MENTORING
first-time teachers



PSP makes a difference in the classroom

PRIMARY SCIENCE PROGRAMME





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JMP mentors, mentees, principals and representatives from the UWC Education Faculty at the certification ceremony

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Joint Mentorship Project a collaborative venture

Two years ago, the Western Cape Primary Science Programme (PSP) initiated a collaborative partnership with a Higher Education Institution (HEI), namely the University of the Western Cape, the Mathematics Education Primary Programme (MEPP), and the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) to create the Joint Mentorship Project (JMP).

The JMP was committed to assisting over 20 graduates who were beginning their careers as local primary school teachers. The JMP provided mentorship and coaching in class, innovative workshops, and general teaching support by the PSP/MEPP mentors. This mentorship project focused on assisting first time teachers with curriculum implementation, classroom management and discipline, understanding the culture of the schools involved, managing administrative tasks, and continuous professional development.

The JMP became a collaborative support system and a helping hand for these teachers trying to overcome the obstacles and challenges that come with being a novice educator.

This booklet takes a look at the unique, individual stories of the first-time teachers and how the JMP helped guide them through the various struggles in their first years as educators. The stories of the mentees and their mentors capture the essence of this programme and its mission: to prepare and encourage confident, skilled, and committed new teachers that will ultimately provide the learners in their care with competent and inspiring primary schooling.

Zorina Dharsey

Director: Primary Science Programme (PSP)







FOREWORD

Anglo American's Chairman's Fund has supported initiatives in education for well over 50 years. The Fund is always looking for new, innovative projects that will help turn education around and enable the learners in our schools to be equipped for a future beyond school. The idea of mentoring new teachers came about one day over coffee and muffins in the PSP offices and has blossomed into the programme documented here.

The stories in this handbook are inspiring. There is so much doom and gloom around the teaching profession and to read the stories of these young, enthusiastic teachers makes one realise, to paraphrase a well-known saying, that 'those who CAN, teach'. As you will read, many of these new teachers tried something else before they realised that they had more to give to society, and went back to school to fulfill their teaching dream.

As these stories highlight, teaching is not for the faint-hearted. Often, time in the classroom is the enjoyable part – it is all the added administrative duties that can break a new teacher who has not been prepared for them. Add to that the very tough socio-economic environment many teachers find themselves in, and it is a miracle that anyone stays in the profession. In fact, about six months after this programme began, one of the young mentees told me that at the programme's inception, many of them had already written their resignation letters! The fact that these amazing young people are still in the classroom is testament to the work of the staff at the PSP, whose commitment and dedication to the young teachers in the classroom has been inspiring.

Anglo American's Chairman's Fund is proud to have been part of that process.

Jane Roach

Education Specialist: Tshikululu Social Investments

For Anglo American's Chairman's Fund

'Rather than provide knowledge itself, we must encourage the joy and excitement that arise from learning.'

– Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), a Japanese educator who worked tirelessly to ensure that economically disadvantaged children were given equal opportunities.

Monique Kiewiets, 26, Grade 4 teacher at Dr. Van der Ross Primary School, Belhar

Attended Blackheath Primary and Blackheath High School Graduated at UWC in 2010

In her second year of teaching

Teaches science

JMP mentor Nadiema Gamieldien



Monique Kiewiets with her Grade 4 class

Learning to integrate language and technology

As an Afrikaans-speaker, Monique Kiewiets had language difficulties in her first year at the University of the Western Cape. The modules were taught in English and so she spent a lot of time doing extra reading and writing.

"I was catching up all the time," she says. But she overcame the difficulties and graduated with a good foundation in content and theory and looked forward to her first year as a teacher.

She soon found though that university did not prepare her for many of the challenges she would face as a teacher.

In her first year, the number of children in Monique's Grade 4 classes ranged between 40 to 50. Monique struggled with discipline and controlling unruly learners.

"It struck me ... This is reality, you are in a classroom, you are a teacher now."

"To be honest," she says with a wry smile, "my small stature made it is easy for them to take advantage of me."

