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Our work brings us ever closer to our dreams. Work grounds our dreams even the more Fantastic they are. The reality of work connects us to our dreams.

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NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN / VISION 2030

Partners for Possibility (Pfp) is a creative solution to South Africa’s education crisis - it is a co-action, co-learning partnership between School Principals and Business Leaders, enabling social cohesion through partnerships, and empowering Principals to become change leaders in their schools and communities. The **Pfp** Programme facilitates cross-sectoral reciprocal partnerships between Business, Government and the Social Sector.

FORMULAE FOR STRONG FOUNDATIONS

The **Pfp** Programme was started with certain expectations, much like Principal Chris Bam’s experience starting at a new school:

“I had bright ideas and was full of inspiration in those first few months – the honeymoon period. During this time, the staff was going to assess and question what I wanted to do, because the fundamental flaw is that your relationships are not built yet.”

Chris furthermore also discovered that in order to be successful at any school, the whole team needs to be on board.

Alongside Breaking Ground Learning and Development Director, Jenni Williams, both partners quickly learned that managing expectations became easier if they were based on solid relationships. Getting to know Jenni, the Principal realised how closely their value systems aligned in terms of unleashing the potential within people. The partners were excited but soon realised they needed a unique approach.

“We first established a personal connection - our school is benefitting from the connection! From this foundation, we could be honest with one another. I think it’s important to be honest and open when talking about what’s happening with your school so true change can take place,” Chris said.

Their journey thus began with the three “valuable workshops designed to support their leadership development”.

At a glance

- On 1 April 1993, the first learner was enrolled at Dalweide Primary, a no-fee Afrikaans medium school.
- The school opened in May 1993, with 519 learners and 18 teachers.
- In 2014 there were 1105 registered learners, including 104 Grade R learners.
- Currently the school has approximately 1300 learners in total.
- For the past few years, the school has had mixed results with the systemic and ANA tests i.e. Foundation Phase: above average, and Intermediate Phase: average and below.

THE POWER OF APPRECIATION

The quote that summed up and gave meaning to the Time to Think workshop of Nancy Kline was:

“Everything we do depends for its quality on the thinking we do first. Our thinking depends on the quality of our attention for each other.”

Nancy Kline

Chris explains: “Coming back to school, I first needed to pay attention to my staff and really hear their voices. Nancy also said that in the presence of the question, the mind thinks again. Now we think about the kind of questions we are asking. For example, is the Principal’s approach one of just demanding and saying this is what we need to do?”

Chris recounted Peter Block’s Flawless Consulting workshop as being about behaviour.

Authenticity with the client means articulating your experience together and asking probing questions.

“Through Nancy Kline we realised that for every negative criticism or feedback you give, one has to complement this with five positive appreciations of that person. That’s what Chris and I tried to do with each other as well as when we worked with the staff.”

Partner Jenni Williams

“There are two fundamental questions to ask whenever you are with your client (in our case your educators and your learners). One, am I being authentic with this person now, and two, am I completing the work of the consulting phase I am in?”

The Community Building workshop was the third one from Peter Block, focusing on building communities of best practice in schools, and making sure everyone is involved in the process.



The question Peter Block asks is: “How do you change the world? The answer: One room at a time... Which room? The one you are in.”

After the workshops, a Development Plan was created for the teaching staff to initiate the process of transformation.



Principal Bam explained how important it was for them to obtain buy-in from the teachers, as well as the support of the governing body. Once Jenni Williams and her partners had spoken to the teachers and engaged with the governing body to get their support, they were able to begin implementing their programme.

As they interacted with the staff and programmes at the school, consistent evaluation took place in order to identify room for improvement. This fundamental part of the Partnership Plan continued to develop as they progressed. Over and above listening and small group activities, the four key principles guided the team through the workshop and as for the relationship component, Partner Jenni forged connections with the staff.

“You need to be honest with your team. As teachers we use a red pen to look for all the wrong answers, but we need to give genuine praise as well, because your staff need to know you are grateful and appreciative for what they do at the school,” Chris expanded on the appreciation component. ■



THE PRINCIPAL:

Chris Bam

“I started at Dalweide Primary three years ago and will never look at my school the same way.

During Peter Block’s workshop, where he talks about the small group activity, this is where we changed our approach towards the school in terms of structuring how small groups gather.

I found it profound how people engage when they work in small groups; how you could personally direct questions to particular individuals and give them a chance to be heard.

I also learned how to listen. I think many voices go unheard when working in a large group; the best way to understand is to listen to everyone, ask incisive questions and remove limiting assumptions.

In South Africa’s National Development Plan, if you read about how the government envisages well developed principles for our schools’ management teams, this is our contribution to the plan.

It was wonderful to have Jenni by my side; of course the ‘appreciation’ part of what we did was to fill in questionnaires and give feedback to our Partner.

The positive attitude with the retrospective teams continues, as will our partnership...well beyond the cut-off date.”



THE PARTNER:

Jenni Williams

“Over the years I have done lots of work in learning and development, and spent substantial time looking for something different, for an opportunity to give something back. Initially I focussed on the area of my background which is health, until I met Melinda from **PfP** and joined Paarl circles.

Before we started, I expected the teachers to be more despondent and exhausted by the on-going nature of their problems, but they weren’t. They all seemed to love their jobs and loved being at Dalweide Primary.

My Partner Chris and I were on the same page from day one, and were lucky that what he needed for his team, was exactly what I was hoping to share.

The relationship we built will forever be important to me, and it confirmed so many things that I have learnt through my experiences.

We learned that firstly, you must work on building a trusting relationship before you attempt to implement change in teams. Building trust and listening are essential skills. I will continue my relationship with Dalweide and Principal Bam, and I will remain connected.

I am also left feeling grateful for the skills I have learnt and that the work I did with the school management team had such an impact on them and their relationships.

The Partnership has also left me feeling that I would like to do more work like this, and have been asked to do some pro bono coaching for a group of Tradesmen that are attending a development programme. Thank you to **PfP** for the support and sponsorship.

While developing our presentation, the following quote made an impact on how I would sum up the Partnership, and I wanted to share it:

*‘When I run after what I think I want,
My days are a furnace of distress and anxiety;
If I sit in my own place of patience,
What I need flows to me,
And without any pain.
From this I understand that
What I want also wants me,
Is looking for me
And attracting me;
When it cannot attract me
Any more to go to it,
It has to come to me.’ ”*