

**UPHULISWANO LWEZIKOLO ZASERHINI
(Developing Rhini/Grahamstown Schools Together)**

**Preliminary Notes on Addressing the Challenges of Developing Effective
Secondary Schools in the Historically Black Areas of Rhini/Grahamstown**

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Introduction

Education, apart from being a fundamental human right, is also a powerful determinant of the economic and social prospects of individuals. Yet, many South Africans, and particularly those that were disadvantaged under apartheid, continue to be denied equity of opportunity in basic and secondary education, and as a consequence are denied the possibilities of economic and social advancement through education.

This is certainly the case in Rhini/Grahamstown. For a variety of reasons a number of schools, perhaps the vast majority, that serve historically disadvantaged South Africans operate far from optimally with respect to a number of indicators related to effective schooling. One indicator of the challenges that face local historically disadvantaged secondary schools in particular is the matriculation results in 2005. The 7 historically disadvantaged schools produced 29 matric endorsements from a total of many hundreds enrolled students. In contrast, the local Model C schools, Victoria and Graham, each graduated some 60 to 70 students with matric endorsements, while St Andrews and DSG together graduated almost 150 students.

In this context, it is necessary to give attention to the possibility of an initiative - **Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini (Developing Rhini/Grahamstown Schools Together)** - that brings together the local historically disadvantaged secondary schools and other public and private secondary schools, Rhodes University, non-governmental organisations, the district Department of Education, teacher unions, business, and other formations or individuals to address the challenges of developing effective secondary schools in the historically black areas of Rhini/Grahamstown.

A conversation on addressing the challenges of developing effective secondary schools in the historically black areas of Rhini/Grahamstown has already begun with the principals of all the local secondary schools, Deans of Rhodes University, and the district Department of Education. Within Rhodes it has been extended to colleagues in the Faculty of Education, academic departments at Rhodes University, the Rhodes SRC, various clubs and societies, and various groups and individuals.

This Roundtable is a wonderful opportunity to extend the conversation by drawing on the expertise and experience of those assembled here. To get maximum benefit from the Roundtable, I thought I should boldly set out my own thinking to provoke critical discussion, deepen the conversation, and take it forward.

To begin with, however, there are a number of points I wish to make regarding my contribution and, more generally, any initiative to address the challenges of developing effective secondary schools in the historically black areas of Rhini/Grahamstown.

1. First, my thinking must be viewed not only as *one* contribution, but also as a *socially located* contribution. That is to say, the nature of the thinking is shaped by the office I hold at Rhodes University, the institutional values, goals and interests of the University, the opportunities and constraints that exist, and the resources that are available and can be potentially mobilised.
2. Second, the nature of the involvement and participation of Rhodes University (as opposed to individual academics and students) will be ultimately determined by the University through its internal governance structures (committees, boards, Senate and Council).
3. Third, the success of any initiative to address the conditions in secondary schools will be conditioned by the extent to which
 - There is clarity of thinking and agreement on *purposes, aims, and objects*
 - There are shared core premises, values and principles and an overall *enabling framework*
 - There is effective drawing on knowledge and experience to fashion the *appropriate strategies and methodology*, methods and techniques for pursuing the defined purposes and aims
 - There is *effective organisation and implementation*
 - There is deep attention to *sustainability* in terms of people and finances, and a conditioning of goals, strategies and methodology by the availability of people and finances.
4. Fourth, in my view, at this juncture the actual content of the thinking that I set out below is less important than the issues that I consider must structure the thinking – purposes, aims, objects, an overall enabling framework, and questions especially of approach and methodology.

A schools initiative will have to *first and foremost* explicitly and clearly answer the questions of purposes, and aims, and alongside this elaborate a guiding framework.

Only thereafter, can the specific and concrete objects begin to be defined.

The objects themselves, of course, only alert us to the issues and areas that will require attention. They do not provide answers to the question of *how* – methodology – the precise strategies, mechanisms and instruments to be used to pursue the aims of the initiative.

5. Finally, we should not assume that we have any great or special *knowledge and understanding* of the critical issues and challenges that confront the historically disadvantaged schools and the specific conditions in which they are rooted. Obtaining *knowledge and understanding* of the conditions and challenges is a necessary condition of defining aims, objects and methodology.

Purposes

One way of defining purposes, is that Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini must

- Create effective secondary schools in the historically black areas so that students are provided an education that nurtures their talents and helps them fulfil their potential
- Enable increasing numbers of students from historically disadvantaged secondary schools to achieve results that enable them to access higher education and through this enhance their possibilities for economic and social advancement.