She was worried about the children's expectations of her and how she was going to adapt. Colleagues tried to be helpful, but they had their own share of responsibilities, and Monique found it tough going.

"It struck me ... This is reality, you are in a class and you are a teacher now."

After a few months of teaching, she found help in the Joint Mentorship Project.

The first thing Monique's mentor, Nadiema guided her on, was keeping track of her administrative duties as a teacher, "...she taught me to be organised".

"On top of everything, I was also trying to find time to spend with learners that needed extra academic attention."

Nadiema helped Monique create practical lessons for learners who were at different levels. With the help of workshops and hands-on mentoring, Monique became adept at integrating language and technology in all her subjects.

"The resources are out there but you don't always know how to use them. I was shown how to use simple things to make teaching easier. The JMP mentors know what they are doing. I can contact Nadiema any time: she's always there to help."



MATHS AND SCIENCE TEACHER STEPHEN STOUTZ







Juggling the duties of a teacher effortlessly

Stephen Stoutz, 34, Grade 5 and 6 teacher at Dr. Van der Ross Primary School, Belhar

Pursued a career in banking after school and an accounting diploma

Graduated at UWC in 2009 with a degree in Education

In his third year of teaching

Teaches Mathematics and Natural Sciences

JMP mentor Nadiema Gamieldien

Never in his wildest dreams did accountant Stephen Stoutz imagine he would end up being a teacher. After working at ABSA bank for five years, he decided to change his career and left the banking industry to start his Bachelor's degree in Education at the University of the Western Cape.

Stephen started his new career in 2010, teaching science and maths to Grade 6.

He says his first day of teaching was "hectic" and he faced numerous obstacles that had nothing to do with teaching itself.

"I knew I could teach Mathematics and Natural Sciences, but dealing with all the other duties, was like swimming through huge waves," he says.

"I had great difficulty juggling all the duties of an educator … the admin, lesson planning, teaching and coaching the school choir, bookkeeping, registers and assessments. I felt unprepared."

Life saver

But just as he thought he was sinking, the PSP introduced Stephen to the Joint Mentorship Project. The help he received with the numerous tasks and administrative duties "was a life saver".

"Nadiema gave me guidance on how to make use of classroom resources with practical, fully prepared and effective lessons. "

He said her presence in the classroom built up his confidence and fostered an atmosphere in which he himself could learn different techniques and strategies for teaching.

"The best thing was, my learners were encouraged to explore and find out things for themselves."

Nadiema's role as mentor

Nadiema Gamieldien was the JMP mentor assigned to work with Monique Kiwiets and Stephen Stoutz. Her role was to help each one manage and overcome the particular challenges they faced in their classrooms. Nadiema supported and guided her mentees. She demonstrated effective ways they could plan, prepare and deliver practical lessons. Her enthusiasm was contagious and with her regular support and encouragement she has helped them to become confident and efficient teachers.





Hanley Pretorius matriculated at Ravensmead High in 2004

She liked school and had a rewarding and inspiring childhood. Her primary school English teacher sparked her interest in poetry, books and reading.

Studied Tourism at UWC before taking a year off

Returned to UWC in 2007 for an Education degree

Teaches Afrikaans and Social Sciences at Eindhoven Primary in Delft

JMP mentor Nadiema Gamieldien

'PSP helps teachers deal with daily struggles'

Hanley Pretorius was happy growing up in Ravensmead and loved school. After completing a degree in Education in 2010, she got a teaching post at Eindhoven Primary in Delft, a poverty stricken area on the Cape Flats.

It gradually became clear to her that her university education had not prepared her fully for the administrative duties and socio-economic obstacles in the classroom.

"Before you can even think about starting your lesson, you have to deal with the various social and economic backgrounds of the children," she says.

While she was qualified to teach high school learners, on her first day she was placed in a Grade 2 class, and later that day moved to a Grade 4 class.

"Before you can even think about starting your lesson, you have to deal with the social and economic issues."

"Eindhoven was a shock to my system. I battled to find my feet and couldn't see how to overcome the poverty evident in the classroom."

