

REFLECTIONS ON THE WORK DONE AT CHARLES DUNA PRIMARY

1998 - 2018



SUME NOMBULELO (PRINCIPAL)

I became the principal of Charles Duna Primary in July 1998. The departmental official never informed me about my appointment. She came to my previous school and took me to Charles Duna. I was warmly welcomed by the SGB chairperson who took me class to class for introductions to staff members.

My first two weeks were eventful; a teacher that was on a long capacity leave died and during her funeral the ex- principal pronounced that “in five years Charles Duna will be extinct just like all the other old schools, due to democratic appointments”. (Apparently she did not get along with the community structures and the SGB as they refused to back her choice of successor.)

My Observations

- During my first SMT meeting, I could pick up tensions amongst the SMT, staff and SGB
- Learners were not wearing uniform, they looked untidy
- The administration block and school yard were not so clean, a totally different picture to my recollection of the school as I am an alumni
- Classrooms were not well resourced
- The school was Quintile 4, Section 20 with an allocation of R5 Per learner.
- HIV/ AIDS related death of learners, parents and staff.
- Poverty and TB including MDR
- Only sporting codes played were soccer, rugby and netball
- Minimal parental support

My pledge / vision

During my meetings with all stakeholders, I pleaded for their support and teamwork so that we can be able to strive for ‘Ex Model C standards’

My Vision: To provide quality Education to the poverty stricken masses of our Black learners so that they can change the trajectory of their families and community. With the political fever still high during my appointment as principal, convincing internal and external stakeholders to support was not that difficult. I have received a fair share of negative responses but I have never allowed them to deter me from soldiering on.

Learners’ home context

Within the first week, a learner got ill and I had to take him home. He lived in Chris Hani Informal Settlement. The house was neat, both parents were at home but there was only a one room house with the kitchen and bedroom area divided by a curtain!

That was an eye opener and I sat with the Admission book for 3 months looking at the home addresses and employment information. I encouraged parents to give as much information as possible so that we can better understand our learners’ home situations.



IMPROVEMENT / INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

1. SCHOOL CULTURE

School environment

By the end of December 1998, the staff had sewn new curtains for the administration block! We bought a Television set and a VCR, a resource that the Foundation Phase to be used at the staffroom as all the classrooms did not have electricity.

In all our parents meetings, I encouraged parents to ensure that learners are kept clean and must invest in the education of their kids. I would use anecdotes from my own life as I come from poverty too but my parents would sacrifice most things and prioritized our education.

Planning for 1999 included periods ending at 12 on Fridays and all classes cleaned the classrooms and school yard. There is one outstanding teacher, Miss Daka who used her own money to plant trees and grass even during weekends and holidays. She would have goodies at the end of the term for the boys that helped to take care of the plants.

All classes after break had a time table to pick up litter and during assembly anti littering talks still continue.

Community environment

We had a very successful clean-up of the Vuku area with the municipality, community, learners and other environmental departments. In one of my home visits I saw two small kids playing in a pile of trash with cows foraging in the trash.

I wrote letters to ALL households in that area and requested a community meeting.

My agenda was why they were allowing themselves to live in filth. When they informed me that they did not receive any service delivery from the municipality, I requested meetings with the managers as I needed people who could take decisions. With the councillor's cooperation, I received all the names and contact numbers of the different stakeholders.

I was surprised by their positive response and the clean-up was a success but could not be sustained due to lack of service delivery.

The wetland that we were also targeting was rehabilitated and still looks beautiful.

(Grade 6 curriculum has wetlands so schools can take learners to see what it looks like)

Late coming and absenteeism

I also focused on learner late coming and absenteeism. Educators took daily statistics of Late-comers and parents had to come in and account. Learners from Motherwell and KwaNoxolo (mid-year relocations) that are using the bus as well as those that walk longer distances are pardoned.

From the onset, it was and still is non-negotiable for teachers to be late or absent without a valid reason.

Those that work during weekends and holidays bank their hours/ days, they sign leave forms that are kept at school for accounting purposes

Control of work by heads of department was a norm; the only concern was quality teaching and learning.

Building healthy relationships

Educator fights and disagreements compelled me to approach PCRD, an NGO dealing with Conflict Resolution to help with team building. (1999 – 2001)

Weekly, once a week for 5 years we had workshops for staff members. The exercises included:

- ❑ Trust and team work- blindfolding the team leader and others had to guide him/her with clear instructions.
- ❑ SWOT analysis
- ❑ Vision and Mission
- ❑ Strategic planning
- ❑ Fundraising and financial management
- ❑ Crafting policies

We used the skills learnt from PCRD saw the school undertaking a fundraising event by the end of 1999. We had a bazaar that raised R10 000 and bought 6 sewing machines. The aim was to start a craft project that would benefit both parents and the school. Parents and teachers taught sewing, knitting and beading to learners. Neighbouring churches and community members were our target market. Proceeds bought classroom needs.

