



Schools Improvement Initiative (SII)

General Briefing Document 1

July 2019

Introduction

The SII was established in 2012 as a vehicle for extending UCT's engagement in schooling to help address the current crisis in education. The Initiative articulates closely with the university's strategy to improve public schooling and to address the under-representation of Khayelitsha learners at UCT.

As a university-school-community partnership, the SII engages in whole-school development at the level of *leadership and management* as well as at the level of *teacher professional development*. More broadly the SII seeks to create *enabling environments* within the schools for teaching and learning through a range of programmes and interventions. To help achieve this, the SII collaborates with various departments and faculties within the university. Interdisciplinary collaboration enables students from across the institution to be placed in the SII partner schools for the duration of their practice learning blocks (see Briefing Document 3). This includes students from the School of Education; the Faculty of Health Sciences (Occupational Therapy; Audiology and Speech and Language Pathology) as well as from Social Work; Information Systems; School of Architecture and the Drama Department. Underpinning the SII's work is therefore its interdisciplinary approach and its commitment to context driven community-based partnerships.

The SII works in five schools in Khayelitsha, three primary and two secondary schools¹. In 2018, the total enrolment in the five SII partner schools was just under 5 400 learners.

The work of the SII is operationalised through its four objectives (below), all of which seek to extend the SII's model of engagement beyond the provision of services towards partnership and reciprocity. Partnerships built on reciprocity implies that the key stakeholders, namely the SII and the partner schools have participated in planning, implementation and monitoring the interventions - and it is through this collaborative approach that engagement between the SII and the partner schools is open, generative and multi-directional.

Objective 1: Teacher Professional and School Organisational Development

The SII draws on the expertise of the Schools Development Unit (SDU) in the School of Education to deliver teacher professional and school organisational development in the five partner schools. The *modus operandi* of the SDU is a combination of university-

¹ Three primary schools: Ummangaliso, Sivuyiseni & Intshayelelo. Two secondary schools: Usasazo and The Centre of Science and Technology (COSAT).



approved professional development courses and formal qualifications² backed up by school-based support. This model of engagement allows SDU staff to address issues of course and curriculum implementation in the classroom.

1.1 Leadership and management

In addition to mentoring of the school principals, support is offered to the School Management Teams (SMTs). At both the level of leadership and management, success is measured against individual targets that are set by the principals and SMTs and are determined by the needs of the particular school. Areas for development broadly include planning, monitoring of the curriculum and monitoring of governance and systems. Individual action plans are informed by the nine focus areas for whole-school development, as outlined in the Whole-School Evaluation Policy³.

Deputy principals and Heads of Department (HODs): the SII offers support to school middle management in monitoring the curriculum as this has been identified by the Initiative as the critical link between governance and systems on the one hand, and classroom-based teaching and learning on the other. Building SMT's capacity in this regard is a key focus of the SII's work⁴.

Principals' Community of Practice (COP): in supporting the principals, deputies and HODs the SII has found greater effectiveness in working in communities of practice (COP) rather than at an individual level only. The SII 'Principals' COP' comprising all five partner principals was initially constituted in 2015 and continues to meet with an external facilitator every two months. Individual challenges identified through the COP are then followed up on in separate meetings with individual principals. The scaffolded approach in mentoring school principals through the COP has been documented by Wylie and Silbert (2018) in a book chapter in 2018 and was presented in a paper delivered at the 2017 SAERA conference (see below).

1.2 Outcomes at the level of the classroom

Secondary schools

Education specialists from the SDU offer classroom-based support in the areas of Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences and English First additional Language (FAL). School-based support is structured and organised according to the needs of the

² The SDU currently has registered four Advanced Certificate in Teaching (ACTs) covering: Foundation Phase (Mathematics & Language); Intermediate Phase (Mathematics & Language); Senior Phase Sciences and Senior Phase Mathematics.