Hanley first encountered the PSP in 2011 when she started attending JMP workshops.

"Although I had never heard of the PSP or the Joint Mentorship Project before, I was motivated from the start," she says.

She became immersed in the JMP and was a regular at the innovative workshops offered by PSP.

"They were extremely helpful and beneficial in dealing with disciplinary issues and developing practical lesson plans."

She said the familiar crowd who attended the workshops created a communal atmosphere and a platform for support and feedback.

"The most important aspect about the PSP's workshops and the JMP is that they focus on the daily struggles. You get the feeling that you're not alone out there."

Juliana's 'heart is with the children'

Juliana January, 31, grew up in Worcester in the Boland

Graduated at UWC in 2009 with an Education degree

Temporary position in 2010 in her home town of Paarl at a Catholic school teaching Grade 4

Moved to another temporary post at Riebeeck Street Primary, Belhar, in 2011

Full-time position at Wesbank Primary teaching Grade 5 and 6 from 2012



Juliana works with her Grade 4s at Riebeeck Street Primary

Juliana January first became involved in the Primary Science Programme's Joint Mentorship Project while she was at Riebeeck Street Primary School, struggling with numerous disciplinary problems.

"I gained a lot from the PSP, and they helped me overcome the challenges I faced with teaching, reading and writing, as well as dealing with discipline."

The school was plagued with drugs, violence, and disciplinary issues. One particularly underprivileged boy caught her attention.

"He was naughty and disrespectful, a violent boy."

Even after he threatened her with a pair of scissors, she continued to believe in him.

Her position came to an end and she was without work for six months. She later learnt that her absence had caused the boy to stop coming to school.

"Because I gave him a ride to school every day and gave him constant attention, he was devastated when I left."

This affected Juliana significantly, but she had learnt a valuable lesson.

"If you respect your learners, they will respect you. Each and every one is different and they all want your attention."

Being part of the Joint Mentorship Project gave her valuable insight into practical, hands-on lesson planning and curriculum implementation.

"The disciplinary workshops especially helped me understand teaching a whole lot better."

Gareth Ruiters, 28, Grade 6 teacher at Ridgeville Primary in Westridge. Currently teaching Grade 8 and 9 at Cravenby

Graduated at UWC in 2010 with a degree in Education

Teaches maths and science

JMP mentor Nadiema Gamieldien





Gareth Ruiters facilitates the hands-on approach with his learners

Gareth was hooked after two weeks,

Gareth Ruiters has not always wanted to be a teacher. It was only after various jobs and a year's sabbatical, that a friend helped him find direction.

"In December 2009 a family friend phoned and asked if I'd be interested in a two-week temporary teaching job at a school in Macassar."

Gareth had never thought about teaching as a career. "Especially in maths, which was the position that was available. But temporary positions are extremely rare in December, so I took it as a sign, and became a teacher for two weeks."

Those two weeks of teaching proved to Gareth that he had found what he was meant to do.

"I immediately e-mailed UWC to apply for the one-year PGCE qualification, but I didn't hear from them. So I just showed up on campus."

Although Gareth was not technically enrolled in the programme, he sat in on lectures and completed projects with the professors' agreement for credit. He was eventually accepted as a student and graduated at the end of 2010.

A foot in the door

In 2011, Gareth was offered an interview at Beacon View Primary and was hired to teach Grade 4 and 5 learners, but on a temporary basis. Determined to get his foot in the door, he took the job knowing he would be paid a fraction of a teacher's salary.

He was also asked to coach the athletics team, and had to hit the ground running.

"The Grade 4s were very challenging. Their ages varied, as well as their levels of maturity, and how to handle their dependence on me was frustrating at times."

Preparing for lessons, as well as completing the administrative duties, left little time to pay individual attention to learners and even less time to a life outside school. By the second term of the year,



"I realised that the only way I could teach these kids, is if I could sell the product called Education to them."



LEFT: Gareth and a PSP facilitator, Novosti Buta, in the classroom

and his passion for teaching grew

Gareth was struggling through the daily grind of teaching.

