challenging circumstances of lockdown, experiencing many people becoming ill with Covid-19. Unfortunately, many more are dying worldwide while a vaccine for the coronavirus is desperately being researched and sought.

Yet we as educators need to continue with our plight, teaching our learners and helping them to remain positive in this new reality with which we are all completely unfamiliar. The question arises: How do we do this? Can we learn skills to overcome our own doubts, fear and be positive and proactive in front of a class? “Yes, we can!” states US psychologist Martin Seligman, father of positive psychology.

Rosenberg, an American educationalist and psychologist, points out that educators in the classroom and in management positions need to start by building up their own self-belief and self-esteem. They do so in order to ensure that their learners not only survive but thrive. This can be done by using the acronym SPANNER.

S — Self-confidence, self-esteem. It is imperative that educators take responsibility for building up their own self-confidence and self-esteem by being their own cheerleaders, not depending on anybody else to make them feel good about themselves. Other people are so busy with themselves, building up their own self-images and coping with their own difficulties, that the building of a positive sense of self is the personal responsibility of the individual. “Catch yourself doing something right,” states Tom Rath and then pat yourself on the back and reward yourself. Do not constantly focus on the negative, on what you’re doing wrong as this will only bring down your self-belief. Learn from your mistakes and move on.

P — Positivity, proactivity, perseverance. Focus on the good things in your life, be grateful for everything you have — no matter how small. Adopt an attitude of gratitude to promote positive, effective thinking. Always remember your thoughts create your reality. You are what you think about. Develop a proactive mindset — you have the power!

A — Accept, allow. Accept the new reality, the new way of living — let go of the past and live in the present. Be in the moment. Allow yourself to make mistakes in this new world — you are learning. Mistakes are not failure. They are about lessons of wisdom that help you to navigate yourself through these uncertain times.

N — Negativity. Avoid negative people who are consistently negative and refuse to see anything positive about the present. Control your own negative thoughts and sharing them with others; they merely perpetuate undesirable situations. Change the channels and look for the positives in your life.

N — New reality, new world, new normal. At present, we are living in a new reality and are expected to cope with it efficiently and confidently. There is no place for self-pity no matter what difficulties we may encounter. Self-pity demotivates and sometimes paralyses us from moving forward. We must change our thinking, our words and our actions to achieve our goals.

E — Energy, enthusiasm, empowerment. We need to embrace this new reality with energy by living in the present and not hankering after the past or fearing the future.

R — Role model, reaction, response, resilience. Our learners will look to us as role models — how we react to this situation. Thus, we as educators need to be extremely mindful of our reactions and responses to this pandemic. We need to ensure that we do not become negative prophets of doom but keep up an attitude of hope and faith.

In the classroom

How should educators behave in a classroom where many new situations, obstacles and problems are faced? Rosenberg shares five basic ideas which will enable the educators and learners to “survive and thrive” under these challenging circumstances.

1 Educators should always remember the ABC of teaching:

A — Always  B — Be  C — Connected
Communicate effectively with all the learners in the class. Praise them when they deserve recognition and listen attentively to them when they are speaking to you. Ensure that your learners feel safe and secure in your lessons.

2 Always be prepared in order to ensure learners are not frustrated and that they remain enthusiastic in the lesson. Remember the five P’s of successful teaching:

Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance

3 Avoid unrealistic expectations of your learners. Understand that they are all experiencing some form of fear and anxiety; some may even have gone through a traumatic experience. Understand the abilities and capabilities of your learners at this time, thereby avoiding frustration and disappointment on your part.

4 Stay focused on your teaching and remain positive about learning. Be in the moment. Encourage learners to focus on the learning process, on acquiring new information which will ultimately help them grow and develop to their full potential.

5 Always do your best. Ensure that you, as the educator, do your best in the classroom. Embrace the new reality of wearing masks, social distancing, constant hand washing and frequently using sanitizers. Say to yourself as the role model, “If it is to be, it is up to me”. Ensure that you distinguish between control and non-control problems. Find solutions for the control problems as soon as possible and let go of the non-control problems.

The principal leading the school through this crisis

No matter what the situation is, the principal – together with the management team – need to lead the school effectively in a new direction in this new reality. Although this may appear to be a daunting, almost impossible task, the principal can use the five Cs of management to achieve success. They are:

1 Confidence

It is essential that the principal displays confidence at all times. Thus, there is a need to build up self-esteem, self-belief and self-confidence. They inspire trust in the decisions taken as well as minimise the fears and anxieties of the staff and learners.

