

MEDIA RELEASE

Principals Academy Trust offers Grade R workshop to address dire need for support in Foundation Phase of education.

South Africa's children enter the official school system in Grade 1 with a backlog in educational stimulation that is often difficult to overcome.

In Statistics South Africa's most recent general household survey, released earlier this year, it was found that only 38,4% of 0 to 4-year olds attended a daycare centre, crèche, nursery school or pre-primary school. Although 49,2% of children aged 0-4 years stayed at home with parents or guardians, the survey suggests that stimulation for cognitive development for this group might be lacking. Almost one half of respondents indicated that they never read a story to the child or drew and coloured with them.

This often leaves Grade R and Grade 1 teachers with a significant gap to address when children enter these earlier grades.

The Principals Academy Trust (the Academy), a non-profit public benefit organisation in South Africa, has been mentoring school leadership teams since 2012. In 2016 the Academy acknowledged this need for assistance and classroom support in the lower grades and adapted its approach with the creation of a Teacher Support Programme. This programme currently has a staff complement of 12 facilitators.

At the end of August, the Academy held its second Foundation Phase workshop, presented by the Teacher Support Programme team. The first workshop took place in 2017 and was offered to all Foundation Phase teachers. The second workshop specifically focused on educators of Grade R classes, with Heads of Department and Grade 1 educators also included in the invitation. The theme for the day was: "Meaningful Connections - Meaningful Learning: making the learning process a happy and meaningful journey for both educator and learner."

More than 130 educators from over 40 schools (some from as far afield as Swellendam and Paarl) attended the workshop which was held at Pick n Pay's head offices in Kenilworth, Cape Town - the venue and refreshments kindly sponsored by the retailer. The workshop offered the educators three separate sessions, which were run concurrently and attended by all delegates on a rotational basis.

The attending teachers achieved five SA Council of Educators' points (SACE) for attending the four hour workshop.

"We believe that if we target and support Foundation Phase teachers, we can make a meaningful impact on the school ecosystem in South Africa. Of course it will not be a big and rapid change, but every little bit makes progress possible," says René Sinclair, original member of the Teacher Support Programme. Sinclair has been active in education since 1978 and head teacher or principal of schools both in South Africa and, for an extensive period while abroad, in South America.

"I have to say that I wish our schools could officially incorporate groups even younger than Grade R. There is so much we can do even before they get to this point," she says.

According to Bruce Probyn, who heads up the mentoring team that supports principals as part of the Academy's methodology, the organisation is achieving significant results and progress

because the problem is addressed from two angles - mentoring the principal on the one side of the spectrum and supporting educators in classrooms on the other.

"This transition in our approach is exciting. Working from both ends like this, like a vice grip, we hope to assist in addressing some of the educational woes that South Africa is facing," he says.

The attendees at the workshop commented on the positive and interactive nature of the three sessions that were offered, already requesting information about a follow-up workshop for the future.

"It is enormously fulfilling to see the teachers take on board and implement strategies successfully that you have shared with them. Our main focus is to improve teacher competence and to see this happening is a great joy," says Jenny van Velden, another member of the Teacher Support Programme who led a session on the day.

The Principals Academy Trust is currently actively supporting 26 schools through its Teacher Support Programme in the Foundation Phase. Educators from three schools who do not form part of this group also attended the workshop.

"We are happy for other schools to attend, even if we don't currently have a presence in those schools," says Probyn. "Ultimately, having the right tools and strategies for teaching will be for the benefit of the children in the classrooms. They are the end beneficiaries of everything we do."

About the Principals Academy Trust

The Principals Academy Trust, a Section 18(a) Trust established in October 2012, seeks to empower school leadership in public schools, serving socio-economically disadvantaged communities. The Trust's ultimate goal is to impact the overall teaching ecosystem and academic outcomes of the schools where we have a presence. Currently 103 schools are part of the programme. Approximately 2 000 teachers teach the more than 60 000 learners attending these schools in Athlone, Bellville, Delft, Franschhoek, Gansbaai, Genadendal, Grabouw/Elgin, Grassy Park, Gugulethu, Hermanus, Khayelitsha, Kraaifontein, Kuilsriver, Lavender Hill, Lotus River, Manenberg, Masiphumelele, Mfuleni, Mitchell's Plain, Nyanga, Paarl, Philippi, Retreat, Simon's Town, Stanford, Vredenburg and Witzenberg.

Read more in our separate fact sheet.

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Photographs (available in high resolution and will be sent upon request in jpg format).

Photograph 1:



Supporting our teachers: The Principals Academy Trust held a SACE-accredited Grade R workshop this past weekend in Cape Town to train and support these teachers in assisting South Africa's young learners on their educational journey. Teacher Support Programme staff members René Sinclair and Shona Breytenbach are addressing some of the more than 130 educators from over 40

schools in one of the three offered sessions. The three sessions covered the following topics: "1. Planning for Meaningful Learning. Work smarter, not harder" presented by Jenny van Velden and Issy Staude. 2. "Management of Literacy and Numeracy Rotational Activities" presented by Meryl Fourie, Anita Bath and Mary Ann Syfret. 3. "Fun-filled Meaningful Learning" presented by René Sinclair and Shona Breytenbach.

Photograph 2:



Caption:

Providing tools and methods to assist learning in the classroom: The Principals Academy Trust held a SACE-accredited Grade R workshop this past weekend in Cape Town to train and support these teachers in assisting South Africa's young learners on their educational journey. More than 130 teachers from over 40 schools attended the workshop. Teacher Support Programme staff Meryl Fourie joins a table discussion with delegates. The three sessions covered the following topics: "1. Planning for Meaningful Learning. Work smarter, not harder" presented by Jenny van Velden and Issy Staude. 2. "Management of Literacy and Numeracy Rotational Activities" presented by Meryl Fourie, Anita Bath and Mary Ann Syfret. 3. "Fun-filled Meaningful Learning" presented by René Sinclair and Shona Breytenbach.

Photograph 3:



Using what you have to facilitate meaningful connections with the learner in the classroom: Teacher Support Programme staff member of the Principals Academy Trust, Shona Breytenbach, addressing a session at the SACE-accredited Grade R workshop held by the Academy this past weekend in Cape Town. The purpose of the workshop was to train and support these teachers in assisting South Africa's young learners on their

educational journey. More than 130 teachers from over 40 schools attended the workshop. The three sessions covered the following topics: "1. Planning for Meaningful Learning. Work smarter, not harder" presented by Jenny van Velden and Issy Staude. 2. "Management of Literacy and Numeracy Rotational Activities" presented by Meryl Fourie, Anita Bath and Mary Ann Syfret. 3. "Fun-filled Meaningful Learning" presented by René Sinclair and Shona Breytenbach.