In that second term of 2011, the PSP introduced the Joint Membership Project (JMP) to the school, and Gareth got involved.

Real issues

Nadiema Gamieldien came to Gareth's classroom at Beacon View Primary to help him with lesson preparation, the quality of lessons, as well as overall management of the class. By the end of the year, Gareth could see an improvement in both his teaching and his classroom organisation.

"PSP started with workshops where first-time teachers and mentors could get together and discuss real issues in the classroom and how to figure out practical solutions.

"In the first term of my second year, I was assigned to a Grade 6 class at Ridgeville Primary School in Westridge. And then in the second term of that year I moved again to teach Grade 8 and Grade 9 at Cravenby Secondary in Cravenby."

His Grade 6 class at Ridgeville was very difficult because many of his learners were struggling with learning problems. The practical lessons that the JMP demonstrated improved the learning environment for all his learners by allowing everyone to work at his or her own pace.

"I realised that the only way I could teach these kids was if I could sell the product 'Education' to them."

He worked on gaining their trust and creating an environment where they could believe in themselves.

"Education is all about adapting to the learners and the environment. And that is why the training from the JMP is so important. You can be a teacher for 30 years, but it is always developing and changing. That's education for you!"

Many paths led Dawn Burke to teaching

As a rebellious young girl, Dawn Burke took many byways before she found the path to her true calling.



Dawn Burke was 40 years old when she graduated in 2010 from the University of the Western Cape (UWC). She started teaching at The Hague Primary in Delft on the Cape Flats the following year.

"Some people in Delft are involved in gangsterism and substance abuse, like alcohol and *tik*. The predominant factor in the community is poverty. Our school has a feeding scheme where learners are properly fed so that they can grow holistically."

Dawn grew up in Kuilsriver and left school after Grade 9. She ran away from home and was only reconciled with her parents years later.

She married Martin Burke in 1993 and they have two children.

She started attending evening classes at Sarepta Secondary School in 1995 after her daughter, Dominique, was born. She later ended up working in the textile and retail industries.

"While I was working I completed Grade 10, and in 1998 I finished matric. I later entered Bible College at Brackenfell Christian College and received a diploma in Ministry in 2003."

Dawn was ordained as a pastor in 2011 and with her husband founded the Kingdom of God Ministries International.

In 2006 she started a business driving children to school.

"While on holiday later that year, I was driving and scrolled through the radio stations, and happened to catch a programme on the difficulties experienced by teachers in South Africa. I heard how some wanted to leave the profession."

> ***"To step out of the role as a carefree student into the shoes of a responsible teacher is quite a challenge."***

The story troubled Dawn and she later saw that conversation on the radio as a confirmation to go and study to become an educator.

"I used to drive past UWC with a yearning to be there but never in my wildest dreams did I think my dream would become a reality!"

She applied to UWC at the beginning of 2007 (which was very late), and finally, after numerous phonecalls and paying an age exemption fee, she was admitted.

"I started teaching at The Hague Primary in 2011. I teach English Home and First Additional Language, Life Orientation, as well as Technology. Last year I had a class of 40 and this year a class of 32. The difficulties at school are mostly ill-discipline and classroom management. Although teaching is very demanding with too much admin, it is also very rewarding. When the day is over, you feel that you've added value to someone's life."

At first, like all first-time teachers, Dawn had difficulties.

"We were trained to teach content. I never thought I would have to be an administrator, sports specialist, policewoman, judge, nurse, technology specialist …"

The JMP workshops, Dawn says, gave her skills in how to make teaching easier.

"I used to keep records of learners who broke the rules. But then my mentor, Themba Tshongwe, advised me to also keep a record of praise reports. Now, the children also want to do good things!"



My role as a mentor

Themba Tshongwe

Having been assigned four mentees at the beginning of the programme, I finally ended up with only two. I lost Goodman who passed away tragically, and Masuku returned to his home in Mpumalanga.