2 Caring communication

Hold regular discussions with the staff to see how their teaching is going. Be open to any new ideas or changes they may suggest, as teaching under these circumstances is like, “navigating a ship in unchartered waters”. Listen to parents and learners when necessary and show them that you as principal care and are concerned about them. Consistently build up the relationship trust to ensure a happy school.

3 Creativity

It is essential to be open to new ideas to use in the classroom. Hold regular meetings with the staff and use these three Fs to bring excitement into lessons:

FLOW – Let educators share their opinions and ideas.

FOCUS – Focus on those suggestions which are practical and can be used effectively in lessons.

FINISH – Be available to help any member of staff who may have difficulty in implementing those new ideas in their lessons.

4 Change agent

You must be open to bring about any change in your school that will benefit the learners. Let go of the past; encourage your staff not to hold onto what was done in former years. These times are different; everyone needs to move forward and embrace the present as best as they can. The ultimate responsibility of bringing about successful change is yours as the principal, the head of the school.

5 Committed

Without your commitment to moving your school in a new direction, very little will be achieved. The time for action is now and only you can make that difference. You need to be committed to helping your staff and learners cope with the challenges of this pandemic, to bring about any necessary changes and to ensure that your school remains positive throughout 2020.

Principals should always remember the wise words of Nelson Mandela, “Everyone can rise above their circumstances and achieve success if they are dedicated and passionate about what they do.”

Conclusion

Indeed, these are extremely difficult and challenging times. More demands are made on educators that seem almost impossible to fulfil. However, educators should bear in mind the words of Kanwer Singh, “The strongest do not survive; the most adaptable do.” The key to survive and thrive during the pandemic is to adopt a positive attitude, to look for the good in the situation and to celebrate even the smallest achievement. You choose your attitude. It is this attitude that will determine your success in the classroom. Always remember: It is not what happens to you in life that is important but how you handle it.

Victor Frankl’s wise words are indeed key to coping with this new world, “Everything can be taken from you but one thing: the freedom to choose our attitude in any given set of circumstances.”

Be positive, be optimistic. Indeed, you are stronger than you think!

Dr Judy Jaye was a school guidance counsellor and principal of a business and secretarial college. She is a motivational speaker and counsellor. Her contact details are jaye@telkomsa.net and 082 920 1665.
A thing of beauty is a joy forever  
(John Keats)

David Millar

I was appointed Provincial Chief Executive Officer of NAPTOSA Western Cape in April 2020. This is the latest career move in a (not so long) line of moves, all of which have been in education.

But let me rewind ... my career has been a marvelous experience from start to 'not-yet' finish(ed).

Barrow-in-Furness in Cumbria County, England, is my birthplace. It is located on the edge of the Lake District. I am a 60s ‘XGen’ baby. I spent my formative years at a comprehensive school where the three 'Rs' were drilled into me.

In 1974 my parents, my sister and I immigrated to South Africa. We settled in the industrial town of Vanderbijlpark. I spent my high school years at The Vaal High School in Gauteng. Nothing interested me more than teaching. My Geography teacher in Standards 8, 9 and 10 was Mrs Koekemoer. She inspired me the most. All I wanted to be was a Geography teacher. Wits University in Johannesburg, beckoned. I graduated with my undergraduate degree, then my Honours degree in Geography and Environmental Studies. Then I did a PGCE in the late 80s.

My first teaching post was in 1989 at Suncrest High School in Vanderbijlpark. I spent thirteen years there and left as Deputy Principal. I settled in Cape Town in April 2002.

I had to resign from the GDE and start again. A three-month contract post at Cravenby Combined School in Elsies River was a start. Plumstead High then appointed me into a permanent post. I was later promoted to HOD and joined the staff of Rhodes High School. Fortune favoured me again when I became Deputy Principal at Norman Henshilwood High School (aka Normies) in Cape Town. Professionally, it had taken me 21 months to get back to where I had left off in the GDE.

In July 2004 I was appointed principal at Normies. I didn’t realise it then but my time as principal turned out to be the best years of my professional life. It’s difficult to put into words the sheer joy of leading a school of 1200 pupils and 75 staff members where you’re valued by everyone.

