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Editor's column

Only history will tell ...

A ministerial task team established by the basic education department has recommended that History should be a compulsory subject in South African schools from 2023. The report, titled “*Report of the History Ministerial Task Team*”, which was released this month, said History should feasibly become a compulsory subject in 2023 by replacing Life Orientation. The team came to this conclusion after it spent three years investigating how 12 other countries – including Russia, Zimbabwe, and Rwanda – have taught history in schools.

In a supporting draft document released by The South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) titled, *The importance of Teaching History as a Compulsory Subject*, it's pointed out that our history was written by “foreign minds who glorify colonialists and not the real heroes of the South African struggle against both the colonial and apartheid regimes.”

SADTU wants the *real* South African history to be part of the curriculum as a compulsory subject in basic education.

They state that at times it (History) raises highly charged issues that have the potential to open up deep wounds for some but it also allows a process of healing, acceptance of the past as it was and the possibility of even embracing the past and using it as a lesson well learnt for the future.

According to SADTU, “History introduces learners to the critical dimensions of the life of the society and further inducts them into educational, historical and cultural discourses underpinning the society, how it evolved and things that contributed to this evolution and offers preliminary understanding of the roles of all these discourses in how society is today as it relates to their current circumstances.”

Some curriculum experts believe that History introduces learners to traditions, practices, values and norms of the group. It initiates learners into these and helps them to recognise and accept them as part of who they truly are.

It would help learners to acquire new dispositions, which they do not have that are different from what they see, and the circumstances within which they are growing up. Dispositions that could help connect them with those who came before them and what they stood for as a society.

“We understand that those who are against this call are scared of telling the real story of South Africa and of course this story includes among others, the stealing of our land and cattle by the white colonizers. The biggest fear is that no one can tell the story of South Africa without mentioning the ANC and its role in the liberation of this country after more than 300 years of colonialism and more than five decades of apartheid,” according to SADTU.

My only editor's comment on this is that it reminds me of the Marxist society I was born into. Where government is master of content and medium – and ultimately controls how we think.

Yours in education

Janos Bozsik
Editor

Tablets in schools – hindrance or help?

Technology in the education sector is a flourishing market. As tablets have become more prevalent, a debate has risen over whether South African schools should switch from print textbooks to digital textbooks on tablets.

There is no doubt that the consumer market for mobile devices must reach saturation at some point, and therefore tech companies are hoping to make converts of the youth, and where better to find them but in schools. Many tablet vendors are pushing their products with the selling point that tablets allow lessons to be tailored to individual students, can have content updated automatically and so on.

Richard Firth, Chairman and CEO of MIP Holdings, says that while tablets are a good addition to the learning environment in terms of being able to hold hundreds of textbooks, save the environment by lessening the need for printing, and boost student interactivity and creativity, they are not an adequate replacement for laptops.



“I believe that we do need to use digital media in schools, but my concern is that laptops are in danger of being superseded by tablets as the perceived de-facto productivity tool, and that is certainly not the case in the work environment. Laptops have USB integration for third party systems, enable a much wider variety of work outputs, and programmers use laptops to write code – even those that write apps for tablets.”

For Firth, another major detractor is the fact that tablets don't have keyboards, which he sees as a core requirement for productivity. “It is far quicker and easier to use a machine that has a keyboard. The touchscreen that tablets use is incredibly difficult to type quickly



on, and nearly impossible to use for touch typists. Learning skills such as programming is impossible on tablets, as they do not have the same functionality as PCs.”



In addition, the costs could outweigh the benefits, he says. “These devices aren't cheap, and mobile technology is notorious for its ability to become completely obsolete in a question of months. Schools could find themselves in need of a slew of new devices sooner than they expect or have budgeted for.”

It's Firth's opinion that the crux of the matter lies in what the schools are trying to achieve through the use of tablets as learning tools. “Today's learners need to use digital tools in order to familiarise themselves with the skills they will require in the workplace. While tablets are a great way to store content, they do not provide a means to create content to the same level that laptops do. We are already seeing the proficiency needed in maths and science for tech and engineering jobs lagging, and by using tablets as the primary technology teaching tool, we are in danger of adding to future skills shortages.”

Safer Internet for children in schools and homes



Opinion piece by Bhavna Lutchman: Online Counselling Project Manager at Childline SA

Bullying – which used to be limited to direct social environments like schools, parties and clubs – has bloomed into virtual spaces at a terrifying pace. Whether the bullying happens online or directly, the effects are the same. Children are often left with deep scars that ache well into adulthood. Children who are bullied are more vulnerable to a host of psychological effects and which can manifest in debilitating low self-esteem and can lead to self-harming, drug abuse and even suicide.