³ These include the following: Basic functionality of the school; Leadership, management and communication; Governance and relationships; Quality of teaching and learning and educator development; Curriculum provision and resources; Learner achievement; School safety, security and discipline; School infrastructure & Parents and the community.

⁴ Success is being measured according to the following areas: frequency of meetings; curriculum management; submission and moderation of Performance Assessment Tasks; quality of assessment and moderation of learners' work; curriculum planning, pacing and coverage.



individual teachers and frequently takes place in conjunction with the delivery of university-approved short courses.

Primary Schools

As in the secondary schools, professional development is offered in response to teachers' needs. Once again this takes place mainly in the areas of Mathematics, Natural Sciences and English FAL. As the SDU is also responsible for delivering implementation support for the Western Cape Education Department's (WCED) R-Maths project, the SII provides support to Grade R teachers in the partner primary schools.

Objective 2: Professional Practice Schools (PPS)

The SII partner schools in Khayelitsha are regarded as professional practice sites where reciprocal links with the university are maintained. The following university departments participate in this aspect of the SII's work:

Humanities

- School of Education: post-graduate (PGCE) student teachers undertake their teaching practice in the partner schools.
- Social Development: third and fourth-year Social Work students are placed at four of the schools (see Briefing Document: Schools Wellness Centre).

Health Sciences

- Occupational Therapy (OT): fourth-year students undertake the practical component of their qualification in the partner schools in two divisions: Community Development Practice and Child, Learning, Development and Play
- Speech and Language Therapy: fourth-year students: Community Development Practice
- Audiology: second-year students undertake screening of Grade Foundation Phase learners.

In total, over one hundred students from across the university were placed in the SII's partner schools during the past two years. The details and impact of this work has been published in a number of chapters in the book *Partnerships in Action: University-School-Community* (Silbert, Galvaan & Clark, 2018).

Objective 3: Broader university engagement

Directly linked to Objective 2 above, is the increasing level of student engagement by university-based social responsiveness initiatives and programmes in the SII partner schools. UCT's student volunteer organisations that are currently active in the SII partner schools are listed below:

- Ubunye: UCT-based student volunteerism organisation. The student volunteer programmes, 'TeachOut' (a learner tutoring programme offered to Grade 8 & 9 learners) and 'Inkanyezi' (a life skills and career guidance programme offered to Grade 11s) are two of Ubunye's three programmes operational at *Usasazo*.



- LAWCO: the law division of SHAWCO engages with Grade 10 & 11 learners at *COSAT* and *Usasazo*. Their community engagement placements take place weekly for the duration of the academic year, focusing on the constitution and human rights education.
- Through the UCT Knowledge Co-op, a group of HOCIP students (Honours Outreach and Community Involvement Programme) complete their mandatory thirty hours of community service each year, teaching basic computer literacy to Grade 11 learners at *Usasazo*.
- SHAWCO Health & Rehabilitation is responsible for implementing an annual screening initiative involving all Grade R's at *Intshayelelo*. In 2016 and 2017 an average of 60 UCT students and the same number of learners participated each year in this activity. Children presenting with learning problems are then followed up with interventions offered by the fourth year Occupational Therapy students who are placed at the same school for their seven-week rotational professional practice blocks.

Objective 4: External engagements

The close collaboration with stakeholders including Metropole East Education District (MEED) officials, responsible for the delivery of schooling in Khayelitsha signals a recognition that the improvement of the quality of educational provision requires the co-operation and involvement of all those involved in education in this community. In addition to the close collaboration with MEED, the SII supports partnerships with education-based groupings outside of the university, as outlined below:

4.1 Library Project (see Briefing Document 7)

Each of the five SII schools has a fully functional library with a full-time Library Assistant, responsible for the daily functioning of the library. The Library Assistants receive a monthly stipend paid in full by the school. Library Assistants are supported by the SII in collaboration with The Bookery (external partner).