My position as principal was never easy. The school needed a lot of work. I believe in Tim Collins' theory of 'The Power of 10': It takes a good ten years to turn something worth turning around, around. By 2014 Normies was a Top 20 Western Cape school. Normies was the talk of the town.

In 2010 I was fortunate to be the NTA winner provincially and runner-up nationally in the 'Excellence in High School Leadership' category. My academic journey continued and I graduated from UCT in Cape Town with a Master’s degree in Education.

By 2006, NAPTOSA was born out of an amalgamation of previous unions. I immersed myself in union leadership structures and was elected Provincial Chairperson in 2008. In 2015 I was elected national Vice-President and a year later, National Deputy President of NAPTOSA.

Once while reading Robin Sharma’s work, I was struck by these words written by him: “If you are not afraid, you are no longer growing”. It hit me hard. I started to question my own professional growth. I applied for a District Director’s post. In January 2017 I was appointed District Director of the Metro North Education District.

My role as a NAPTOSA office-bearer ended. Senior Management Service civil servants could not hold leadership positions in a union. I was responsible for 210 schools. I was terrified (remember what Sharma said). It was an enormous task – and one that allowed me to grow professionally. I made exciting new connections and learnt all I could learn about how Head and District offices function. I worked with some of the best professionals I’ve ever encountered.

When the provincial NAPTOSA PCEO post became vacant, I applied. It just seemed right after having spent three years at Metro North. I was stoked to be back, serving, albeit in a different capacity. I looked forward to embracing my professional activist role again.

I’m proud to be called a ‘teacher’ more than any other ‘title’ that I’ve been fortunate to have been given. Yet, in the grand scheme of things, I know that I’ll always be the ‘statue’ and never the ‘pigeon’. Endymion is a poem by John Keats. The poem begins with the line: "A thing of beauty is a joy forever". Education is a joy forever. It will never “fade into nothingness”.

David J Millar is the Provincial Chief Executive Officer of NAPTOSA in the Western Cape. His contact details are davidm@naptosa.org.za and 021 689 2998.
Laboratories are places of exploration. They are places where collaboration is key to solving real-world problems, making new discoveries and defining the future.

Harvard University, with the support of the Amgen Foundation, saw an opportunity to bring this spirit of laboratories into the digital education space. Educators and learners would be able to reap the benefits of world-class digital content, delivered on a free, online platform that allows users to integrate and share their learning and research experiences.

And so, LabXchange was born.

Focused on high school and undergraduate educators as well as students interested in life sciences, LabXchange gives you access to thousands of interactive digital learning experiences. At the same time, it equips you to discover, engage, and share content with a global community of diverse thinkers. In the words of Faculty Director and Principal Investigator, Robert Lue, “We envision a world with equal opportunity for success in science for anyone, anywhere.”

Everything that you find on LabXchange, from the content shared in our digital library to the functionalities that let you collaborate and learn with others, is available completely free. Being free is an essential part of our mission to make cutting-edge science content accessible to everyone. You can choose to register for a free account to further personalise your experience by creating your own content, classes and engaging with mentors or mentees.

No matter who you are, you’re able to utilise content from the vast LabXchange library, filled with high-quality, free digital resources from universities and scientific organisations worldwide – including virtual lab simulations, videos, assessments, narratives, and more.

LabXchange empowers learners and educators on their journeys through the world of science. Our curated digital space provides content that encourages learners to engage in the process of science at their own pace by carrying out lab protocols, data analysis, and experimental design. The virtual environment allows students to make mistakes in a low-stakes, supportive environment and take ownership of their learning.

By using the content available on the platform or creating your own, you can support learners in building their critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving skills while exploring and connecting with their interests. Learners can create their own content, too, offering a more nuanced way of demonstrating mastery and understanding than can be done through a test.

LabXchange also gives educators the ability to create private classes which can serve as collaborative spaces for learners or educators. Here, learners can participate in private class discussions and experience content curated to meet specific goals. Our mentorship feature also provides a way for members of the LabXchange community to connect and support each other in developing new skills and discovering career paths.

When learners log out of the platform, having participated in class discussions, engaged with lab simulations, and perhaps curated and shared some of their own content, our goal is for them to feel that they are agents who have the power to add value to the world of science.

