



# National Newsletter

**February/March 2010**

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**South African Montessori Association**

**Message from the President:**

Dear Fellow Montessorians

It has certainly been a really busy start to the year. My mother was certainly right when she said the older you get, the faster time seems to fly by!

A call went out to you all to share and submit what works for you in your Montessori school. This tactic seems to have worked, because for the first time in a long time, the number of submissions from members (not including Exco or Trustees) increased! Thank you to everyone who shared – I am sure that you will find this newsletter full of interesting snippets – from the children, directress and school owners.

Thank you too, to the members who have renewed the membership for 2010, and for those who have already booked for the Ses’fikile conference. The conference committee have been very busy preparing and look forward to an excellent conference. Our guest speakers will definitely inspire your work in Montessori.

I recently had the privilege of hearing a wonderful lecture on the key points of Montessori’s philosophy. The talk prompted me to think about how sensitive we need to be as the ‘keepers and custodians’ of our environments. Not only is our mission to prepare a beautiful, aesthetically pleasing environment, but also to ‘serve the spirit of the child’. I was reminded of the following key points in the Montessori philosophy:

- Understanding the sensitive phases;
- The importance of observation;
- Reflecting of the characteristics of the child in each plane of development so that we develop realistic and appropriate expectations.

I urge you to reflect on your preparation for your work with the children. Going back to *The Secret of Childhood* and *The Absorbent Mind* after that lecture gave me a new perspective. I know that I had read the words before many, many times, but this time – some of them stood out more and seemed more relevant. This is the beauty of hearing the philosophy from a fresh perspective! Our work with each child reaches far beyond what we do in a presentation, a morning, a day, a week, a term or and a year. We are educating that potential which will blossom and flower in its time. What a precious and awesome task!

I would like to end with a poignant quote from the above mentioned lecture, which I believe sums up what we can reflect on as Montessorians as part of our spiritual preparation. “Montessori should be practised for the benefit of humankind.”

Heidi van Staden  
SAMA President

We have been running our Montessori Pre-school since 1995. We are still exploring ways of normalising a good number of new children especially energetic boys! (Can't keep their hands off the shelves!) at the beginning of the year. As much as of six weeks at the beginning of each year is strictly spent doing grace and courtesy with the children there are still gaps and sadly we end up correcting rather than giving children another lesson. We had our first observation chair opened to a parent today and we had to orchestrate a bit round the very young ones in order to keep the noise down and have constructive work done. If anyone has better ideas please share. This January our very first Montessori Primary school opened and out of 23 students in Grade 1 and 2 eleven of them were graduates from our own Montessori preschool. So normalisation continues at different level.

Best regards to you all.

Shida Sinaei (principal at Montessori International Pre-school Swaziland)

What we understand and know works extremely well here at Blue Moon Montessori Preschool is the uninterrupted work cycle. To support this during our mornings we have snack time as a choice for the children. While I know that many schools do practice this, there are still many others who continue to break for mid morning snack. Because of this, the children's periods of concentrated work is interrupted and one has to manage a whole group, all a waste of precious time! We involve the children with the preparation of fruit cutting; to serving themselves; to washing, drying and replacing their plates once finished. The children appear to enjoy the sense of control they have when able to self-regulate their eating. I can only emphasise the value this adds to the children's independence and freedom of choice.

Jacky Price

Blue Moon Montessori Preschool, Cape Town



Photos: Blue Moon Montessori Preschool

# NAISA REPORT

## Meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2010

### Submitted by Sam Streak, SAMA Representative on NAISA

We are still awaiting the minutes from this meeting but here are some important things noted during the meeting.

We had a presentation made by a delegation from SACE who wanted to clarify the position of educators and registration for all NAISA members and their respective associations, including SAMA. The delegation included the Chief Operating Officer (COO) Ms Dipholo, the manager of registration Charlotte Ngobeni as well as the acting manager of registration. The delegation clarified the role of SACE, their legal mandate and the development of a programme towards Continued Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) points.

The delegation clarified once again that educators with 'foreign' qualifications such as Waldorf and Montessori educators, received conditional registration with SACE – to teach only within their respective environments. Charlotte Ngobeni, manager of registrations, made a point of emphasising the positive and good working relationship established with SAMA, particularly through Heidi.

