

CATHOLIC

# Education

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times for  
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# CATHOLIC Education

From the Editor <

Teaching is a caring profession, but often teachers take little care of themselves thinking that it is unnecessary and that in giving they will receive. Eventually, personal relationships suffer as a result of teachers giving too much to their careers or children in their classrooms. Learning how to put boundaries in place allows us to be free to give to the children at school who are in need and have enough left to take care of ourselves and our loved ones. Claudine Ribeiro provides some good tips on to remain professional while seeing to it that the needs of the children are taken care of.

Children who struggle to understand instructions struggle with learning. In classrooms with many learners, these children fall further and further behind. Ruling out hearing problems is the first step, the next is to assist these children in the classroom environment to follow instructions and understand the day's programme. Speech therapist Carol Brenner gives us some ideas on how to do this in busy classrooms.

The 12th Bishop Brenninkmeijer Memorial Lecture was delivered by Dr Mark Potterton in early October. Mark inaugurated the memorial lecture in memory of the bishop so it was fortuitous that he was able to give the lecture himself this year. Mark spoke about the challenges facing education, and Catholic schools in particular. A summary of the talk is on page 4.

Another year is sprinting to an end but before the respite of the Christmas summer holidays arrive much work is to be done. Good luck to all learners and teachers involved in exams, concerts, prize givings and other school events. Your holidays will be well deserved!

Kelsay

 Catholic Institute of Education

 @CathEducation

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12<sup>th</sup> Bishop Brenninkmeijer  
Memorial Lecture:

# Challenging times for Catholic schools

By Dr Mark Potterton



I am honoured to have the opportunity to remember the life of Bishop Hans Brenninkmeijer. Monsignor Hans, as he was known to some, was a remarkable man who cared deeply for education. Many years after the death of Monsignor Hans we still find ourselves in a country characterised by inequality and poverty with the majority of the most vulnerable pupils still achieving poorly in schools. A recent Statistics South Africa Report (2017) found that more than one out of every two (55.5%) South Africans was poor in 2016: this poverty has a negative impact on a child's development.

**W**e need Catholic schools to flourish in this country, particularly because of the crisis we are in. In her work, Hannah Arendt, shares her ideas on how many people readily accept lies in times of global uncertainty. For Arendt, education was about the passing on of knowledge, and of allowing young people to recreate the world for themselves: "Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world."

Catholic schools in South Africa today, perhaps now more than ever, have a particular role to play today in the teaching of values. Our schools are still distinctive because of the philosophy underpinning our approach to education. Thomas Groome says:

- God's love and grace comes to us through creation and everyday things;
- We find our identity and true selves in relationship with others;
- We are capable of sin but essentially good;
- We can think for ourselves, trust our own discernment and decision-making;



- Our tradition and the salvation story in the scriptures are important.

The education system is continually changing. The first changes I was engaged in were over 20 years ago to rapidly remove the offensive aspects from national party curriculum. I remember preparing notes to help teachers understand outcomes based education (OBE), and have vivid memories of the heated discussions that we had around Jonathan Jansen's 'Ten reasons why OBE will fail'.

Despite our enthusiasm and belief in the important need for educational change and reform, change has been slow. Transforming an education system which was so divided and so unequal has been a mammoth task, perhaps more mammoth than ever imagined. These divisions are still an albatross in Catholic education too. Bringing about equity and improving school quality have been key imperatives of education policy in South Africa which have not yet been achieved.

A recent example of dysfunction in our school system, just kilometres away, was reported in *The Star* (11 September 2017). At Klipspruit West Secondary School pupils loiter, have sex, gamble and use drugs on the school premises. Pupils harass teachers and very little teaching takes place. Leadership problems persist at the school and authorities blame the situation on racial divisions in the school.

The intervention efforts that have been made by government up until now in our education system, have done away with the racially differentiated system, but have reproduced a class differentiated system, where socio-economic factors have become

a major determining factor of the quality of education for the schooling system. In other words, the quality of education for poor people in general still remains poor.

I don't want to detract from the many gains and improvements that we have made in the system. For example, around six years ago I observed the most impressive school nutrition programmes in operation in the Bushbuckridge region in places where academic performance was poor. I was particularly impressed by the generosity and kindness of teachers who actively set out to help vulnerable and needy children who they met daily in their classrooms.

Working with teachers in many of the poorer schools, I have seen that teaching in impoverished contexts is draining and demands more on a personal level than just teaching a subject. The reality of a study in impoverished schools in Britain came to life. This study found that teachers often had to deal with drama, conflict and tears, and found it hard to remain detached. Other day-to-day issues that teachers faced included having to cajole pupils to complete homework and to return books and equipment to class. These issues resulted in working environments that were unpredictable. Something could happen at any time and lessons could not be relied upon to go according to plan.

Violence overshadows the communities we live in. Recent news reports speak of a child being killed at school, a principal being murdered in a Gauteng school and a Grade 2 child bringing a gun with bullets to school to shoot another pupil.

How are ordinary people making a difference in South African Catholic

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**"Catholic schools in South Africa today, perhaps now more than ever, have a particular role to play today in the teaching of values."**

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## “In the Catholic school, teachers play a central role in securing the wellbeing of pupils, and indeed the importance of institutional culture in influencing human interaction.”

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schools? Earlier this year I was in Durban to attend a farewell Mass for Mrs Judy Finn. She had been a teacher at St Augustine Catholic Primary School for 40 years. Nineteen of these years she served as principal. Mrs Finn was a servant leader, but very powerful. She oversaw improvements to the school and had to deal with many challenges. Many of the children at her school came from impoverished homes and had to overcome obstacles. Mrs Finn was motivated because she believed in the God given dignity of every child, parent and teacher in her school community. Her values of compassion, tolerance and solidarity with the poor were manifested in her daily life. We often speak of the new role of laity in Catholic schools, but Mrs Finn had been in leadership for 19 years where she honoured the traditions and spirit of the founders of her school enculturating these values into the day-

to-day life of the school. St Augustine staff showed their commitment to renewal programmes which animated and sustained life at the school. Mrs Finn and her staff demonstrated respect for a spirituality of transformation.

Teachers like Mrs Finn, are expected to conjure up miracles on their own with very few resources. She did not shy away from this challenge. Results in the Annual National Assessments “must improve” she was told. In a few provinces, schools were being supported in systematic curriculum interventions, but in others teachers were left to grapple on their own with bulleted sentences in thick curriculum documents in overcrowded classrooms. Surely school improvement needs to go hand in hand with support.

Returning to Hannah Arendt, she provides an account of a plural society in which human beings have the capacity to make

and keep promises, and she argues that human actions change thought.

Schools in themselves cannot take action. Leaders, teachers and pupils shape the institution and they animate a school. The teachers’ and pupils’ role in shaping a school culture cannot be underestimated. In the Catholic school, teachers play a central role in securing the wellbeing of pupils, and indeed the importance of institutional culture in influencing human interaction. Arendt’s concept of ‘natality’ reminds us of the human capacity of renewal. For Arendt ‘natality’ is the core of education – ‘people are constantly born into the world and are in need of introduction to that world and to one another’. Newcomers bring with them the possibility of renewal and hope - an ability to renew and to change the world.

In South Africa there is an urgent need to rediscover a sense of agency in schools. Teachers and pupils must escape from the



mindset of being so weighed down by the context that they are unable to transform the schools they find themselves in. This weighed-down mindset means that schools are trapped in the present and unable to create a new and better world. Somehow schools, and the people in them, need to unsettle the social processes that seem so entrenched.

From a practical perspective, changing the way schools organise themselves in the South African context is not easy, but the following two steps from the Catholic school tradition may be helpful: firstly, schools need to be secured and made safer. On a practical level, fences and gates need to be fixed and access controlled. Care for premises is both practical and symbolic of a broader climate of care, and in this regard, litter needs to be cleared away, classrooms swept, cracked windows replaced and broken doors and handles repaired.

Secondly, teachers themselves need to model respectful behaviour to pupils, in how they themselves act as well as in their treatment of their students. They need to show students that there are consequences

for bad behaviour and for breaking the rules. More importantly, schools need to do away with many practices that foster violence. For example, using corporal punishment merely teaches children the negative values of degradation, force and humiliation - and must be stopped. Intimidation by leaders and teachers also needs to be avoided in school situations.

