CREATING A SUSTAINABLE LEARNING COMMUNITY:  
THE VUSELELA COLLEGE: JOUBERTON CAMPUS  
AND ARE-FADIMEHENG  
COMPUTER LITERACY PROJECT  

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1. BACKGROUND

Vuselela College is one of three Further Education and Training Colleges offering VET in the North West Province of South Africa. The College is the result of the recently completed national merging process of the previous technical colleges. The four campuses have an approximate student headcount of 4435. The campus which is situated in the township of Jouberton was initially established as a practical training centre for neighbouring primary schools. In 1983 the previous Department of Education and Training declared the centre as a technical college, and in 2003 the college became one of the four merged campuses of Vuselela College.

2. COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT REALITIES

Figure 1: National unemployment rate by population group and gender

The national official employment rate is 28.2%. Africans had the highest unemployment rate in the country in September 2003, while whites had the lowest unemployment rate.
Reflecting South Africa's political past, the African and Coloured labour force had the highest percentage of people with no education or with incomplete school education (primary and secondary). And while it is generally expected that the completion of higher levels of education would improve job prospects in the labour market, the unemployment rate was higher among people who had some education but had not completed secondary education, than among those who had no education – particularly among Africans and Coloureds.

The North West Province is inhabited by 91.2% or 3.1 million African people, while there are only 6.6% whites, 1.4% coloureds and 0.3% Indians. The Province is characterised by high unemployment rates, and inequality in terms of access to resources and income levels. The mining industry is the largest sector in the economy, which employs about 39% of all those with jobs in the North West Province (North West Province 2001). A large number of people in the North West Province follow elementary occupations characterised by low skills levels, about 27.7% or just more than two hundred thousand.
Poverty affects 62% of the Province’s population, the second highest provincial figure for South Africa. The Province has an unemployment rate of 37.7%, the fourth highest in South Africa. The farming sector provides opportunities for employment for the rural communities, but the income derived from this sector is very low. There is also very little upward mobility in this sector due to the education levels attracted to the employment. Further linkages can be found in relation to food security and unemployment. The higher the level of unemployment, the more food insecure the population becomes. This has a spiralling effect in terms of other social elements such as health and crime.

Based on the UN Human Development Index, the North West Province is the third lowest of South Africa’s provinces in terms of quality of life.
3. COMMUNITY EDUCATION REALITIES

Figure 2: City Council of Klerksdorp: Age 20+ with no schooling
According to the Situational Analysis of FET Institutions in the North West Province (a 2002 project of the Business Trust and the National Business Initiative), only 8% of the population we serve have a Grade 8 qualification, while another 8% have completed their education to the Grade 12 exit level. One percent of the population has a qualification of Grade 12 plus a diploma. Adults with no formal education make up 27% of the population.

A Statistics SA study done in 2001, suggests that more than one in every ten South Africans aged 35-54 years have no education, rising to more than one in every four in higher age groups. Moreover, that study also suggests that there was great variation in the ability to read in at least one language across the population groups.

Education, in particular sustainable learning leading to a completed level of education is an important variable because it is a determining factor in gaining access to employment and earnings. Knowledge about the educational and skill levels of unemployed people can provide guidance on how training programmes or employment creation programmes may be improved.

Data obtained from the October 1995 Household Survey, suggest that there is stark contrast in the educational attainment between the African and White population groups 20 years and older in the North West Province. It was estimated that up to half of the African population did not complete their primary education, compared to 2% of all the Whites in this province.
4. THE LEARNING COMMUNITY OF JOUBERTON CAMPUS

Many Jouberton school leavers do not complete their secondary education, and not many continue to further and higher education. The majority join the many unemployed. Few gain access to the formal labour market in the light of the poor economic growth in the area. If they do gain employment, they enter the workplace with inadequate skills which in turn limit them to elementary occupations.

Major challenges for the campus are its progression from the former disadvantaged education sector and the fact that it is situated in a poor community. The campus is situated in the township area, a large part of which is a squatter camp. It is surrounded by a number of schools which experience similar and indeed more pressing challenges.

It is clear that the learning community of the North West Province and the campus learning community in particular, face substantial challenges. The educational level of unemployed adults in the community also becomes a primary challenge. A culture of self reliance needs to be instilled by imparting skills needed for self-employment, entrepreneurial activities and community development. Dr Latin of Botswana mentioned the issue of self employment during a discussion at the Sub-Sahara IVETA Conference in Cape Town last year when he said that the fortunes of industry vary, and it cannot always guarantee to employ trainees. We need to educate members of the community to help themselves and others, and not be dependent on others and the government.