Charlotte also responded to a question posed by the representative from Jewish schools as to whether Grade R educators needed to be registered. Charlotte responded that ECD practitioners, which include Grade R educators, must be registered with SACE. Usually a minimum qualification level for educators is NQF 5. However, ECD practitioners may apply for registration with a level 4 qualification. The ECD Sector was created in 2004 in response to the impending formalisation of Grade R.

SACE also appealed to all associations to encourage their members to please ensure all of their paperwork was correctly certified before submitting it to SACE and that annual fees are paid. Anyone with queries should contact SACE.

A long discussion was held around changes being made at the ETDP/SETA. It is a very complicated situation and I would prefer to give feedback once the minutes have been sent through. In essence, NAISA (and by implication SAMA) will fight for representation on the new board structures at the ETDP/SETA. Although NAISA maintains an open relationship with Umalusi, there are some serious challenges in terms of Umalusi's powers and the implications for independent schools. NAISA continues to pursue answers to problems and issues that have been ongoing with Umalusi for a long period of time. Umalusi has made it clear that they cannot help with 'foreign curricula' such as Waldorf or Montessori. NAISA will continue to co-operate and ensure the door for communication remains open. There are some associations who are independently considering legal action against Umalusi.

Sandile Ndaba (NAISA Chairperson) made a strong appeal to all of us to reinforce to our members to work hard towards diversity and transformation in our schools. He stressed that independent schools are one of the only sectors in our country that has had the luxury of undertaking transformation in our own time. We need to lead by example and ensure our schools truly reflect a non-racial, diverse culture.

More feedback will follow in the next newsletter.

## A PARENTS STORY

An article by Nishi Jock & Husband Dear  
(Tirelessly parenting teenagers)

Both our teenagers are being schooled at the Montessori College. Our journey started more than a decade ago, when it was still a very difficult period of transition in South Africa. As people with 'different' religious and cultural beliefs, we did not want our children to experience the trauma that accompanied our uphill battles in our personal quest to get an education and just be recognised as being human. One of the primary reasons we sought a Montessori school was the fact that it advocated equality in all social aspects, including race and religion. This was important for us as we wanted our children to learn and grow by valuing diversity. This was the kind of break that all South Africa needed to make as it embraced its new democracy.

For most the Montessori College is not just a school... it is in fact a home away from home for those of us affiliated to this very unique place. It is learning, growing and developing in a relaxed environment where people are not judged or deliberately stereotyped. It is a place where not only the academic but the social needs and interests of learners are stimulated.

With Montessori principles facilitating the difficult transition from childhood to adulthood, individual differences are recognised and self understanding is encouraged. It is acknowledged that each learner has an innate desire to learn and is guided to independence and to have the ability to adapt to social life.

By allowing learners to study at their own pace and in a self directed manner, the development of self-discipline and development of personal as well as social goals are encouraged. This prepares learners to be well grounded and confident. No doubt this is of great significance in our modern world.

Also significant is that the college follows the Cambridge University International Curriculum. This affords a time tested curriculum with an internationally recognised qualification.

Whilst this system of self development nurtures independence and creativity in learning, we have experienced aspect that allows much room for improvement. However, we do not regret our decision to go Montessori and are convinced it is the schooling of the future.

*In the soul of the adolescent great values are hidden,  
and in the minds of these boys and girls there lies all  
our hope of future progress. Dr Maria Montessori*



**Attention: The Principal and Natural Sciences and Life Orientation teachers**

**Join us for Earth Hour 2010 NOW!**

WWF will officially launch the Earth Hour 2010 campaign on Friday, 19 February. It would be fantastic if your school could roll out Earth Hour to staff and learners any time after 1 March and keep the momentum going until Saturday, 27 March!