I can differentiate for my students on LabXchange by personalising pathways, giving them choice and empowering them to learn science at their own pace. In diverse classes, this allows me to support students where they are and help everyone meet the learning goals.

Mary Liu, Science Teacher, Weston High School, Weston, Massachusetts, United States

Sign up to connect, collaborate and create. When you sign up to LabXchange as an educator, our aims for you are two-fold:

First, we want to empower you to meet each class or individual student exactly where they are in their learning journey by facilitating content remixing and easy differentiation. Our platform gives you the ability to set up private classes with your learners, where you can share customised content, engage with them, and monitor their progress.

Second, we want to help you connect with an intergenerational network of educators, mentors and researchers. These connections can help you collaborate with colleagues to co-design curriculum, get insight and feedback from researchers into the latest cutting-edge scientific studies, get input from mentors around implementing a new curriculum, and more.

Through the social networking tools available on LabXchange, you’re able to create a profile, share your learning pathways, and discuss your hands-on research experiences. The resulting networks and mentor relationships serve as lifelong resources, allowing you to form affinity groups based on changing research interests.

It’s in this space of diverse community that we believe you will be more empowered to create, experiment, share and solve.

To start engaging with and contributing to this community, sign up for a free LabXchange account today.

Dr Jessica Silverman is the Content and Collaborations Manager of LabXchange. Her contact detail is jsilverman@fas.harvard.edu Enquiries can also be directed to Andrew Morris at andrewm@learningsandbox.com and 076 160 5306
Your professional friend in a crisis

Covid-19 has caused a crisis in education across the world. The routine of how to lead and manage a school has been turned on its head. Ways of learning and teaching that have stood for decades have suddenly had to be radically changed within the space of a few days or weeks.

Teachers’ conditions of employment have – in so many schools – been subject to enormous changes. There are many questions that need professional answers. To cite one example: What is co-morbidity and how does it impact on a teacher’s salary and conditions of employment?

In these times of crisis, NAPTOSA has been a true friend to the teaching profession. The staff is at your service. The free advice for members is efficient, friendly and professionally sound.

Office hours from Monday to Friday are from 08:00 – 16:00. 

www.naptosa.org.za

The name of the PCEO (Provincial Chief Executive Officer) for each province is included in the details below.

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| Executive Director: Basil Manuel | PCEO: David Millar |
I’ve been in education for close on 28 years. It’s gone by very quickly. Although I’ve only worked in five schools, I’ve covered some ground having worked in South Africa and in the UK. I have worked in the independent sector in South Africa in both boarding and day-school environments. By training, I am an English teacher and have held a number of posts including that of Executive Headmaster.

Now I’m very happy to serve as a Deputy Head with a specific brief to look after our pupils. In other words, I have a pastoral role and support a team of Grade Tutors at HeronBridge College. What I’ve learned over time is that a happy child thrives.

A child who is happy at school generally will succeed. It should be our goal to provide an environment that – at the very least – offers a place for children to be happy.

An academically strong pupil who dreads school will invariably be limited by the fear of being in that environment. In that situation, a school can provide the best possible academic offering but it will be undermined by the school ethos.

One can generally get a good temperature test of a school by walking around at break. At my school, with responsibility for pastoral care, walking around at break is key. It’s vital that I’m outside walking about. When I talk to friends who aren’t teachers, they sometimes ask me what I do all day. I often answer, to wind them up, that I walk around. Yet in all seriousness, walking around is a vital component of the relationship-building that lies at the heart of being a good teacher.

It’s in walking around that one gets to speak to people and to engage with them. There’s no short cut to relationships...they take time.

All schools have three central components: parents, staff and pupils. Those three groups all want the same thing. They all search for the same goal and so ensuring that the relationships are strong amongst all three is vital. At HeronBridge College, fast and effective communication is our watchword. We respond to anything that comes through. We invest time in people, thereby ensuring that our relationships are strong and firmly in place.

Once you have the relationships in place, you have the fertile ground to work with and are able to ensure a happy campus for the boys and girls of your school.

Over the years in education, all sorts of educational skins have arrived and have fallen away. Where I once wrote with chalk, I don’t anymore. The whiteboard arrived and so did smartboards. We have now moved into a world of devices but one thing remains. That is relationship.