While the Department of Education is doing a commendable job in transforming education to ensure equal opportunities for all, the inequalities of the past cannot be erased instantaneously. Dr Anis Karodia, Superintendent General of North West Education, mentioned to an audience of local business representatives on 25 June 2004 that the apartheid backlog for educational infrastructure alone amounted to 2.6 billion Rand. Added to the heavy burden of past practices are the poor socio-economic environment of the community and government budgetary restraints.
5. COMPUTER LITERACY PROJECT: PHASE ONE

During a recruitment visit to the nine secondary schools in Jouberton, the disturbing discovery was made that not one of the schools was equipped with any computer equipment, and that learners had no exposure to a computerised environment at school. Some of the schools were found to have classrooms designed for IT training. These venues were equipped only with the most basic furniture.

To help address the dire need for IT training in the area, Jouberton Campus started a very modest project at Are-Fadimeheng Secondary School in June 2002. Twenty eight PCs and twelve printers were installed in a classroom at the school. While the technology was certainly not state-of-the-art, it was the humble beginning of a project to get learners to master keyboard skills and to learn some word processing and spreadsheet skills.

Careful thought was given to community development and inclusion from the very start. All the labour for the conversion of the classroom was obtained from Jouberton residents and from Are-Fadimeheng parents. The conversion included the installation of additional electrical points and wiring, stripping and painting, lighting, welding, as well as extending the security system.

The school timetable was adapted to allow Grade 10 and 11 learners to attend a ten week IT skills training programme for two hours per week, amounting to sixty contact hours. The programme was designed to adhere to the principles of action-oriented learning, with the focus on the learners’ own actions of processing and applying information.

A minimal contribution is asked per learner, and is used to cover maintenance costs and consumables. Sixteen percent of the proceeds are returned to the school as a contribution towards the school fund.
6. COMPUTER LITERACY PROJECT: PHASE TWO

The project expanded in 2003 from twice weekly sessions to a full-time daily programme running five days a week to train 160 learners from Grade 8 to Grade 12. When campus IT equipment is upgraded, the old components are used to upgrade the Are-Fadimeheng classroom. A second secondary school in close proximity to the campus has been approached to start a similar programme, and discussions will follow shortly.

Since January 2004, the programme was expanded to include primary school learners. The ten to thirteen year old learners follow a similar programme which includes an introduction to technology, as well as word processing and spreadsheet skills. They attend sessions on the campus itself, and have the advantage of using advanced hardware and software.

Upon completion of their basic skills programme, many of the learners enrol for formal after hours part-time Computer Practice and Information Processing classes at the campus. A number of the educator and administrative staff members of Are-Fadimeheng attend the computer literacy programme at the school, after which they enrol for formal training at the campus. These classes for working adults are taught in the evenings and on Saturdays.
7. CREATING A SUSTAINABLE LEARNING COMMUNITY BY ADAPTING TO THE
CHANGING FET LANDSCAPE

The changing FET landscape has brought an increased focus on skills training, with the
emphasis on shorter courses which teach relevant and market-related skills. This new focus
on skills training was a key motivation for the introduction of the IT training project at Are-
Fadimeheng.

FET campuses offering Vocational Education and Training should be a beacon of skills
opportunities for the communities they serve. With this project and other campus skills
projects, Jouberton Campus strives to become an extended community learning centre, and
to cater for specific community needs.

The project goes beyond a prescriptive and linear model which segments learning into
content, age group and educational system. Although secondary school learners form the
major part of the source pool of our learning community, primary school learners, in
particular the less privileged learners of Jouberton, should enjoy exposure to the world of
technology in order to whet their appetite for supplementary learning. This project has
established a measure of cooperation and is forming increasingly strong linkages between
VET and mainstream education, the advantages of which cannot be over emphasised. We
aim to foster the concept of interdependence among schools and colleges, not of
independence. Children from as young as nine are benefitting from the project, and we are
committed to foster their capacity and desire for learning.

One of the primary focus areas of FET is lifelong learning. The teachers at Are-Fadimeheng
who have enrolled at the campus for formal part-time programmes bear testimony to one
very important concept of lifelong learning: Teachers must not only encourage students to
learn, but, additionally, continue to learn themselves.
8. KEY BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT

It must be emphasised that this project was never about financial gain. The project has resulted in a number of key benefits which we believe far outweigh financial profit:

A sustainable learner source pool is cultivated and learners who have completed the programme enrol for Computer Practice at Vuselela College Campuses. Learners are introduced to the concept of lifelong learning, and bring family members and acquaintances to enrol for full-time and part-time programmes.