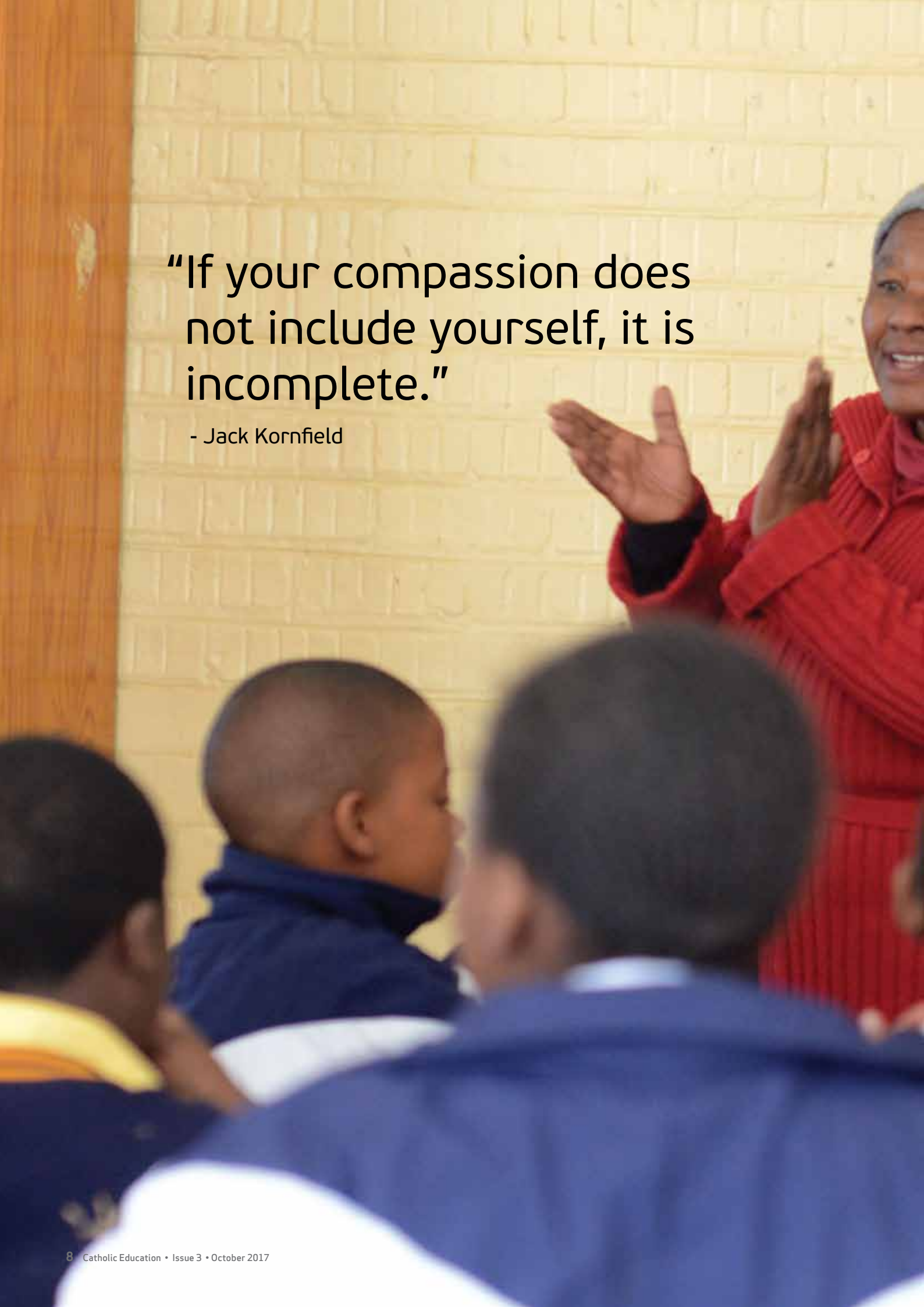
Monsignor Hans, like the many founders of Catholic schools, often challenged the conventional wisdom of the day - he saw beyond the present. Today we are called to see beyond the current reality and make roads where no road has been. We need to establish more projects supported by our network, we need to worry about out-of-school youth, we need to ensure that poor Catholic people who want a Catholic education for their children get it. Joan Chittister said: "spiritual leadership is about assessing reality, about reclaiming the cosmic vision, and about being courageous enough to ask the right questions along the way." We need to realise as Catholic schools that our individual futures are bound to our collective future. ■

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**"Spiritual leadership is about assessing reality, about reclaiming the cosmic vision, and about being courageous enough to ask the right questions along the way."**

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A woman with short grey hair, wearing a red ribbed sweater, is clapping her hands and smiling. She is standing in front of a group of young children who are wearing blue and white school uniforms. The background is a light-colored brick wall. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

"If your compassion does  
not include yourself, it is  
incomplete."

- Jack Kornfield





# The Need for Self-Care

## A Guide for Educators

By Claudine Ribeiro, Director, Johannesburg Parent and Child Counselling Centre

Many young people experience learning difficulties, challenging home circumstances and/or a lack of resources, making it difficult for them to engage fully in the classroom and have a wholesome school experience. Educators often become overwhelmed and disheartened in their attempts to assist such children to do better at school and to fulfill their potential. Burn out levels are high among caring professionals, which makes it essential to implement a strategy of self-care.

Educators often serve as a giant shock absorber, a sponge for the emotions of the children in their care. Educators experience exhaustion, frustration, anger, depression and sadness, none of which are easy to deal with and do not make for effective, caring professionals, which is when guilt creeps in. Educators feel that they must keep giving, that teaching is a vocation and that they cannot turn anyone away. However, educators need to look after their own emotional well-being too. We cannot give what we do not have.

This is a simple guide to nurturing oneself, so that, as educators, we can continue to offer support and a helping hand. This guide involves a plan that requires ongoing and repeated attention to oneself in the following four areas:

### 1. Self-Awareness:

When working with children and families it is helpful to understand how our interactions with them leave us feeling, and what emotions we take home with us each day. If we do this we will have a better understanding of our inner resources, of how others affect us, and whether our interventions with others are effective. This internal barometer can be

used to help those very people become aware of their own hidden emotions, triggering their self-awareness too. It will help us recognise when we are not helpful to others, serving as an alert for when we are in trouble ourselves. Hidden and repressed emotions often lead to a lot of problems including illness and severe depression.

A self-care regime involves ongoing internal awareness and reflection, followed by an expression and discussion of feelings that surface. Use a journal, talk to a friend or partner, or express and explore feelings through some form of art.

### 2. Setting Boundaries

Boundaries are the invisible rules and regulations that we put in place to protect ourselves, our values, and the people we help. Without clear boundaries there will inevitably be enmeshment, over-involvement, and feelings of guilt towards ourselves or those we help. Boundaries ensure that our interactions remain positive and help us to provide a consistent frame for our relationships. Boundaries ensure that everyone's needs are met, without anyone feeling guilty.



## A school could form a support team that takes important decisions together about children that offer support and relief.

It is not always easy to put boundaries in place, especially if you do not know yourself and your values. Perhaps the School Management Team could assist each other and members of staff to agree on common boundaries.

Putting the following boundaries in place is a healthy way to assist others:

- **Physical Boundaries**

Define specific times and places to interact. Set limits on physical touch and personal space (e.g. allowing children in to your home may initially seem the right thing to do, but over time could cause resentment and anger from yourself or other family members). Some of these are outlined in the Child Safeguarding Policy for Catholic schools.

- **Emotional Boundaries**

These are the decisions we need to make about how much of ourselves we are prepared to offer others, e.g. do you share our own feelings and to what extent; how much advice do you give; how much responsibility do you give to families; do you accept blame; to what extent do you sacrifice your own needs - do you give up family time, time to exercise or prep time to stay after school to help a child?

- **Material boundaries**

Are you going to give money, clothes, food or other goods to the people you work with? How much? How often? Will you offer transport? Are you willing to

accept gifts from those you help?

- **Mental Boundaries**

This involves how you conduct interventions, e.g. are you prepared to give direct advice, to share your opinion, and be willing to be open minded? Do you say yes to every request or are you able to say no if you do not have the capacity or the request crosses a boundary? How much do you want to be seen as the rescuer? Are you offering assistance for the right reasons? Are the reasons healthy and good?

- **Professional Boundaries**

Maintaining confidentiality around issues facing school children and their families is a professional requirement. One must also keep detailed notes of interactions with families or children. A guiding principle is always to act in the best interests of the child.

- **Spiritual Boundaries**

Be aware of the ethos within a Catholic school and to what extent this will inform and guide your interactions.