**Rolling out Earth Hour is easy, all you have to do is:**

- **Pledge** your support for Earth Hour 2010. Your school's name will automatically appear on the Who's Involved page. This year WWF is also challenging schools to take the lead by [pledging](#) to reduce their own carbon footprint. [Commit](#) today, and challenge other schools to follow suit.
- **Switch off** the lights of your schools and hostels on Saturday, 27 March from 8:30pm – 9:30pm.
- **Spread** the message to your staff, learners and parents (A generic email will follow for you to distribute after 1 March).
- **Show** your support by posting the Earth Hour 2010 web banner and widget on your website, printing posters or having an Earth Hour event on the night. Download the Green Events Guide, just click on the [Events](#) button at the top of the webpage. You can download all of the above from the website. Click on the [Get Involved](#) button for loads of information and fun ideas.
- **Remember** to load pictures of what your school is doing for Earth Hour on the [Flickr stream](#) or email your pictures to [earthhour@wwf.org.za](mailto:earthhour@wwf.org.za).
- **SMS:** If your staff or learners do not have access to the internet, they can SMS "EH2010" and their name to 34017 to pledge their support. R2 per SMS.

Save the date: **Saturday, 27 March 2010, 8:30pm – 9:30pm.**

Please contact Candice Adams on 021 888 2840 or [cadams@wwf.org.za](mailto:cadams@wwf.org.za) if you have any questions.

We hope that you will support **Earth Hour 2010**. Together we can make a difference.

For a living planet  
The WWF Team

**If you find it in your heart to care for somebody  
else, you will have succeeded.  
Maya Angelou**

**What Works in Our School – Lower and Upper Primary Submitted by Heidi van Staden,  
Principal of The Montessori Academy and College, Pretoria**

**THE CHEQUE BOOK**

The Cheque Book system is a great way of helping children understand the value of money. It is an easy and fun activity that the children can do on a weekly basis that will cover among others, the following skills:

- Addition
- Subtraction
- Estimation (i.e. do I have enough money left to afford this purchase)
- Writing skills
- Becoming accountable
- Showing responsibility
- Learning to budget

Schools working with the NCS, will find that they can cover outcomes in the following learning areas:

- Mathematics
- Language
- Economic management science
- Technology



Children bring in R100.00 to start the year. This money goes into the class (or school) 'bank'. This is usually a petty cash lock up box kept by one of the directresses. The children may spend their chequebook money to pay for outings, incidentals like the 'snake-man' visit to the school and stationery. Each environment keeps a small stock of pencils, pens, glue, erasers etc. which the children can buy should they lose theirs. This save time and alleviates borrowing. We have also found that the children become more responsible for their belongings when they have to pay for lost items themselves. In some cases, the children may use a cheque to pay for special tuckshop opportunities that arise now and then – e.g. boerewors roll day.

Of course, in your environments, you can set the limits on what the children may write cheques for. The children are issued with a cheque book (initially with 10 cheques) and also have a reconciliation page that they need to complete when their cheque book is full, or money is finished so that they can account to their parents what they spent their money on. Parents can then send in more chequebook money as needed.

Initially, the 6-9 year olds need quite a lot of guidance in filling out cheques and their chequebook stubs. With practice, and because this is an activity that will be repeated often, they soon pick up the skills needs.

I am more than happy to share my template for the cheques and the reconciliation page. If anyone would like a copy – please email [office.montessori@gmail.com](mailto:office.montessori@gmail.com) and it will be forwarded to you.

# South African Montessori Association Trust

## 8<sup>th</sup> National Conference

*Ses'fikile*



*“We Have Arrived”*

The SAMA conference committee would like to remind members that the early bird special for the conference ends on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March. Please book before this date to secure the best rates.

A separate newsflash will go out shortly giving more details about the speakers and the talks on offer.

This conference is all about Ses'fikile. We believe that as Montessorians, we have arrived. We are making our mark on the landscape of South African education on a daily basis. This year alone, SAMA has been represented at SACE, on NAISA, and has training centre members that liaise with the ETDP SETA. SAMA was invited to a conference hosted by the Department of Social Welfare, at which the Department of Education were delighted to see us represented!

Our honeymoon period is over, and we need to now take ownership of what we have created and ensure that our standards remain high and our commitment to the philosophy remains unwavering.

You are urged to see the conference as an opportunity to maintain your commitment to your professional development, and look forward to seeing you there!