Good teaching doesn’t need chalk. Not does it require whiteboard markers. Good teaching doesn’t need a device, nor Wi-Fi, nor an interactive smartboard. What it needs is relationship. Behind every lesson I’ve taught, lies a much more important foundation. That foundation is the relationship that I have with the student.

Therefore, I ask myself these questions: Do I demonstrate through my words and actions a deep care for the children in my class? Do they actually feel cared for by me? Do they feel secure in my classroom? Do they feel empowered and encouraged? Am I a force of good in their lives? Do I help them? Do I make things better for them?

Children immediately see through inauthenticity. You really cannot deceive them. If you’re a fake or a fraud, I am afraid that they’ll know. My relationship with them matters above all else. I need to be authentic and even when I get things wrong, I need to own that misstep. By being authentic will come the trust and the relationship.

This relationship builds an environment where pupils feel secure, where they can enjoy class, where they can take risks knowing they will never be belittled and where they can feel confident. Enable children to be happy and to feel nurtured. Break down the ridiculous power barriers; build trust and make school fun. Who knows what will then happen.

For me, this is what it’s all about – children feeling deeply cared-for, confident, empowered, happy and secure. If we can make these our unconditional deliverables, then all the other stuff – the curriculum and all that – will slot perfectly into place. Happy children thrive and succeed.

Simon Crane is the Deputy Headmaster of HeronBridge College, Fourways, Johannesburg. His contact details are 073 407 9629 and scrane@heronbridge.co.za
Why I love teaching

Kobashni Nair Ramsamy

NAPTOSA KZN ran a poetry competition on one of their social media pages. Readers were invited to submit poems on the theme, "Why I love teaching." The winning entry was based on the entry that received the most likes and shares. Warmest congratulations, Kobashni Nair Ramsamy on your poem which beautifully shows the special joys of being a teacher.

The essence of a teacher cannot be found in a book. It is located in the understanding eyes of a child who was worth that extra minute I took.

Alphabets and numbers can only get you so far. But connecting with a little one? Now that truly raises the bar. Recognising the eagerness to learn despite paralysing circumstances... This is what keeps me at the top of my game throughout my various classes.

I hold in my hands, the ability to mould young minds. To raise up little ones who will go on to change the world with their finds.

It is a gift to make a positive impact on a little being. And why teaching will forever remain my one true calling...
How to punish high school students... and the likely consequences

Johan Fourie

The argument goes that punishing bad behavior will discourage other students from behaving badly. Yet a recent study points to quite the opposite.

High school teachers have tough jobs. They have to maintain control in a class of several dozen excitable, attention-distracted adolescents, while also trying to convey calculus, or Eukaryotic cell structures, or the reasons for the Second World War. It’s no wonder that things get out of hand sometimes.

Enter the trouble makers. In every class, it seems, there are those students who push the disciplinary boundaries. For their classmates, they are often a source of entertainment. Yet for the teachers, they are mostly sources of frustration and, at worst, anger.

I vividly remember one incident in high school when a few of us had pushed the teacher to extremes. He put down his chalk, turned around slowly and in a cold rasping voice said, “I only have two words for you. Be quiet now!” From the back of the classroom, breaking the silence, came the muzzled response from the class’s chief troublemaker, “Those are three words, sir.” We were all summarily marched off to the principal’s office.

Most disruptions don’t end with a nice story to tell, though. If it happens repeatedly, it can turn the class environment into a toxic mix of poor attention, low motivation and weak effort. This is the death of learning – both for the troublemakers themselves and for any of the other students. It is sadly currently the case in many of South Africa’s classrooms.

Frequent troublemakers inevitably leave teachers with a tough decision: cajoling them with considerable effort into better behavior, or expelling them from the class. It’s never an easy choice. One argument is that punishment should be severe enough to discourage bad behavior. Of course, we mirror these arguments in other parts society too: Want to discourage speeding motorists? We should increase fines! Want to prevent obesity? Increase sugar taxes! Want to reduce crime? The death penalty!

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<th>PUNISHMENT</th>
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<td>Based on rewards &amp; penalties</td>
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Disciplining badly behaved students through detention, suspension and expulsion, the argument goes, would be a lesson to others – and will ensure a classroom conducive to learning. Not so fast says a new National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) working paper by three education economists.