The aim of the SII Library Project is to support the improvement of language and literacy in the partner schools. The success of the libraries is measured according to the following objectives: usage of the library by all classes in the school; amount of reading taking place across the grades; involvement of the library assistants in reading-related programmes; involvement of teachers in the use of the library; links with other libraries (school and public) and integration of the library into the daily practice of the school.

The daily operation of the libraries is documented through data submitted by the Library Assistants in the form of monthly reports. Training, offered to the Library Assistants on average four times per year is conducted by The Bookery, and monthly support meetings take place in the form of a community of practice which is extended beyond the SII partner schools to include Library Assistants attached to all Bookery schools. The SII is integrally involved in the training of all Bookery Library Assistants.



To support the SII Library Project, the SII initiated the Library and Language Partnership (LLP) in 2014. The LLP comprises a group of partners based within and outside of the university, who's work focuses on literacy in under-resourced schools. Partners include the SII; Rotary; The Bookery; Nal'ibali; School Aid UK; Read SA and EDULIS (Education Library and Information Service) of the Western Cape Education Department. The LLP meets on a quarterly basis with the aim of channeling library-related expertise into the school libraries.

4.2 Schools Wellbeing Centre (SWC) (see Briefing Document 6)

Launched in January 2016 as a pilot project at COSAT, the SWC was established after ongoing consultations between the SII, MEED and the Department of Health's structures in Khayelitsha.

The SWC is operated and coordinated by a qualified social worker and involves third and fourth year Social Work students plus a number of other roleplayers from UCT, MEED and the broader community. The SWC is a significant example of the SII's impact - both from the UCT student's professional practice perspective and in terms of providing a wellness centre to a school in Khayelitsha. This is the first time anything of this nature has been implemented in South Africa, and indeed on the continent. Significantly it has full support from MEED, the Department of Health, the teachers and parent community.

The main focus of the SWC is the psychosocial support offered by the social worker as well as the Social Work students. Personal and Developmental Wellbeing includes leadership development (offered through community-based organisations); career guidance (offered through UCT admissions); an ongoing sanitary pad project (offered through the Department of Health); Peer-mentoring (offered through Childline, a community-based non-profit organisation); meditation (offered through private service providers) as well as programmes that address substance abuse, gender and sexual health, depression and anxiety and strategies to enhance interpersonal relationships. The focus on parent involvement has taken the form of regular parent workshops and information sessions (offered through MEED). The social worker is currently undertaking her Masters at UCT and is documenting the work of the SWC as part of her research.

The benefits of the SII for the University beyond school-based improvement

The SII's work is closely aligned to UCT's Strategic Goal 5 which seeks to 'enhance the scope, quality and impact of engaged scholarship with an emphasis on addressing development and social justice'. Since the establishment of the SII, two of its five objectives have focused primarily on enhancing interdisciplinary collaboration at the University to strengthen its social responsiveness and engaged scholarship agenda. The focus on establishing professional practice schools firstly has created opportunities for UCT students to undertake their professional practice, service learning and teaching



practice in the partner schools. As outlined above, students from a range of faculties and departments are placed in the partner schools, thereby creating opportunities to develop a theoretical and practical understanding of community-based engagement.

The SII's focus on broader university engagement (Objective 3) has also extended the University's social responsiveness imperative to student-based volunteer organisations. Both these objectives are closely aligned to UCT's Strategic Goal 5 which focuses (amongst other things) on '[providing] opportunities for staff and students to learn how to build reciprocal relationships with external constituencies in different social contexts and apply their learning in practical projects as part of the formal curriculum'. Linked to this Strategic Goal, the SII has also succeeded in improving the 'visibility of engaged scholarship', as outlined below:

NRF Grant

A three-year (2015-2017) National Research Foundation (NRF) grant was awarded to the SII with Professor Roshan Galvaan (Division of Occupational Therapy, Faculty of Health Sciences), as the Principal Investigator. The study explored how the existing SII engagements promote a learning environment through working with school partners and inform the way that support for learning and teaching is conceptualised and implemented. A key focus of the NRF research project was the interdisciplinary collaboration within the institution between disciplines in Education and Health Sciences (as outlined above). Findings suggest that the processes through which the disciplines engage with the schools are contributing to shifts in learning practices both at the level of the university and the schools. At the level of the schools, interdisciplinary collaboration and community engagement has created opportunities for shifting professional practice for teachers, principals and students undertaking their practice learning. At the level of the university the project has enabled academic staff to start exploring ways in which new practices might inform curriculum transformation.

