



Dear Parents,

FROM THE RECTOR

Parents who have undergone the process of applying for places in senior schools will be able to testify to the willingness that many schools display in accepting St Peter's pupils. Our Mission Statement includes the undertaking to prepare children for senior school and life beyond.

What follows below is the first part of an article I have written. It explains the thought and research devoted to the creation of the St Peter's curriculum and teaching methodology. We're dishing it up in small portions to make it easier to read.

St Peter's – the Difference ...

In June 2014, the province ordered Witkoppen Road widened from the Cambridge Rd intersection all the way up Witkoppen Rd to the entrance of St Peter's. As a consequence, this stretch of road was sometimes closed or opened only to a single lane of traffic. It took parents up to two hours to negotiate this stretch. Frustration amongst parents was at boiling point. Something had to be done.

Exco met on a Wednesday to address the situation and the following Monday, a mere two working days later, Rob Macaulay and Trish Attlee launched St Peter's first **Flexible Learning Programme (FLP)**. Online and hard copy work was provided to the pupils to allow them to work at home or partly at home and partly at school.



The pupil assignments were, however, not merely exercises to occupy them, but the culmination of years of research into the most effective teaching methods and a constant effort to have staff include these in their lesson planning. Over the years, teachers had gradually adopted certain aspects of this new philosophy, but, in all honesty, we could not say that every staff member was using all of it. It took a disaster to make this happen.

News of the programme spread rapidly and we were bombarded with requests from other schools to share our methodology. Groups of teachers visited and went home with sheaves of St Peter's documents; staff were invited to speak to many groups and Rob was requested to address the annual Conference of the Southern African Heads of Independent Schools Association (SAHISA).

During this time, a St Peter's parent dismissed the FLP with a comment along the lines of *it's only project learning, just as I had at school*.

Since so much thought, research and effort had been devoted to the creation of the FLP, the comment was widely shared amongst staff and still is to this day. It rankled. Many teachers were furious, especially since the results of the children's achievements and efforts astounded even us. The depth of thinking demonstrated, problem-solving ability and the speed at which learning took place went far beyond our expectations.

So what did St Peter's do differently to engage pupils so successfully and liberate their minds in a way that enabled them to learn more quickly and deeply?

We tried to explain to parents what we were doing and why we were doing it. We were only partially successful, however. The answer is a complex one and this article serves to provide a brief overview. Everything that St Peter's does is based on our fundamental belief that **intelligence is not an innate aptitude but a process.**

1. Intelligence is not fixed/we are not born with a fixed intelligence (IQ)

For thousands of years, humankind has viewed intelligence as a 'gift'. The mind was viewed as a 'blank slate' at birth which was gradually filled with knowledge as a consequence of one's experiences and interactions with those around them. Some were 'gifted' with greater intelligence than others. As the science of genetics evolved, intelligence was attributed to genes as well as the effect of the environment. This view again inferred that intelligence was inherited. More recently, Cognitive Psychologists, Ethologists, Neuroscientists and Evolutionary Biologists have produced evidence to show that environment plays a far bigger role than previously considered. The evolution of the concept of intelligence can be portrayed in the equations below:

- Intelligence = God-given
- Intelligence = genes (inherited) + environment
- Intelligence = genes x environment (Steven Pinker)

The 'early environment' therefore had great influence on future progress.

The effect of the **environment** on genes begins in the womb and continues after birth. Many people have difficulty in believing that DNA can be changed until we remind them of examples such as:

- The gender of crocodiles and alligators is determined by the temperature of the developing eggs. Incubation at 33°C produces mostly males, while incubation at 30°C produces mostly females in American alligators (the gender of hatchling turtles is affected in the same way).
- An increasing number of scientists now hold the view that the health benefits of the **Mediterranean Diet** are not so much a consequence of the nutritional value of high fibre and other components but rather about the effect on the Arteriosclerosis gene.
- In the US, Betty Hart and Todd Risley were at the forefront of educational research during the 1960s War on Poverty. The high-quality Early Intervention programme and the language skill expansion programme which they had developed proved unsuccessful. Frustrated, they embarked on a research programme to investigate children's exposure to language in professional, working class and families on welfare (state subsidies). Observations of each family were conducted from the time the child was 7 months until the age 3. The results were shocking.

Hart & Risley (1995)
"The 30 Million Word Gap"



Observers found that 86-98% of the words that children used were derived from the vocabularies of their parents. Most worrisome, was the number of words to which each child from the different socio-economic groups was exposed:

- Families on welfare (poor): 616 words/hour
- Working class families: 1251 words/hour
- Professional families: 2153 words/hour

When extrapolated, the deficit within the first four years of the life of these children was a 30-million-word difference.

In addition, professional families provided their children with far more words of praise than those from the lower income groups. The children of the low-income groups were exposed to 123 000 more words of discouragement than encouragement. Children from high-income, university educated families received 560 000 more words of praise as opposed to discouragement, an extraordinarily vast disparity.