### 3. Skills and resources:

Interventions with children should be done by a team and not by any one person alone as this is unethical and results in feelings of guilt, blame, being overwhelmed and overburdened. Educators need support from within the school and externally. A school could form a support team that takes important decisions together about children that offer support and relief. This

team would assist with difficult home circumstances and children who require extra assistance. Such a team would meet regularly to discuss specialised cases and take decisions on the role of the school. Such a group could also work on creating a policy within the school for referring cases, getting therapy, accessing resources for children and deciding about legal intervention. The group would inform staff about policy and procedures, and ensure that they stick to this regime. School counsellors or therapists could be included as part of the team. External psychologists or social workers can provide supervision or mentorship as a regular intervention not just in times of crises. If there is a lack of funds, it may be useful to access support from people in the community, e.g. appropriate clergy or a community social worker. Confidentiality must be remembered, and if necessary, withhold identifying details of children. If the school elects not to make use of external support structures, the least they could do is have debriefing sessions when there has been an emergency or trauma that has left educators or learners with feelings of despair and fear. It is irresponsible not to engage in debriefing.

The school could also form a small support group with other schools in the area, be it informal, or facilitated by a professional. Such groups offer support, ideas sharing, creativity, group decision-making, accountability and debriefing, which is very reassuring.





#### 4. Self-Care Regime:

This is how you look after, nourish and care for YOU. It is highly personal. Looking after your holistic well-being and strengthening yourself will directly impact the level of care you offer at work.

Use this table to assess how well cared for you are:

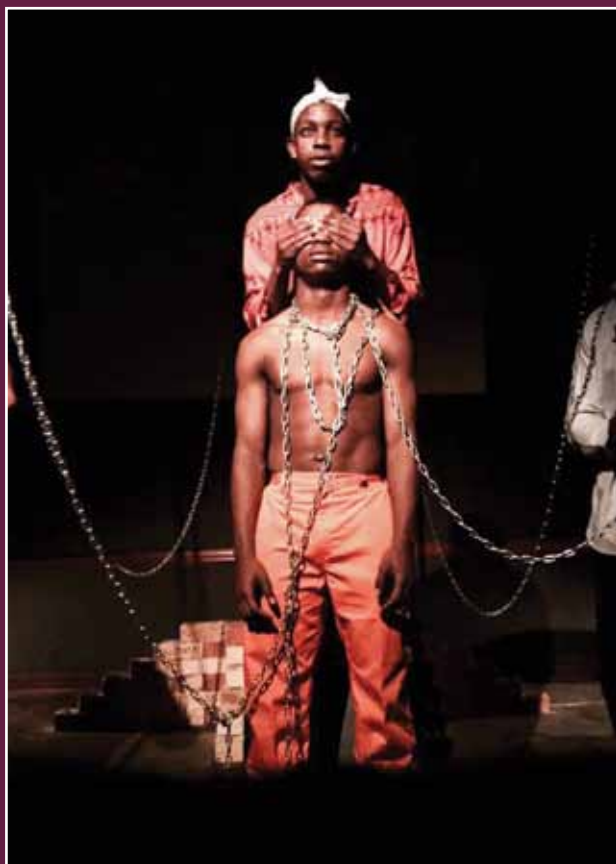
Type of Self Care	Elements Involved	Do I do this?
Physical	Fitness / exercise	
	Healthy diet	
	Healthy sleep routine	
	Regular lunch breaks	
	Regular break in daily routine	
	Regular holidays/breaks	
Psychological	Keep a reflective journal	
	Hobbies	
	Seeing friends	
	Family time	
	Therapy	
Emotional	Supportive friendships	
	Keeping account of emotions and feelings	
	Positive reinforcement of self	
Spiritual	Yoga	
	Meditation	
	Worship	
	Art	
	Prayer	
Relationship	Prioritize personal relationships	
	Attend family events	
	Spend time with family	
	Talk to meaningful family members	

#### Guidelines for your personal self-care plan:

- Develop a personal self-care plan based on the areas where you answered 'no' in the above table.
- Reassess the plan regularly.
- Always add new things.

As educators, our role goes way beyond teaching and touches the lives of children and their families in a unique and special way. Looking after ourselves ensures that we remain whole and can attend to others constructively. ■

“Interventions with children should be done by a team and not by any one person alone as this is unethical and results in feelings of guilt, blame, being overwhelmed and overburdened.”



# High school boys tackle tough topics

By Raymond Perrier

The National Arts Festival in Grahamstown is always full of surprising delights, secular and also sacred. I was especially surprised to encounter a compelling play from a boy's high school; even more surprised that it was a Catholic school; and even more surprised that the play dealt honestly and sensitively with taboo subjects.

**T**he play was called 'Sisazabalaza' (we are still struggling) and came from St Benedict's College in Johannesburg.

This is a school that I confess to associating more with rugby and rowing than with the creative arts and yet here was a group of 15 okeish young men (aged 16-18) presenting a play that they had written themselves and dealing with themes that they had selected. And the themes were not easy: a successful student on the edge of depression, a drunken and corrupt father, a role model older brother throwing his life away, a bullying teacher, economic inequality among teens, the rape of a girlfriend caught up in the cross-fire.

Two teachers, Brittany Craze and Karen McAnda, had coached the actors in developing the script. But, they assured me, the themes and the characters were the boys' own choices. It was during conversations in drama workshops about the issues that troubled them that the boys themselves identified these themes and then created the realistic characters who portrayed them. Inevitably, some of the characters were heavily drawn from

the boys' own lives or from people they knew. But they were also not afraid to be more subversive in their character development. For example, a note of humour was introduced through a white cop who wanted to be black and a black cop who wanted to be white. And, even more surprising, there was a young man who played the character of the girlfriend, not in caricature or jokiness but with great sensitivity and restraint.

Parents and educators often worry about the EQ (Emotional Quotient or emotional intelligence) of young men today. They are locked away in their rooms with their play stations or lost in music played through their ear phones; we don't know what they are thinking and we worry. The work of the St Benedict's group showed that drama can give young men the tools they need to have hard conversations with their peers, with their parents and, in fact, with themselves.

Catholic schools, rightly or wrongly, have not always had a reputation for radical social honesty. Certainly they produce great results and excellent discipline. But are they seen as places where there



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**"Parents and educators often worry about the EQ (Emotional Quotient or emotional intelligence) of young men today. They are locked away in their rooms with their play stations or lost in music played through their ear phones; we don't know what they are thinking and we worry."**

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are authentic conversations about hard topics? This group showed that they can be and set a bar for other schools to follow. In 'Sisazabalaza' the topics were alcohol, depression, rape, untimely death, bullying and poverty. Another time they might have chosen drugs, contraception, sexual orientation, relationships or cheating. Whether we like it or not, we know that these subjects are preoccupying many of our young people. Faced by this, parents and schools have three possible responses: denial, dictation and dialogue. The first attitude, denial, is what prevailed when I was at school: if difficult things are not spoken about then they do not exist or will magically go away. Of course, we know that does not work. A second approach (dictation) is when an adult decides what the young person needs to know or think – about drugs or AIDS or life – and then keeps telling them over and over again. The student ends up able to repeat what they have been told. Whether it actually changes their behaviour remains unproven.

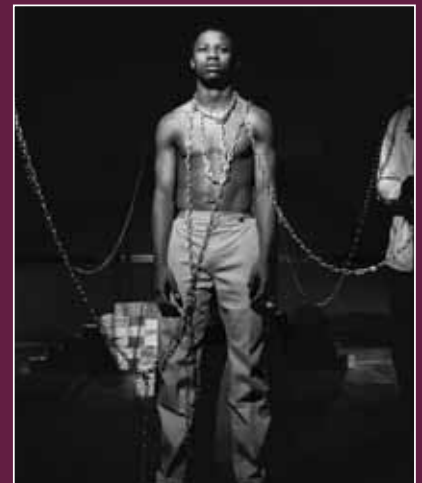
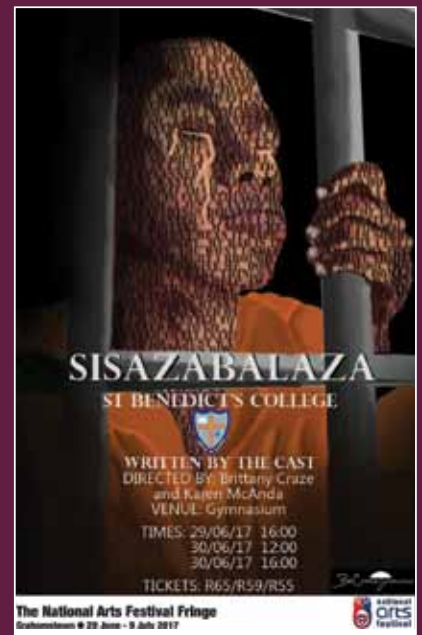
Dialogue is the approach that takes most work but, in the long run, is the most effective. This recognises that it is best to start with the young person – his or her life, experiences, values, concerns – and build from there. It still allows space for the young person to be challenged – by adults and also by other young people – but it ensures there is space for the voice of the young people themselves. Drama is an excellent way to provide that space and allows a safer context in which to discuss 'hard topics'. One line really sticks with me. The boy who has raped his girlfriend is asked by his abusive father why he did it. "I don't know how to love because you never taught me. But I know how to hurt, papa, because you taught me that."