Cyberbullying is especially prevalent amongst the youth and ranges from rumours to threats to outright, unrelenting harassment.

Childline recognises that in light of the growing use and popularity of the internet and various on-line communication options amongst children and adolescents, especially in schools, and has tailored a way to be available through the very channels that young people are most familiar with.

And while bullying is a major concern, Childline aims to help protect youth in cyberspace against all the forms of abuse they are exposed to there. Young people need to understand the dangers of, amongst other things, data theft, cyber-stalking, the subtle ways in which sexual predators lure potential victims as well as internet addiction.



The first question to ask ourselves is about the amount of exposure children have to these threats. It's been reported that the average teen spends around 31 hours a week online. If smartphone usage is included, it goes up to 100 hours a week.

And while social networks like Mxit, Facebook and YouTube are publicly criticised, the reality is that these are here to stay.

We cannot wish them away. We can only respond to them – and teach our children to respond to them in a way that keeps them safe.

Childline Services, in keeping with the ever-growing use of technology and the mobile culture, is meeting children where they are. We offer an online counselling service through Mxit.

The service is free of charge to South Africans under the age of 21 and who are registered on Mxit. The same service is available to adults who are concerned about their children. That service is available weekly from 2pm to 6pm.

These services are offered in close consultation with all Childline's provincial offices, to which children and youth who require face-to-face services are referred.

An example of a cyber-safety initiative

Safer Internet Day (SID), a 12 year old initiative promoting safer and more responsible use of online technologies, was marked across the world earlier this year.

Google Africa marked SID with more than 600 learners in day-long workshops in South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, and Senegal. In these workshops learners discussed and formulated their own ideas on how to make the internet a safer space.

Responding to the core theme of SID 2015, "Let's create a better internet together," Public Policy Manager for Google in South Africa, Fortune Mgwili-Sibanda says Google is committed to empowering young web users.

"Google has provided tools for parents, teachers, and most importantly young people to learn more about staying safe online. The aim of this cross-continent event is to reach out to young internet users and share information with them on how they can enjoy the multiple benefits offered by the internet, while at the same time staying safe from harm and exposure to age-inappropriate material." Mgwili-Sibanda said.

To ensure that lessons were shared by all those who took part in the events, all learners in the four participating countries took part in a virtual plenary and report back session. Also showing the learners how technology can be used positively, this session was held over Google Hangouts.

In the plenary session, a spirited discussion took place with learners both being pro and anti-anonymity as a solution to online safety.

Those in the pro-anonymity group argued points such as whatever information an individual posts online can never be used against them in the future. Other pro-anonymity positions argued that an entirely anonymous internet would protect young peoples' identities from potential abusers and molesters.

The anti-anonymity group argued that anonymity was often the very thing which led to bullying online. They also pointed out that if anonymity was the default setting online there would not be real interaction on the web. Much to the entertainment of the gathering, one learner pointed out that when using the internet for online dating one could fall in love with one's own cousin if anonymity were a default.

Google Africa also wants to ensure the day's messages of internet safety reach as many young people as possible. In that regard they have also partnered with key organisations.

In SA, Google Africa has partnered with the Film and Publication Board (FPB), to further address and publicise the issue of internet safety for young people.

"We are delighted to launch our back to school campaign with Safer Internet Day and highlight the importance of online safety," comments Themba Wakashe, CEO of the FPB.



We aim to explore and use all forms of electronic communication open to children, youth and adults in order to ensure that everyone – including those with disabilities, and especially those that are hearing and speech impaired – is included.

We are guided, in many instances, also by the sterling work done by tech companies such as Google, who provide safety guides for families and schools, including easy-to-use tools about safety basics. All adults, and especially parents and educators, now have an extended duty to protect children – not only out in

the "real" world, but in the parallel one in which our children now move more naturally than we do, and which they inhabit far more than we think they do.

Childline hopes to meet children where they "play" in the virtual world and to offer not only a shoulder to cry on, but a guiding hand. ▲

The Paperless Classroom – some tech-facts for learners

By Martha Chauke, Social Media Specialist

Just the other day you would be in detention if a teacher caught you busy on your cell phone (instant messaging your buddies) or feeding your Tamagotchi during class. In fact, not long ago the only form of tech in a classroom was old and big table-top overhead projectors which used pull-down screens to project what was written on transparencies.



