

New Research Project for the sub-programme: Holistic learner development in diverse contexts

In collaboration with Prof. Deborah Eyre (right) (Founder: High Performance Learning (HPL), UK), Proff. Mirna Nel (left) and Mary Grosser (centre) (see picture below) conceptualized a new research project during the visit that Prof Eyre paid to Optenia (12-16 October 2016), that will commence during 2106.



The project, entitled *Nurturing high performance learning in inclusive educational settings in South Africa* will be built on the following research premises:

- All students can learn and succeed. Encouraging excellence among all (human capital approach).
- Belief in the optimal expression of the potential of all human beings.
- Positive belief in the cognitive modifiability of human potential. Deficient and/or fragile cognitive processes can be reversed so that students become better at dealing with learning challenges on their own. Students, who are not high performers, can become high performers. Cognitive modifiability enables the acquisition of additional abilities that were not previously present or accessible (Feuerstein *et al.*, 2010:6-7).

The project that will start as a pilot study in four public schools in the Sedibeng East and Sedibeng West Districts of the Gauteng Department of Education, will implement the High Performance Learning framework of Prof. Eyre, to measure its merits for the South African context. High Performance Learning theory suggests that most students are capable of achieving the high levels of

academic performance once seen as the domain of the very few and that the role of a school is to help students make this a reality.

Prof. Eyre's framework postulates that the effective development of advanced cognitive performance characteristics (competencies to think) and values, attitudes and attributes (competencies to behave), form the foundation of HPL for all learners as depicted in the visual representation below.

Apart from the competencies to think and to behave effectively, HPL depends on seven pillars, namely:

- a mind-set shift in the way learner potential is viewed;
- providing opportunities for enquiry based learning during teaching to nurture the competencies to think and to behave;
- practice and training to develop expertise in the competencies to think and behave among learners;
- continuous feedback to learners regarding their progress towards acquiring the competencies to think and behave;
- engagement of parents to support and reinforce what is being done in school; and
- always doing things with students and not to them (Eyre, 2015).



The HPL theory of Prof. Eyre ties in well with the current two research projects in the sub-programme Holistic learner development in diverse contexts as the framework supports the development of effective cognitive competencies and success for all learners, which stand central to the Schools as Thinking Communities and Inclusive Education projects, respectively. Applying the HPL theory in the South African contexts could open exciting avenues for comparative research studies with schools in the UK context.

High Performance Learning is the key to unlocking potential for greatness within each child and equipping them with competencies that would enable them to become smarter at thinking and behaving.