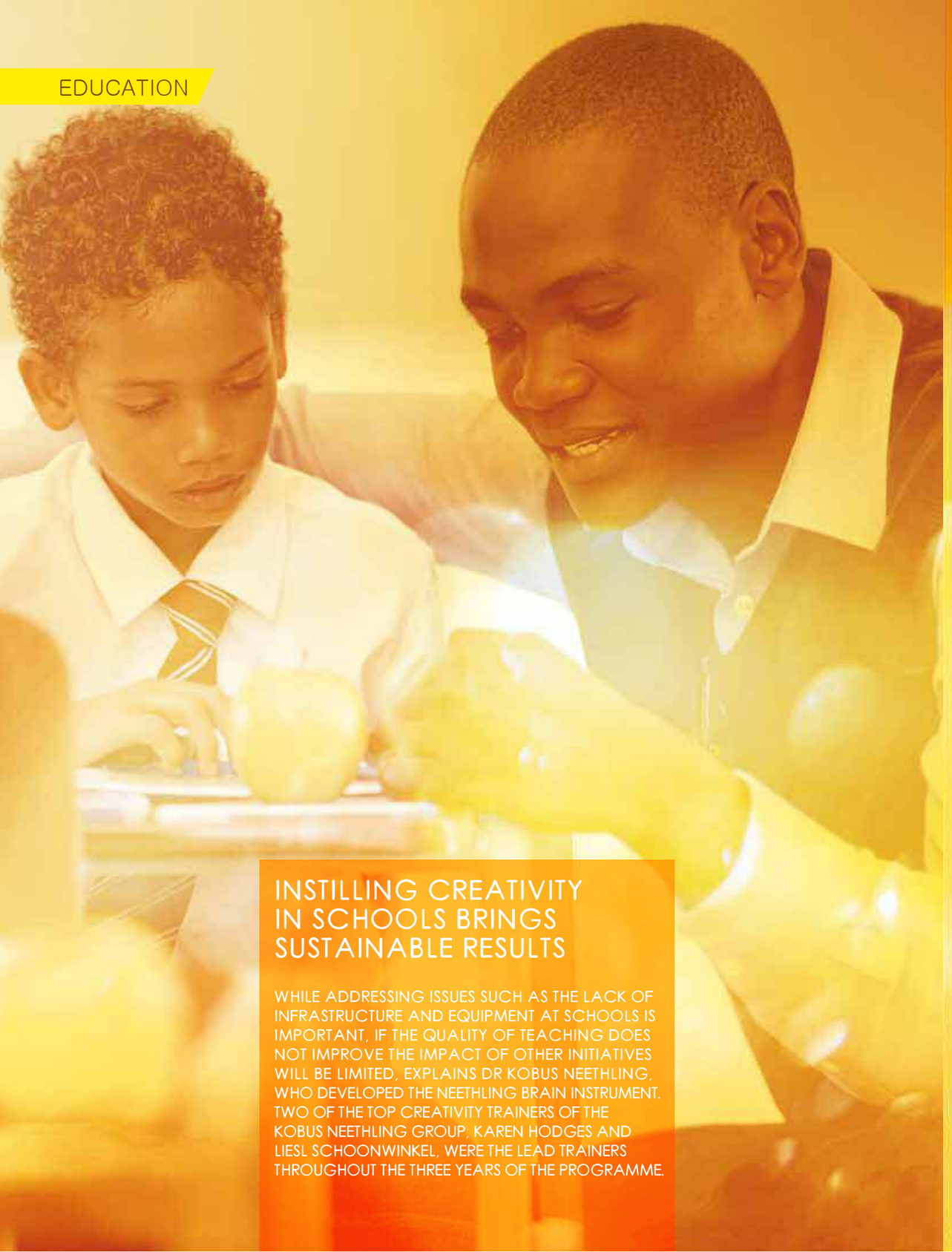

INSTILLING CREATIVITY IN SCHOOLS BRINGS SUSTAINABLE RESULTS

WHILE ADDRESSING ISSUES SUCH AS THE LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND EQUIPMENT AT SCHOOLS IS IMPORTANT, IF THE QUALITY OF TEACHING DOES NOT IMPROVE THE IMPACT OF OTHER INITIATIVES WILL BE LIMITED, EXPLAINS DR KOBUS NEETHLING, WHO DEVELOPED THE NEETHLING BRAIN INSTRUMENT. TWO OF THE TOP CREATIVITY TRAINERS OF THE KOBUS NEETHLING GROUP, KAREN HODGES AND LIESL SCHOONWINKEL, WERE THE LEAD TRAINERS THROUGHOUT THE THREE YEARS OF THE PROGRAMME.

"Badly trained teachers perpetuate the weak education system by not being able to teach the next generation. Traditional education, which is largely teaching by rote, has become outdated. Trying to focus on making that system better is like trying to improve yesterday," he says.

"We need a total revolution in education, with creativity and innovation at the core. Many schools maintain a strong sense of focus on achieving good matric results when they should be looking at how to uplift the entire culture of their organisations."

For the past nine years the South African Creativity Foundation, which has been in existence for more than 20 years, has been providing whole brain training in education to bring creativity and innovation into the organisational culture and the syllabi at schools.

The programme can be applied from pre-school up to high school level and at any given time. It is being taught in 15 previously disadvantaged schools nationwide, which is made possible through corporate sponsorship. The two phases are taught over two years, with each phase having six modules.

