

# Quality Education News

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## Is the Rainbow Nation rainbow fading?

### Dear Supporter of Quality Education

Desmond Tutu famously described South Africa as the Rainbow Nation. How apt that description seemed around 1994. A country that had been culturally, linguistically and racially divided for centuries, was taking baby steps to become a united nation. In the mid-1990s it felt good to be called a South African. We were showing the world under Madiba's leadership that no matter how divisive and cruel our history, we could reach out to accept each other.

Incidents in recent times have put a question mark around the idea of us being a Rainbow Nation. Racially-based and xenophobic incidents of violence have been on the increase. The "RhodesMustFall" campaign at UCT had vitriolic cascading consequences across the country. People were talking past and not to each other. The Human Rights Commission stated that there had been an increase in the number of racial incidents brought to their attention.

Of racism and xenophobia, Abraham J Heschel made the statement:

*... man's gravest threat to man – the maximum of hatred for a minimum of reason.*

In the newspaper industry there's the cynical but true quip: "Bad news help sales to soar." We've recently seen in South Africa that mud (or other item)-slinging at people and objects that we don't like, gets huge media publicity.

Yet if you've been a teacher in classrooms and schools since the 1990s, you'll have seen magic unfolding before your eyes. So many classrooms, sports teams and schools are happily integrated. At inter-school sport events, the children shout and sing war cries of encouragement to players of their own school. The sometimes hysterical hoarse support for their school teams is colour-blind.

No child has ever been born a racist. That's an acquired prejudice.

There's the true story of a parent who had her child enrolled at a former Model-C school. Her son often spoke about his best friend, John who sat next to him in class. One day the mother

asked whether John was a white or black boy. The son replied with disarming honesty, "I don't know. I've never really looked." Maybe it's the adults who are fixated by race!

Every Quality school has a set of ethical and timeless values at its core. That includes an acceptance and appreciation of the diversity that makes our Rainbow Nation so special. In such a school, one sees that the children, parents as well as the staff, daily abide by those values. As one girl replied when asked by a teacher what the word 'Values' means to her in the school, her insightful response was, "It's just the way we all do things here."

Teachers teach subjects but more importantly, they teach values too. Values are taught formally in School Assembly homilies; at other times during routine lessons. Then there are those unscripted magical moments to nurture values in the classroom as well as during the extramural and community outreach programmes. Those are gifted times to make compassion, humility, kindness, perseverance and so many other values really come alive.

Millions of Born-Frees are happily part of our young democracy. Look at the children all around you. They're not obsessed about race. Let's nurture Values further in our critical role as teachers in the Rainbow Nation.

Sincerely

Richard Hayward



This newsletter is edited by SAQI and distributed to those schools benefiting from their participation in the MySchool programme. MySchool acts as a conduit which raises and delivers essential funding for education and social development on a sustainable basis. This enables members of the community to participate in the future development of our nation.



# Quality Assurance precedes Quality Education

When the annual Grade 12 results are announced, everyone seems to have an opinion. Radio chat shows, TV programmes and the newspapers have education experts and not-such-experts making their points. In January of this year, the media again drenched us with countless opinions about the most recent results.

In the midst of all the words hardly anyone commented on a crucial fact that singles out those schools that perform well as against all the rest. Every school that excelled was subject to one or more forms of Quality Assurance. Those forms of Quality Assurance took different formats which included:

- Rigorous internal self-evaluation within the school
- District, regional and Umalusi evaluation teams visiting the school
- Independent schools being subject to evaluations by outside Quality Assurance teams

Underperforming schools are often very reluctant to allow any type of Quality Assurance team to enter their gates. If the team does enter, it's often treated with distrust and hostility. When recommendations are made on how to improve, they're treated with disdain or simply ignored.

There are a small number of South African schools that are world-class and there are an ever-increasing number of schools that provide quality education with very limited human and physical resources.

Yet in the big picture, our education system is performing poorly. Only 28% of the 2014 Grade 12s qualified for any form of tertiary education. Even more chilling was the statistic that only 11% of the children who entered Grade 1 in 2003 reached matric last year. Where are the lost millions of children?!

Lack of money is often given as the reason for the poor results. Yet according to the recent International Monetary Fund report, South Africa spends more money on education as a percentage of GDP than countries such as Canada, United Kingdom, South Korea, Brazil and the USA. (Rose 2015). All those countries get better education results than we do. To put it bluntly: In South Africa we don't get enough 'bangs for our bucks' for the money spent on education.



(Acknowledgement: *Sunday Times Business Times* 11 January 2015.)

