

ARTICLE IN HERALD: MATRIC RESULTS

Quality of matric passes needs to be examined with overall results

There are interventions that can improve educational standards, writes **Andre du Plessis**

EVERY year the same headlines feature related to the matric results. I am perturbed, for example, by the statement we can be "happy" with the pass rate. Statistics can be a powerful deceiver. What does a 51% pass rate really mean? What this figure does not reveal, is a breakdown of how well the matrices performed who are part of the 51% and how badly those in the 49% category failed. I am confident if an analysis can be published indicating the results per learning area in increments (such as 0 to 10%, 10,1% to 20%, 20,1% to 30%), we will be quite shocked to see in which category the majority of those who have passed fall.

To see whether there is actually an improvement or decline, one cannot just look at the overall pass rate. Even if the overall pass rate increases with 1% to 3%, it does not necessarily mean there is an improvement in the quality of the overall passes. This can only be determined by breaking down the results into the increments indicated above and then comparing them over a number of years.

Why are we not seeing these breakdowns in the media? Probably because the majority of the 51% who has passed, has passed on a very low pass level.

So can we turn the "boat" around? Yes! We are focusing on the wrong areas to look for solutions. There are some simple, intermediate and complex solutions. I will limit myself to a few.

The simple ones are many teachers would have to make a paradigm shift in their attitude towards education, and the children and communities they serve. It is not OBE principles or the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) that is to be blamed, but the attitudes towards it and to change in general.

Teachers also have to become aware they are there to serve and it means being on time to ensure teaching and learning is taking place, to build learning relationships with one's pupils, to walk the extra mile, etc.

The issues to be addressed on a higher level are, for example, the creation of a different leading and learning culture in our educational system and schools.

This will not happen overnight.

Furthermore, we need to change the way workshops are conducted. Presentations have been made to the Education Department regarding this.

The question is whether there will be buy-in into this by them. In addition, teachers need on-going and effective support, not training without support.

Communication from the department to the district offices and from them to their schools has to be improved. ICT could play a vital role and assist with the improvement process on a wide front, yet, the gazetted

Draft White Paper on e-education has not been implemented in our schools.

Much has been made about many learning areas. There will be a reduction from eight to six learning areas soon. This is not the problem.

The problem is language and this we will have to address. Why do Xhosa-speaking pupils have to switch over from Xhosa to English in totality after Grade 3?

Why not let these pupils continue in Xhosa in Grade 4 in six learning areas? In the other two remaining learning

areas they are instructed in English.

In Grade 5, the pupils are instructed in five of the learning areas in Xhosa and in English in three learning areas. Following this approach leads to the gradual introduction of English so that the pupils will be ready for English in totality by the end of Grade 7 or 8.

What we also need is a systems theory systemic approach to be used in our planning. This entails, for example, that we look at where we want to be in five or 10 years and then plan backwards to achieve this, including evaluative and assessment strategies to assess whether we are moving in the right direction.

Strategic planning is one thing, but what we need in sync with it is strategic management of the strategic planning.

Zimbabwean children seem to be performing well academically, even in the disarray state of their country. Maybe it is time that we start visiting our fellow African brothers and sisters, who in many cases might be worse off than us economically, and see how they get things educationally right.

A further final question that begs answers is: who is running the Education Department, the officials or the unions?

Andre du Plessis is an academic in the education field