Kind regards

Heidi van Staden on behalf of the Conference Committee

SACE –  
South African Council for Educators  
NAISA –  
National Alliance of Independent School Associations  
ETDP SETA –  
Education and Training Development Practices: Sector for Education and Training Authority

## What Works for us...9-12s Perspective

### Submitted by the Montessori Academy and College (in the words/spelling of the children)

I asked the 9-12 year olds what works for them in their Montessori school:

*The thing I like most about Montessori is the teachers, our principle and our friends because the teachers don't shout at you and are really funny. They know each one of us and that makes us feel important.*

*Our principle is very friendly and makes us all feel special.*

*You also find lots of friendly people at Montessori. We all know each other and we are a big family taking care of each other.*

*I enjoy the way we get to do our work. We get to go outside and explore with some subjects. And sometimes we even get to have a class outside.*

*I love my school and that's why I am proud to call myself a Montessori kid.*

*Dean (10)*

**The thing I like about Montessori is that you are yourself. You don't have to wear the same clothes or the same hair style. I am me, you are you, she is her and he is him. I am Nqobile Sigudle MYSELF! (9)**

**I like Montessori because I like the work. It's not too much or too little. It's not too hard or too easy. The teachers are friendly and with responsibility comes privileges. The break is not too short, it is long enough to eat and play. The children are very friendly. The rules are not too bad – actually they are not bad at all. We have fun aktivitys and fun sports. We have lots of laughter and exitment and the class rooms look beautiful and the school is beutifull. At the tuckshop they serve nice things. Its not to expencive. Damien (9)**

**This school is nice because you don't have to wear a traditional suite. And the teachers teach you self dissapplen. I also love the monkeys at the school. We can take out our phone when it is erjent. I love this school because last year some of us got an injection against flus and miesels. And we have freedom and we are educated and I love this school because it is not a traditional school. Rani (11)**

**Being at Montessori is almost like a blasting Beatles song in my room. There's a sens of comfort and belonging. Like knowing I'm at home.**

**At my Montessori school we don't wear uniforms, which makes you more creative. It's way better than being at a traditional school, because at a traditional school, you don't learn basic human morals and behaviour. At Montessori we learn inner-discipline, respect and friendship.**

**At Montessori, the education is of high standard and they use the skills performed by Maria Montessori. This school is probably better to me because at traditional schools there is not much space for arts and creativity is strangled by the neck. But not at Montessori. Here we are allowed freedom of expression and space to do our own thing, while we have the structure that we have time to do our work in. There couldn't be a better school system.**

**Malaika (11)**

**The purpose in life is to discover your gift. The meaning of life is to give it away – David Viscott**

**Managing Outings...**  
**From Nutwood Forest Montessori Pre-School**  
**Submitted by Jane Cope**

Outings – who is who when 5 schools are at the zoo? We have recently invested in BRIGHT green golf shirts with our logo on the front (top left) and STAFF on the back. The children have each brought a white T-shirt to school. Using fabric paint the children “hand print” their own t-shirts. Because 3 classes may go on an outing on the same day we have colour coded the handprints. At a previous school the staff also wore hand printed T-shirts for easier identification. We also ask parents to provide lifts and use a form for each class to co-ordinate their lifts. A master copy is left in the office for quick reference in case of an emergency and each directress takes her list with her in the first aid suitcase with the original indemnity forms for the outing. This is a sample of the “ Preschool outing lifting list”

## Frogs

Outing: .....

Date: .....

Directress cell: .....

Assistant cell: .....

Lift name: .....

Lift name: .....

Cell: .....

Cell: .....

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Lift name: .....

Lift name: .....

Cell: .....

Cell: .....

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Lift name: .....

Lift name: .....

Cell: .....

Cell: .....

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Children not attending:

Meeting us there:

Children absent:

## Annual Concerts – planning ahead

### Submitted by Jane Cope of Nutwood Forest Montessori Pre-School

Concerts – to perform or not to perform? Although I don't remember where I read or heard the following idea, apparently Maria Montessori said young children (3-6) should not in fact perform on stage because the practicing was boring and the stage performance was stressful. I don't even know if in fact that statement is true, but over the years I can confirm that Pre-school children do find concert practice tedious and the first time on stage can be very overwhelming – however I have also seen how much the children come to enjoy the experience if the process is managed well. It is also huge PRO and the friends and family of the children are so enamoured with a happy and successful performance. Concert practice – start in January for a year end performance. List the songs, collect the music, choreograph the dances, think out the skits/speaking parts, plan the costumes. If you base the concert theme round your academic (cultural area/OBE grade R themes) theme for the year you will be reinforcing the concert concepts in the concrete and you will be showing the academics at the year end for the family and friends that often wonder what it is exactly that we do with the children academically. Break up the preparation and incorporate into your normal daily program e.g. songs during ring time, dance during extramural (we offer creative dance as part of our program and the directress is also experienced in drama), skits and reading parts can be prepared during literacy “time” – the key is breaking it up and doing a little at a time rather than a whole lot in the month before the concert. Plan for and try to incorporate as much as possible in your normal routine.