In the first phase educators are introduced to the four quadrants, and the two dimensions of each quadrant, of the brain. Individual profiling uncovers the quadrants they favour in terms of their thinking preferences. Then they are guided to assess their own code of conduct and approach to students, from encouragement to punishment, and learn how different thinking preferences have different impacts on learning and behaviour in the classroom.

The next step is learning how to create a whole-brain educational environment that facilitates learning for all thinking preferences. Training involves preparing and presenting whole-brain lessons for assessment by the facilitators. Strategies for creatively eliciting desired behaviour in students and applying discipline using a whole-brain approach are also explored.

"ENGAGING LEARNERS IN A WHOLE-BRAIN MANNER HAS HELPED THEM TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR EDUCATION AND ENHANCED THEIR ABILITY TO COMPREHEND AND ASSIMILATE KNOWLEDGE"

COWAN HIGH

Cowan High School, located in the mostly disadvantaged area of New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, has to battle many challenges that include a shortage of teachers, funding and equipment. The majority of learners are impoverished, and just manage to scrape through on their grandparents' pensions or child grants. Another challenge is that the learners come from a range of feeder schools so their levels diverge considerably.

Principal Trevor Dolley explains that the school took advantage of Nedbank's sponsorship.The training took place in 2011, 2012 and 2013. And the results have been dramatic. After the first year the matric pass rate went from 38%, to 48% to 73%, to 75.4%, largely due to the teachers becoming more effective.

The interactive style of the programme enabled the teachers to undergo a definite shift where they gained the capacity to apply a whole-brain approach that uses divergent teaching and learning methodologies to cater to a range of learners. The school does a baseline assessment of incoming students to identify their challenges and needs and now the teachers are equipped to adapt their approach according to those needs.

"Teachers are more actively engaged and use an array of methodologies to structure and present lessons and deal with problems in the classroom. They then monitor these approaches to assess which are working. Engaging learners in a whole-brain manner has helped them to take responsibility for their education and enhanced their ability to comprehend and assimilate knowledge," says Dolley.

To bring creativity into mathematics teachers divide the learners into groups and each group is given the same problem to solve. Then the teacher gets each group to explain what methodology they used to solve the problem so that the students are exposed to various ways of approaching a problem.

Many of the students have barriers to learning due to a combination of factors such as the lack of parental support that comes with living away from their biological parents in an impoverished community. In response, the teachers tailor an education approach for each individual to assist them with productively carrying out the tasks assigned. Teachers also come to school early and stay after hours to provide support to students who need it. •

Phase two explores the core characteristics of creativity and develops the capacity of educators to equip learners with the tools they need to become creative problem solvers and leaders. This involves actualising the concept of thinking above the line, where teachers learn how to maintain positive attitudes and thinking patterns. Then they can thrive as educators and be role models. One module takes participants through steps to help them with creative problem solving, where they learn to perceive challenges as opportunities.

Many learners face severe challenges in their daily lives and part of the programme takes them through a cultural change. “This move away from problem talk to opportunity talk empowers people to apply the whole brain not only to their education but also to relationships and problems they encounter in their communities.”

The journey doesn’t end there. Sustainability requires the further step of embedding this cultural change into the organisation and transforming the code of conduct into a value-based set of ethical principles. Techniques are applied to actual problems in the institution and to the operations and the style of management. This includes the functioning of task groups, teacher collaboration, and the format of cultural and sport activities.

“Adhering to sustainable principles requires making a choice but it is very difficult to get people to have a conversation about sustainability,” says Neethling. “In cases where educators have learnt creative approaches to teaching using the whole brain, the results have been extraordinary.” •

“THE MOVE AWAY FROM PROBLEM TALK TO OPPORTUNITY TALK EMPOWERS PEOPLE TO APPLY THE WHOLE BRAIN NOT ONLY TO THEIR EDUCATION BUT ALSO TO RELATIONSHIPS AND PROBLEMS THEY ENCOUNTER IN THEIR COMMUNITIES”

AFRICAN CREATIVITY CONFERENCE

The South African Creativity Foundation hosts the annual African Creativity Conference (ACRE). For the past eight years, the main ACRE conference has been preceded by the ACRE education conference, which is unique for its focus on creativity in education. Around 90% of the delegates are teachers from the poorest areas, requiring sponsorships to attend. Exposure to 30 or 40 of the top creativity teachers globally has been a life-changing experience for many of the delegates, with some having progressed to the extent of becoming presenters at the conference. •

HIGH SCHOOL TURNAROUND STRATEGY

Among the many initiatives to improve the output in South African schools is the High School Turnaround Strategy, which involves the Gauteng Department of Education partnering with industry and the private sector. Launched in March 2013, this strategy is being implemented in 41 technical high schools.

Companies have been involved in the upgrade of technology centres, introducing additional subjects at schools, and providing bursaries and apprenticeships for Grade 12 learners. The aim is to raise the level of technical training to industry standards and draw high-performing learners to these schools.

John Orr Technical High School is one of the schools now designated as a centre of excellence in maths, science and technology. This was made possible in 2011 through the partnering of the Department of Basic Education with the Sasol Inzalo Foundation, Imperial, and the Ukhamba Community Development Trust, as well as involving the Wits and Johannesburg universities. Imperial Holdings also puts an estimated 700 apprentices through its academies annually to become mechanics of various trades. •

PRACTITIONERS:
hosanna.ministries@protonmail.com
Yvonne Anker - Berglie: No. SA010-1267 - INT0401038EU
EMAIL: yanker-berglie@protonmail.com
www.hosanna-institutes.org