The authors use detailed student data of US schools to show that schools with more severe punishments – like higher suspension rates – are also schools where students are more likely to perform poorly, more likely to drop out of school and less likely to attend college. To account for the fact that schools might impose more severe punishments because they have more troublemakers – troublemakers who would inevitably have performed worse that the rest – they use a variety of natural experiments: things that exogenously changed the school punishment system without changing the composition of students. One of these is a school boundary change.

In one US neighbourhood, a new school was built in 2002. Students on one side of the street were forced to go to the new school, while those on the other had to stay in the old school. That meant that students previously ‘exposed’ to equal punishment were now split between two schools. And importantly: the new school – maybe because they wanted to show that they were disciplined – was ‘stricter’, handing out more severe punishment.
So what happened? Well, the most obvious thing was that students in the new school were far more likely to be suspended than in the ‘old school’. If you were unlucky and lived on the ‘wrong’ side of the street and assigned to the new school, you were more likely to be suspended than your buddy on the other side of the street.

Yet do suspensions actually matter? Turns out that they do. Those suspensions, the authors show, have negative impacts on student outcomes. Students in those schools that are one standard deviation stricter are 15% more likely to drop out and 11% less likely to attend college.

The impact is not only limited to education, though. They find a large impact on adult crime outcomes. Students that are assigned to middle schools that are one standard deviation stricter are 17% more likely to have ever been arrested and 20% more have likely to have ever been incarcerated.

School suspensions seem to have a direct, causal effect on crime. The effect, the authors show, is largest for males and minority students, which means that it exacerbates pre-existing gaps in educational attainment.

It should not be necessary to emphasise how important this link between schooling and crime is in the South African context. We suffer from some of the worst education outcomes and highest crime rates globally. Much of the focus on education is on improving lesson plans, training teachers and providing access to teaching materials. A new book on SA’s education system, titled South African Schooling: The Enigma of Inequality with Nic Spaull and Jonathan Jansen as editors, provides more detail on attempts by government to fix things.

These things are necessary, of course, but there are other things that matter too. The disciplinary systems of schools – especially in schools with unmotivated, uncommitted and poorly equipped teachers – may be one of the major reasons that many students are not prepared for a life of learning but, sadly, for a life of crime instead.

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Many life lessons are being learnt during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. One of them is how much we need each other. The medical profession is caring for thousands of infected people. If it weren’t for them, so many more lives would be lost.

In the teaching profession, teachers are proving to be heroes and heroines. They are giving emotional support and care to traumatised children across the world. The teachers are changing – at incredibly short notice – the ways in which they teach the curriculum. They are designing online lessons and preparing printed lesson packs for the children.

Teachers won’t forget 2020. It’s a physically and mentally exhausting year. So many teachers who’ve been in education for decades, have commented that they’ve never worked so hard in their entire careers. School holidays have had to be cancelled and teachers have worked late into the night preparing new-format style lessons.

One of the major values being emphasised for World Values Day this year is Appreciation. Thursday, 15 October is a great opportunity to celebrate the values that are to be found in a quality school. It’s also a chance to show special appreciation to all those who are doing so much for others.

Every school has many who deserve our appreciation: the maintenance staff who keep clean and sanitise the buildings, the administrative staff who have a mountain of extra duties, the teachers who prepare lessons and school leadership teams who are adapting at breakneck speed to changing realities. The list is long.

World Values Day is an ideal day for showing appreciation. It’s also a day to remind us of the values that undergird all that we do and say. In a school situation, we can highlight on display boards and posters the values that define the school. In classrooms and staffrooms, we can ask and answer questions such as:

- What are the values of our school?
- Do they need a revamp?
- How well do the children, parents and staff understand them?
- In what ways do we ‘walk the talk’ of our values?

Should a school make the effort to celebrate World Values Day? Especially during such a year such as this one, the time is most apposite. It’s time for a ‘values rethink’. Morris Franklin makes the astute observation, “There is too much stress on material things. I try to teach my children not so much the value of cents but a sense of values.”

Ideas and material to help set up a World Values Day event are available at www.humanvaluesfoundation.com and https://www.worldvaluesday.com
The Triple Package: a book review revisited

Mark Potterton

Title: The Triple Package: what really determines success
Authors: Chua, A and Rubenfeld, J (2014)
Publisher: Penguin Books
Price: R 340

It's not often that you get to revisit and revise a book review. I thought some of our readers might find The Triple Package interesting. The book was certainly very controversial when it came out. The authors, Chinese American Amy Chua and her Jewish American husband, Jed Rubenfeld, are both Yale law professors. They’re smart, wealthy, influential and very aspirational and as one reviewer put it, “Ever so lucky”.