Aims

In relation to the above purposes, the specific aims of the Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini initiative could be:

- To support secondary schools that are unable to function optimally with respect to teaching, learning, curriculum, governance and management and administration, and also experience challenges related to facilities, resources and a general culture of learning and teaching
- To enhance the knowledge, competencies and skills of teachers, students, and managers and relevant stakeholders that are vital for the effective functioning of the schools
- To increase the numbers of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds that achieve matriculation results that enable them to gain entry to universities and universities of technology
- To increase the numbers of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds that achieve matriculation results that enable them to gain entry to Rhodes University
- To increase the numbers of students that are offspring of Rhodes University workers to achieve matriculation results that enable them to gain entry to universities and universities of technology, including Rhodes University
- To mobilise the financial resources that can facilitate historically disadvantaged students to attend Rhodes University.

Objects

In pursuance of the above aims, the objects of the initiative could be *to develop sustainable strategies and mechanisms*

- For building effective secondary schools
- To support teachers at these schools to enhance their professional knowledge, competencies and skills and qualifications
- To support Grades 10-12 students at these schools to develop the knowledge, competencies and skills that are necessary to achieve matriculation results that enable them to enter universities and universities of technology, including Rhodes University
- To support school managers to enhance the governance and management and administration of schools
- To support schools with respect to the mobilisation and maintenance of the necessary facilities and resources that are required for effective schooling
- To enhance the knowledge, competencies and skills of relevant stakeholders that must play a vital role in the building and maintenance of effective schools

- To facilitate students accessing higher education and making choices with respect to choices of universities and universities of technology, and fields and disciplines
- To encourage and inspire students to strive to excel and access higher education
- To mobilise the financial resources that can facilitate historically disadvantaged students to attend Rhodes University.

Framework

In developing and implementing any Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini initiative, the premises, core values and principles of the initiative would need to be clearly articulated. These could include

- The challenges of effective schooling in local disadvantaged schools are a problem of the entire Rhini/Grahamstown community and must be embraced as such
- The building and maintenance of effective schools is the collective responsibility of, the Rhini/Grahamstown community, its institutions and organisations, the district Department of Education and the provincial Department of Education and government
- The building and maintenance of effective schools requires collective commitment and effort and bold and imaginative action on the part of the entire Rhini/Grahamstown community, its institutions and organisations, the provincial government and other key actors
- The development of strategies and mechanism for building and maintaining effective schools must be an inclusive programme that draws on the knowledge, expertise, skills and resources of all Rhini/Grahamstown institutions, organisations and actors, and other pertinent actors
- The recognition that any serious developmental effort requires long-term and sustained commitment and endeavour, and requires such commitment and effort on the part of key institutions, organisations and actors
- An acknowledgement and recognition that a number of actors are already engaged in a range of interventions that seek to contribute to the development of effective secondary schools.
- That there should be no unnecessary duplication or competition with existing interventions as much as the co-ordination, expansion, deepening, complementing, enhancing and, where necessary, introduction of new thinking and initiatives that can contribute to the overall aims that are identified above
- There has to be a commitment to the constitutional values of non-racialism, non-sexism, educational and social equity and redress, and democratic practice
- There has to also be a commitment to co-operation, accountability, integrity, good governance, effective management and administration, and responsible conduct.

Methodology

Methodology – the precise and concrete strategies, mechanisms, instruments, methods, and techniques through which the aims will be pursued – is, of course, a hugely important issue.

One obviously looks here to the knowledge, expertise and experience of the Faculty of Education, local education projects, initiatives in other provinces, and bodies like JET for guidance and assistance.

Structure and Organisation

In so far as structure and organisation are concerned, one way of imagining these could be as follows:

- A principled partnership comprising in the first instance all the secondary schools in Rhini/Grahamstown, Rhodes University and the District office of the Department of Education constituted in a Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini **Alliance** that meets regularly
- A Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini **Forum** that comprises the Alliance, non-governmental organisations, teacher unions, business, other committed formations and organisations involved in initiatives geared towards building effective schools and meets intermittently
- A Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini **Office**, staffed, to begin with, a knowledgeable, skilled, sensitive, and dynamic full-time **Co-ordinator** who is charged to give effect to the purposes, aims and objects of Uphuhliswano Lwezikolo Zaserhini, however they may be formulated, and to function in accordance with the overall framework of the initiative.

Ultimately, structure and organisation will, of course, be shaped by the framework and methodology.