Other keys to success are:

- Having concerts in the third term rather than the fourth term works well – everyone is less tired and less committed to other events and if you need to hire the local school or civic hall you will get better availability and sometimes even a better rate.
- Child friendly but up beat music. Background music while the parents wait (children's music is also good here too) – if possible a slide show of photos taken during the year.
- Large colourful backdrops (generic so they can be reused year after year) and colourful costumes (whether hired or home/class made) – when a child stands frozen to the spot with a fixed grin (or fixed frown) they still look and feel part of the bigger picture in a costume rather than generic jeans and red t-shirt (or whatever).
- Making or hiring of costumes can be stressful for some, but very satisfying for parents who want to be involved and the children LOVE them and will wear them for as long as they are able to keep them, even if it is only the weekend. To help the parents you can put samples up or organize class work parties. Sew simple glue really does work.
- Face paint works. Masks do not work – children can't see properly and if they have to move even 3 steps they can trip over their own feet and everyone else as well.

Directresses, Assistants and Principal on stage also in costume – all dress as trees, or wear black and have different hats to denote different nationalities etc. Remember the parents are focused on the children and are not watching the staff intently – but staff absence is conspicuous. Anyone can MC – it is a good time for Thank you's.

*It is unfair for us to hold people  
responsible for our illusions of them.  
Contessa Diane*

## Communication between Staff...A Useful Tip (Jane Cope)

Staff memos: If you run more than one class keeping everyone in the loop when things change, staff members are absent and a reshuffle is needed, reminders of events or deadlines or all staff need to be aware of some special circumstance and waiting for staff meeting is not an option – then a daily general staff memo that can be signed when the staff arrive can be very effective. We add a Montessori quote for the day to encourage the spiritual (self) preparation of the staff members. Individual messages that are specific only to one person are recorded on a separate message board. Parent's special arrangements for collections and lost property are written up by the parents on a white board in the foyer.

## Requirements for moving from Nursery to Preschool or entry to Preschool Submitted by Jane Cope

- Potty trained – control of body functions most of the time.
- Weaned from bottle /dummy/ sippy cup/ blanket.
- **Independent:** Drinker + eater ( not necessary own food preparation)
  - Putting on of elasticized shorts/ skirts /trousers.
  - Putting on of skirt / jersey/ jacket.
  - Packing of ruck sack /bag (not necessary folding)
  - Putting of belongings in locker.
  - Putting of art on rack.
- Speaking in sentences.
- Beginning to search for specific stimulus i.e. not so random.
- Able to focus & imitate 1 to 2min presentation.
- Physically able to carry a chair & roll a mat.
- Sit in circle time for 5 to 10 minutes.
- Some impulse control.
- Ability to separate from care giver. (Consideration)

“the criteria should be used as a general guide and consideration should be given to each individual's needs and abilities.”

**If help and salvation are to come, they can only come from the children, for the children are the makers of man. Dr Maria Montessori**

## **What works in our 6-9 environment in terms of the Montessori philosophy** **Submitted by Marike Gersbach (Montessori Academy and College)**

We start our day with a three hour work cycle. This has proved time and time again to improve the children's concentration and helps them to focus on the task at hand. During this period from 08:00 – 11:00 the children are asked to choose work in one of the learning areas. The children know that their Language and Maths work for the day should be done during this time and if they choose to work on something else, will finish the language and maths for homework.

Another positive that I have observed is the vertical grouping where older and younger children work together and help one another to understand and explore new work. The older children reaffirm their understanding of the work by explaining it to then younger children, and this in turn is beneficial to both the older and younger child.

Each and every child in our environment accepts the responsibility to manage their own time in which to achieve their goals.

Marike Gersbach (converted traditional teacher!)