School values

An exercise by the Kobus Neethling Foundation saw the school giving staff and SGB deciding on school values. On reflection about this exercise now is the voice of the learners as they were never consulted but were involved in painting them on the wall. The good that came out is our monthly 'Hero' awards. Learners are given certificates for honesty during assembly, this resulted in less theft of other learners stuff. An incentive of R100 is sponsored by our partner, Pick n Pay

Boy/ Girl talks and address by the Police forum are some of the programs that help to modify behaviour. Next year we are focusing on drug abuse. Mrs Whittaker, an experienced drug rehabilitator will be conducting workshops for parents and community members plagued by drug use in their homes. Our community is under threat due to high numbers of kids addicted to drugs especially when they get to high school. Crime is getting out of hand. For our school, the aim of the program is to prevent our learners from becoming victims of drug abuse and crime.

We joined the GMSA Foundation's Peace Promoting School program. Teachers were trained on Peer education and Peace promotion. The program gave birth to our first school leaders.

The employment of Learner Support Agents by the Department helps learners to have a confidant closer to them by age and sees to their personal challenges.

My long service in this department has taught me to be proactive rather than reactive.

2. FUNDRAISING

A partnership (from 1999 to date) with Anthea Hyde, the owner of 5th Avenue Beach House, (B&B) introduced us to housewives of International managers from Johnson Control. Through these ladies, the parents, staff and learners were skilled on pottery, fabric painting, card making, mosaic, wine bags, Xmas decorations, table mats and aprons. This initiative culminated in a partnership with two schools from Malibu, USA and Battle Primary in London. All our learners knitted blankets, scarves and binnies that were donated to an old age home in Zwile. The owner of a knitting foundation in Los Angeles paid for my expenses to collect the blankets personally to both schools. I got a chance to chat about curriculum issues and form partnerships. The teacher that hosted me in London visited Charles Duna in 2015 and I returned the favour. She held a birthday fundraiser and donated R5000 towards a mat and bean bags for the reading corner at our library.

The media attention the school was getting because of the craft program got alumni, Dr Sipho Pityana interested in supporting the school. He visited, grilled me on my vision and school needs and when he was satisfied that I was "genuine", he pledged his support. He was instrumental in getting Aberdare Cables in sponsoring the new administration block. During the handover of the new admin block on 25 November 2005, Dr Pityana invited Mr Enver Surty to handover the building. I usurped the opportunity and asked him in front of all the parents that attended the function if the poor learners did not have any right to have electricity in their classrooms as they had to use candles when it's overcast. By the end of December 2005 the department put in electricity in all our classrooms!

IN 2007, Dr Pityana registered a Trust fund in the schools name and delegated his family member to ensure the schools focus on Literacy, Mathematics, Science and Teacher Awards were supported. Complications with the non- availability of board members and dictating rather than being guided by school needs curtailed the operations of the trust fund, after

only two years there was a lull. Currently the SGB is working on getting the old trustees to resign so that the school can get revenue through tourists and companies that can get a tax exemption certificate.

Anthea Hyde introduced me to Paul Miedema, the owner of Calabash Tours. We were looking at selling our craft to tourist but the idea of Charles Duna becoming a tourism tea stop/ township tour destination was birthed! We host tourists, serve drinks and rooster brood at a cost of R35 per person. When cruise ships come to our shores, they are requested to donate stationery to the school. We augment the insufficient resources we get from the Department of Education. Even though we are currently Quintile 3 and a No Fee school (SINCE 2013), funding is never enough. I still have to service current partners and form new ones. My belief is that we cannot wait for government to deliver as we will be failing the thousands of learners coming through our gates.

3. FEEDING SCHEME – addressing poverty and diseases

When I joined the school, there was high absenteeism, parents and learners were dying due to HIV/AIDS and TB. I developed a culture where staff or myself would do home visits when learners were serial absentees. I came face to face in one household during my morning visits with the smell of TB. I formed partnerships with the two neighbouring clinics. We got learners tested for TB (with the permission of parents) especially when a classmate had TB. I remember that we used to bury a learner yearly through HIV/AIDS. Through donations, we would buy E-Pap (has 19 nutrients). It was quite expensive and ALL learners received a table spoon of porridge which did not bode well as they expected a bowl to address their hunger pangs. Daily we educated the learners on how the porridge was helping them to be 'intelligent' and healthy. Currently, absenteeism is minimal. Woolworths donated R121 000 towards the renovation of the old administration block into a kitchen.

