

## Essay of Concern

Since the interjection of Covid-19 has entered our lives, life as we know it will never be the same again, and that is true for education as well.

I'd like to start this essay off by quoting from the British paper, The Guardian, which quoted several parents and their perspective of lockdown or home schooling. Gavin Williamson, the Secretary for State Education in the UK was quoted as saying, "kids need three to five hours of home schooling each day. Parents replied, "to expect that of parents is laughable, even if they aren't working. We're not trained as teachers." My own concern, based on our parents who think that any form of home schooling is fine and that they'll be able to keep up with the school work.<sup>1</sup> In fact, one parent said to me a while ago, "I have nothing left of myself to give this time. I feel like I'm stuck. I paid out a huge amount of money to get the schooling material I need to compensate for not being at school, I bought what was recommended, **but I'm not a teacher** and teaching multi-level lessons is exhausting me to the point where I just can't cope any more. Now I've reached the level where I feel that I'm failing my kids."

## Home Schooling

It is very difficult for a school to keep track on the learner that is working at home but still registered with the school to do school work. The recommended checks are listed below that parents are advised to consider for home education in order to complete work that is consistent with the curriculum offered at the school/or obtained from the education department or district. There's also the material needed and to ensure that the child is being assessed and is achieving the outcomes required of the particular grade.



To ensure that learners are achieving the required results, the parent needs to:

- Keep records
- Have independent assessments/or negotiate with the school for assistance
- Be responsible for ensuring the records are kept and work remain up-to-date.
- Further:
  - Keep a portfolio of the learner's work.
  - Keep a portfolio of the educational support they have arranged to be given to the learner.
  - Keep evidence of the continuous assessment of the learner's work.
  - Keep evidence of the assessment
  - Keep evidence at the end of Grades 3, 6 and 9 showing whether or not the outcomes for these grades have been achieved. (if applicable)<sup>2</sup>

These records must be made available for inspection by the school and the GDE. All relevant assessment results must be kept for three years.

Home or school-at-home educations should be a well-thought-out decision made by families who are in general very concerned about the well-being of their child in a mass schooling situation and choose to take on the full responsibility for their child's learning and development. At this point in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.westerncape.gov.za/service/guidelines-home-education>. (Note: the same applies to Gauteng and all other provinces who may have similar programmes)

time, it appears that the GDE has also created a nomenclature regarding schooling at home for learners with parents who have extreme anxiety regarding the transmission of Covid at school.<sup>3</sup>

It is a **choice they themselves make** and is not imposed by an outside person or government. Home education families, therefore, ensure that they are very well equipped to manage the process. There is no real choice in following a curriculum as these families must follow the set curriculum as stipulated by the Department. This type of schooling is not a scramble for information to teach, or just a parent desperately trying to figure out what is required from a worksheet or textbook. Nor is it an attempt to find random online educational programmes to keep the child busy. This is a structured learning approach, where the home becomes a rich learning environment with a wide variety of resources that support and provide the child with opportunities to freely explore and engage in activities that will enhance and promote the educational needs of the child within a set framework of the curriculum needed to be taught.

The caveat in all this is that many **parents will hold the school responsible for work given and assessments as they feel this their right and the job/function of the school official**. However, the kind of collaborative arrangement may be difficult to keep and both the parent and the school will have to work extremely closely in order to ensure correct teaching takes place. There is of course another option and that is that the GDE or Education Department provide guidelines and prescriptive rules for the parent to follow at home with a set curriculum.<sup>4</sup> This may be the case for learners who have been granted permission to follow 'stay-at-home-education' as the parents are concerned about Covid transference. At the end of every phase, the parents must appoint, at their own expense, an independent, suitably qualified person, who is approved by the Head of Education, to assess the learner's progress at the end of that phase.

Education, as we always understood it, started when a learner entered school gates, and was the responsibility of the school and educators. **However, what Covid-19 has taught us, is that there must be a greater cooperative relationship between the parent and the teacher, and between the school and the world of the learner.** "Children are the priority. Change is the reality. Collaboration is the strategy." (Washing State Superintendent of Education)<sup>5</sup>

The shift from contact learning to distance and online education and back to the school has been a challenge for parents and students, but now the focus should turn towards the future as families are starting to adapt to the new norm. Online and distance teaching **IS** different from face to face interaction, leaving families at first distraught but once the options became clear, found that continuing with the curriculum was better because of the support of teachers through the virtual classroom, drive-throughs, pick-ups and WhatsApp groups. Now, enter the concept of home-schooling or assisted schooling at home.