## **What Works for Me in the Montessori System – submitted by a Middle Schooler**

I strongly believe that the Montessori system is a really great and effective way of working.

Maria Montessori was a wonderful woman and I am really grateful to her for perusing what she did and for not letting anyone stop her from what she believed in. I think that we should always follow her example and always do our best, always have faith and give 110% in everything we do.

It is believed that many people that the Montessori Method /Way of teaching is one of the bet methods as it promotes self discipline and self respect.

I came from a traditional primary school to my current school three years ago. I moved because I did not like the way of teaching where they would just read with no explanation and then tell you to do the work.

On the first day in this school, I was amazed how the other children could work by themselves, even when the teacher left the room, and I was also amazed by the amount of freedom. For example we could sit on the floor, call the teacher by his or her name and not 'sir' or 'ma'am'. We could also drink water in class which was never allowed in my old school.

Children educated in the Montessori system need to have responsibilities and self discipline.

We take on important responsibilities like everyone cleaning our environment, and very simple things like not to write on someone else's property for example a desk or table, or to pick up paper even if it's not yours.

These responsibilities help us later in life to do things for ourselves and not to depend on everyone else to do it for you. We have learnt to take responsibility for our actions and to have respect not only for our environment but also for the people around us.

In traditional schools you do not learn skills like these. (Well, not the one I went to anyway.)

I will never forget my experiences in Montessori and the values I have learnt. I will stay here forever.

I believe the Montessori system will be around for a long time because in this system, I always look forward to school, which was a new experience for me. I would never leave my school or ever leave Montessori.

These are the reasons why I love Montessori!

Gabi (13)

## What Works in Our School

### Submitted by Melanie Livanos, Village Montessori School

#### INDEPENDENCE

In the Village Montessori Pre-school we are continuously trying to find ways to create a greater sense of independence within our little ones. As Directresses we know the capabilities of a child between the age of 3 and 6 and we adapt our environments to suit their ever growing needs. Some parents on the other hand do not have the privilege of seeing these amazing little beings and how competent they actually are, as they are naturally in protect mode, often being over protective. Therefore we encourage the following to assist the child in becoming more independent and it motivates our parents to let go:

- Children make use of the drop off system at the gate.
- They walk down to class on their own, carrying their own bag.
- Our snack time is during the three hour work cycle. The snack area is readily available from 9:00 and the children decide when they want to eat: they prepare their own snack and clean up afterwards.
- Larger classes - children tend to not depend on the adults as much and rely on assisting each other instead or using their initiative within the prepared environment.

#### OUTSIDE PLAYTIME

Our playtime outside is from 7:40 when the children start arriving until 8:50. The benefits of changing our playtime to first thing in the morning are:

- Cooler time of the day, sun not as harsh;
- children get to awaken all their senses by running on the grass, climbing trees, jungle gyms etc;
- clingy children settle quicker as they want to join playtime;
- children work out excessive energy levels;
- children are very eager to get into work and improvements in concentration levels have been noticed;
- socialising takes place during playtime - more focus on the activities during class time; and
- children that happen to arrive late do not feel uneasy as they fall into playtime.

#### INTERVIEWING STAFF

Small points that I have found to be really important:

Set your interview during school hours and walk the candidate around, the children are naturally curious and ask very interesting questions - note the interaction between the candidate and the child, for example, does she go down to the child's level and does she appear comfortable around the children.

Prepare a couple of scenarios, for example unhappy parent, difficult child and ask her how she would handle each incident.

Have a questionnaire to answer - this will give you an idea if he/she is able to write reports.



**What is wrong is wrong, even if everyone is doing it. Right is still right, even if no one else is doing it. (William Penn, 2010)**

## [Making Sure Our Schools are Working](#)

### [Submitted by Sam Streak, Port Elizabeth Montessori School](#)

**I received the following newsletter by email and it really got me thinking about Best Practice / Minimum Standards and what really makes our schools work and what doesn't. I am not sure exactly why this newsletter struck a chord with me but it did and I thought it would be useful to other heads of schools. We do not necessarily deal with labour disputes but running a Montessori school is a huge job at the best of times and perhaps we need to be conscious of working to more than just minimum standards but always aiming for the very best.**

**Gimme, gimme, gimme!** – by Mark Deavall – February 2010

I was visiting with a client today when he told me a sad but familiar story. We had been having a problem connecting for the last few weeks due to some quite serious labour unrest that he was taking care of at his place of employment. I asked him what this unrest was all about, so over a cup of tea, he told me the story. Keep reading, it gets really interesting.