All of this has changed today. The classroom you were once all too familiar with got a face-lift! Out with the old and in with the new. Teachers no longer stand in front of the class trying to manage behaviour (while sneezing from chalk-board dust) and teach all at once. The classroom is more interactive, alive and fun through the use of new tech.

Let's explore must have awesome gadgets and affordable tech to aid teaching and learning in and out of the class:

Laptops vs Computers

Teachers and students need to get the right laptop that caters for their daily needs. Take weight, screen size, storage space, memory, battery life, keyboard size, touch (like Windows 8.1) or not, ports and drives into consideration before investing in one. We all love cheap stuff but brands matter. Any device is as good as the company that stands behind it.



Traditional computers cost less and are not easy to steal, but they are not mobile and take up more storage space in your home or residence. You can easily carry a laptop to

class, home, the library or when travelling on a daily basis. The beauty of a laptop is its portability. You can connect quick and easily to free Wi-Fi at coffee shops, your local park or bus stop (when and where you work is literally up to you!)

Depending on what you need to use your laptop for, choose the one with features you need the most. In today's market you are spoilt for choice.

Tablets, iPads and Apps

Tablets and iPads are altering methods of teaching and learning to an extent that by the end of the 2017/2018 financial year the Gauteng Department of Education hopes to have rolled out the paperless education project in all Gauteng Township and rural schools. Some schools already bid farewell to the "old school pen and paper" method of note taking. Students do activities on their tablets and

iPads and submit assignments via apps like Dropbox, Google Docs or Moodle.



Primary and high school learners with iPads have access to textbooks at reduced prices and also for free from ZA Books with the added benefit of making notes within e-books themselves. While all students (up to MBA level) with tablets using Android or Windows can enjoy access to low-cost and free textbooks, exam preparation help and access to downloaded content offline at any time from Intel Explore & Learn. For more useful apps download *The Ultimate South African Education App Guide for iPad*.

Connectivity

Literally everything today works with internet. Can you imagine no internet for a month? The world would come to a standstill. One can't function with slow internet connection either. That's just how important the internet and connectivity is to you in order to do research on your homework, projects and assignments as well as for your teacher's lesson preparation. If your school is experiencing dire internet connection recommend they seek advice from industry leaders on the best connectivity options available. ▲



What is Alateen?

Alateen, part of the Al-Anon Family Groups, is a fellowship of young people whose lives have been affected by alcoholism in a family member or close friend. We help each other by sharing our experience, strength, and hope.

We believe alcoholism is a family disease because it affects all the members emotionally and sometimes physically. Although we cannot change or control our parents, we can detach from their problems while continuing to love them.

We do not discuss religion or become involved with any outside organisations. Our sole topic is the solution of our problems. We are always careful to protect each other's anonymity as well as that of all Al-Anon and AA members. By applying the Twelve Steps to ourselves, we begin to grow mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Each Alateen Group has at least two Alateen Group Sponsors. These are adult members of Al-Anon who have been through a certification process. They provide safety and guidance in the meeting and help the Alateens keep the meeting focused on the Al-Anon/Alateen program of recovery. An Alateen Group Sponsor doesn't play the role of a teacher or assume a parental role. They honour Alateen members' anonymity. For the safety of all involved, Alateen groups cannot meet without certified Alateen Group Sponsors present. When Alateen Group Sponsors are not available, Alateens are welcome in Al-Anon meetings.

Self-Esteem

"Before Alateen I would always hurt myself because there was no other way to punish and discipline myself. Why would I punish myself over tiny little things? Alateen has taught me to move on because if I just focus on all the bad things, I am not living; I am just judging. Alateen has taught me to accept." **Markus, Cape**

Message from Al-Anon

We are thrilled to be reaching you with our message of strength and hope, for teens through Alateen, Al-Anon Adult Children {AAC} for adults who grew up in alcoholic homes, and with Al-Anon Family Groups – open to anyone whose life has been or is affected by problem drinkers. AA is our sister fellowship – a place for recovery for those of all ages who are personally dealing with the disease of alcoholism.

Please visit our websites, both locally and globally. Get in touch with us, send us topics you'd like covered, and issues you face on a daily basis.

alanongso@iafrica.com

24 hr Helpline - 0861 25 66 66



Al-Anon Family Groups
Help and hope for families and friends of alcoholics

INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS

How Will the Student Benefit from an Alateen Meeting?