In following up the progress of the children in the third grade, researchers found that the measure of accomplishment at age 3 was highly indicative of performance at the ages of 9 and 10.

To be continued...

Greg Royce

FROM THE JUNIOR PREP

THE GRADE 2 BOYS ARE BACK!





Despite the cold weather 46 of our Grade 2 boys returned to school on Wednesday morning. It was wonderful to welcome this group back into our building after such an extended period at home! The day went so well and I was extremely proud of our boys and how responsibly they managed social distancing and wearing their masks. The feedback from our Grade 2 boys at the end of the day was that they were very excited to be back and see their friends and teachers. They had a happy day and enjoyed the activities they completed. As for the teachers they feel like their buckets are being filled because the part they love most about what they do is their interaction with children.

All in all a great start to the return to school for everyone involved!

DISTRIBUTION OF HARD PACKS

The hard packs for Grades 0, 1 and the Grade 2 boys who have not returned to school, will take place on **Saturday, 20 June from 9:00 to 11:00 in the Chapel Car Park**. Please do collect the activities for the week 22 to 26 June 2020.

HALF TERM

The Grade 2 boys will close at 12:15 on **Friday, 26 June** and Grade 0 to 2 boys will return to school on **Monday, 06 July: Grade 2: 8:00, Grades 0 & 1: 8:15.**

FATHER'S DAY

I would like to take this opportunity to wish our dads a very special day on Sunday – I hope your families spoil you! I just love this quote about fathers:

*"When you are young you think your dad is superman.
When you grow up, you realise he is a regular guy who wears a cape!"*
- Dave Attell

Unfortunately I will be having surgery on my knee and will not be at school next week, but I hope our boys continue to enjoy their learning for the week before a well-deserved Half Term Break. Stay warm and keep safe!

Warm regards,
Kenda Melvill-Smith

DIVERSITY: AFRICA DAY AND YOUTH MONTH

Africa Day on 25 May was a celebration and acknowledgement of African solidarity, unity in diversity, creativity, challenges and successes. The day gave us a chance to reflect on the progress that Africa has made, while also coming together to find solutions to the challenges that we face on the continent.

This year's theme for Agenda 2063 was "Silencing the Guns", a plan that aims to end all wars, civil conflicts, gender-based violence, violent conflicts and preventing genocide AND "Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development and Intensifying the Fight against the COVID-19 Pandemic".



June is also **Youth Month**. This year marks 44 years since the uprising in which many children lost their lives while standing up against a system that sought to strip them of their identity and break their spirit. This year's theme is "Youth Power: Growing South Africa together in the period of COVID-19".

All citizens have to play their role in fighting the pandemic but it is sad that our energy, particularly that of the youth, is being hijacked by social injustice and loss of lives either perpetrated by ordinary civilians, governments or law-enforcement agencies, nationally and internationally.

A call is being made for us to use Africa Day and Youth Month to lead by example, reflect, reconnect and recommit ourselves in support of all positive interventions to develop a united South Africa, Africa and a better world.

Our responsibility is to treat each other with respect and dignity regardless of race, country of origin or beliefs. We need to strive to promote and create an equal-opportunity society for all.

If we stand together as one against the 'health' and the 'social' war, we can instill a sense of pride and confidence in our youth to overcome the stresses of the pandemic, focus on their needs and create a happier and safer environment for them, and us!

**CHILDREN USING PRIVATE TRANSPORT COMPANIES**

We are aware that some parents use the services of transport vendors or au pairs. If you do, kindly note, in terms of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act no 57 of 2002), bus services, taxi services, e-hailing services and private vehicles shall not carry more than the licensed capacity and all directives regarding hygienic conditions and the limitation of exposure to COVID -19 must be adhered to.

Please also inform all operators that they must ensure that public transport vehicles are cleaned and disinfected before picking up and after dropping off pupils, that door and window handles, armrests, handrails and seats are cleaned/wiped with a disinfectant before picking up and after dropping off pupils. Passengers must wear a mask and sanitise their hands before getting in, using the provided hand sanitisers with a minimum of 60% alcohol content. Our security team will monitor transport vendors and au pairs. We are confident that they, like our parents and staff, will also observe the Schools protocols.

Vijay Maharaj (Deputy Head: Campus Compliance)

FOOD DRIVE: Feeding Diepsloot

A huge **Thank You** to all our families, we have raised R36 500 and collected numerous food items.

We are helping to feed the children of Diepsloot! The need is dire and we hope to continue with our assistance to make a small difference.

To Help:

1. Any non-perishable food item: cans of food and staples, collection point Chapel Car Park. From Monday onwards, these will be placed at various entry points.
2. Cash donations: please deposit into:
St Peter's Foundation
Standard Bank
Acc: 422 057 533
(Section A18 tax certificates can be issued).
3. **Second-hand clothes:** this will be for our own community.

Thank you

Monica Sloane and Father Richard

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!