I also saw the power of this last year with

a play about street-dwelling drug users developed at the Denis Hurley Centre by the Big Brotherhood Theatre Company. It was performed to an audience of Grade 11 learners (from Holy Family School Durban) and a hundred priests and deacons (plus a bishop, a cardinal and a papal nuncio!). Watching the play together with adults, opened up a space in which the young people could talk frankly about the reality of drugs and temptation, and it allowed the clerics the space to listen before they started to speak.

I wonder why this approach seems so unusual to us. After all, its roots are in the Gospels. Jesus knew about the hard topics of his day – political oppression, self-righteous leaders, poverty, stigmatisation. His approach was certainly not one of denial. And while he did spend some time 'dictating' through preaching, he also spent a lot of time in dialogue with those who were most troubled giving them space to tell their own stories. Furthermore, parables were his form of drama, helping people to see their own stories and receive lessons that were hard to hear.

It would be a wonderful contribution to South African society – a true example of community serving humanity – if our Catholic schools developed a reputation for being places who were not unafraid to deal with hard topics and who trusted their learners enough to give them their voice. The Church has a tradition for being a voice for the voiceless. Sometimes that might mean speaking on behalf of someone. But it can also mean making sure that voices that need to be heard are given a platform; drama can provide that. As one of the young men explained when I asked whether his parents were happy about the play portraying such a cruel father. "Oh they're used to it," he replied. "They expect us to tell the truth." ■





# Energy Use in South Africa

## > What is energy?

Energy cannot be seen yet we know it is there. All living things on earth depend on the heat and light of the sun's energy to function. Energy is the ability to do work. Electricity is also energy. In South Africa, we draw our energy from the national grid of which most is generated near the coalfields of Mpumalanga. Electricity is transmitted along transmission lines and distributed to industries, businesses and households. South Africa also uses nuclear power which is generated at the Koeberg Power Station near Cape Town.



## > Renewable and non-renewable energy.

There are two kinds of energy sources: renewable and non-renewable. Fossil fuels such as coal and oil are examples of non-renewable energy sources. These fossil fuels are being used up much faster than they can replace themselves. Fossil fuels have been formed over millions of years but are being used up in just a few hundred years. An energy source that can be easily replaced is considered renewable energy. Examples of such energy sources are wind, sun, biomass, tidal power and geothermal energy.



**DID YOU KNOW?** When you use fossil fuels, like heating oil to keep your house warm or petrol for your family's car, these things create carbon dioxide, also called CO<sup>2</sup>. Carbon dioxide is called a greenhouse gas. Many scientists believe that greenhouse gases are making the earth too warm. Your carbon footprint is the total amount of CO<sup>2</sup> you create. A big carbon footprint is bad for the planet.





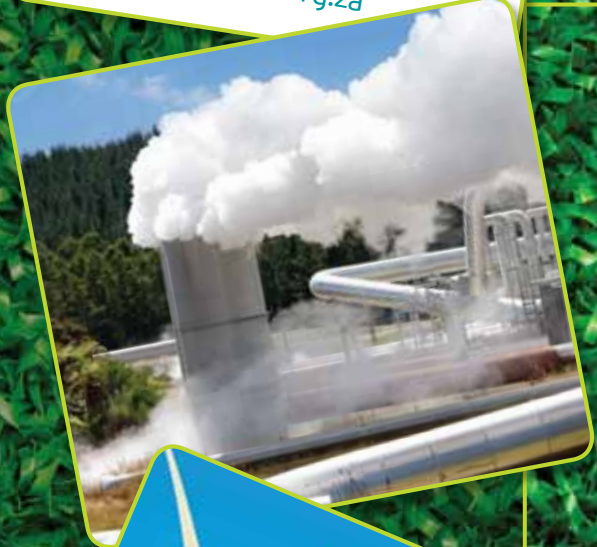
### > Think about this:

- Coal is used to produce about 74% of South Africa's electricity.
- Mining for coal, if not properly managed, leads to natural resources such as water, being damaged or destroyed.
- There are only enough coal reserves in South Africa to last another 100-200 years.
- Burning fossil fuels releases potentially harmful gases into the air. Not only is this harmful to our own health but it can also contribute to climate change.
- Oil supplies about 15% of our energy resources.

Contact Delta Environmental Centre (DEC):  
Tel: +2711 888 4831  
Fax: +2711 888 4106  
delta@deltaenviro.org.za  
Delta Park, Road No 3, Victory Park, Johannesburg  
www.deltaenviro.org.za

### > Some energy saving tips:

- Use your kettle to boil your water instead of the stove. Only boil the amount of water required.
- Switch over to energy saving light bulbs (CFLs) and switch off lighting when you are not using it.
- Do not leave the fridge door open longer than you need to. Ensure that the fridge seals are not broken.
- Use the cold-water cycle option on the washing machine.
- Insulate your geyser with a geyser blanket.
- Install a solar water heater.
- Save energy by recycling – by recycling just one aluminum can you are saving enough energy to keep a laptop computer running for four hours!



### > Activity:

#### Assessing energy use in your area

Draw a map of your local community area and show where energy is being used and abused e.g. street lights, homes, shops, offices, traffic lights, factories etc. Identify places where energy could be used more efficiently, where there are unsafe or hazardous connections and where energy is used wisely.

#### Discussion points

- What action can be taken?
- Discuss the issues and action-taking steps with your community members
- Develop and implement an action plan with your community to address the highlighted issues.



# Care for our Common Home

Workbook based Laudato Si' Encyclical letter by Pope Francis on the Environment

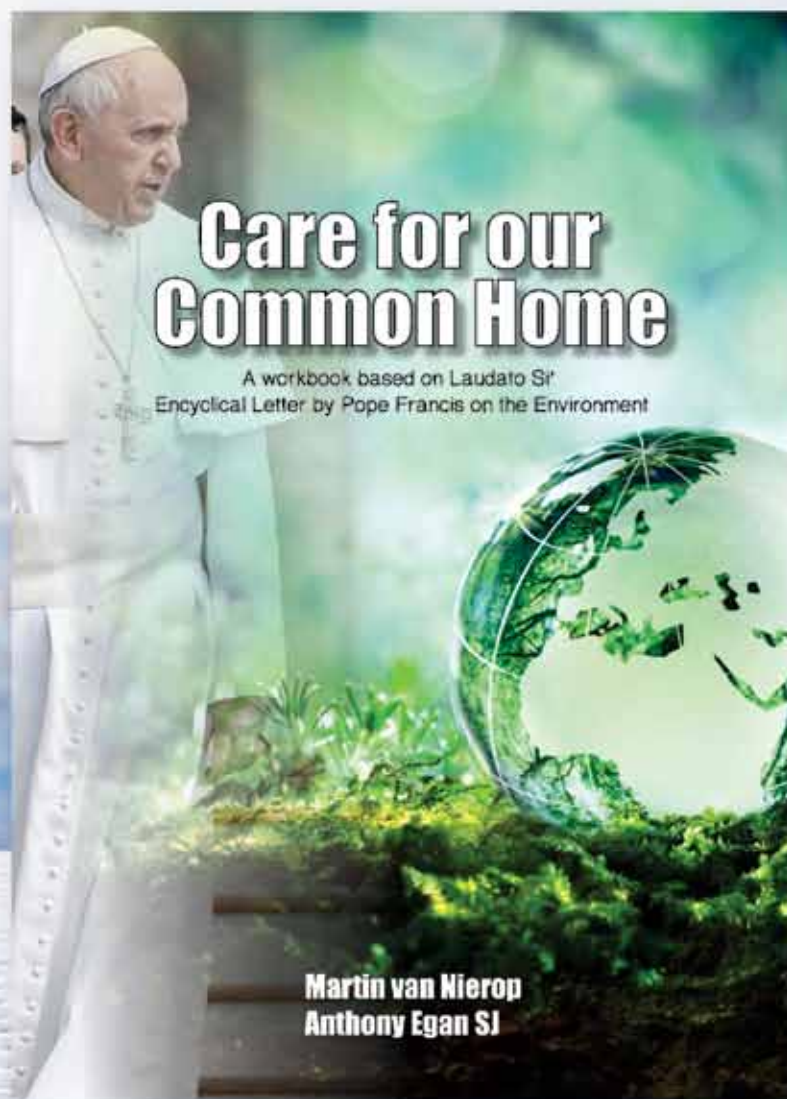
Perfect for use in schools & enviromental clubs