The disease of alcoholism in a family member or friend affects children and teenagers in many ways that impact on their behaviour and ultimately, their school work. Frequently, students and educators do not realise that a relationship with an alcoholic could be a factor. Alateen, an integral part of the Al-Anon Family Groups, is a fellowship of young people whose lives have been affected by alcoholism in a family member or friend.

Alateen helps young people understand how alcoholism affects the lives of all who are associated with a problem drinker.

Alateen members meet to discuss their common problems, share experience, and encourage one another. They help each other learn effective ways of dealing with their personal problems by using the principles of the Al-Anon / Alateen program.

Alateen in South Africa

We have learned that learners are very cautious about attending Alateen meetings at their schools.

In some areas Alateen meetings are held in the evenings in a nearby church hall, community centre or somewhere secure.

A list of Alateen meetings may be found on our website:
<http://www.alanon.org.za/meetings/>

Further useful information is available <https://al-anon.org/newcomers/teen-corner-alateen/>

Education divide between racial groups is narrowing slowly

Study Time trend projections show that it could take almost 16 years to close the education gap between black and coloured South Africans, 23 years to close the black-white gap and 26 years to close the black-Indian gap.

This is according to Prof Acheampong Yaw Amoateng, research professor of Sociology and Family Studies at the Mafikeng Campus' School of Research and Postgraduate Studies. In a study published in the *South African Review of Sociology*, he and two collaborators from Brigham Young University in the USA investigated racial differences in educational outcomes in South Africa. Educational outcomes refer to the average number of years of schooling completed by a child between 2002 and 2009. "Races in the society had unequal access to education in the past so we wanted to see whether the trend has been arrested in the post-apartheid era," Prof Amoateng says.

Focusing on recent changes

"The countrywide study focused on boys and girls aged 7 to 18 years in the four major race groups, namely Africans, Coloureds, Indians and Whites," he says. "Our interest was in assessing recent changes, using Statistics South Africa's General Household Survey data for 2002 and 2009." In terms of average years of school completed, Africans have nearly one year's less schooling than the average of 1.1 years of schooling. Coloureds are more than a third of a year above Africans, while whites are nearly a year above Africans and Indians are 1.2 years above Africans.

"Indians have an advantage over other race groups by age seven and maintain that advantage as they age," says Prof Amoateng. "Other race groups too have similar educational attainment by age seven but the gap increases as they age. For example, by age 18, Africans and Coloureds have substantial disadvantage in attainment."

The researchers believe that these differences may be linked to racial differences in family and household characteristics. "While not disregarding infrastructure, income and service disparities, some of the educational disadvantage of African and Coloured children may be due to an unequally distributed disadvantage in family backgrounds and school conditions." For example, about half of African children live in female-headed households, while 12% live with only fathers. African and Coloured children also live in households with more siblings, fewer economic resources and less educated parents.

Disparities linger but are declining

"Our findings imply that despite the democratic government's efforts to address the educational inequalities and inequities of the past, discrepancies still exist,



especially as far as the African majority are concerned," he says. "However, we also observed that even though the magnitude is small, there is a decline in inequality between Africans on the one hand, and whites and Indians on the other. This shift suggests that the household circumstances of Africans are changing for the better, since without this they would be doing a lot worse than they are doing now."

The improvements give credence to government's claim that it has a good story to tell in terms of improving the circumstances of the poor and previously disadvantaged. "However, to ensure that the narrowing of the educational gap between Africans and other race groups is sustained and deepened, there is a need for more effective education policy that addresses both issues of racial inequality and disadvantaged family background."

Prof Amoateng says the study has raised further questions for investigation. "We would like to look at this issue from the point of view of social class and see if there are variations or differences in educational outcomes within the black group. In other words, how is the so-called black middle class doing compared to other classes of blacks? "Better still, does the black middle class compare favourably with the white and other middle classes in educational attainment? These would be interesting questions to examine in future." ▲

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Strengthening human rights literacy in the classroom

Ask any South African what their human rights are, and you are likely to receive any number of different – but equally valid – answers.

Go into any depth on human rights and human rights values, and it would soon become clear that many people have a superficial knowledge regarding the subject. What's more, relatively few would be able to describe how they integrate human rights values into their everyday lives.

"Equity, for example, is a human right and a constitutional right, but what does equity mean to each of us and how does one apply it in all spheres of life? It is easy to know my rights and to go to court to defend them; it is much more difficult to internalise human rights values and to live up to them." So says Prof Cornelia Roux, leader of the Human Rights Education in Diversity (HREiD) research project group in the Education and Human Rights in Diversity (Edu-HRight) research unit at the Faculty of Education Sciences at the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus.