Dawn Burke tries very hard to live by example and be a good role model. This is often a big challenge because of discipline and classroom management issues and community pressure. She is very knowledgeable about her subjects namely: English, Life Orientation, Afrikaans and Technology. She is a good listener, always willing to experiment with suggestions and willing to implement her own ideas – like initiating a school magazine.

Finding a critical balance between the curriculum and learners' success, as well as their own goals will be what defines all these teachers going forward.

Mentorship a 'space for engagement'

Gené Rooy had an inspiring and enjoyable childhood education. She went to university determined to "pursue a career that gives back to the community". No surprise then, that she ended up teaching.



From her first year at Heidelberg Primary School to the year in her aunt's classroom at Bishop Lavis Primary, and then her senior years at Cape Academy, Gené was fortunate to have had inspirational role models amongst her teachers.

"As the first wave of students at Cape Academy, we received an exceptional education and developed great relationships with our teachers. Their doors were always open to us."

She went to the University of the Western Cape where she contemplated many different majors before turning to education. In her final year of training at UWC, Gené was stationed at Belhar Primary, where she now teaches Grade 7.

Halfway through her first year, Gené was introduced to the PSP and the Joint Mentorship Project.

The PSP and the JMP helped Gené with lesson preparation and discipline in her classroom, as well as providing resources for her to teach hands-on, exciting and practical lessons.

"The workbooks gave me a basis for engaged and pro-active lessons. In the process, because the PSP was present in the classroom, I became more alert to the needs of the learners."

The JMP and PSP provided Gené with "a space for engagement between us, the teachers, and our learners".

‘Natural leader’ Shana kept going through the tough times

From the time Shana was a student, she was a leader. She grew up and went to school in Manenberg where she was involved in the student body and sports teams. In 2006 she began her university career at UWC, studying Engineering Science. However, soon after beginning her courses, she switched to Education.

“Life has a weird way of showing you what you should be doing,” said Shana. “I figured my leadership qualities were meant to be used in the classroom.”

After graduating in 2010, she went back to Manenberg in 2011 to teach at Easter Peak Primary, where she has been for the past two years.

Giving back

“It is my way of giving back. What I bring to the table is my community experience. I understand the children. I know what factors impact them.”

This self-belief helped Shana through many difficult times at the start of her career, but she still felt she needed assistance.

“UWC taught me that you always survive no matter what, no matter how. But as far as practical training goes … Who can train you for that?“

From the first day as a teacher, Shana felt she had to figure things out for herself. She remembers going into her classroom feeling as if she was a Grade 8 student instead of a fourth grade teacher. But she continued to “put on a happy face” and show her learners that she always cared, no matter what. They began to respect and trust her.

This had its own disadvantages.

“They unloaded their issues and problems on me which resulted in me being emotionally drained by the end of the day.”

She wanted to be there for each of her learners but knew she needed support.

“There were so many frustrations and struggles at school and sometimes I couldn’t wait for the day to end,” she admits.

But she persevered. Halfway through her first year, Shana was invited to become involved in the Joint Mentorship Project.

The workshops supported her with tools to cope in the classroom. “But above all, it was a place where I could talk about my frustrations and doubts.”

Surprise

“I was surprised how many of the other new teachers were struggling with the same problems I had.”

Shana says her mentor, Agatha Lebethe, was a neutral sounding board and eventually became her emotional support.

“The JMP is amazing. It goes beyond teaching,” she says.

“Life has a weird way of showing you what you should be doing.”



Shana Hendricks, young Primary in Manenberg





teacher at Easter Peak



Larissa Strauss, 33, Grade 7 teacher at Beacon View Primary in Beacon Valley, Mitchell's Plain

Graduated at UWC in 2010

In her second year of teaching

Teaches science

JMP mentor Zorina Dharsey



Skeptical Larissa learnt valuable skills at JMP

Larissa Strauss grew up in the Northern Cape and graduated from UWC with a Communication Science degree in 2001. She spent ten years working at a cell-phone company. Larissa needed a change and her mother suggested teaching. She comes from a long family line of teachers, but had never felt the desire to become an educator.

