

Support for curriculum advisors as new curriculum comes of age

In 2006, the Department of Education introduced a new curriculum into South African schools. 2008 marks the first time that Grade 12 learners will be writing their final examinations based on the new curriculum. As with any major transition, the implementation of the new curriculum has not been without a few teething problems. "Curriculum transformation is a tedious and lengthy process presenting many intellectual and practical challenges," Ronald Swartz, the Superintendent-General of Education for the Western Cape Education Department, noted in his welcome letter to the inaugural South African Curriculum Advisors and Teacher Support (SACATS) conference in 2007.

It was in recognition of the support required by those who in turn provide support to others that the SACATS conference was conceptualised. There are approximately 3000 curriculum advisors in South Africa who are playing a pivotal role in the implementation of the new curriculum. Their duty is essentially to provide a bridge between schools and the Department of Education (DOE). They supply critical leadership and support to teachers whilst also acting as liaisons for the DOE, providing essential feedback on how the implementation process is being played out in the classrooms of South Africa.

The annual SACATS conference allows curriculum advisors from all the provinces to get together and to meet with other stakeholders in the education system, such as members of the DOE, publishing houses, and providers of ICT and other education materials. SACATS provides a unique forum for these professionals to engage with one another and to share strategies and experiences that encompass the various stages of development of schools in different geographical, social, and economic environments.

Research conducted by the Building on Success Programme, a consultative initiative that focused on exploring the competencies that curriculum advisors require to best fulfil their roles, revealed that the broadened role imposed by the transition to the new syllabus required curriculum advisors to develop new attitudes, behaviours and skills. At the time there was a paucity of resources to aid curriculum advisors in their advancement as mentors, coaches and collaborative teachers. SACATS aims to provide access to these resources in order to assist curriculum advisors in their vital task.

Rookan Podesta and Dylan Wray, responsible for initiating the SACATS conference, remark that "Curriculum Advisors do great work in difficult circumstances and it is crucial to focus appreciatively, celebrate and learn from whatever is working." In 2008 SACATS welcomes as one of the key speakers Pam Christie, principal author of the *Schools that Work* report that was submitted to the DOE in late 2007. The report identified themes of success from a selection of schools that have produced exemplary results under the outcomes-based education model currently in use. Christie, an associate professor at the University of Queensland School of Education and Visiting Professor of the University of the Witwatersrand and of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, will be discussing the recommendations of the report and the practicalities of applying them. Also speaking at the conference is Professor Jonathan Jansen, an internationally respected researcher in the field of education, and recently appointed scholar-in-residence at the Oprah Winfrey Leadership School for Girls.

In the furtherance of its goal to discover and recognise islands of excellence and success within the world of teacher support, SACATS will host the annual Curriculum Advisor Appreciation Awards. Nominations are made by teachers and principals across the country. In 2007 thirty curriculum advisors were honoured for their exceptional contributions.

SACATS 2008 incorporates an exhibition, and introduces an experiential ICT lab on its exhibition floor as a value-added learning resource. The White Paper on e-Education, which was published in 2004, stipulates that "Every teacher, manager and administrator in general and further education and training must have the skills, training and support they need to integrate ICT in teaching and learning." The hands-on ICT training on offer at the SACATS ICT lab is aimed at giving this directive a boost forward.

The Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) will also be showcasing the educational materials of its members, allowing curriculum advisors and teachers to access the latest textbooks and other educational materials available to South African schools

SACATS 2008 will be held at the Emperor's Palace in Johannesburg from 7-9 July. Additional information can be found online at www.sacats.org.

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