Virtually every high achieving country has certain forms of Quality Assurance in place. Accountability is a core principle at school, district, region and national level. Nobody can fob off personal responsibility for under-performance by hiding behind the discredited 'collective responsibility' cop-out. Everyone has duties and responsibilities. Someone is ultimately responsible for what has or has not been achieved. If a person carries out given tasks properly, you're OK. If not, the Quality Assurance process will step in. Advice, continuous professional development and support are made available. When such interventions still don't help and if it's in the interest of Quality education, such personnel are removed from the profession.

Traditionally, most education systems have Quality Assurance done in the format of an inspection. An evaluation team visits the school for

a period of between two and five days. The visit can be – if handled insensitively by either the school or the team – hugely traumatic. A school can go into panic mode and stress levels soar; the team members themselves can be arrogantly unappreciative of the excellent-day-to-day work being done by teachers and the school senior management.

The word 'inspector' is a word frowned on in many school systems. In New Zealand, for example, the person is referred to as a 'review officer.' Whatever term is used, a quality assurer (is that a less threatening word?!), has a most important function. That person is to evaluate what is being done and in broadly defined terms, to evaluate whether it is of sound quality. There's also a need to affirm and praise good work as well as give professional advice. Then, of course, there are action routes to set in place if poor professional performance is evident.

Another form of Quality Assurance is standardised testing. The Grade 12 examination in South Africa is an example and likewise the ANA tests. If approached sensibly and analysed accurately, the tests can pinpoint what is being done well in the classroom as well as identifying problem areas.

However, two major problems can undo Quality Assurance examinations and tests. One is an obsession about the results. This can result in teachers teaching to the test. Learners could also not want to learn anything other than what's likely to be found on the test paper. True education then takes a distant second place to result scores.



Quality Assurance in schools has two broad approaches. There's the inspection-style approach which can be rigorous in its implementation. England typifies this style with the use of OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education). An inspection panel does a whole range of assessments around every aspect of the school. The school is then given an overall judgement in one of these categories: outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. A poorly performing school can be put in "special measures". A poor grading can result in the school head being dismissed or leaving the profession.

The second approach is that of the school doing its own self-evaluation. Scotland typifies this approach as well as Mexico and a number of Catholic schools in Australia. The school evaluates itself identifying what it does well and what it needs to improve on. Also, the school describes how it intends to deal with those areas needing improvement. All the inspectors who visit the school are trained in interpersonal skills and maintaining positive relationships. Jane Renton, the assistant director of Education Scotland observes:

*If you don't do that, people aren't going to listen to what you say anyway. You need an atmosphere of mutual respect so that*

*schools are doing the inspection along with us, rather than feeling they're having it done to them."*

In the Scottish system, the school doesn't get an overall single assessment or evaluation. Rather, there are five areas of the school that get evaluated separately. Each category is rated on a six-point scale ranging from excellent to unsatisfactory. A school that's rated weak (the second lowest grade) or worse, gets help from Education Scotland. In the 10% of cases where insufficient progress has been made, the inspectors return with a year.

One country that doesn't have any formal inspection system is Finland. That country has a highly qualified teaching corps and does exceptionally well in international standardised exams. Schools do their own self-evaluation and a culture of trust has been established. Teachers are told that they are trusted enough not to send in outside inspectors. That responsibility is devolved on to the school and the local authorities.

Pasi Sahlberg was the last chief inspector of Finland before the inspectorate was abolished. Yet he himself has his doubts about whether scrapping inspections would be a wise move for all countries. He observes:

*If anybody is considering doing away with the old inspectorate function, one thing to consider is that you can get rid of inspectors but don't throw away the inspection.*

*Turn it into a self-evaluation. I don't think it is the right message to say to schools, 'You can do whatever you want to do.' You need to have the same function but in a different way.*

No school should be exempt from some form of regular Quality Assurance assessment. There are undoubtedly South African schools that need rigorous assessment. In some of them, heads should roll. Then, of course, there are those many schools of which a light-touch visit is sufficient.

We need to have Quality Assurance strategies in place and implemented in all our schools and education departments. When we do that, the oft-mouthed mantra of, "Quality Education for all," will actually happen.

#### References:

Exley, S 2014. Inspection: have we got it all wrong? *Times Educational Supplement*, 31 October, pages 24-28.

Rose, R 2015. The last word. *Sunday Times-Business Times*, 11 January 2015, page 9.



# Making sound decisions

## BOOK REVIEW

The Million-Copy Bestseller

The Art of Thinking Clearly

Rolf Dobelli

Author: Rolf Dobelli  
 Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton  
 Price: R190  
 ISBN 978-1-444-75956-3

There's something special about a non-fiction book that sells over a million copies. This is such a book which has been translated into many languages.