Her research has shown again and again that there is a difference between knowing what one's human rights are and internalising human rights values.

Gaps in knowledge and practice

Prof Roux has been investigating human rights in education since 2004, often in collaboration with national and international faculties of education. One such study was completed in 2008 on intercultural and interreligious dialogue in a group of teachers and teacher education students.

Prof Roux and her research team found that respondents were well aware of their own rights within a legal framework and gave many examples of human rights



Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga at a Human Rights Education Conference

violations in South Africa and elsewhere. They were also familiar with the human rights language of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. However, there was a severe lack of knowledge, human rights education praxis and skills to address human rights values in classrooms. Only a minority of students and teachers indicated that they could cope with human rights and human rights education, beliefs and values as outlined in the curriculum and school environment.

These findings point to a tendency towards superficial content knowledge and classroom praxis in the area of human rights education. "Human rights education and the internalisation of these values are not always taken seriously in education systems, particularly in many South African education milieus," says Prof Roux. "Discrimination and violations of human rights are also visible in many tertiary institutions, and the question arose as to why the education institutions, including teachers, lecturers and professors, and our communities, are failing the next generation to prosper in mutual respect."



The intrinsic rights to dream and pursue achievements



The basic right to dignity in education

Delving deeper into human rights literacy

A current Edu-HRight research project that explores human rights literacy in the classroom is "Human rights literacy: the quest for meaning". This NRF-funded project, led by Prof Roux and her colleague Prof Petro du Preez, investigates literacies and knowledge on human rights education in teacher education at several South African faculties of education. "The problems identified in research indicated that our in-service and pre-service teachers do not have the knowledge construct to successfully facilitate human rights education," Prof Roux says.

This is cause for concern

"When there are issues that students and teachers don't understand or cope with, it will influence holistically all education spheres, and will impact on classroom praxis. The lack of human rights literacy seems to be the main impediment. "Human rights literacy underpins not only the understanding of legal terms and documents but especially the internalisation of human rights."

Contributing to transformation

The project, *quest for meaning*, focuses on what human rights literacies entail and how these can contribute to transformative curriculum development and teaching-learning praxis. The aim is to positively influence teachers' and lecturers' engagement with human rights issues in education.

The team, which includes four researchers, three postdoctoral fellows and three students, is focusing on five main research areas. These are gender issues, human rights values, social justice, socio-cultural contexts, and curriculum development and implementation. The funded project commenced in November 2012 with a "walkabout" at four university campuses to gain broad insight into education students' views and understanding of human rights issues. The emphasis was on university campuses that were part of mergers a decade ago.

Talking to students

The main question posed to students during the walkabouts was, "What is the most important human rights value for you?" "In some cases we found students

very defensive of their own rights without understanding the rights of others," says Prof Roux. "That already indicated a gap between students' conceptual understanding of human rights and internalised human rights values."

The next step was a survey among first and fourth-year education students and BEd Honours students at five universities in three provinces with 1 089 respondents. The aim was to determine their knowledge construct of human rights literacies within the five areas identified. "The 'born free' generation was specifically included to determine their impact on understanding human rights literacies and its internalised values," says Prof Roux.

"A most rewarding part of the research was the focus group discussions and interviews with student volunteers from all ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds involved in the survey. Rights are emphasised so strongly that the meaning of the right, the responsibility towards the right and the internalising of the human right values, all fall in the realm of literacy." The project will also expand and include a university in Germany in the near future, to internationalise the development of theory for human rights literacies. The students of today are the teachers of tomorrow. Here's to a future where the next generation has a clearer, deeper understanding of human rights values – inside and outside the classroom. ▲



Access to education is a universal human right

Early Childhood Development is enriched by human interaction – and technology

Harnessing interpersonal traits and the ability to develop relationships are at the very heart of early learning and development in children. As children grow and develop, they increasingly want to play; speak and take in what is happening around them, which ultimately influences their own behaviours and mannerisms. Through early interactions children learn to communicate and enjoy being in a social environment.

Education expert Gavin Keller says: “Children’s understanding of the world around them is often given a meaning by their exposure to immediate relationships, communication interactions, how they play and how their needs are met through contact with others. Many interactions are spontaneous whilst others come about through careful planning and direction from the parents or minders to ensure that the child is developing well in all areas. It is a well-known fact that children learn by being with others.”

