

Paper to be presented at the Conference to be held at The University of Cape Town in September 2012 : Strategies to overcome poverty and inequality: Towards Carnegie III

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Category : Youth transitions : from education to the labour market

Making Education Work: The Midlands Community College experience :

Introduction

This paper describes the programmes, projects and initiatives of the Midlands Community College since its establishment in 1981. The aim is to describe our work as practical solutions to educational problems that existed during apartheid, and which continue to exist today for different reasons and in our current time. The programmes and courses that Midlands Community College offers have always been in response to expressed needs from the community around educational difficulties and access. All our programmes, we believe, are practical models of delivery to support solutions. In particular, the Maths, Science, Technology `Recovery Project` is an appropriate practical model that helps Grade 12 students from under-resourced schools and poor backgrounds to `connect with opportunities` – in this case to access tertiary studies and further education that otherwise would not be possible. Likewise our training courses and projects in the area of Early Childhood Development impact at the very foundational levels of safety, health and education for a new generation of school learners.

All our courses in some way help young people, and adults without much education, to gain skills or qualifications that enable them to improve their chances of entering the labour market.

I would like to describe our story from the perspective of an NGO which has always been a private educational institution, and as such, has always been dependent on donor-funding for its survival. (Along the way I will track the support of donors and sponsors, companies and trusts, foreign governments and individuals, who provided the funds to support each new idea. These will be noted in *italics* after each project description).

Our history

Our beginnings, our history, are interesting and aspirational. They went against the prevailing laws of the time. Certain individuals of great moral conviction and stature took a stand against the inequalities of educational opportunities of the time, envisioned a better future for all, and went out to do something about it. Amongst these were Peter Brown, local farmer, liberal, apartheid activist, who donated the land, and Pauline Greene, a young teacher from the UK, who was appalled by how the apartheid system affected human development in the area. She had the vision, asked Mr Brown about acquiring land, and from him gained a piece of his farm on which to start building. The purpose was to establish a community-based college for skills development initiatives in the Nottingham Road district. It opened in March of 1981.

The buildings were sponsored by the then Barclays Bank, and its first major donor was Anglo American. Other first donors were the Danish Government, European Union and the Kagiso Trust).

What they did and what we do now

I will tell of what they did first and what we do now.

1980s – In these years the College offered mainly **skills development** courses related to practical training in the agricultural sphere, such as rearing poultry, fencing, tractor driving, cooking, brick-laying, plastering, welding, etc. These were all relevant to community needs in an agricultural area in the Natal Midlands at the time.

1990s - The introduction of ECD training and SLOT.

- **ECD:** There was little support for very young children on surrounding farms and in rural communities at the time, in terms of accessing social support and pre-school education. The College introduced training in Early Childhood Development in partnership with the Lady Usher Midlands Development Trust which still funds activities in training practitioners, and establishing, equipping and supporting over 50 creches and pre-school sites throughout the region. *(The sustainability of the Midlands Community College over the years is largely attributable to The Lady Usher Midlands Development Trust, and is quoted by the BoE Philanthropy Office in KZN as a prime example of how NGOs can benefit from attracting such bequests for their long term sustainability.)*
- **School Leavers Opportunity Training. (SLOT)** Not satisfied with the lack of opportunities for very young children growing up in a rural area, the intrepid Mrs Greene, ever envisioning something better, could see that local **school leavers** in the area had few means of studying further or getting jobs. So she started an initiative, based at the College, the mission of which was to “ guide educationally deprived and unemployed out-of-school youth, in order to improve their opportunities for gainful employment or self-employment”. This organization linked young people with the world of work, and today SLOT has grown into one of the most respected NGO’s in its field, with branches all over the country. Now based in Pietermaritzburg, it continues to assist youth in crisis by running effective and dynamic programmes which help youth improve their quality of life and chances of gainful employment. (SEE the SLOT website).