With parents we started the vegetable garden. Learners that were interested in gardening were given plots. The proceeds from the garden were sold to generate income for the parents and cooking for learners. I would go out and scout for food donations. ABC trust was out biggest supporter.

The University of Pretoria came on board and our focus was de-stigmatising HIV/AIDS in the community, nutrition education, support groups, give hope, living good memories for the kids by creating memory boxes with letters and photos so that the parents can keep in touch beyond the grave! 2006 was the last year we buried any of our kids through HIV/AIDS.

Our partnership with the university still continues. The garden project led to numerous colloquiums where schools are sharing best practices. The parents and school have won several food garden awards, recent ones: in 2017 - R80 000 obstacle course from INMED, 2018 - EC winners from Nestle - R15 000 and Woolworths Permaculture competition in Johannesburg R7 500.

The learners have planted vegetables in two homes already that are on the school's wellness list. In 2019, we intend to start Aquaponics. Five parents and the school plan to start a business, selling vegetables to schools including our school nutrition.

We formed a partnership with the Department of Agriculture. My intention is to get funding for the learners who are interested in studying farming to get bursaries. In meetings when the officials visit, I am planting the seed!

The Department of Forestry will be planting fruit trees before the schools close. I have requested them to also plan Moringa trees as the dried leaves are used to boost the immune system. The Moringa products are popular in Johannesburg. The aim is to plant the trees along the fence so that community members can have access for free. The school won a Nutrition award in 2015

4. Water and Infrastructure challenges

The school was built in 1962 so there are infrastructure challenges. 'Low pressure' as the Departments' technical section described it resulted in blocked toilets as there was never enough water for flushing. The challenge was known but there were no funds for new bigger water pipes. By 2005 only a trickle came out of our taps and later that year the taps dried out. I was told to release learners at 11 am daily. When two months passed with no solution, I held meeting with parents and requested them to support my plan. Learners were to bring their own drinking water; I got permission from the manager of the neighbouring community hall to hook up a hose pipe from their tap and 80 parents filled 25l buckets and manually flushed the toilets. (27 of those parents are still volunteers at the school)

My plan was not well received by some staff members and they wanted the parents to Toyi- toyi. I had a different view. It is difficult to control mobs, criminals join in and do more damage than good, in all protest actions buildings get trashed or burnt. I allowed educators who wanted to relieve themselves at the community hall to do so. Unions were informed but they never did anything. My focus was ensuring that learners were taught and the syllabus completed to guard against gaps that would later on lead to dropouts.

Leaving the school at 11 would mean they would not finish the syllabus.

An invitation by the University of Pretoria to speak about the work done at Charles Duna led to a meeting with a manager from Coca cola. Vukani was excited to help as the company had a project of getting water and sanitation to schools. It was surprising to know they were working with the department and we were not on their list. July 2013, our taps had water and toilets were renovated! The consultants that were investigating the challenge noted how clean the toilets were despite our water challenges. I am forever grateful to the parents for their unwavering support. Six months into the parents' volunteering, I applied to the municipality for their stipend through the EPWP project. They have been paid from 2006 to date.

During the handover function, not a single Departmental official attended. The school is still battling flooding as there is no storm-water drain. Promises of Grade R classes and the storm

water drain are not forthcoming. Parents renovated old toilets into Grade R classes and our 4 practitioners are paid by the SGB.

5. CURRICULUM INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT

The Child at the Centre” is constantly my message to both staff and parents. Whenever there are challenges I use the phrase to refocus our decisions and actions. The example of my parents who would start buying school needs in December when other parents were concentrating on clothes and fun activities. My mother had wisdom that I cherish and use to motivate the young parents.

I brought the culture of Analysing learner results quarterly. Teachers have to submit intervention strategies. Monitoring the quality of tests, exam papers and scripts uncovered a lot of discrepancies. The failure rate became higher each year. Fortunately we had a qualified remedial teacher and I negotiated with staff to relieve her of normal teaching so that she can concentrate on learners with barriers only. Mrs Mbewana worked well with the Education Psychologists, Mr Sipho Williams, Miss Nonqaba Mabece, Mrs Jenny Jansen and Mrs Townsend but after they left for greener pastures, there has been no black psychologist for years. The Department would place the learners referred for assessment to Luthando Luvuyo Special School without them being assessed. This angered parents and refused to sign referral forms. We were stuck with large numbers of learners with special educational needs. Miss Mbewana retired at 60 and we were back to square one.