"Pope Francis appealed to all people of goodwill when he said: 'I urgently appeal for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.' Southern Africa is not excluded from this conversation. This book, produced by the Jesuit Institute, will be a very helpful tool in assisting us enter into conversations about the environment. It is practical and applies Laudato Si' to our own context. I recommend its use in parishes, schools and any forum that would help us talk about and face up to this enormous challenge."

*Bishop Abel Gqaba*

Bishop of Kimberley

Chair: Justice and Peace Commission Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference



In Pope Francis' Encyclical "Laudato Si'" he sends out a wakeup call to help humanity understand the destruction that people are rendering to the environment and other people. The letter's scope, while addressing the environment directly, also looks at the wider impact of environmental destruction.

The document looks at care for the environment from a spiritual, social and cultural perspective. It addresses the relationships of man to nature, as well as the relationship of man to each other. Pope Francis, in his encyclical, asks us all to be involved in finding solutions.

# R 120

each excluding postage



**CareforourCommonHome.co.za**



Workbook based Laudato Si' Encyclical letter by Pope Francis on the Environment



# Care for Our Common Home: A new workbook for schools



In June 2015 Pope Francis issued his social encyclical *Laudato Si* to draw attention to the way that human carelessness and callousness is damaging the natural world. He also looks at how the exploitation of the natural world leads to unequal and unjust human relationships that could be directly linked to poverty. Pope Francis critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, he addresses environmental degradation and global warming calling for “swift and unified global action”. In the encyclical, Pope Francis calls for urgent discussion and dialogue.

The Jesuit Institute South Africa has partnered with Gondwana Environmental Solutions to try and heed the Pope’s call for discussion and dialogue. In May 2017, the Institute released a workbook entitled *Care for Our Common Home*. The workbook is divided into five sections, each dealing with a specific topic related to a major section in the encyclical.

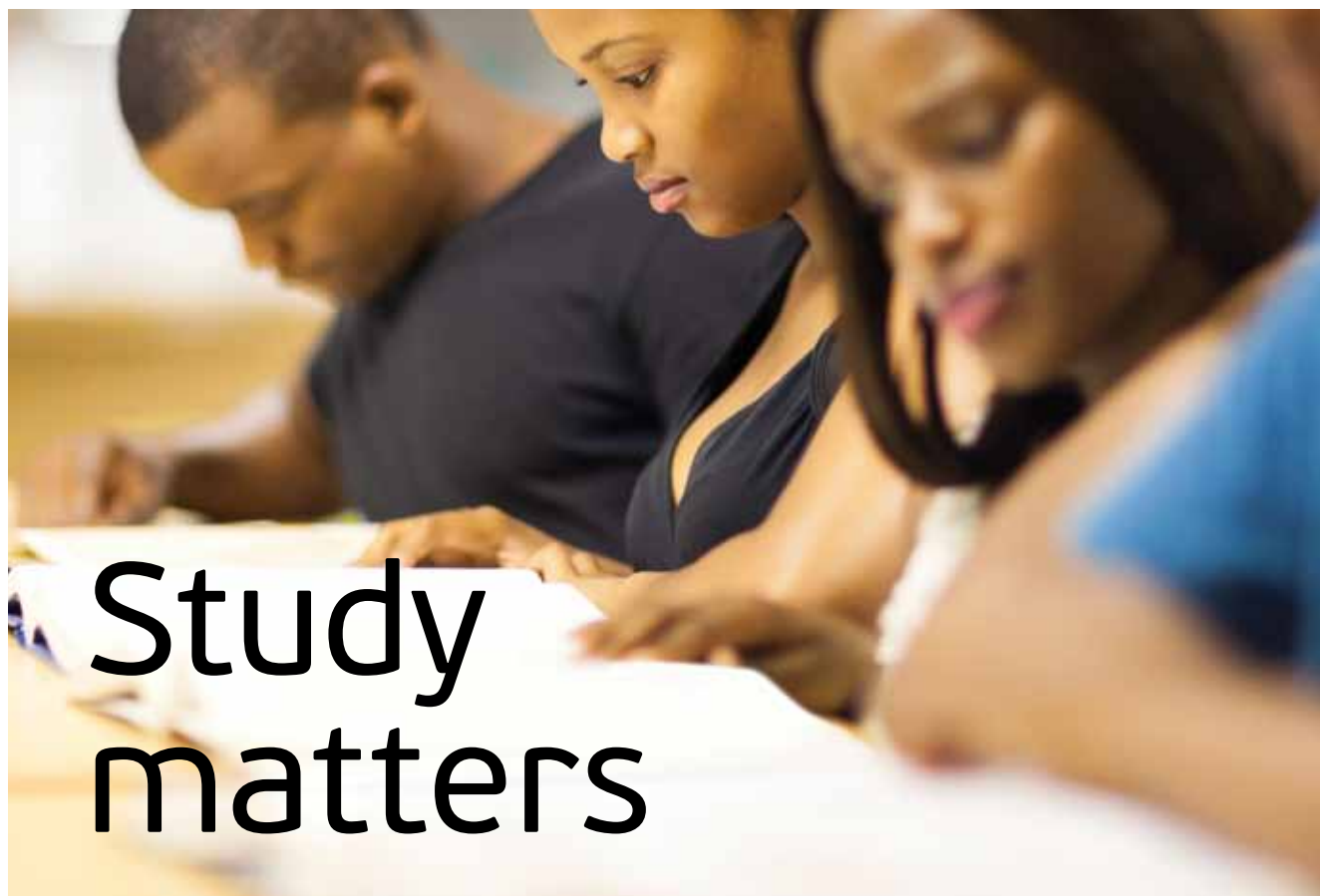
Professor Bob Scholes from WITS University’s Global Change Institute says that caring for the environment is part and parcel of faith. He says, “The workbook explores the many contemporary issues raised in the encyclical in a way that is interesting, practical and correct on both the technical and theological sides, and shows how care for nature has been a recurring theme of religious teaching for many centuries, though perhaps never more important than now.”

The object of the workbook is to try and help people interrogate the encyclical’s contents. The workbook has tried to contextualise what the Holy Father says into the southern African context, which is not immune to climate change and its effects. Southern Africa is experiencing a far-reaching drought and what Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si* is very relevant to the whole region, environmentally, economically and politically.

Bishop Abel Gubuza, Chair of the Bishop’s Conference Justice and Peace Commission, said, “The workbook will be a helpful tool in assisting us enter into conversations about the environment... I recommend its use in parishes, schools and any forum that would help us talk about and face up to this enormous challenge.”

The workbook offers questions for personal reflection or group dialogue after each section. It is ideal for anyone wanting a practical guide to the encyclical. It can be used by RE teachers, catechism teachers, clergy, justice and peace groups and youth groups.

The workbook is available from the Jesuit Institute South Africa for R120. Contact the Institute on 011 482-4237 or email [admin@jesuitinstitute.org.za](mailto:admin@jesuitinstitute.org.za) ■



# Study matters

By Anthony Joseph

There are various thoughts on effective study habits and various opinions on what learners need to do to achieve their best. My experience over many years in the education sector exposed me to many learners with varying degrees of competency in the subject that I taught. I noticed that study skills were not only related to intellectual ability, but also to practices that helped learners to perform better.

When used consistently, the study techniques below can help learners improve understanding and memory regardless of the subject being studied. The methods are effective for school grades, college, independent study or any other learning environment.