On the back cover of Rolf Dobelli's book are the words: 'The secrets of perfect decision making.' He refers to the simple errors (cognitive biases) that we make when we're confronted with choosing amongst choices of action. Donelli believes that if you can be forewarned against making illogical decisions, you can insure yourself against too much 'self-induced unhappiness.'

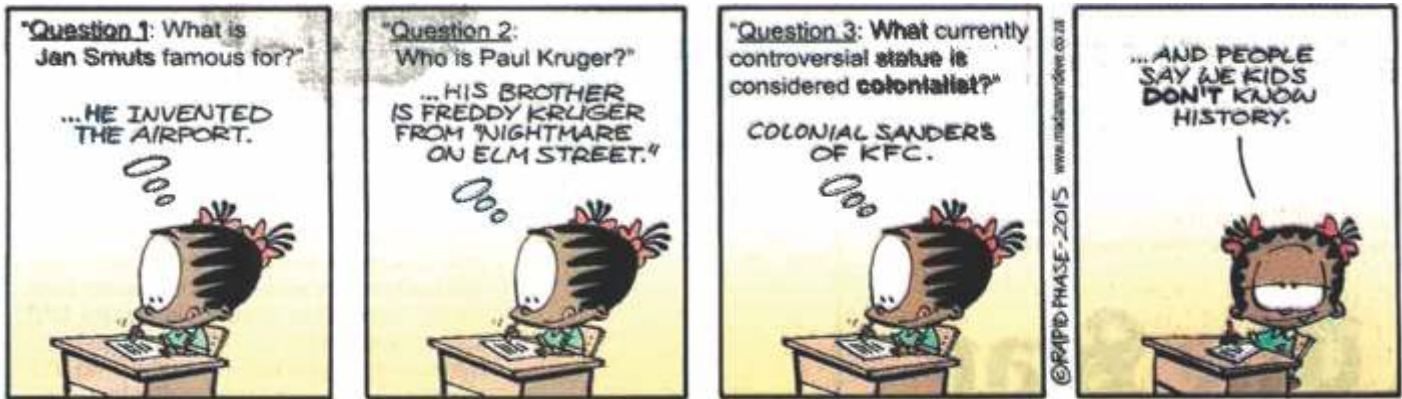
Each chapter consists of a few pages which explains an example of faulty thinking. Interesting anecdotes are given to show how people use incorrect thinking to make wrong decisions. These anecdotes are often described in an amusing, dry-wit way and reflect Dobelli's understanding of human nature.

An example of his understanding of human behaviour is the chapter titled, "Why teams are lazy." He describes the 1913 experiment

done by Maximilian Ringelmann who had several men pull a rope and measured the force applied by each person. When two people were pulling together, each person invested 93% of their individual strength. When three pulled together it was 85% and with eight people it was only 49%. In Science this behaviour is called *social loafing*.

Donelli explains the weaknesses to guard against in team decision-making meetings. He refers to the *diffusion of responsibility* that happens in teams. The bigger the group, the greater the likelihood of a sense of lack of personal responsibility. This was highlighted in the Nuremberg Trials after the Second World War. In their pleas for clemency, many Nazis stated that they were simply carrying out orders given by others. They claimed that they weren't behaving on their own decision-making processes.

Who would benefit and enjoy reading this book? Anyone who needs to think sensibly before taking decisions. That means you and me!



(Acknowledgement: The Star, 13 April 2015)

## SACE-endorsed Professional Development courses

SACE has endorsed seven courses presented under the aegis of the South African Quality Institute (SAQI). The courses are:

1 An introduction to Total Quality Education (TQE)  
 Duration: 8 hours PD points: 10

2 Challenges of leadership in a Quality school  
 Duration: 4 hours PD points: 7

3 Growing Madiba's values in our school  
 Duration: 75 minutes PD points: 5

4 Influential leadership levels and types  
 Duration: 75 minutes PD points: 5

5 "Klagtes! Complaints! How may we help you?"  
 Duration: 75 minutes PD points: 7

6 "Should I leave teaching? I'm so demotivated!"  
 Duration: 75 minutes PD points: 5

7 The kids are hell. What can I do?  
 Duration: 75 minutes PD points: 5

The courses are presented by Richard Hayward, a former principal of two Gauteng schools. Courses are done across South Africa and poor schools are sponsored. If you would like more details, please contact him on either 011 888 3262 or [rpdayward@yahoo.com](mailto:rpdayward@yahoo.com)



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