College/community involvement is expanded on multiple levels: We aim to address the need for skills required for quality employment that can lead to sustainable livelihoods for those most affected by poverty. The skills level of the community is being improved, and the wider community will become increasingly involved when the project is formally expanded to include adult learners. Community members provided labour and inputs from the very initiation of the project. During the renovation and alteration of the training centre, capable private contractors were identified. Upon completion of this project, they were in turn contracted for various other building projects at the campus. This once again resulted in more job opportunities, as campus staff saw the quality of their workmanship, and used these contractors for domestic and other projects. The snowball effect of job creation is evident.

Empowerment continues to take place on more than one level:

Learner empowerment is obvious: no other secondary school learners have access to school-based computer training in Jouberton yet. Learners are acquiring basic computer skills that can be utilised for entrepreneurial and academic activities.
The school status has been enhanced to a sought after institution, resulting in a greatly increased learner intake. Are-Fadimeheng has always been one of the top achiever schools in North West, and was officially congratulated on provincial level with the establishment of this computer training centre.

The campus, of course, also benefits, as the entire project serves as a relationship marketing instrument for both the campus and for Vuselela College. The College’s community involvement is apparent, and we maintain a prominent profile in the community as a direct result of this project.

Apart from the obvious financial benefits the facilitators also gain generic workplace experience which increases their marketability. One of the facilitators had, in fact, been declined a mining company’s job offer for an administrative position with a competitive salary package and many fringe benefits. She indicated that she would rather use this opportunity to carve an entrepreneurial career in computer training for herself. Through the administrative part of their duties (filing, record-keeping and updating the learner database) the facilitators accumulate evidence of suitable experience required to obtain a complete national diploma qualification.
9. FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN COMMUNITY AMELIORATION

The computer literacy project formed the beginning of a new awareness of the importance of community development through sustainable and lifelong learning. Several other programmes have been initiated to augment college/community involvement. These include:

☑ Dressmaking and design

The campus houses a dressmaking and design project. Unemployed women meet daily to design and manufacture traditional attire, uniforms, and various household articles. Profits from sales are used to purchase fabric and sewing equipment, and also to pay the women a stipend.

☑ Vegetable growing and cultivation

The campus supports a vegetable growing skills project by supplying a fairly large area of arable land as well as water. The project is run in conjunction with the Southern District Municipality that supplies fertilizers, seeds, pesticides and basic equipment.

☑ Entrepreneurship training

Full time students, as well as trainees on the vegetable growing and dressmaking and design projects attend a week-long Entrepreneurship course on the campus. The course is presented in partnership with the Foundation for Economic and Business Development (FEBDEV). The purpose is to assist and train people in the community to start and run their own businesses, and the courses are linked to the learners’ specific areas of skills training (e.g. dressmaking, fast foods, agriculture, computer skills, etc.).
The following aspects are covered during the course:

- Motivation and Economic Development
- Entrepreneurial Characteristics and Self-Evaluation
- Idea Generation and Project Screening
- Marketing
- Production
- Organisation and Management
- Financial Planning

Metalwork: Arts and Crafts

This project aims to equip community members with the skills required to create metal household and garden decorations with an African theme. An under-utilised workshop is used to house the project. Welding equipment, protective clothing and materials are provided to the learners. The completed articles are sold both in the Klerksdorp area as well as at arts and crafts markets in Gauteng. The proceeds of the sales are ploughed back into the project to ensure its sustainability.
10. CONCLUSION

The FET college sector is now recognised as the key sector to reach out to the constituencies that have, historically, been excluded from many education and training opportunities. These include unemployed or under-employed youth and adults, and others who need to update, reskill and retrain for South Africa’s changing economy. This sector must provide access to learning that supports an inclusive democratic citizenship. The FET sector will only succeed when it provides diversified programmes that offer the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values South Africans require as individuals, citizens and lifelong learners.

Pockets of excellence do exist, but support for lifelong learning requires a network of FET Colleges working with different partners to deliver responsive and relevant programmes to meet the needs of individuals and the wider social and business community. The achievement of our national policy imperatives of redress and economic inclusion depends on the existence of accessible, high-quality and cost-effective learning opportunities for all.