"Now I believe I was chosen to do this."

Larissa went back to university in 2010 to take the PGCE course and become a teacher. After graduating, she was hired at Beacon View Primary.

"At first it was hectic because I didn't know what to do. There was no support. I was thrown in and just had to swim."

It felt as if she was constantly in over her head, dealing with parents and handling the "emotional baggage" of teaching in a challenging environment.

Halfway through her first year, the PSP invited her to participate in the Joint Mentorship Project.

"I was skeptical at first because of the extra time and effort I would have to put in, but agreed to join for two years."

After the very first workshop she realised how valuable this programme was going to be for both her and her class.

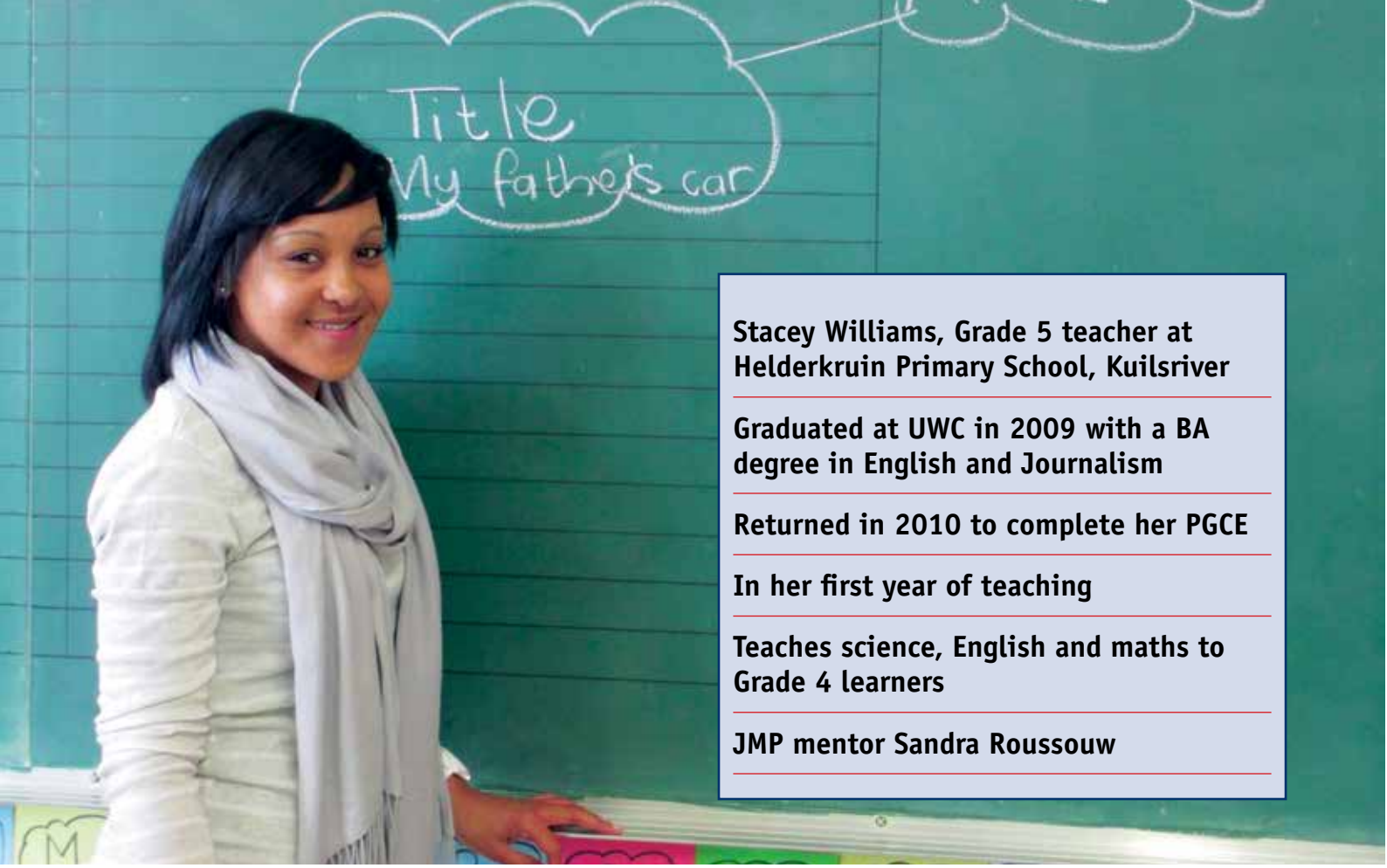
"It was like an answer to a prayer," she says.