I was open about our challenges and declared them to the officials as a result in 2009, the Department granted 14 posts. My EDO discouraged me from employing all 14. I informed staff members and requested their support as they would be two in some classes. I got a chance to have Mathematics, Science, English and three remedial educators including Mrs Mbewana who taught until age 65. We have recruited a remedial teacher this year so in 2019 we will have the remedial class again. The aim is to sort learner academic challenges within the Foundation Phase.

In 2000, I approached the READ Education Trust to do capacity building workshops for our language educators. They donated book boxes for all our classes. All staff members were expected to do reading daily with their register class from 8h00 to 8h30. By the time READ pulled out in 2003, there was a significant improvement in learner results.

The school became a member of Active schools in 2007. The aim was school improvement, sharing best practices and fundraising for joint programs. In our meetings we held each other accountable for the implementation of the organisation’s programs. One of the highlights for me was the partnership with PEER International. Joanne and her team from the USA did literacy workshops. I was introduced to baseline test, a practice that we still do to date from grade R to 4. Assessing learner reading abilities to

determine at which age they are reading was valuable information in planning for intervention. Getting teachers to be fully committed was a struggle as they saw the program as additional work. Those that embraced it benefited from the strategies. When the Nelson Mandela University introduced the concept of a community network of schools, Active schools disbanded and we became a member of Manyano Network of Community Schools under the mentorship of the Centre for Community Schools.

A donation of R1000 000 by the Mott foundation and The Learning Trust brought much needed interventions in our schools. Commitment into programs is a challenge though.

Focus on literacy saw the school creating a library to encourage reading for fun, a discrete place to give one on one time to learners experiencing reading challenges and allocation of periods for classes to go to the library. The SGB is paying a parent that has been trained by Debby, a librarian who relocated from Durban. Books came from schools in England, Kay Benjamin's family from the USA, Engen Garage in New Brighton and individual community members. We do not have enough Xhosa books. An idea that I am implementing is the use of grannies to tell stories to learners who type and bind them into books. We have started with two grannies and hope to inspire more to join in 2019. The books will be placed in all class reading corners.

The voice and tangible contribution to curriculum programs by parents is missing. They are called when learners are misbehaving, reporting on learner progress and during school activities.

Computer literacy is another program that started as early as 2000 when people were getting rid of their computers due to the threat of the 'millennium bug'. I managed to get 15 computers and had to install electricity to a classroom closest to the office. Technical Section was not happy at all with me but that never stopped us from having our first computer lesson in 2001. The excitement of the learners and parents was worth all the hassle. A donation of more computers came from Active Schools. When I meet ex-learners, they always remember their time in the computer lab with Mr Dolonga who was our technology 'guru'

The new computers were donated by a tourist from the USA and Anglo Ashanti Gold through

Dr Pityana. Due to crime, they were initially put in cages until we beefed up our roof, windows, and entrance, alarm and security cameras. In twenty years, only four computer were stolen from our lab. With the help of our German volunteers, Grade 4 – 7 have computer classes.

A former NMU lecturer, Prof Ron was instrumental in organising Wi-Fi for the lab.

For Life Orientation, I have introduced the learners to research, summary and power point presentation. Less contact and more independent learning gave them more confidence even though in term one they were battling.

A partnership with Lauren Stretch, owner of Early Inspiration helped in training our 4 Grade R practitioners, 7 parents and I approached all my feeder creches and their practitioners have level 4 ECD training too free of charge. The school continues to provide work place internship for community youth who register with Early Inspiration. The quality of learners coming from our creches into Grade R has improved. Our Education Pipe Line will be fully realised when I can get the feeder High schools into the Manyano Network.

6. Educator capacity building

With curriculum changes and lack of proper in-service training by the employer, different qualifications among staff members and low moral compelled the SMT to look for partners in teaching and learning strategies for staff.

Kobus Neethling Foundations introduced the 'Creativity, Beyond' program. Once per term from 2012 to 2016. The key focus was on differentiated planning to cater for all learning styles, creativity in planning engaging lessons, allowing learner voice in their learning space and motivational Ted Talks. Annually two teachers attended the Creativity Conference in Bela - Bela.

Even though we are not part of the program anymore, we get an invitation to attend the conference. Mr Hlulani, our only male attended and came back energised. I have introduced neighbouring schools, Stephen Mazungula and Pendla Primary to the program.