## Space it out

Encourage learners to space out their studying, e.g. it would be better to study their Business Study chapter in three one hour sessions rather than in a long three hour session. Cramming has been proven to be an inappropriate study method. Learners ought to start studying ahead of time, and separate their studies for each subject into more than one session. There are at least three reasons why this spaced learning is better than cramming:

### 1. Attention span:

There is a limit to how long one can focus on a given set of material. Concentration and attention are key to the recollection of material.

### 2. Consolidation during breaks:

This strengthens memory.

### 3. Context and mood: Memory is aided by context.

The room, the type of pencil or the learner's mood link what they have learned during studying with what they can recall.

The more study sessions a learner has for one subject, the better the chance that their mood or some other factor will match the environment during their test time. As a rule, set shorter periods for harder subjects and longer periods for easier subjects.

## Use whole and part learning

Learners need to know when to break up material. If a learner needs to study and remember a long chapter in their history book, should they try to learn everything in the chapter straight through, or study the individual chapter sections carefully one by one?

The best approach is often a combination of the two. Some options include:

### 1. Whole Method with extra studying for Parts:

Learners may use the whole method to get a good grasp of the material, then separate the more difficult sections for extra study and reinforcement.

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The order in which items are organised affects how easy it is to learn them. This is called the Serial Position Effect. Items at the beginning and the end are easiest to remember, not so with items in the middle.

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## 2. Whole-Part-Whole Method:

Another suggestion is to go through all the material a few times then divide the material into logical parts to be studied separately. Finally learners will need to go back and review everything from beginning to end. This is effective for long and difficult material.

## 3. Progressive Part Method:

Another option is for learners to break up the material into sections and begin studying the first part, move on to studying the second part but study the first along with the second part and repeat if there is a third part.

Learners need to keep in mind the big picture as they progress through what they are studying using this method.

The order in which items are organised affects how easy it is to learn them. This is called the Serial Position Effect. Items at the beginning and the end are easiest to remember, not so with items in the middle. Also, the last few items are easier to remember than the first items. So, when studying a list or group of items, learners can do this:

- If the items do not need to be in a certain order, learners can arrange their list so the more complicated, less meaningful items are at the beginning and the end of the list. Put the simpler, more meaningful items in the middle.
- If they can't change the order of the items, they ought to spend more time and effort studying the items in the middle.

## Study skills: Recite it

Verbal repetition forces learners to pay better attention. Headings can be used as a memory aid. Learners can recall each chapter heading, then explain to themselves the contents of that chapter section. If they cannot, it is a signal that

they should spend more time studying that section.

Recitation is one of the best study skills that aid memory because it commits learners to:

- **Active Learning**

Recitation is active learning which engages multiple senses;

- **Feedback**

Recitation provides feedback on what to spend more time on.

- **Concentration**

Recitation forces the learner to concentrate and be attentive.

Recitation is exactly what learners do when being tested. It makes perfect sense for learners to practice during their study sessions what they are going to be doing in the test.

## Use a study system

A study system is simply a method of approaching the study of any material. One of the oldest and best-known study systems is SQ3R. SQ3R stands for the steps of the system, which are Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review.

Here is how learners undertake each step of the SQ3R study method:

### 1. Survey

This is similar to the whole learning above. Instead of learning the details, when surveying learners need to understand the framework of the information to form a mental outline. When surveying learners need to study everything except the actual meat of the material.

### 2. Question

When the survey is complete, learners go through the same parts they just surveyed and ask questions about each one. For example, if they are studying DNA profiling in Life Sciences, ask questions like "What is DNA profiling?"

"How is it used?", "What views are there for and against?" etc. Questions keep learners focused and engaged with the material. Without focussing on details, learners will begin thinking deeply about the content.

### 3. Read

After surveying and thinking of questions, it is time for learners to read the paragraphs and other detailed sections. Without first surveying and questioning, it makes it difficult to place the material into memory in an orderly way. Learners must read everything without taking notes. They must avoid underlining at the first reading because they can't really judge what is most or least important to remember.

### 4. Recite

As discussed above, reciting means to ask and answer questions about the information. Learners must go through the chapter and read each heading and subheading. They can ask themselves questions about the headings, and answer from memory without looking at the book. They may want to recite out loud the specific facts they want to remember.

### 5. Review

The review step is usually short. It consists of reciting their way through the material again. It is recommended that learners review the material several times before the test or examination over several hours or days.

The SQ3R method can be used with a wide range of material, including English, History, Science, Mathematics, and related subjects. As with most study skills, using the SQ3R method takes a bit of extra time, but in the end learners will save time.

Good luck and all of the best in your studies. ■

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# Hearing and understanding: Two different things

## Auditory processing explained

By Carol Brenner

Parents and teachers complain that a child simply “does not listen” or “appears deaf” and cannot follow instructions or often forgets what they have been asked to do. They seem distracted and often misinterpret verbal information. This is the typical presentation of a child with an auditory processing difficulty.

**H**earing loss must be ruled before considering an auditory processing difficulty. Although auditory processing starts in the brain, there are no scans that can be done to confirm it. It is by ruling out other hearing and learning problems that it is diagnosed. Auditory processing difficulties often co-exist with other conditions such as attention deficit / hyperactivity (ADD and ADHD) and dyslexia.

We know that the complex process of interpreting what is heard has an impact on a child’s ability to learn speech and language, manipulate sounds and words (develop phonological awareness) and understand how language works (acquire language concepts). By definition then, auditory processing is the way the brain processes, stores, manipulates and uses information that is received through the auditory channel (ear).

In essence, a child with an auditory processing difficulty will have problems in at least one of the five tiers of processing:

- **Auditory attention:** The ability to recognise the direction a sound is coming from, or to listen to someone talking if there is background noise such as music playing, children chattering or the general noise of a classroom where learning is happening.

- **Auditory memory:** The ability to hold information in short-term working memory in order to process it and respond to it. For example a set of numbers (a telephone number), a set of words (a shopping list) or a sentence (instructions or a dictation).
- **Auditory discrimination:** The ability to identify different environmental noises (e.g. a cock crow vs. a vacuum cleaner working), the ability to notice and copy sound patterns (e.g. rhythmic drum beats or clapping sequences) and the ability to notice subtle differences in speech sounds (e.g. a child may not realise that the words 'mail' and 'nail' sound different)
- **Auditory analysis and synthesis:** The ability to break speech up into words, syllables and sounds

(phonemes) and blend them back together again. For example: the word 'mat' can be broken up into three sounds, m-a-t. If you say 'mat' but don't say 'm' you are left with 'at'. 'Mat' is one syllable. If you say 'mat' and add the syllable '-ter', you have 'matter'. And the ability to guess the last word or sentence in background noise or when speech is interrupted, e.g. "What is the ... with you?"

- **Auditory comprehension:** The ability to put sounds together to understand language.

A child with an auditory processing difficulty may be unable to say a number of speech sounds correctly and may consistently substitute one sound for another, e.g. f / th, as in fumb / thumb and teef / teeth). These children often confuse

similar words or sounds, e.g. they struggle to say words like 'hospital' and 'animal' and they may say 'hopstibal' and 'amimal'. They very likely have poor vocabularies and sentence structure (grammar). These weaknesses may well translate into problems with sound-symbol association when they begin to read and so will battle. They may take extra time to make the association between the letters of the alphabet and the sounds that these letters make in words. This results in challenges with learning to spell, read fluently and comprehend what is being read. Often children with poor auditory perception are poorly organised, struggle with sequential processing (doing things in order), cannot complete tasks within given time limits and lack a methodical and sequential approach to tasks.

## So how then can auditory processing difficulties be overcome within the classroom?

To adapt the physical learning environment (classroom) ask questions like:

- Does noise reverberate, or echo, in my classroom?
- Could I reduce the echo in my class by putting up curtains, adding more carpets or placing tennis balls on the bottom of the children's' chairs to reduce noise levels?
- Could I introduce a 'talking stick' to encourage one person to speak at a time (the person holding the stick) and others to look at and listen to the person who holds the stick?

Make provisions for children with auditory processing challenges:

- Use visual cues to help children understand what they hear, e.g. children can use their fingers to remember the number of things they must do.
- Develop visual schedules to help children organise themselves and understand the sequence of the days' events. The schedules will help

the child remember what comes next. E.g. 1. Begin with a prayer, 2. Writing, 3. Reading, 4. Play time, 5. Wash hands, 6. Come inside, 7. Maths, 8. Prayer and home time.

- Make use of short, simple sentences when giving instructions and repeat or rephrase the instructions to help understanding.
- Allow children to repeat instructions they are given. This ensures that they have clearly understood what they have been asked to do.