As an outcome of the NRF Grant, the book *Partnerships in Action: University-School-Community* was published in October 2018 by HSRC Press. The various chapters explore philosophical, conceptual and practical aspects of school improvement through processes of community engagement and interdisciplinarity. Two of the chapters are co-authored with two of the SII partner principals.

The collaboration that operates at the level of interdisciplinary engagement across the university as well as at the level of partnerships with the schools has enhanced the SII's understanding of how processes of community engagement have shaped and constituted its practice in a community with a low socio-economic status. As an illustration of engaged scholarship, this multi-leveled interdisciplinary collaboration has generated new insights into the ways in which practices can be shaped that will create an enabling environment where student learning at tertiary level can be enhanced



through relevant context-based engagement – and in which teaching and learning practices within the school may be enriched.

Going forward, the SII will continue to explore collaborative ways through which to co-construct and promote relevant knowledges by fostering relationships in which power hierarchies are replaced with partnerships. This requires an awareness of patterns of exclusions and marginalisation – fostering instead opportunities for participation and inclusion in generating expert knowledge. Through seeking to equalise power hierarchies between the university and the community, the SII remains committed to generating new knowledges in order to contribute towards ongoing transformation, sustainability and social justice.

Against this backdrop, the SII remains committed to its site-based work in the five partner schools in Khayelitsha. This entails:

- Drawing on the services of the SDU to deliver teacher professional and school organisation development programmes in support of broader whole-school development (Objective 1).
- Extending the utilisation of the schools as Professional Practice Schools (PPS) (Objective 2).
- Encouraging university-wide engagement in the schools, particularly through student volunteer organisations (Objective 3).
- Sustaining and extending existing partnerships in support of the school libraries, the Schools Wellbeing Centre and other initiatives in the five schools. Whilst retaining a close working relationship with Metropole East Education District (Objective 4).

Scholarship (see Briefing Document 4)

Although the SII was established as a school-based interventional initiative, much of its work has been documented for publication, thus promoting engaged scholarship and advancing the university’s social responsiveness agenda. Research outputs include:

Silbert, P. & Bitso, C. 2015. ‘Towards functional school libraries: supporting library assistants in under-resourced schools through a university-community-school partnership’. *South African Journal of Library and Information Science*, 81(1): 53-62.

Silbert, P, Clark J. & Dornbrack, J. 2015. ‘In schools, in community’: implementing a university-school partnership at the University of Cape Town. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 29(3): 262-280.



Silbert, P. & Verbeek, C. 2016. Partnerships in action: establishing a model of collaborative support to student and mentor teachers through a university-school partnership. *Journal of Education*, 64: 111-135.

Galvaan, R and Silbert, P. 2016. 'Service learning in unequal contexts: towards transforming learning practices in South African schools'. A paper presented as part of the Service Learning Special Interest Group at the American Education Research Association (AERA) in Washington DC, 8 – 12 April 2016.

Silbert, P. & Galvaan, R. 2016. 'Reimagining interdisciplinary collaboration through a university-school partnership'. A paper presented at the 2016 South African Education Research Association (SAERA) conference in Cape Town, 23-26 October 2016.

Silbert, P. 2017. 'Building organisational capacity through a principals community of practice: implications for decoloniality'. A paper presented at the 2017 South African Education Research Association (SAERA) conference in Port Elizabeth, 23-26 October 2017.

Silbert, P., Galvaan, R. & Clark, J. (Eds). 2018. *Partnerships in Action: University-School Community*, Cape Town: HSRC Press.

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