I believe in sharing with other principals so that all our schools can produce quality learners. I am not ashamed too to ask for help from all the principals I work with. We are not in competition but must complement each other.

The Zenex Foundation focuses on literacy education in the Foundation Phase. It started from 2013 to 2018. The training of HODs on coaching, holding productive meetings (Grow model) and how to give feedback. As principal I get a briefing on progress from the mentor fortnightly when she does individual mentorship visits. The use of DDD Dashboard and computers for planning is encouraged. Edefundi program started from 2014 to 2018 with a focus on classroom management, double planning and discipline techniques. 6 educators are mentored per year. I have requested an extension so that the new teachers can benefit.

7. Parent capacity building

For the school to get maximum support from parents, one must give support, educate, treat them well and do justice in teaching their kids.

I acknowledge that without the intervention and support of the following organisations, we would never be able to support our parents and community through their daily struggles:

FAMSA conducts parenting, divorce/ separation coping strategies and attend to learner home challenges.

ACVV and NMU Social Work Department are giving a much needed service to the learners and their families.

The Department of Social Development donates uniforms to needy parents
Nedbank donates blankets during their winter drive, school uniforms beginning of the year and Xmas presents

Remax New Brighton is our current sponsor for the Xmas party organised by our LSAs for orphaned and vulnerable learners

Nankumntwana, Adopt a Learning Child, a brainchild of two young women who wanted to make a difference in our communities, organised individuals and families to "Adopt" a child by providing their educational needs from primary to Grade 12. Some of the learners they started with are doing 2nd year at NMU. The program has been duplicated in two schools.

Coega IDZ who trusted me to scout for youth who wanted to do Learner license and skills workshops with possibilities for employment. We have to address challenges facing our communities

8. Sport / Extra-curricular activities

Wednesdays are dedicated to sport and extracurricular activities but the learners play daily even beyond 3 o'clock. The trophies at the office are a testament of the success of our sporting programmes.

Netball – for 2019 a learner received a full scholarship at Collegiate High

2 girls have also scholarships at Alexander Road for 2019

Our school has opened its doors and resources to Hope for kids Academy to use the field for training and camps during weekends. This program rescued one of our girls from drugs.

Soccer, Chess and Handball - learners have adorned Provincial and National colours.

8 (4 boys and 4 girls) of the first group we started handball with are playing for the National team. One of them, Jamza has started his own development club. Mr Hlulani was trained in Germany on Sport Administration. This training led him to study Sport management at NMU.

The first March and Drill team was made up of learners with behaviour challenges. The learners are trained by SAPS New Brighton. Within a month, the learners were disciplined! From 2014 they have been representing our province in Cape Town.

Rugby is not doing that well due to lack of strong coaches. In June this year, they took part in Private schools rugby tournament. The experience and environment at Woodridge College was a motivator for the boys. Daily they practise after school and have sourced an ex learner to help them.

Young Entrepreneurs program had a great impact on the learners and their families. The craft they sell to markets has generated income that was used to buy groceries at home, some have saved their money and others bought clothes. The learners have R5 000 saved in school coffers for 2019 capital.

We have a partnership with a German organisation. We receive two volunteers that help with physical education for all learners at the school. With the volunteers we are creating a swimming team. Water challenges are hampering our plans as the Kwazakhele pool is closed.

The offering of so many codes addresses diverse interests of our learners

Collating these memories, I am in awe of the work we have been able to achieve as staff and parents. It was never easy. One has to be courageous and be able to take unpopular decisions. Currently the SGB and I are refusing to permanently employ a temporary educator who resigned in 2016 but did not have any positive contribution during the 9 months at our school, Grade 4 has 19 Xhosa failures and my stance is known by all that we need young educators we can mentor to take over when we retire. The department as the employer can override our recommendation. Some staff members are supporting the teacher. This shows that with all the training and workshops they have been exposed to, emotions take over and they are willing to sacrifice quality teaching and learning.

I believe in Servant Leadership. I constantly pray for humility and wisdom to treat people kindly and have the discernment to pick my battles. (Emotional intelligence)

When requesting staff to do a task or new project, I am hands on so that they know I will never require them to do something I would not do myself. Working with older more sceptical staff has taught me never to wait for full participation or cooperation, once the wagon is rolling, more people join in.

1000 learners' future rests in our hands. As the captain of the ship, I have to steer them to greener and positive pastures Black kids cannot continue to be disadvantaged with us at the helm.

My resilient spirit and passion for Education carried me through the tough times. As my chapter is closing at the school, I know my hands are clean, I have done my best. God has been blessing me with guidance and protection.