The workshops helped her in planning for each subject and made her finally feel as though she knew what she was doing.

"I was thrown in and just had to swim ... It (the JMP) was like an answer to a prayer."

Larissa has been teaching Grade 7 learners for the past two years.

"Every time I come to a workshop, I get something out of it. When I think there is no one to speak to at school, I know my mentor, Zorina, is available to listen and help out."



Stacey Williams, Grade 5 teacher at Helderkruin Primary School, Kuilsriver

Graduated at UWC in 2009 with a BA degree in English and Journalism

Returned in 2010 to complete her PGCE

In her first year of teaching

Teaches science, English and maths to Grade 4 learners

JMP mentor Sandra Roussouw

Discipline and respect, 'basis of the classroom'

Stacey Williams completed her first full year as a permanent teacher in 2012. With the help of the Primary Science Programme and the Joint Mentorship Project, she has worked through numerous obstacles and challenges.

After graduating from UWC in 2005 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and Journalism, she expected to start working immediately.

"But I struggled to find anything suitable and landed a one-month substitute teaching post at Newcastle Elementary School in Maccasser, teaching Grade 6 learners."

"The PSP workshops focus on interactive, immersive learning in the classroom."

The teaching bug had bitten Stacey and after her job as a temporary teacher, she went back to UWC for a post graduate certificate in education.

In July 2011 she landed a permanent post at Helderkruin Primary School in Kuilsriver. Taking over a class of Grade 4s halfway through the year, when the learners were already used to their previous teacher, proved to be a daunting task.

"My training had been focused on high school learners, Grades 10 to 12. I found it very hard to adapt my teaching style to fit primary school learners."

Stacey joined the mentorship project and guided by the PSP, she set about creating a disciplined classroom. "Without parental involvement in the school, this is always a big challenge."

Sandra Roussouw, Stacey's mentor, gave guidance and provided her with hands-on skills, materials and resources for the classroom.

"The PSP workshops focused on interactive, immersive learning in the classroom," Stacey remarks.

She says the most important skill she learned was lesson planning.

"Before Sandra's help, it was difficult to know where to begin teaching. With the help of the JMP, I was able to find my feet. I know what is expected of me and where I am going."

Stacey plans to continue her participation in the PSP workshops and is enrolling for an Honours degree in education.

Louise Johannes, 26, Grade 4 teacher at Wesbank Primary School in Delft

Matriculated in 2004

Worked two years as a cashier to support family

Went to UWC on scholarships in 2007

Teaches science, Afrikaans and Life Orientation to Grade 4

JMP mentor Zorina Dharsey



PSP teaches us how to teach, says Louise

Louise Johannes fell pregnant in her final year of school and the principal asked her to leave. Louise gave birth in August and returned to school in September to finish her exams.

She pushed on, worked hard and passed her final exams. She graduated from high school in 2004, but instead of following her dream to become a teacher, she was forced to find work as a cashier at Checkers in Brackenfell to support her family.

Two years later, Louise's cousin brought her a form to apply to the University of the Western Cape. With financial burdens and a child to take care of, going to university seemed impossible, but she submitted it anyway.

Louise was accepted and applied for several loans and scholarships before beginning the four-year programme at UWC in 2007. With persistence and hard work, she graduated and started to look for a teaching job in Cape Town.

"When I landed a job at Wesbank Primary I was unsure about teaching in the same area where I went to high school," she says.