**Develop compensation skills:**

- Explain to the children that we all get it wrong sometimes.
- Encourage them to ask questions for clarification.
- Allow them to choose the best seating for themselves in the class and encourage them to provide feedback about their position or ask to be moved if they can not see or hear.
- Encourage them to ask themselves

these questions, perhaps put them up near the front of the classroom: What do I know? What do I need to know (or what's missing)? How do I get the information I need? This will help children to problem solve and empower them to be more independent in the classroom.

Auditory processing skills continue to develop and be refined throughout the teenage years so they should be given ongoing attention. Unfortunately, the advancement of technology has resulted in the reduction of family time (listening, talking and working together to complete chores) and an increase in screen time, which requires very little in terms of a well-developed auditory system. As professionals and educators we should be encouraging parents to keep screen time to a minimum in the home and rather engage in real communication around the dinner table. Reading together enhances the development of auditory perceptual skills and should ideally be a daily activity in the lives of all children. ■

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A person wearing a hoodie stands in the center-right of the frame, silhouetted against a bright light source at the end of a tunnel. The tunnel walls are covered in colorful graffiti, including large faces and abstract designs. The floor is made of cobblestones. The overall atmosphere is somber and contemplative.


# Pastoral responses to addiction and recovery

By Fr Russell Pollitt SJ

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During July the Jesuit Institute South Africa hosted their annual *Winter Living Theology* series. The theme of this year's series was *Finding God in Addiction*. Pastoral responses to addiction and recovery. The series was presented by American Jesuit, Fr Thomas Weston. Substance abuse is on the increase in South Africa, particularly amongst young people. One participant said that the school where her daughter attended was riddled with drugs. Many schools are afflicted by the scourge of drugs and the threat that it poses to the stability of the school environment. Fr Weston's messages are important to think about and take back to our schools when dealing with drugs and alcohol abuse in our communities





**F**r Weston is a recovering alcoholic. After his philosophical studies, his Jesuit superiors realised that he had a problem with alcohol and they sent him to do a recovery programme. “I came to a point where my life was uncontrollable, luckily my Jesuit brothers saw this and acted, they saved my life,” he said.

Fr Weston told many stories with much humour. He said that addiction is an allergy of the body and obsession of the mind. He explained that alcoholics don’t drink more than other people but rather they drink differently. He said that symptoms of alcoholism included blackouts, dramatic personality changes and intolerance of the substance. He said that for addicts and their families many losses occur that include: lost opportunities, loss of friends and loss of self-dignity.

Fr Weston described the dynamic of addiction in three steps. Step one: taking drugs is fun. “You have a good time, you have lots of friends and you have a little more courage than you would ordinarily have. I asked girls to dance after a few drinks, which is something I would never have done as a young man of 16 without a little alcohol in me,” he said. “Then you get to step two: fun plus problems. You notice that your use of a substance gets you into trouble, you drive drunk for example. Finally, you get to step three: just problems. Your substance usage creates more and more problems – perhaps debt, relationships getting rough and maybe you are locked up in jail and charged criminally.”

Fr Weston said that addicts themselves must want to change. “Sometimes we worry and try to fix the lives of others. We can’t. We will fail. Don’t do it. Addicts must hit rock bottom, they must come to the realisation that they are powerless and in their powerlessness, seek help. It’s tough. Tough love isn’t easy but sometimes it’s all you can do in these situations.” Fr Weston told parents that often they spend their lives worrying but that worry isn’t going to change anything except make them more anxious and less likely to be able to live their own lives well.

A parent asked Fr Weston how many times they should pay bail for an addicted child to get out of prison. He said: “You help once, maybe twice. If you keep doing it they will keep doing it. Sometimes you must have the strength to let an addict stay in a crisis, jail might just be the crisis they need. Don’t keep bailing them out!”

He said that if you are family or friends of an addict you have the imperative to look after yourself. “It is very important that the loved ones of addicts get help and support. There are meetings for loved ones and friends, and in these meetings they can be with and talk to people who understand their situation. They will help them cope. They listen, and in that safe

space allow friends and family members to feel and trust again.”

Fr Weston said that it is common for families who have an addict to follow three dangerous rules: don’t talk, don’t trust and don’t feel. “It is dangerous because it means loved ones don’t seek help, they bottle it all up. Groups like Al-anon help loved ones overcome this. If they don’t, it can be like a time-bomb slowly ticking away.”

Fr Weston told his listeners to remember that there are three things in life that we cannot change: the past, the truth and others. “If someone doesn’t want to change we cannot change them. It’s a fallacy to believe that the right man or the right woman’s love can change someone. Never try and change someone else, we change how we behave towards them but we cannot change them.”

Fr Weston said that certain things can trigger someone in recovery to relapse. He said that he has become very aware of what he calls HALT. “People in recovery, or even trying to live a normal, balanced, decent life, must watch that they don’t get Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired. These can trigger anxiety, which can lead to problems.” Fr Weston explained how important self-care is for those in recovery: “Do what you can, not what you cannot. Unnecessary pressure can often be the enemy.”

Fr Weston advocates strongly for the Twelve-step Programme and regularly attends meetings himself. “The Twelve-step Programme has helped millions of addicts and it continues to be one of the most successful ways of helping addicts recover. It’s not just a programme, it’s a way of life,” Fr Weston said. He describes Twelve-step meetings as places where recovering addicts can get support and ensure that they keep their sanity when they are tempted to slip into craziness.

An addict who attended one of the workshops said, “Fr Weston showed much insight and wisdom. So much of what he said spoke about my experience and my continual struggle to keep clean from narcotics.” ■

Every year the Jesuit Institute South Africa, partnering with the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference, brings an international speaker to the country to present the annual Winter Living Theology. Recordings of Fr Weston’s talks are available on CD or in Mp3 format from the Jesuit Institute South Africa. They cost R200 per set and can be ordered by emailing [admin@jesuitinstitute.org.za](mailto:admin@jesuitinstitute.org.za) or calling 011 482 4237.

Reflection:

# Praying for Others

This reflection may be used for staff, management of board meetings, during RE lessons or as part of a prayer service or paraliturgy. It might be a good exercise to do on 1 or 2 November, All Saints and All Souls Days, to remember those who have died.



Praying for others is called intercessory prayer. When we offer intercessions, we are asking God for a change of direction in the present course of someone else's life. This might be the healing of their physical body, the reconciliation of relationships, or any other way in which their life is out of kilter. When we pray for others we become part of God's compassion modelled for us by Jesus. Intercessions are also appropriate for countries, political issues or world crises. Your entries might include any creatures or collections of humanity that are in your mind or on your heart.

Praying for another is being with the other in the presence of God

- Draw a shape on the page – a triangle, trapezoid, squiggly line or imperfect circle.
- Write the name of the person for whom you want to pray in or near the shape.
- Add detail to the drawing. This might be dots, lines, circles, zigzags or whatever your hand wants to do.
- Continue to enhance the drawing. Think of each stroke and each moment as time that you spend with the person in prayer.
- Add colour to the picture. Choose colours that remind you of the person for whom you are praying.
- Think of each stroke and each moment as time that you spend with the person in prayer.
- Keep drawing until the image feels finished.
- Repeat the person's name to yourself. Think about their face or the entire person as if you were sitting with him or her in conversation.. ■





# An Advent Activity: The Jesse Tree



The season of Advent is a time of hope and joyful anticipation. The Jesse tree is a lovely way in which to help children prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth. The ornaments of the Jesse tree tell the story of God in the Old Testament, connecting the Advent season with the faithfulness of God across four thousand years of history.

## Materials

- Jesse tree (If you're unable to find a bare tree for the children to decorate, draw a large tree on poster paper and have the children glue their ornaments on its branches.)
- Coloured paper
- Khakis, markers, crayons, pens, and pencils
- Strips of ribbon
- Hole puncher
- Glue

## Directions

- Ask the children to share what they know about the significance of the Jesse tree during the season of Advent.
- Explain that Jesse was the father of King David. The Jesse tree is named from Isaiah 11:1: "A shoot shall come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." The ornaments of the Jesse tree tell the story of God in the Old Testament, connecting the Advent season with the faithfulness of God across four thousand years of history.
- Tell the children: The Jesse tree helps us to connect the custom of decorating Christmas trees to the events leading to Jesus' birth. We adorn a Jesse tree with illustrated ornaments that represent people, prophecies, and the events leading up to the birth of Jesus.
- Provide the children with colouring materials and coloured paper to create their ornaments for the group's Jesse tree. Provide them with a list of symbols (See table)
- When the children are finished, invite them to hang (or glue) their ornaments on the tree.
- Close the activity by reading aloud the passage from Isaiah 11:1.