(Sponsors from the early days : The Kagiso Trust, Royal Netherlands Embassy and DG Murray Trust)

The 2000s – Introduction of a Maths and Science programme

At the end of the 1990s, MCC was poised to take another incredible step forward into the new decade. 1999 saw a further instance of the College providing what was needed and responding innovatively to the educational needs of young people. This time the observed ‘gap’ was that our young people from poor backgrounds and under-resourced schools, still had little chance of accessing further education of a more academic nature. The stage was set for a major development at MCC. Again, it was Mrs Greene – now in her late 70s - who proposed a post-matric bridging year that would concentrate on Maths and Science in order for isiZulu-speaking learners to improve their marks and be able to qualify for tertiary studies in these fields. This became known as the ‘**Maths, Science, Technology (MST) Recovery Project and has been running successfully for 12 years.**’ As the College had always had residential facilities to cater for those from the more remote inland areas, space was allocated for 60 young people to enrol for this ‘second-chance matric’. The educators recruited to teach these two vital subjects, were retired teachers from well-known private schools in the Midlands. The MST programme (which includes English and /or Life Sciences) has an excellent track-record. The pass rate is 100%, and over 80% of students qualify for tertiary studies each year.

Preparation students for higher education: All students do the IDCL computer course. All have intensive career guidance, individual mentoring, and help with bursary applications, while a holiday school provides workshops in Leadership and Ethics, and in Creative and Critical thinking skills based on the TASC –Thinking Actively in a Social Context – Problem-solving model of Wallace and Adams.

All these aspects of the programme, together with a safe and pleasant environment in which to live, and the inculcation of a sound work ethic, are felt to be critical for success at tertiary level.

2002 - 2012 A Mobile Science Laboratory to support under-resourced rural schools

In 2002, a retired Michaelhouse Science teacher suggested a means for helping schools with no science laboratories to do the required practical experiments for Grades 11 and 12. Grade 12 graduates from our MST Programme were trained as technicians to go out with equipment to set up and demonstrate experiments in surrounding schools. In 2006 the College, in partnership with *the Department of Education and the Shuttleworth Foundation* expanded the project over the next 3 years to reach 32 schools, which were visited by three technicians for a total of 12 times each during the year. Seen to be an essential component of the project were workshops for the teachers. Two educator workshops were held each term in two centres, helping between 36 and 40 Science teachers with the practical component of the new curriculum. This project has continued to expand its reach, and today over 6000 learners taking Physical Science as a subject in grades 10-12, and approximately 50 educators, benefit from the College's support.

The reach (outputs) of our programmes in 2012

Early Childhood Development : We train 30 practitioners at NQF Level 4 each year, and another 200+ (mostly rural women) working in remote areas, in short courses to support health, psycho-social and cognitive developmental needs of approximately **6000 children in over 55 ECD sites.** (*Lady Usher Development Trust*). We also reach 100 extremely poor and vulnerable families in Mpophomeni township, supporting caregivers and approximately 200 children between 0 and 6 years who cannot access any form of ECD at formal sites. This is a community-driven home-based model following well-researched, successful initiatives delivered by other members of the National ECD Alliance and some of our KZN ECD consortium partners. (*Sponsored by Anglo American Chairman's Fund and the DG Murray Trust*). We operate a **Toy Library** for four clusters of practitioners from our 55 ECD centres. We offer toy-making workshops, APT, parent training and short courses in caring for babies and toddlers, HIV/AIDS and First Aid. All are sponsored, residential courses. (*SOLO Foundation and the Midlands Primary Healthcare Trust.*)

Primary Schools E-learning support in Numeracy and Literacy: In 2011 the College introduced the CAMI curriculum-aligned software for a neighbouring school with no access to computers. 279 Grade R – Grade 7 learners attend two hours a week each with their educators in attendance to help facilitate.

Maths and Science Programme :

- **MST `Recovery' Project:** Today we still have 60 grade 12 learners upgrading Maths, Science and a choice of English or Life Sciences annually. All do the ICDL Computer course, and have intensive career guidance and mentoring, and are helped with tertiary bursary applications. (*List of over 10 Donors including Shell SA Marketing, Old Mutual Foundation, BoE Educational Foundation, FirstRand- RMB Fund, Hulamin, Sugar Industry Trust Fund for Education, DG Murray Trust, Abe Bailey Trust, Fulton and other Private Trusts*)
- **The Mobile Science Laboratory** now reaches 6108 Grade 10, 11 and 12 learners taking Physical Science as a matric subject. (*Old Mutual Foundation, SHELL SA and Transnet Freight Rail*)
- **Holiday Schools and Saturday schools** : MCC runs these for the top 140 Maths and Science Learners from 10 under-resourced schools in the Wartburg/New Hanover area around the SA Sugar mills operating in that region.(*Sugar Industry Trust Fund for Education*)

Skills Development:

- **Sustainable agriculture:** We train groups of 20 rural women at a time in Organic Vegetable Gardening in collaboration with the Rural Women's Movement and various agricultural organisations (80 participants during 2011 and 2012) (*Belgian Development Agency, HCI Foundation and various Private Trusts*)
- **Computers** : We run ongoing courses in basic computers for all members of the community
- **Cooking and Catering** with a Business/Entrepreneurial component (15 participants per course – 4 courses per year. (*Sponsored by Nedbank Foundation*))
- **Welding** : Courses for 10 learners per course ; 5-6 courses per year - ongoing for unemployed youth (*Nedbank Foundation*)

Our impact

Midlands Community College has continued to grow and now has a campus which includes classrooms, training facilities, a computer centre and boarding facilities for 140 students and adults enrolled for residential courses. These are accessible and affordable even to those from very poor communities because of the generous and on-going funding of our supporters.

ECD

Since 2006 we have been offering the NQF aligned National Certificate in ECD, Level 4 and have trained over 210 practitioners. This is a one-year part-time qualification facilitated and assessed by qualified Midlands Community College facilitators and assessors. The impact in the communities surrounding our 55 ECD sites is evident and the College has in place sound monitoring and evaluating tools and strict reporting requirements. The impact we have in our surrounding communities is considerable. Lives are changed and we have feedback from our past students on a regular basis. ECD sites that were established over 17 years ago are still sending parents and community members on our short courses. A passion for ECD is a feature of these women's lives. An entrepreneurial spirit also exists among them in that many pre-school practitioners are attending courses in basic computers for their own personal development, as well as in organic vegetable gardening to grow vegetables for better nutrition for their children. This is possible because of our long-time funders who value the role of women as 'custodians' who champion the rights of the child and the vital importance of ECD.

Maths and Science Programme : MST 'Recovery' project

This is perhaps the project that impacts most dramatically on young individuals who show promise, but who are restrained by poverty from reaching their true academic potential. Over the 11 years since the start of this post-matric bridging programme, a 100% pass rate has been maintained in Maths and Science. Last year, 86% of the students who enrolled improved their results well enough to gain entrance to various tertiary institutions this year. Of these students, 27 were accepted to study degrees or diplomas in Engineering, while the rest chose to study towards Bachelor of Science degrees or pursued careers within the Health Sciences. This year two students have qualified through their excellent results, to go to Cuba to become medical doctors.

Help in accessing bursaries

MCC endeavours to work with Corporates and other NGOs to secure bursaries for our students for tertiary studies. Each year we get students in to the UNITE bridging programme for engineers at UKZN or into the Augmented Science Programme. Some get bursaries from REAP (Rural Education Access Programme) for deep rural students. Corporates who usually sponsor tertiary education only, are now offering to sponsor our MST year (where learners only pay R5000 for a full residential academic year costing approximately R 30000 per student). This is because they know that these disadvantaged young people get an excellent grounding in preparation for University at MCC, in terms

of work ethic, self-discipline and the motivation to succeed. Certain companies are now negotiating to ring-fence funds to ensure financial aid to take our well-deserving students through their higher education courses.

Success stories and evidence of impact

In the twelve years that the project has been running we have consistently achieved excellent results and have maintained a **100% pass rate**. The results achieved in 2010 were beyond our expectations: In **Physical Science** 9 learners achieved A symbols, 16 achieved B symbols and 20 achieved C symbols. **Our top student, Trevor Msibi, achieved an impressive 91%** - he came in with a D symbol- **and our most improved learner, Lindelani Siyamkela, improved his marks from 35% to 80%, an improvement of 5 symbols**. Overall in Science learners improved their results by the following symbols: 2 learners improved by 5 symbols, 15 learners improved by 4 symbols, 25 learners improved by 3 symbols, 8 learners improved by 2 symbols, 6 learners improved by 1 symbol and 2 learners stayed the same. In **Mathematics** 7 learners achieved A symbols, 12 achieved B symbols and 15 achieved C symbols. **Trevor Msibi, also our top student in Maths, achieved an incredible 100% and our most improved learner, Thulasizwe Mehluleli, improved his marks from 32% to an impressive 74%, an improvement of 4 symbols**. In Mathematics learners improved their results by the following symbols: 1 learner improved by 4 symbols, 11 learners improved by 3 symbols, 19 learners improved by 2 symbols, 15 learners improved by 1 symbol, 10 learners stayed the same and only 2 learners dropped a symbol. **88%** of our 2010 learners are currently either studying at tertiary level or are gainfully employed. The results for 2011 were similarly pleasing. **Our top student in Mathematics, Sanele Sibiya, scored 88% in the final exams and is the second MCC graduate to be selected for the Cuban doctors' medical programme, leaving for a life-changing 6-year study period.**

Challenges and the Path Forward...