"The PSP helps not only with science and maths, they go further. They teach you how to teach."

She was aware of the poverty, crime, and drug and alcohol abuse in the area.

"The school had 17 principals in ten years – this made me very nervous." But she went anyway. "And immediately I wished I hadn't!"

There were over 40 learners in her classroom and although keeping discipline was difficult, this was not her biggest concern.

"My main struggle was trying to organise the class, and the administration side of teaching was very confusing."

Louise came to Wesbank prepared to teach Life Orientation and English, but was asked to teach her Grade 4 class Natural Sciences, and Arts and Culture.

"I felt completely at a loss."

Louise joined the Joint Mentoring Project and her mentor, Zorina Dharsey and the PSP team stepped in to help with the subjects she needed assistance with.

"Not only with the content in the new subject areas, but also with specific lessons and experiments to assist with the learners' understanding of the material."

Louise soon found her feet. In fact, she gained so much confidence, she has requested to be moved to a Grade 7 classroom next year where she will be dealing with the new curriculum.

"The PSP helps not only with science and maths, they go further. They teach you how to teach."

‘PSP mentors know what they are doing’

Samantha van Rhyn grew up in Malmesbury in the Swartland. In Grade 8 she had an English teacher who made a difference in her life.

“He inspired me to always give my best.”

His enthusiasm and passion for teaching eventually helped spark her own decision to become a teacher.

After finishing high school in 2006, she went to the University of the Western Cape and graduated in 2010 with a degree in Education.

“I wanted to help people and I wanted to start at the beginning. I think that children are the beginning, so that is why I became a teacher.”

Not prepared

The courses at university focused on subjects like psychology and theories. Assigned to a Grade 5 class in her first year of teaching, she found her degree had not prepared her.

“My university training had painted a beautiful picture and I thought everything would be under control in the classroom.”

That was far from the reality.

“My first day did not go as I planned. It felt like I was a first-time learner! No matter how prepared I thought I was, it never felt as if I knew what I was was doing.”

Samatha’s first teaching days seemed to revolve around administrative tasks, which left little time to actually interact with the learners.

Many times during her first year Samantha asked herself, “Where is the teaching coming in? And why am I not enjoying it?”

Halfway through her first year of teaching, Samantha was contacted by the PSP and agreed to become part of the Joint Mentorship Project.

“My university training had painted such a beautiful picture I thought everything would be under control …”



Samantha van Rhyn (seated) gets guidance from her mentor, Nocawe Malatse

“At first I felt as if this might end up being just one more time consuming thing to add to my to-do list. But after attending the first workshop, I changed my mind.”

She was relieved to see that other teachers were also trying to overcome the obstacles she had encountered.

“The PSP mentors know what they are doing and everything you need to know is presented at the workshops. You can never walk out and say you didn’t learn anything.”

Mentors

The mentors’ creativity and focus empowered Samantha and taught her how to incorporate simple things in her lessons to help her learners understand the curriculum.

Towards the end of her first year, just when it seemed things were going well, she learnt that she would be transferred to a Grade 2 classroom for the following school year.

“Again the mentorship programme was there to help make the transition smooth.”

After completing almost two years of teaching and receiving help from the JMP, Samantha is adamant: “This programme should be available for every teacher out there!”







Background to the PSP

The Western Cape Primary Science Programme (PSP) is an award-winning non-profit organisation that improves the quality of teaching and learning in disadvantaged primary schools by providing training and comprehensive support to teachers in Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Language, Social Sciences and Environmental Education.

As a centre of excellence in primary education, the PSP develops teachers' content knowledge and skills and offers a variety of teaching strategies for innovative classroom practice.

The PSP also creates and produces materials to support learning. These are distributed nationally.

The PSP works with over 1 000 teachers each year from around 120 primary schools through a number of projects. This work includes:

- Developing and running training courses with large numbers of teachers
- Intensively supporting teams of science and mathematics teachers in small clusters of schools
- Mentoring individual, newly qualified teachers in the classroom.

The PSP has been operating since 1984.

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