

Back to basics with diagnostics

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The long-term solution to the Department of Basic Education's urgent need to bridge the gap in education post-Covid, comes down to one fundamental theory: diagnostics.

According to research by Stellenbosh University, the findings are extremely concerning with losses indicating that learners in 2021 had fallen more than a year of learning behind learners in the same grade in 2019.

As per the report, two policy areas require special attention: The first is to find more time for Mathematics, to overcome the deficit that has accumulated during the Covid years. For instance, Grade 9 learners in 2021 are performing more than a year behind Grade 9 learners two years earlier, so they must catch up a full year before they write matric. This requires that they progress more than four years in the three years before they write matric. In Language, the big challenge is to ensure that reading has been mastered in the Foundation Phase, while at the same time giving urgent attention to ease the language transition. Weak reading skills and English vocabulary can inhibit all further learning for the majority of learners who have to make this language transition.

Education expert Aunyana Moloisane has this to say on the matter: *"We at Optimi feel strongly about assisting learners and teachers in bridging the gap caused by the unforeseen effects of Covid. We believe that we owe it to our learners to ensure that they are not left behind, as this may have a negative snowball effect later in their learning journey. Optimi would like to partner with schools and provincial education departments to redress the learning gaps. Our learning solutions, particularly diagnostic testing, will benefit teachers and learners immensely."*

A crucial gauge in measuring learners' understanding is a diagnostic assessment performed by individual teachers to test learners' proficiency. Optimi Classroom has become the benchmark educational institution to actively unlock this door to both testing and assessing both teachers and students.

These diagnostic assessments serve as a barometer for how much prior knowledge a student has about a topic and helps both the teacher and student understand how much they know, and don't know. This is key in a teacher's lesson planning and learning objectives, and in identifying areas which may require special attention.

"The result of Optimi's Diagnostic Test includes a detailed list of the assessed content areas as well as their subdivisions," said Optimi Academy Coordinator, Reinhardt Venter. He added: "This detailed breakdown assists teachers and parents to facilitate targeted intervention with regards to problem areas, ensuring that such interventions are manageable and do not overwhelm the learner. Not only do Optimi's Diagnostic Tests give detailed feedback, but the tests are self-marking, freeing up time the teacher would have spent marking. Tests can also be done more than once, allowing a learner to go back and see whether specific interventions are effective."

On par with the 17 sustainable development goals that clearly define the world we want to live in, leaving no one behind; The reality is that the future of South African learners' lies in the balance. The truth is that the rules have changed. The outcome is that it's time to do things differently.

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