Home-schooling is a form of private education that is parent led and home based. Because of this, home-schooling does not rely on either state-run public schooling or schooling for a child's education. However, in the South African (notably GDE) context, the department does allow for learners to be taught at home through collaboration with the school and its Education District

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<sup>3</sup> GDE Memorandum on Lockdown Learning Section 4 - 7

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum by GDE on Procedures for Partial/Conditional Exemption From School Attendance (Lockdown Learning) dated 26 February 2021

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extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Fhealthykidsmo.org%2Fconferences%2F2017-Presentations%2FWSCC-Building-Case-Change.pdf&clen=3085037&chunk=true

officials. Most often, research shows that this form of education can be successful, **depending on the level of education of the parents or the host providing the daily lessons.**<sup>6</sup>

A slightly different scenario to this is the impact of learning at home **for students with disabilities, which implies a very personalised and intensified layer of support to ensure that the child is successful in his studies.** This layered support from the Education Department and school in collaboration with the parents can be highly beneficial for both learning and well-being.

It may well be that the most successful events in this regard come from collaboration where the parents accept the recommended and identified support needed from the school and local district as critical for them to innovate and teach autonomously to ensure a successful learning programme.<sup>7</sup>

At a school where children who present with both neurological and physical needs (MID, SID learners and learners with cerebral palsy related complexities) **layered or scaffolded teaching would need to take place.** Often in a crisis situation such as the in the current Covid-19 pandemic or with something similar, parents remove their children from the school teaching environment, thinking that schooling at home will suffice. **Parents need to understand that the goal of teaching learners with special education needs, is for the learner to undergo a transition from segregated special classrooms with low performance expectations to a more challenging education classroom with high outcome expectations.**

## What is a “scaffold”?

Think about how this term is used in the building industry...

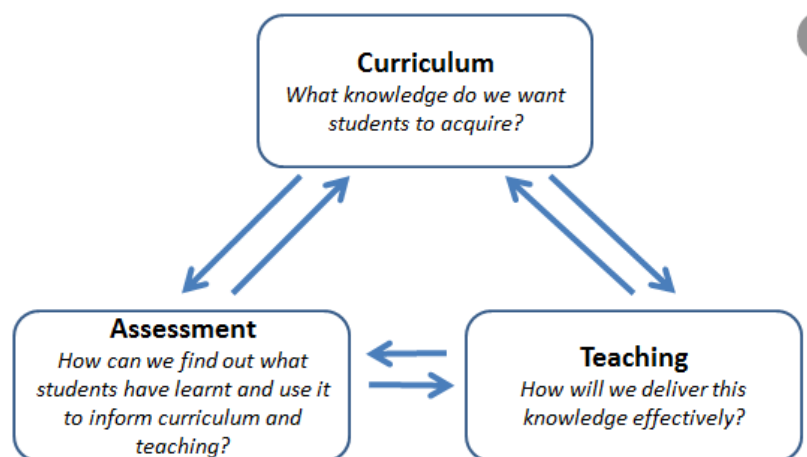
- A “scaffold” is a **temporary** platform.
- “Scaffolding” means to “to **provide support**”.



-- Scaffolds **get people to a higher level** that they cannot reach without support.

At the forefront of all this, is keeping the child’s developmental ability in mind. The assessments, class lessons and general structure of the curriculum is established and created in correlation with this in mind. Parents often think that simple lessons at home will encourage and spur their children on to next level of attainment. Most **often the SEN (special educational needs) child is taught with a host of scaffolding levels built in to the lesson and the desired outcomes.**

There are many purposes for education, one of which is to help guide the development of our "thinking" skills. So as we move through our educational experiences, we are able to better understand the world around us. This is the reason that teachers prepare and teach with a certain methodology or scheme in mind. Blooms Taxonomy most often forms the base line from which lessons are prepared and assessments created.



<sup>6</sup><https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgicfindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.scielo.br%2Fj%2Fpp%2Fa%2FZTmFNfSGTXjzn4W43MKwXJ%2F%3Fformat%3Dpdf%26lang%3Den&clen=609180&chunk=true>

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum on Procedures for Partial/Conditional Exemption from School Attendance



Bloom's Taxonomy provides a useful structure on which to base the description and writing of learning objectives for curriculum/ schooling/ home learning. **It can be used to determine the levels of understanding that learner's will be expected to demonstrate, as well as aid in the development of appropriate instructional strategies that will enable learners to complete the activities successfully.**

*Is this not partly the reason why teachers study to become teachers and why so often, the home schooling or parent-home school fails? The failure to understand **how to layer, scaffold and measure the needs of the child against the curriculum takes time and experience plus understanding to be successful.** Thus, unless the parent is an experienced educator or well-educated individual, the child at home(school) will not achieve the standard of advancement that he/she would have achieved at school.*

One great advantage that the home has over formal schooling is love. The home environment is where the child experiences love, feels comfortable and safe within his/her surroundings. Formal school settings can quite often be the opposite, which is why schools need to be nurturing chambers lead by professionals who see the child as priority and not the curriculum. Note: This is quite contentious and I'll probably be had up for saying it).

### Schooling – The Future?

It is the hope that the curriculum at the school where your child attends will be delivered and the content will be taught in such a way that learning, experience and application can take place to his/her benefit. This is why schools develop strategies and class lessons – to ensure that the correct lesson content is learnt and that what is learnt can be assessed in order to **determine a good pathway for the child to follow.** For example, being assessed in an academic stream and then moving to a technical or skills stream based on the continual outcomes and measurements over a period of time.

