

TARGETED TRAINING TO CLOSE THE LOOP

The staff and volunteers working in after school programmes in the Western Cape bring a variety of strengths and experiences with them. Activities currently on offer include those centred around sports and recreation, arts and culture, academic and e-learning, and life skills. Given this variance, continual, appropriate, top-quality practitioner training is critical to the success of any after school programme and will help to achieve a critical mass of learners in the Province attending quality after school programmes in low-fee and no-fee schools by 2019.

The training intervention is underpinned by the idea that quality training of practitioners will lead to quality after school offerings for young people.

In addition to passionate and skilled practitioners and coaches, the entire after school ecosystem needs to be considered including at the leadership, specialists and voluntary levels. It is for this reason that the After School Game Changer (AS GC) has been working to build the required capacity at all levels of the after school environment. "This is not training for training's sake," says AS GC Training Manager, Wayde Groep. "We conducted audits and solicited feedback to understand where the gaps lay. Working with partners, we created a pipeline of training opportunities - ranging from ad hoc thematic workshops through to doctoral study programmes to build capacity within the after school sector."

Groep emphasises: "After school programmes require leadership, committed and skilled coaches and practitioners and learners to succeed. The training strategy and focus is about closing the loops to ensure that the sector is capacitated through the various training interventions that address specific needs presented at different stakeholder levels. What this means is that targeted interventions are developed and rolled out, but it is also about closing the loop in terms of ensuring that everyone involved in

the offering is provided with the skills and tools to ensure success."

According to Groep, the various training programmes have the added benefit of helping to connect stakeholders to a network of support. Training also helps these stakeholders to understand their different and diverse roles.

This article looks at three training programmes within a larger package offered by the AS GC and partners. These are the Leading Innovative Partnerships in Extended Education Programme targeted at leaders; the Education Practitioner Training Programme targeted at practitioners in general; and the Creative Arts Training Programme targeted at a specific group of practitioners, namely arts coaches working in after school programmes in the Western Cape.

LEADING INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS IN EXTENDED EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The tone of the school and its commitment to the after school programme is essential for its success. It is for this reason that the AS GC partnered with the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Dr Allistair Witten, an adjunct professor at the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) and founding director of the Centre for the Community School at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, who co-designed this course - which is focused on ensuring that what is offered in the after school sector is on the agenda of leaders within the sector.



There is an added concentration on the building of leadership skills for the sector.

The course is targeted at leaders from schools, government departments and social purpose organisations working with schools. The aim is to help these key stakeholders build a system of holistic learning and teaching support across the extended school day by facilitating the creation of strong innovative partnerships within the Western Cape educational ecosystem.

The course was launched in 2017 with a cohort of 32. This year, over four consecutive Saturdays in February and March, 35 participants from across the Western Cape came together to learn about topics such as: developing a systems thinking approach to understanding South African education complexities; the key elements of systemic change at schools with specific emphasis on collaboration and innovation; the role of the non-profit sector in the school-based Complementary Learning Framework; asset-based approaches to school and community development; leadership in schools, with an emphasis on leading in a complex environment; and project management.

When asked what their key take-outs from the day were, responses, collected anonymously included sentiments such as: "The value of partnerships in building the bigger picture of education in the Western Cape and the idea that agency is hope realised." And: "I had a paradigm shift from needs based to asset-based partnerships. I was reminded to start with what I have."

The seeds of several partnerships were sown as a result of interaction during the course, while one respondent simply reflected on having "renewed hope in the WCED."

Two further training sessions are planned for later in the year.

EXTENDED EDUCATION PRACTITIONER TRAINING PROGRAMME

This free 15-month certificate course seeks to equip practitioners already working in the sector with the skills and competencies to design and run quality after school programmes with recognised norms and standards. Partners in this programme include the Community Chest, Stellenbosch University and Rutgers University (USA).

The programme was launched in November 2017 with a cohort of 55 practitioners representing 34 organisations. Successful applicants include Western Cape Government (WCG) staff working in government-run after school programmes, NGO/NPO staff and volunteers working in after school programmes across the province.

The course consists of five residential training blocks augmented by district level mentorship and workshops. The first residential training component took place in January 2018. The aim of this module was to equip practitioners with the foundational, practical and reflexive competencies required to lead effectively "from the inside out." Over the course of six days, participants were given the opportunity to gain a better understanding of themselves, their personal values, biases and perspectives.

Practitioners were asked to provide daily feedback, submitted anonymously. Some of their comments included sentiments such as this one, captured at the end of the first day: "Wow, I am just so excited because of this programme and I finally am on a path of self-discovery. I have been yearning for years to get to know myself and how others perceive me. I was taken aback by a lot of newfound discoveries about myself."