## List of symbols

Apple	Adam and Eve	Genesis 3:1-15
Ark	Noah	Genesis 6
Lamb	Isaac	Genesis 22:1-19
Knife	Abraham	Genesis 22:1-19
Ladder	Jacob	Genesis 28:1-22
Coat	Joseph	Genesis 37:1-4
Burning Bush	Moses	Exodus 3
Harp	David	I Samuel 16:14-23
Crown	Solomon	I Kings 1:22-48
Whale	Jonah	Jonah 1-2
Dove	Elisha	II Kings 5:1-27 (spirit of healing)
Rose	Isaiah	Isaiah 35:1-2
Heart	Ruth	Ruth 1:15-18
Wheel	Ezekiel	Ezekiel 1:15-21
Lion	Daniel	Daniel 6:1-24
Lily	Mary	Luke 1:26-28
Hammer	Joseph	
Camel and Star	Wisemen	Matthew 2:1-12
Chi Rho (an X with a P through the middle of it)	Jesus	

Source: <https://www.loyolapress.com/faith-formation/activities/our-jesse-tree-advent-activity>  
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# Peace and conflict resolution for Kenyan Catholic schools

By Anne Baker

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In August, on the invitation of the Catholic Schools Principals' Association of Kenya and Augusta Muthingani, who heads the Education Desk at the Kenyan Bishops Conference, who attended our Congress in 2004 and spoke at the Leading Learning conference last year, I attended their annual conference to deliver a paper entitled 'The Universality of Catholic Education'. The overall theme of the conference was 'Catholic Schools – Hubs of Integrity'.



Some 1100 high school principals attended. These schools are known as Catholic Sponsored Schools and are the equivalent of our Public Schools on Private Property. Interestingly all high schools in Kenya are boarding schools, although the government is now encouraging day schools.

One of the most inspiring aspects of attending this conference was the dedication of the principals to their schools and the support given the schools on the part of the institutional Church. During the course of the conference at least four Bishops spoke and there were a numerous priests present. At Masses I counted over 25 priests concelebrating. The Papal Nuncio, the Reverend Charles D Balvo, also addressed the conference and shared personal memories of school.

Many challenges were offered the principals some of which were:

- Build cohesiveness as the lections causes polarisation of tribes
- Africa is known for corruption – what do the schools need to do?
- Schools need to be role-models of integrity and develop young people able to bring about change.

The Right Reverend Maurice Makunda appealed to everyone to treat each other with the highest respect. What is said should not harm our neighbour. He emphasised the need for Pastoral Care in schools.

It was evident that an annual competition to become ‘Principal of the Year’ or ‘Teacher of the Year.’ This seemed to be as prestigious for the District as for the school with the District Director coaching the participants. This year the winner of the Principal of the Year was a Religious Sister and much fuss was made of her.

Of note was the request from the Kenyan Presidency for President Kenyatta to address the conference (this was prior to the court case which declared the election illegal). Bishop Maurice, in welcoming the President, spoke of the dedicated professionalism of teachers in Catholic schools. He emphasised the values, management and ethos of the schools. Bishop Maurice acknowledged with appreciation the relationship between the Ministry of Education and the Kenyan Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Bishop Maurice outlined the need to overcome vices such as cheating and violence in schools. He appreciated the ongoing curriculum reforms and the emphasis on values education, as well as the proposed chaplaincy programme in which the state will pay the chaplains. The Bishop took the opportunity to request an increase in budget as schools have increased enrolment. He assured the President that the Church would continue to pray for Kenya and its peace.

The President said one of his first functions was to be with the teachers and express his gratitude to the Catholic Church and its role in education. He spoke about reforms to the education system and how to develop the spiritual needs of children.

An affirming presentation was that of the Emeritus Bishop Alfred Rotich, a former Chaplain to the Armed Forces. He spoke

on the need for school to teach peace and to bring conflict resolution into schools as well as tools such as social and emotional learning, communication techniques and restorative processes, mindfulness and other proven peace-building skills. The increased peace in schools will lead to improved graduation rates and transform violence, bullying, truancy and other challenges facing schools.

Given CIE’s efforts to assist schools to build peace through these same techniques it was most comforting to hear such a wise person recommend the same path to follow.

It was an honour to spend this time with our Kenyan colleagues. ■



*Principals gathered in the auditorium of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa.*

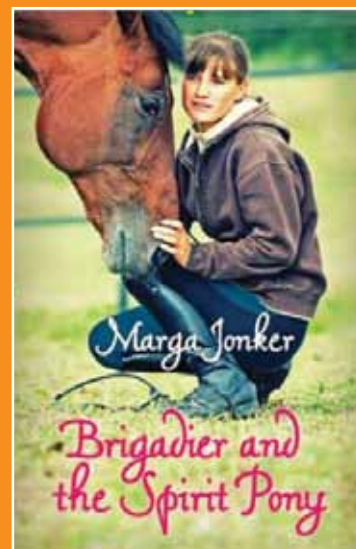


*Kenyan Catholic Church and Education representatives Photographed with the President elect Uhuru Kenyatta when he visited the principals' conference.*

# Brigadier and The Spirit Pony

By Marga Jonker

Publisher: Tafelberg,  
ISBN: 9780624077428



Reviewed by Puku Children's Literature Foundation

Sisters Alex and Gabi couldn't be more different. Alex is a brash, confrontational teenager, while Gabi is horse-crazy, quiet and conscientious. Their parents are divorced, their Mum is remarried and their father, Ben, has just returned from working overseas and is taking the girls on a holiday to get to know them better. Gabi's rather anxious about this, so she won't go anywhere without her horse, Brigadier. Ben, who knows nothing about horses or children, learns that having a family is not as easy as he had previously thought, and Mum is expecting the worse.

When Gabi realizes that there are extra guests she hadn't known about, she knows that Brigadier is not the only addition to the family party. She's worried and it looks like she has good reason to be! Alex is being melodramatic, (which is really funny,) and she's acting out as the crazy older sister, showing off in a bid to impress her Dad. Reacting to the changes, Brigadier becomes increasingly skittish and when a ghost horse appears, the story becomes a wonderful mystery, filled with intrigue and page-turning excitement.

The book cover seems to put readers off, suggesting that this story is only for girly horse-lovers, thus limiting young reader access, but it's a story most kids will love. The first chapter is rather confusing and requires a few re-reads in order to fully understand who's who and what's going on, but this is only for a few pages and then the reading flows easily. The rhythm stops again when Alex's character suddenly takes a backseat for sister Gabi to take over, but this is because Alex is essential to the tale later on.

If needs be, skip the first chapter and read on, because Brigadier And The Spirit Pony is a journey of pure reading delight.

Reminded of the old century's Nancy Drew

series, as well as more recent articles on the horses of Knysna, the story is both current and relevant; filled with a balance of humour and suspense, inspiring kids to keep turning the pages.

Author, Marga Jonker masterfully highlights the parents and plays them off against each other, making the discussions between divorced parents light-hearted and funny, without ever underestimating the difficulties their situations create. The same goes for Jonker's teenagers - characters who are most amusing, while at the same time, quite crazy and on the very edge of losing control, a precarious balance that holds readers spellbound.

Through dialogue, Jonker describes each personality by gently introducing their personal flaws and traits, leaving it up to the reader (and Gabi) to decide whether they like them or not - a powerful way to draw youngsters deeper into the story.

Written for ages 9 - 13 years, Gabi, the heroine, leads with an unfailing moral compass in a strong tale about a family that loves each other despite the connections that have broken down between them. Trust issues, preconceptions, stereotypes and parenting problems all play a role as Gabi learns to keep her head and not give

in to the fear that swirls around her - the ghost horse a thrilling representation of this.

We were glued to every chapter. Add to that the slang, colloquialisms, African voices and the juxtaposition of city kids in the African bush and this is one book kids really don't want to miss. ■



The Puku Children's Literature Foundation (Puku) is an organization that promotes reading and book development, with programmes designed to address the acute shortage of children's literature in all South African languages. Puku helps to ensure that more children have access to mother-tongue literature, particularly those who are most materially deprived and marginalized. [www.puku.co.za](http://www.puku.co.za)