During early development it is important that children are encouraged to learn through self-initiated and self-directed learning tools. At other times, the adult leads through planned and guided activities and increases or lessens the amount and type of support as children grow in confidence and competence.

Children learn more effectively by being involved in making choices and decisions, and by feeling in control. Through interactive games, learning can become part of every activity, which is enjoyable and rewarding for the child as they can challenge themselves to learn new skills or build on their existing skills. It is in this type of interactive environment that children also practice language and problem-solving skills. Keller adds, “When an adult is listening attentively to the child while displaying positive body language and uses words, phrases or gestures to let the child know they are listening, the child is encouraged to express himself in a creative manner by using their imagination.”

Technology can make a difference

“The biggest development of children comes from interaction; therefore it is imperative to make sure that we are using the right tools to assist in the development of children’s skills. Interactive tools such as STIMULEARN from Nestlé NIDO 3+, help children explore, discover inquire, make decisions and take risks. Through this experience, children gather information which helps them build skills such as language, psychomotor, problem solving, attention, concentration and memory,” says Keller.

It can easily be said that children use playing as a vehicle to learn through exploration, imagination and investigation. Many education theorists support the



idea that playing is an essential part of children’s lives, it teaches them to learn, think and solve problems, imagine, create and communicate.

Understanding that children learn interdependently and interactively with parents or teachers, the App also creatively combines parental interaction with cognitive stimulation through the various games that make up the App. The App also has a special learning feature for mothers to help monitor their child’s development, equipped with tips and advice from experts.

Keller concludes “Movement activities are especially well-suited to helping children develop social skills.

The App serves as the ultimate visual learning tool specifically designed to meet the learning needs of children whilst understanding children need to be active with games such as:

- Pearl Beach – designed to aid or improves Psychomotor Skills.
- Island Market – designed to aid/improve Language, Memory and Attention.
- Story House – designed to aid/improve Language and Attention skills.
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Teachers – keep your eye on their vision

Approximately 80% of what children see affects their learning. Therefore, vision plays an integral part in their education. Children can spend up to 200 days in school and 55% of their time per year is spent being supported and educated by teachers. During the day, teachers can keep a close watch on children and often take a caretaker role to provide supportive leadership and identify signs of illness and learning problems.

Reading is one of the most common visual learning processes children experience and requires different visual skills that may change throughout a child's school career. Various problems can be associated with reading difficulty in children and vision problems can sometimes be overlooked. "In most cases, children will not complain of vision problems simply because they don't know what is 'normal'," says Andre Horn, senior optometrist and MD of Mellins i-Style. "If a child is performing poorly at school, an eye examination could rule out an underlying visual cause".

Teachers who generally spend more time with schoolchildren during the day can help identify if low vision is the cause of a child struggling at school. Children with vision impairment experience more pressure and will usually:

- Avoid reading and other near visual work.
- Attempt to complete their schoolwork, but with reduced efficiency.
- Appear uncomfortable, tire quickly and are easily distracted.

It is important for teachers to acknowledge and remind parents that the visual skills required for reading are tested in a comprehensive eye examination. Screening tests done at schools are not a substitute for an eye examination by an optometrist and do not provide a thorough diagnosis. Because a child's visual learning capacity may change throughout their school years, Horn advises teachers to encourage parents to take their children for an eye examination at least once a year and more frequently if they are already wearing glasses or have diabetes.

Teachers can play an active role in the development of schoolchildren's visual skills and at the same time incorporate a fun and educational dynamic in the classroom. There are different visual games and exercises to help children (mostly younger primary school children) understand how their eyes work.

The following classroom eye exercise can be helpful for children to understand how their eyes react and adjust to light

What do you need? A mirror and flashlight.

How does it work? Close the curtains and switch off all lights in the classroom, but allow enough light for the children to see their eyes in a mirror. Place a mirror in front of them so they can have a good look at the size of their pupils.

Ask them whether they noticed if their pupils had enlarged and what they think the reason is.

Answer that in low light the muscles of the iris, the flat ring-shaped membrane behind the eye, makes the pupils bigger to allow more light into the eye.

Next, ask the children to point the flashlight towards their eyes from a distance, while they watch their pupils in the mirror.

Result. The pupils become smaller to allow less light into the eye.