Thus following on from this and emerging from the Covid pandemic is the concern for the child's future..... It seems that the majority of parents only became really concerned about their child's future after Covid took its toll on families and society/business/jobs in general. As companies closed and jobs became scarce, companies retrenched, closed or only kept essential staff on board, **creating the need for a new sector of jobs in the job market, one that is more in line with the youth and technology of today.** Thus the most asked question in my office has become, **'what is my child going to do when he finishes at school...or more succinctly, at this school?'**

With our society's titanic short-sightedness, ***we live in a role-based society where the majority of people, particularly in business, typically believe that people are only suited to fit one role.*** A software salesperson can't sell hardware, a hardware salesperson can't become a lawyer, a lawyer can't become a data scientist, and a data scientist can't become a software salesperson, and so on.

While educators prepare students for lives of learning, it's more **true to say their role is to prepare students for lifelong careers**. But while that was a relatively simple task in the past, it's now much more difficult. In the past educators could teach someone law, for example, and it would be fair to say that we could have expected those students to remain gainfully employed within their chosen profession for at least 40 years.

Governments and academia estimate that between 30% and 50% of all of today's jobs will be replaced by technology. However, unlike the disruptions of yesteryear, where technology replaced blue collar jobs, today's technologies are replacing white collar knowledge workers, and it's this shift that could have dire consequences for you and your children's career prospects. Some of the world's best self-learning artificial intelligence systems and cognitive computer systems are already replacing advisers, analysts, artists, commentators, consultants, doctors, journalists, musicians, paralegals, Ph.D.s, teachers, translators and even the data scientists who created their original algorithmic models. Machine vision systems are replacing quality inspectors, maintenance workers, security analysts and security guards. Robots have already replaced many blue collar factory and warehouse jobs, and now they're replacing bar staff, maintenance workers, porters, soldiers, waiters and surgeons.

Education is one of society's cornerstones. After all, as government spokespeople say, "**it's what prepares us to become "useful and productive members of society."** But as the job market continues to shift, education needs to shift ahead of it -- the education industry needs to be developing hard and soft skills curricula that prepare students for a changing world. But often the education industry is at least one or two generations behind the technology curve

In order to channel our children into the job market which is becoming more and more speciality niche centered, the school has had to re-look at its purpose and courses offered. This implies at the very least, new levels of communication, a collaboration between parents, teachers and the school community, digital learning and

## "Top 10" 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

1. Adaptability
2. Self-Awareness
3. Digital Fluency
4. Communication
5. Collaboration
6. Empathy
7. Analysis/Solution Mindset
8. Resilience
9. Entrepreneurial Mindset
10. Social/Diversity Awareness



the utilising cellphones, tablets and computers for learning. Further, the increasing of the child's computer knowledge and development, establishing new and higher levels of critical thinking and creativity in order to "fit in" to the new norm and techno environment created by the surging torrent of mechanically driven and . All of which are 21st Century competencies which young people need to master in order to get them ready for the jobs of the future. Most LSEN schools, and probably ordinary academic schools are not ready for this, which is why the market place is booming with computer coding courses, artisan courses and home-office based competency options, all of which are very difficult to come by in a school.

Our previous version of “normal” will never be seen again. We don’t know what waits for us in the future, but it is becoming apparent that learning in future must incorporate a blended model – a hybrid of classroom and online as well as greater exposure to the technical world, factories, industry, etc. We have to be prepared and ready to build the independence of our learners and the resilience of our teaching models in this fast-changing and unpredictable world.

However, we cannot just suspend our children’s education or schooling each time we’re faced with a new wave or some over-reaching trauma brought on by Covid or a similar pandemic. ***The turmoil and uncertainty, which experts predict will be the norm rather than the deviation in years to come must not determine our relationship with the school and thus bring interruption to their education.*** Regardless of the challenges that this new paradigm brings, the school, together with the parents must collaborate and commit to success of the child’s education, rather than allowing external factors to come between the school, the parents and the learners. The importance of building a long-term relationship with good support for each other cannot be overstressed. One of the challenges for students with special needs is that their support is more disjointed and remote. This is why building out a team of support is even more critical than ever before. Whether or not students with disabilities have a formal plan in place, or have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in terms of their special education needs, collaboration among other educators, support staff, and especially parents is key. ***Lastly, a comment about moving to the home. Moving to the home environment for perceptions of safety and general well-being may be massively counter-productive not to mention disruptive to a child’s educational journey especially if no collaboration or partnership has been created for the benefit of the child.***

I want to close this essay with the following thought. We all want our children to be self-sustaining and secure in the future. Let’s start collaborating with the school, external and good business companies as well as educational and similar institutions now. ***Not everyone will be willing*** to assist, to aid, to help, to guide, to provide...but hopefully by starting, we’ll prepare a pathway for our children to be ready to enter the future and to enjoy life.

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