



Basic Concepts
Building Thinking - Harnessing Potential *unlimited*

Basic Concepts Program

Description

Basic Concepts Unlimited is an organisation that focuses on developing high quality teaching and learning in the foundation phase. Studies in South Africa have shown that many young children are not acquiring the basic foundational skills for language development, numeracy and literacy (<http://www.educationinnovations.org/blog/impact-introduction-grade-r-learning-outcomes>). The lack of early stimulation has meant that children start school without the foundational knowledge and associated thinking dispositions required for learning. Children who start school with cognitive and language gaps are at risk of not learning to read, write, or calculate and function at a very basic, concrete level of thinking. As the children progress through the early grades these backlogs compound and it becomes increasingly difficult to catch up.

Teachers often revert to 'chalk and talk' or rote teaching to embed the foundations of numeracy, literacy and language development. In addition teachers do not always have the skills or capacity to identify developmental delays or do remedial work with learners.

Basic Concepts is a philosophy of teaching and learning that offers teachers a clear and systematic approach to developing the conceptual tools that every child needs for learning. This in turn greatly increases their chances of successfully bridging the gaps. The training is also applicable to occupational therapists, educational psychologists and speech and language therapists. It was also extended to include Learning Support and Curriculum Advisors as it was important to target these managers to reach more teachers, as well as shaping the curriculum and sustaining the learning.

The programme uses an interactive, hands-on and activity-based approach to scaffold learning. The emphasis is on the child and how he/she learns. Scaffolding starts with basic concepts like colour, shape, size, position, number and letter, which then lead onto numeracy and literacy. The content is aligned to the new CAPS (Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement) curriculum. The training is designed for

approximately 30 teachers in each cohort, over 22 hours. The style of the training is experiential, building teachers' confidence to use this approach. The training phases include sharing of content, coaching and mentoring. The course has been accredited to NVQ6 level and works well as part of professional development.

A particularly successful project was run by the Namaqua District Department of Education which has placed emphasis on early foundations for learning. It was funded by the Rural Namaqualand Education Trust. The Basic Concepts team was commissioned to train 43 Grade R teachers to prepare disadvantaged children with language and developmental backlogs for Grade 1. Learners who participated in the Basic Concepts Programme in Grade R in 2011 were tested during the first term of Grade 1 2012. The majority of learners who participated in the intervention programme in Grade R were school ready.

By making a difference in Grade R, a positive ripple effect can be seen in years to come. Research and an external evaluation by UCT School Development Unit has shown that implementation of the programme has positive effects on overall scholastic functioning in children with developmental learning difficulties. Basic Concepts Unlimited is a service provider for various provincial departments of education.

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