This particular business is in the manufacturing industry, and employs around 500 workers. Their factory staff fall under an agreement that states that they work 40 hours per week and anything over that is classed as overtime. The rest of the employees, warehouse, admin, transport etc, fall under a separate agreement that states that they work 45 hours per week. Now the merits of this arrangement are not the point, so read on.

These agreements have been in place for many years. Suddenly, the “other” (non-factory) staff decided that they did not want to work a 45 hour week anymore, and wanted to work a 40 hour week instead. After initial negotiations were held, they declared a dispute, and summarily started to work a 40 hour week. In summary, those are the facts.

I now ask myself this question – what happened, that after all these years of these agreements being in place and working fine - to make these workers dissatisfied with the hours that they were working? Was it the working conditions? Was it the benefits that they were receiving? What was it? The answer is very simple and lies with the culture that exists amongst our workforce, and that we as business started a long time ago, and still propagate today. We have fostered a culture of “minimum standards is the goal”.

In 2007, in the world competitiveness report, out of 55 so called industrialized nations, we ranked number 50. Not an auspicious achievement at all. Especially when you look at who our running mates were that came after us – Croatia, Venezuela etc. What is even more shocking is that in 2006, we were ranked number 38! In one year we slipped 12 places. And all because we pay for a person's presence at work and their adherence to minimum standards. I haven't seen the world competitiveness figures for 2009 yet, but I shudder to think where we place now!

So now it stands to reason that all that this “culture” does, is to make people think of ways of doing less work and lowering the minimum standards, and all this for more money! All that wonderful creativity, motivation and initiative that our workforce has, is being used to figure out how to do less for more! We need to harness these qualities of creativity, motivation and initiative to get our workforce to make minimum standards the starting line!” Most companies depend on a Performance Management system to try and achieve this.

So here is the truth. Performance Management systems don't manage performance. Managers manage performance. What a Performance Management system does is to raise an awareness of performance for around two weeks prior to the worker's performance appraisal, and for about a week after that. What a Performance Management system really is, is a Performance Measurement system. It collates the results of the Performance Management done by the managers.

It's the manager's job to get their staff to see minimum standards as the starting line! It's the manager's job to get the worker's creative attention off "how can I work less for more money", and on to "how can I earn more by producing more?" This is the minute by minute, hour by hour and day by day job of the manager. In other words, a manager's job goes "**beyond performance management**".

So to get back to the client I visited today. The problem has come about because they have people working at that company that are "job description" focused instead of "responsibility" focused. People will always work down to a job description, but always up to a responsibility. Toyota never had the goal of being the biggest car manufacturer in the world, but they got there anyway through fostering a culture of "continuous improvement" in every single one of their employees. In fact this was one of each employee's performance criteria!

Let's work on getting our staff "responsibility" focused where minimum standards is the starting line and continuous improvement the goal. Let's get their creativity, imagination and initiative working on ways to earn more through being more productive.

*I trust that you have found benefit in this article. If you would like to contact me or have me talk to the people in your company, please call me on 27 11 609-1264, or e-mail me on [mark@meritbusiness.com](mailto:mark@meritbusiness.com).*

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Photo: Blue Moon Montessori Pre-School

## From the Staff at Hermanus Montessori School

Infant community (18 months to 3 years) encouraging independence through routine in that they have to collect their own plate and placemat for snack. Afterwards they have to wash up and pack away, clean the table with a damp cloth. Up to 2 years old especially love to do this.

Pre Primary (3 to 6 years) Encourage parents to spend a day in the environment before their child spends their 2 days here for assessment before they are enrolled. This way the parent has a good idea of what type of questions to ask at the subsequent parent- teacher interview.

Primary school section (6 – 12 years) choosing an artist and a composer for the quarter and every morning share an interesting fact about the person – also listen to that specific composer's music for that quarter.

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**Focus for March/April issue:  
SAMA CONFERENCE 2010 Deadline for**

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