Our story is not complete.

Despite our successes in seeing so many of our MST students through to acceptance and enrolment at tertiary institutions for Engineering and Maths & Science-related degrees, there are still huge **challenges** that will forestall success for a large number of young people with great potential.

Here is a letter from the father of one of our 2011 students, on his son's first term at UKZN. It says it all. It was sent to us with a report, accompanied by the printout of his very successful half-year marks.

"We had to begin with so much activities to do for Thobani as he was unable to get accommodation and so he ended up to be settled out of Durban in the place called New Germany. This was the only alternative that we had as it was only 1 week before Thobani could start his lectures. I did follow up with the Howard College authorities but they gave us false expectations that Thobani will initially get bursary and accommodation on campus. Each day he had to travel 40 kilometres before he could reach the college and the cost of the transport was R800.00 a month. The accommodation was R600.00 and month excluding food and pocket money. I was making sure that he get food and transport and I had some few challenges with packet money. We always have mentoring and evaluation system that we have with my son at the end of each month.

These meetings have been very helpful to me to see where it needs some changes and this has also gave so much support to Thobani to focus more on his work .Despite long kilometres to reach school my motivation and mentorship stood up to Thobani and realize that he needed to work very hard so that he can have good results at the end of the 1st Semester .I am very proud and value your (MCC) support to Thobani in terms of Finances that you channelled through for his studies and as a family we feel that you have indeed contributed in one young person of SA and for that you have been part of the Nation Building .My son has good academic records and I think the only thing that it has slightly drop down is because of the distance that he used to take on each day as he has to leave New Germany early before 06h00.

CHALLENGESS (Thobani's father's heading)

- One of the challenges was the issue of accommodation.*
- The most was the financial assistant to cover all his education cost.*
- The transport was also one of the challenges as he was sometimes start his examination at about 17h00 on each time whenever he has one .*
- The taxi industry had strike in May and it was very difficult for Thobani to reach the Collage.*
- The other factors that were affecting his focus were the fact that we were not able to get bursary or full financial aid.*

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT (Father's heading)

- We have made plans with one institution in town that works with children in risk to give us accommodation for 1 week while we are waiting for accommodation on Campus.*
- We have also started application with few companies for bursaries*
- We will make sure that we attend all parents meeting or workshop that is organised by the Howard college.*
- We will still continue with mentoring and evaluation workshop that we have to do each month so that Thobani will have consistent progress in his results.*

The support that you have made to us is tremendous and I am quite sure that you have not only gave support but you have also touch the heart of this young man who has bin so keen to future his studies, so because of you his dream have come alive ."

The Path Forward

Corporate Social Investment (CSI) Sponsorship, Fundraising and Sustainability

Fundraising is a critical aspect for every NGO and needs a professional approach by highly competent member/s of the organisation. Conferences such as those hosted by SAIF (South African Institute of Fundraisers), and the CSI Traialogue Conference, together with workshops and seminars run by the Philanthropy Offices of Financial institutions and the Communities of Practice Forums called by some of the big corporates, are all critical for knowledge sharing and for collaboration between Government, NGOs and the Business community.

It is said that non-governmental organisations provide at least 30% of civil services in our country, especially in the areas of education, healthcare and social justice.

For MCC, as for all other similar institutions that do not benefit from any form of government funding, it is imperative that we align ourselves strategically in **collaborative partnerships** that will help us to maintain and improve the work that we do. We need to ensure sustainability, by remaining relevant to, and investing in the community we serve. We need sufficient income to operate effectively. This has been achieved thanks to our increased donor-base. We have received CSI grants from large companies, donations from many private trusts, and sponsorships from loyal individuals. All have recognized our attempts to put the right building blocks in place: appropriate structures, the right human resources, skills and competencies for effective delivery of our projects, strict financial controls and sound governance. We now need to increase long-term sustainability not only by trying to generate our own funds through projects and events, by attracting bequests and endowment trusts, but by having a strategy to build up our reserves over time.

