



“

We work towards goals with patience. Invested in actual effort. We invest in our efforts and are not waiting in disengaged expectation. Because we are impatient to succeed. We work with painstaking rigour.

”

National development plan / vision 2030

Partners for Possibility (PFP) is a creative solution to South Africa’s education crisis - it is a co-action, co-learning partnership between School Principals and Business Leaders, enabling social cohesion through partnerships, and empowering Principals to become change leaders in their schools and communities. The **PFP** Programme facilitates cross-sectoral reciprocal partnerships between Business, Government and the Social Sector.

At a glance

- Desmond Mpilo Tutu Secondary School was built in 1996 .
- There are 39 teaching staff and 1453 learners in 35 classes, with a class average of 42 learners per class. Because of poverty and high unemployment in the Mbekweni community, there is a lack of resources.
- Challenging subjects include: Maths, Accounting, Life Sciences & Physical Science.
- The under 19’s soccer team won the K. Motsepe Cup for the second year running, earning the school R 10 000.
- In November 2015, the WCED paid tribute to Western Cape’s top teachers, and Ms Ras-Pretorius (Dramatic Arts) in the FET Phase, was recognised for Excellence in Secondary School Teaching.

She attained a 100% pass rate for Grade 12 since 2005, and a number of her learners attained Bachelor Passes in Grade 12 and furthered their studies in Drama. She always goes the extra mile. When learners struggle academically, she arranges psychometric testing to ascertain where they encounter problems and, when learners are absent, she visits them to ensure that they catch up on the work done in class so that they do not fall behind.

Paarl estate agent - Mr Ben Joubert - partnered with young Principal Mr Julius Allah and fondly recalls his first meeting with the school management team: “There was passion, love for their subjects, love of the children, love for each other and real common values.”

Regardless of this drive, Ben noticed at the starting point of their new journey that each of these educators was going in a different direction collectively, and not making a change. Julius and Ben met as many as 8 - 10 times a month, debating different issues. However, the core question they based their partnership on was: Who do we need to be in this journey?

They felt this is an important question to consider for anyone interested in change, much like Ghandi’s famous quote “Be the Change”. The question that followed was: “How do you bring about change?” A great deal of this partnership revolved around managing expectations: “From a managerial point of view, one creates a strategic plan, setting out the vision and values, to drive select goals,” Ben said.

However, he quickly learned that this was not going to be as simple in this context. The team embarked on a course where learning materials covered themes such as Time to Think, Community of Practice, and Flawless Consulting, which inspired new ways of thinking and winning with people.

“Whenever I go into a situation and become outcomes-driven, I derail the project... every time. I learned that often there are more profound methods that can bring about change.”

Ben Joubert

In this regard, Principal Allah and Mr Joubert spoke of their realisations from Peter Block's notion of 'Flawless Consulting'. They learned that the irony of an outcomes-driven process means it excludes the very thinking and feeling that gives it sustainable value. As a result, together with the school management team (SMT), they learned how to think and engage one another in a practical manner, through listening.

Spending enough time with the team gave Julius and Ben the opportunity to speak and make connections outside of their own circles, as well as solidify friendships that foster growth.

As the partners unleashed their collective potential, set the example of how to listen, come up with the right answers and asked the right questions, they noticed that Symphonia was a catalyst for the very growth they were meant to be facilitating.

The outcomes of the motivational day at the Mbekweni Community Centre focussed on vision and values for 2016:

"A passionate educational stakeholder in a learner-centred cultural environment of excellence."

School Vision & Values for 2016

The goal itself is to place the school in the centre of the community by drawing in parents, teachers, educative bodies and business, to contribute to the lives of the children.

Teachers engaging this vision in their work would naturally demonstrate the new goals and values that were identified: caring, honesty, diversity, and innovation. Addressing the task of aligning values of the school management team and senior staff required development of a clear vision, strategic management, self-management and collective project planning.



THE PRINCIPAL:

Julius Allah

Dealing with 56 staff and their needs is a huge undertaking, and Principal Allah quickly gained his partner's respect based on, among other things, the assumption that the life of a Principal is only that of academia.

During the programme, they had to arrange community policing to counter an arson attempt. In addition, Julius had a serious back operation and was absent during the third term. During this time, a large fence fell, and gangsters, cattle, goats, as well as community members dressed as school children entered the school grounds causing turmoil.

"For five months, the Education Department didn't do anything. Our initial proposal to them was to replace the fence with a wall, however the fence issue had not been resolved."

Of his Partner Ben, Julius recalls fondly: "I really missed him when I was off from work and it was hard when I came back. I was switched off, but he ignited my battery the moment I was asking myself why I joined this programme in the first place!"



The next step was school improvement. Challenges that arose and were addressed included:

- Drug abuse: identifying some 'perpetrators' who were suffering, and getting them help with tough love and mentoring;
- Helping manage the pregnancy policy;
- Appointing a new Deputy Principal;
- Installing and updating the Wi-Fi;
- Holding matric motivational sessions and sharing goals with the parents in attendance; and
- Mathematics intervention: Desmond Mpilo Secondary has 400 Grade 9's with a 2% pass rate for the Annual National Assessments (ANAS) i.e. only 8 out of 400 learners pass Mathematics.

The Partners set about a cooperative learning project and seized the opportunity to invite Labori High School for two afternoon sessions. One focussed on algebra and the other, on geometry.

Students worked side by side, learning and unleashing one another's potential. The context for this interaction also fostered social cohesion and sensitivity toward cultural diversity. ■



THE PARTNER:

Ben Joubert

Real estate agent and business consultant, Ben Joubert, spent time working in education across Africa. His decision to get involved in the PFP programme was inspired by the belief that education is truly the key to a successful South Africa. In the partner circles, the well-known saying that 'it takes a village to raise a child' took on a new dimension; they realised it takes a city - a nation - to build a school.

"We spent a lot of time developing trust and connecting on a personal level. In looking at our life purpose and dreams, we slowly came to the realisation that most problems are resolvable."

"However, we also learned that it would require a team to do so. The partnership has developed my management skills. The magnitude and diversity of these trials were so much more than I was used to. Rethinking the entire strategy and mobilisation of an organisation was also a great challenge."