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The second training block took place in April and focused on leading in a complex environment. This training was structured to equip participants with the skills to critically engage with diverse stakeholders and to map various scenarios and possibilities in extended education in no-fee and low-fee schools.

Anonymous feedback received from participants at the end of the four days reflect the efficacy of the training. "My journey starts here and I am getting to know myself and the learners on a different level and I know myself much better and I understand the plights of our learners on a different dimension now," one wrote.

Someone else reflected on how the sessions "reminded me why I'm in the after school space and how where I lead from impacts/influences others." Another felt compelled "to think more critically about the environment I work in - nothing is as simple as it seems."

The third training module will take place in June and will look at how practitioners can create positive pathways for youth. The further two training blocks are scheduled for September and November this year and will focus on leading in partnership and building effective after school programmes respectively.

Course convenor, Chrischar Rock from the Community Chest offered her own reflections, noting that the programme design has had to become responsive to the varied needs of participants. "Through the training, participants have been immersed in the context in which they work - and they've been challenged. The nature of the sessions has allowed them to engage in conversations they wouldn't otherwise have. The training has also empowered them to view themselves and the work they do in a different light. They are taking this message back to their organisations and to the young people with whom they work."

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CREATIVE ARTS TRAINING PROGRAMME

Now in its second uptake year, this programme focuses on the mastery of a particular group of practitioners - after school Arts coaches. This initiative is a result of audits done on the MOD Centres and DSD Partial Aftercares, which saw the need to address the capacity and skills of Arts practitioners to offer quality programmes. The AS GC partnered with Assitej SA, a network organisation committed to training artists and educators who work with children and young people, to deliver this programme. Admission is free to WCG staff working in government-run after school programmes as well as NGO/NPO staff and volunteer staff working in after school programmes.

The one-year, part-time programme supports after school coaches to deliver quality arts engagements (theatre/drama and dance) to their learners and aims to provide skills development, mentoring support and showcasing opportunities for Arts coaches in the Western Cape. The 2018 course kicked off in February with initial site visits to the coaches and their after school programmes. This gave the team an opportunity to review the context, challenges and needs of the coaches in their respective environments. All the coaches came together for the first time in March at the Baxter Theatre's Zabalaza festival, for their first training workshop and considerable exposure to the performing arts.

In anonymous feedback at the end of the workshop, one respondent spoke how their view on theatre had changed: "I always thought it was boring but the way things were done gave me ideas. Lots of ideas. I'm inspired to go back home, work hard and motivate the kids as well."

Many respondents highlighted the novelty of theatre. "The art of theatre is a whole new experience. I will have something new and valuable to go and teach my learners," one said. Learners lack exposure to theatre too, it was noted: "Most kids aren't exposed to theatre life and for me being part of the programme will be a silver lining for the kids: for I'll be equipped enough to mentor and bring [out] the very best actors, actresses and future creatives in the arts and culture industry."

The second residential training block took place during the April school holidays. Over the course of the 4-day workshop, coaches were exposed to ways of developing their creativity and were introduced to skills to facilitate music theatre as well as drama and dance specialisations.

At the end of the training, one participant wrote about coming to the realisation “that with the relevant knowledge about what one is doing and what the origins and history of it is, that anyone can facilitate performing arts of any context and culture.”

Noting the personal growth of so many of the coaches they’d worked with over the two trainings, Director of Assitej SA, Yvette Hardie, said: “We have seen coaches who are proactively in contact with one another in order to better support their learning and growing journey, developing regional clusters of support. We have also seen a willingness from coaches with no previous experience of an art form, to dive into the practicalities of working within that form, and by so doing, develop confidence and an awareness of their natural capacities, which can then be enhanced through better understanding and specific training.”

Further aspects of the creative arts training will include onsite mentoring, training and support,

specialist workshops on different aspects of drama or dance provided on regional basis, community-based showcasing of dance and/or drama performances for input and mentoring and a joint showcase for all coaches who have been part of the programme.

According to Jacqui Boule, “From the responses we’ve seen from course convenors and participants themselves, participants are already starting to change the way they see themselves and the work they do. Many spoke about feeling increasingly supported. Others spoke about having created their own networks of support as a result of attending workshops and meeting like-minded people.”

“By providing training and support to policy-makers, school leaders, educators, coaches, NGO/NPO staff working in the after school space as well as volunteer staff working in after school programmes in the Western Cape, we can create win-win programmes that benefit practitioners and learners alike,” Boule added. Several additional programmes are in the planning stages, including a middle management training programme and a number of other training interventions aimed at further closing the loop to ensure that all stakeholders are equipped to provide quality after school offerings for learners.



“WE CAN CREATE WIN-WIN PROGRAMMES THAT BENEFIT PRACTITIONERS AND LEARNERS ALIKE,”

$$m_2 \ddot{y}_2 = -F_b - F_p + R_y \quad m_3 \ddot{y}_3$$