- Sponsorships must continue to be sought from local people and personal friends in the community, with wealth and a moral conscience, to support us.
- Relationships with companies and corporates with CSI budgets must be fostered, and our credibility established to such an extent (through excellent, scrupulous governance) that they keep funding us in a way that we remain a sustainable organisation (we have been for 31 years)
- Strategic partnerships and collaboration between like-minded NGOs, the business world, and government, must be strengthened and pursued with a vengeance in order to move with urgency to support education in critical areas, region, by region

Programme Ideation, Implementation and M&E

- All programmes must be of immediate relevance to the expressed educational needs of the communities served and able to be easily implemented (less bureaucracy and more effective delivery).
- Flexibility and relevance – matching problems and needs in education shortfalls with effective solutions
- Source funding for better monitoring and evaluation by experts from local universities (Two of our most recent funders have allocated part of the budget towards UKZN –based academics to monitor our ECD Family Facilitator project and our Maths and Science Saturday school project this year)
- Continue to learn how to conduct work on evaluation design and impact evaluations for our specific projects ourselves. Begin to ‘address the evidence gap’ and learn to provide tools for evidenced based policy making, which is demanded more and more by donors.
- Learn from mistakes in order to increase effectiveness for the future.

Possible replication of educational models that work

With the above, plus the will, purpose and vision similar to that of our founders, a spectrum of critical educational needs in our surrounding communities can be addressed. Could similar models of small community colleges like MCC, with similar programmes, not be replicated in similar contexts (i.e. rural areas where access to FETs and tertiary institutions is difficult because of remoteness and distance)? This would provide 'educational mobility' for deep rural children.

- Start prioritising ECD for all 0-6 year olds in every area. The early years are critical. Children are our future.
- Where primary schooling is failing children, support schools with appropriate projects to address the needs (e.g. mobile libraries and computer centres). Think critically and creatively about what is required, seek funding and government collaboration, and do it!
- Use the TASC – 'Thinking Actively in a Social Context' model to structure initiatives and creative solutions
- Replicate the SLOT programme to give Life Skills training and relevant courses to create opportunities for school leavers and link them to the world of work, jobs or self-employment.
- Replicate the MCC Maths, Science, Technology programme to help matrics in each region with the transition from secondary school to gain access (with bursaries) to tertiary education which will ultimately lead to employment in critical arenas of the economy
- Provide Mobile Science Labs and Mobile Libraries where none exist
- Survey the field, region by region, suburb by suburb, and support education where the needs are obvious. Lead from the future as it emerges. (Theory U). Acknowledge the past, keep working on reconciliation and justice in terms of creating equal educational opportunities for all our youth.
- Demonstrate good governance, organisation skills and commitment, to make each project work better. Ensure high competence and total commitment of all educators and co-ordinators involved.
- Work on partnering and collaboration wherever possible.

Conclusion

This has been a descriptive/ narrative account of one NGO's attempt to make a difference by supporting education in South Africa. It is an account of one woman's remarkable vision and her life-long commitment to achieve it. Her dream is the legacy she has left for us to continue. What has been achieved in the past, can be improved. What we are currently succeeding in could be replicated at scale, in similar social contexts.

It is hoped that some of these suggestions be considered as feasible options that could be implemented to make the difference that is so urgently needed to improve education for all our children. A significant contribution to all the national imperatives, specifically the access to quality education and alleviation of poverty, unemployment, and the lessening of disparities between rich and poor, in terms of equal opportunities, can thus be made.

Useful references:

Midlands Community College : www.midlandscommunitycollege.co.za

SLOT: School Leavers Opportunity Training <http://www.slot.org.za> `Empowering youth for opportunity`.

Schooltrade Colin Mackay, Pietermaritzburg (Google it)

For more on the TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) Framework for Problem-Solving (Wallace and Adams) contact Debby Evans at Midlands Community College, KZN or IACESA

(International Association for Cognitive Education in SA) and Thinking Schools SA (websites)



Pauline Greene :

Mrs. Pauline Greene, who founded Midlands Community College in 1981 and SLOT (School Leavers Opportunity Training) at Nottingham Road in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Midlands in 1990, had a very clear vision. Her ideas were creative, and her problem-solving strategic and effective. Her effort has been unstinting. Her contribution to education in our region is inspirational and amazing. She is now 87 years old.