Teachers can make the exercise more relevant to the individual child by asking him or her about the situations in which the pupil size would change, for instance watching a movie at the cinema, walking into bright sunlight, travelling through a tunnel and looking at a light at night. ▲



Teachers can play an active role in the development of schoolchildren's visual skills



Annual eye tests are important

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Mobility and the Millennial workforce – how the new generation fits into the job market

Millennials, also known as Generation Y grew up during the technology wave and the subsequent digital revolution and their use of technology is at a far higher rate than any generation before them.

The era of digital disruption is earmarked by the birth of social media, an explosion of hyper-visual content and the rise of the individual. These factors have not only impacted how this age group views a career path, but how its members search for and find jobs.

“We’re finding that members of this generation don’t necessarily want to engage with recruiters over the phone, but want to access information about prospective jobs quickly and effortlessly from their mobile devices. They are frustrated when they can’t find what they’re looking for within a few clicks,” says Angelique Robbertse, Product and Marketing Manager for Job Mail.

To accommodate the wants of Millennials, online career portals have had to evolve their offering to include notifications of jobs that are available via email and SMS. Such alerts are a fast and easy way to notify job seekers, who’ve registered on the career site, of jobs available in their specified industry.

Mobile is a key channel to reach this peer group, but mobility also defines them in terms of their fluid career time frame. Sometimes referred to as ‘slashies’, members of this age bracket aren’t defined by a single career and they often move onto a completely different job after only a couple of years.

“We refer to them as techno hippies as they’re so flexible and consume information on the go. Mobile alerts on potential career opportunities suit them perfectly as they want to try it all and are frequently on the lookout for new possibilities,” she says.

Another trait of Millennials is that they have complete access to education and knowledge thanks to the internet. This wealth of information at their disposal means that this demographic is on a continuous learning path where they learn, unlearn and relearn.

“Their appetite for knowledge means that that they’re keen to improve themselves and better their job seeking, application and interviewing skills. This is one of the reasons why we’ve developed comprehensive e-books to aid a younger generation of job seekers with the process of applying for a job,” says Robbertse.

Living and seeking a career in a connected world doesn’t necessarily mean that job seekers (or those currently employed) are aware of the pitfalls of broadcasting their opinions on social media platforms or that they know how to use these platforms to their advantage.

Members of Generation Y make their opinions count in cyberspace and they have a strong value system and are willing to fight for their beliefs, even in a work environment.

Tips on how to manage and retain a Millennial employee

- Expect creative CVs, but know that they’re driven by knowledge, so encourage them to go on courses and allow them the opportunity to continue to learn new skills.
- Offer them work life flexibility instead of a work life balance, they’re after fluidity, therefore articulate how their work environment will enable them to perform different tasks within flexible hours and not necessarily from the comfort of the office.
- They’re after meaning, not money, so make sure that the organisation has a formal CSI programme that allows employees to donate their services during company time.
- Realise that their timeframe is fluid and that they may only stay for two years. They want a lifestyle, not a job and when the job starts encroaching on their individual boundaries they may leave the company.
- They make good mentors as they’re able to receive and dispense advice. They’re eager to share their opinions and engage with their colleagues, therefore make a mentorship programme part of the company’s DNA.
- Millennials enjoy a wealth of riches in the freedom and time technology affords them and employers need to realise that they require their jobs to offer them the same flexibility. ▲

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Preparing our youth for employment

By Mary Webber – job coach at Sparrow Schools

Job Coaching is one of the most rewarding areas to work in as one gets to mentor and journey with our learners as they enter the workplace. This is really important as one is responsible for inspiring and motivating our learners by encouraging them to work hard, follow their dreams and achieve their goals.

The Job Coach is also responsible for identifying suitable companies that will accommodate and mentor the learners for this section of their training. Once the learner is placed in the workplace, we monitor them by way of visits to the companies and courtesy calls to the mentors. This enables us to form relationships with both the learner and the company and to deal with any problems that may arise, all of this working towards our end goal of employment for our learners at the end of their programme.

Once our learners have completed the theoretical component of their skills programme or learnership, they need to complete the workplace experience component. This is where our learners' gain hands on experience in their chosen skill. Before the learners enter the workplace, they attend a session on Workplace Induction. During this session we discuss what is expected of the learner once they enter the workplace. We go through a Workplace Code of Conduct unpacking topics including: Attendance and time keeping, Dressing for work, Work relationships, Using of Company Amenities, Communication and Safety to mention a few. We also highlight areas where previous learners have fallen short and discuss how they can avoid making the same mistakes.