The authors had observed that the Jews and the Chinese are among the big players in their imagined premier culture league. They set out to investigate why this might be so and developed their own thesis. They also noted that Mormons, Nigerians, Iranians, Indians and Cuban émigrés also performed well. Among the losers in America are African Americans and WASPs.

The authors noted that Asian-Americans made up about 5% of the US college-age population, and 19% of Harvard’s undergraduate body when the book was published. At Yale, that figure was 16%. At Princeton, the figure was 19%. At the California Institute of Technology where – argue the authors – admissions are based solely on test scores rather than a combination of scores and more opaque criteria, a whopping 40% of undergraduates were Asian American.

According to Chua and Rubenfeld, the three factors that make up the triple package and determine success are insecurity (‘outsiders’), a sense of superiority and good impulse control. Chua compares good impulse control to that of the Marshmallow experiment. In that experiment, a child can either enjoy a piece of marshmallow instantly or wait and have twice as much of the treat later.

Chua concludes that delayed gratification is one of the most important elements in The Triple Package which together make up a puritan mindset long ago abandoned by white Protestant America. That section of the population now has below-average wealth. Immigrants from certain parts of the world these days tend to possess such a mindset and it represents an advantage.

The authors claim that Mormons have a triple-package culture, characterised by a superiority complex (Mormons believe God has revealed himself to them); a sense of insecurity (Mormons were persecuted and forced to flee where they have lived on the margins of American society) and impulse control. Mormons are supposed to abstain from alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and premarital sex. The superiority complex sets high expectations; the sense of insecurity is a chip on the shoulder that inspires hard work and the impulse control facilitates perseverance.

In Chu’s book, The Battle Hymn of Tiger Mom, where she implicitly asserted that some cultural groups are superior, it generated heated public debate. The topic was seen as incendiary. Some called the book, “A series of shock-arguments wrapped in self-help tropes, and it’s meant to do what racist arguments do: scare people.”

Another reviewer claimed that Chua repeated the same argument from her previous book, Battle Hymn — the rise and ultimate supremacy of China. The publication was, “… so well-timed to deepen economic anxiety and the collective fear that the American middle class was about to disappear for good.”

To conclude, The Triple Package discusses the three cultural traits of eight successful immigrant groups in the United States. These traits — inherent superiority, a sense of insecurity, and impulse control — are the boosters that launch pupils toward upward mobility.

The question we must ask is what this book has to do with us in South Africa. How can this book make our schools better? My view is that what the book ignores — and what is so important — is the fact that we don’t all start off from the same base. Our society, like America, is dreadfully unequal.

This inequality impacts on both academic success and life chances. We can’t ignore this. However, we can’t just write this book off. Hard work and determination are great traits. If a child thinks they can do it, then they are more likely to succeed.

To quote the authors, “A life that doesn’t include hard-won accomplishment and triumph over obstacles may not be a satisfying one. There is something deeply fulfilling — even thrilling — in doing almost anything difficult extremely well.

There is a joy and pride that come from pushing yourself to another level or across a new frontier. A life devoted only to the present — to feeling good in the now — is unlikely to deliver real fulfilment. The present moment by itself is too small, too hollow. We all need a future. Something beyond and greater than our own present gratification, at which to aim or feel we’ve contributed.”

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Last Laugh

IT'S A LIBRARY, JOLLY—
KIND OF AN EARLY
VERSION OF THE
WORLD WIDE WEB.

TEACHERS BE LIKE

"I'M JUST GONNA
WAIT 'TIL IT'S QUIET..."

WHO SAYS
TEACHING IS STRESSFUL?

I'M 39. AND I FEEL GREAT!

MY FACE

WHEN PARENTS SHOW UP FOR MEETINGS AND
YOU REALIZE THE APPLE DIDN'T FALL FAR
FROM THE TREE

restaurant

BANK

REAL ESTATE

WHEN ENGLISH TEACHER'S RETIRE

That moment you
realize you have 22 more
report cards that need
comments

ONCE, I TOLD A
CHEMISTRY JOKE

THERE WAS NO
REACTION

SEEMS LEGIT

(Acknowledgements: Pinterest teacher cartoons)