

# STRONG MEDICINE FOR EDUCATION SYSTEM IN DENIAL

OBE is a failure, but how do we put things right?

Extract from Cape Times article by Michael Rice – 21 Jan 2010

***“ Rote learning has been unjustifiably condemned. Proper recognition must be given to, and opportunities provided for rote learning – multiplication tables, poetry, spelling, memory development and training.”***

One of the problems endemic to our education system is that most of the people taking decisions have little or no experience of teaching. Very few of them went to well-run functioning schools and therefore have few positive models to draw on. The politicians aside, few of the education experts who design curricula and make decisions that affect the daily running of schools have any classroom experience. They theorise in a vacuum devoid of practical knowledge. They have no idea of the realities faced by teachers every day.

Bureaucrats in the national and provincial education departments and at district level responsible for taking decisions that affect teachers' didactic/methodological practice should have taught and have extensive classroom experience.

Teacher/pupil ratios need to be rigorously implemented. Teacher/administration staff ratios need to be improved and implemented to relieve teachers of bureaucratic overload. Work plans and timetables must be completed and signed off by heads of department and the principal before the beginning of the school year.

OBE has been a costly disaster. The curriculum needs, above all, to accommodate the existing limitations of teachers in the system, while allowing those who are competent to use their creativity. It needs to be simplified and made much more practical, with emphasis in the primary school on getting the basics of speaking, reading, writing and arithmetic established. Curriculum design must be led by those who have extensive classroom experience.

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An extensive programme of model lessons in all subjects in all official languages with support materials needs to be provided to every school to assist teachers who, though willing, are not able to cope with the demands made on them. This should be a bridging measure.

All schools should have a fully equipped library with appropriately qualified staff who should not be required to teach school subjects. Every pupil should have at least one time-tabled period in the library every week. Teaching staff should make provision in their lesson preparation for pupil research in the library outside of classroom time.

**Teacher training needs to be resuscitated as a matter of urgency. All teacher training should be conducted at training colleges by staff who have extensive classroom experience.**

**Primary school teacher training should have an emphasis on language, maths, science, art, music and drama. The primacy of language teaching must be recognized and accommodated. All teachers must be language teachers in addition to their specialisation. Primary school teachers must be generalists with a specialization in language and two other academic subjects.**

**It is vital that teachers are recognised as professionals. This means they must be given professional responsibilities and means to implement them; the material resources, and the administration support to carry out their duties. Teachers must also be aware that they are in loco parentis with all the obligations and responsibilities that implies.**

**Teachers must be given status, recognition and support by society. This is where the politicians can play a role, not in the classroom.**

- Rice is a former Special Adviser to the Minister of Education and was for many years a lecturer in English at the Johannesburg College of Education.