Our learners really benefit from the mentoring and advice that the job coach provides. For many of our learners this is the first time that they are entering the workplace and it can be a bit daunting. We also find that many of our learners have no role models at home and often benefit from the fact that they have someone looking out for them and keeping tabs on them. We encourage our learners to take

responsibility for their own lives and actions.

We find that the mentoring really helps our learners with their attitude towards the workplace, with their goals and visions of future employment and most importantly – being able to make an active contribution to the societies that they live in.

I have a passion for working with people, for helping, motivating and inspiring them. As John F Kennedy once wrote: One person can make a difference and everyone should try! These are words that I try to live by. One of the greatest compliments that I have received from one of my learners was: "Miss Mary, because of you – I didn't give up".



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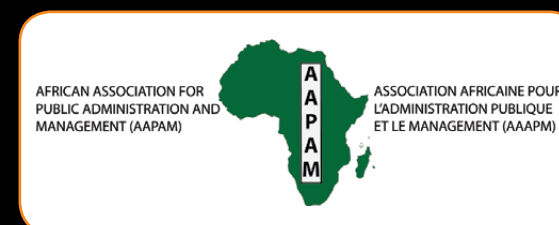
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Distance learning: effective strategy needed to combat unique challenges

In today's competitive job market, many people consider distance learning as an obvious way to upskill without having to leave their employment and lose their paycheque in the process. Additionally, it is viewed as an option that provides more flexibility and control over time and pace than full-time study.

But while these perceptions are relatively accurate, going the distance study route should only be tackled in partnership with an effective strategy, since there are many challenges associated with this mode of study, an expert warns.

"Distance study provides the ideal opportunity in certain circumstances; however students should know what they are letting themselves in for and how to handle any issues that might arise, if they do not want to join the ranks of those who threw in the towel after discovering it is not the walk in the park some perceive it to be," says Dr Felicity Coughlan, Director of The Independent Institute of Education, SA's largest and most accredited private higher education institution.

"Regrettably, many people who register for a full qualification in the distance mode do not succeed, chiefly because these students do not have access to the critical success factors enjoyed by contact students," she says, adding that to be successful, both institutions and students must remove the 'distance'-elements from distance study by leveraging all the tools available.

Coughlan says the most important thing distance students have to do to ensure success, is to structure their time and be clear about the workload they are taking on.

"In most cases, students underestimate the work they have to get through, and as a consequence they don't make adequate provision to accommodate these demands in their normal routine.

"Higher education institutions should therefore provide detailed information about the time required, as well as proposals on how to pace the learning to achieve best outcomes. Students should make extensive use of electronic diaries and alerts and ensure that they set up reminders for the various milestones on the way to deadlines."

Successful distance students should also ensure that they are connected to other students doing the same work, says Coughlan.

"Many institutions have learning management systems with virtual classrooms enabling students to collaborate. Students who take that further, by collaborating beyond the required activities, also do not feel as isolated, while receiving the support that contact students take for granted."

Coughlan says a third indicator for successful distance study is when the student is not just a number, but has an identity.

"These students fully engage with the available support systems, including tutors and lecturers, and make sure that they are known for being active and involved. As a result, they get the attention of those who are available to

support them. Interestingly, distance educators often experience the same frustration over the lack of feedback that their students feel, so they instinctively gravitate towards engaged students."

And finally, when the going gets tough, successful distance students don't just give up and disappear.

"You have to ask for help as soon as things start to go wrong. Because at any reputable distance institution, help should be available to support you through the challenging times to get you back on the road again," Coughlan says.

She says institutions can greatly improve their distance learning success rates if they:

- Have early warning systems such as monitoring online activity, and reach out to students as soon as a student seems to have gone quiet;
- Make full use of the functionality of learning management systems and include activities that elicit responses and collaboration;
- Recognise that access to bandwidth is not a given, and thus have mechanisms other than the learning management system to enable students to engage;
- Have used appropriate learning theory in setting up the coursework in recognition of the challenges of independent learning by adults;
- Give feedback efficiently and at a level of detail that enables students to implement required remedial action, and
- Allocate sufficient resources to student support. ▲



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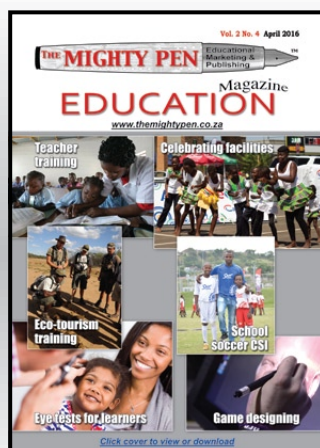
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