

‘Nothing more precious than knowledge’ – SU Rector at opening of telematic centre in Bloemfontein

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“There is nothing more precious than knowledge – not shiny cars and big houses, but knowledge.”

This was the message of Prof Russel Botman, Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University (SU), at the opening of a telematic centre at the Dr Blok Secondary School in Heidedal in Bloemfontein on Monday night (8 October 2012).

The highly successful telematic broadcasts of the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) – via satellite from Stellenbosch University (SU) – were recently extended to three schools in Heidedal in Bloemfontein. The schools are Dr Blok, Petunia and Heatherdale Secondary Schools. The function included a live, interactive crossing to the studio in Stellenbosch and learners were able to ask questions about the project via sms.



A special plaque to commemorate the opening of the telematic centre was unveiled at the event. Here are Ms Grace Koetaan of Dr Blok Secondary, Ms NEH Motsoeneng, Director of the Motheo District Office of the Department of Education, Free State Province, Prof Russel Botman and the headmasters of Dr Blok Secondary, Mr Daniel MacPherson; Heatherdale Secondary, Ms Verna Jeremiah; and Petunia Secondary, Ms Maureen Miles.

At the event which was attended by representatives of the Free State Education Department, the Premier’s office and Stellenbosch University, as well as teachers, learners and their parents, Prof Botman said it felt like coming home because he is a former learner of the school.

He recalled how his father wanted to further his studies but how he first had to finish matric. He returned to school, to Grade 11, when Prof Botman was in Grade 1, and they went to school together.

“It was here that I got a first-hand demonstration from my father of the value of a good education. And it was here that my mother taught us that you have to make the most of your opportunities in life. It was here that I learnt that the most precious thing in the world is knowledge.”

He explained how he and his wife visited the area shortly after New Year and how the schools told him of their attempts to improve their exam results and to increase the number of learners who receive university exemption.

“I approached our Division for Community Service, Faculty of Education and Division for Telematic Services and asked them how we can help. In consultation with local schools and the education departments of the Western Cape and Free State it was decided that Heidedal will tune in to our interactive satellite broadcasts of extra lessons for Grade 11s and 12s.”

He added that the programme has been running in the Western Cape since 2010, and last year the average improvement in matric results in the 147 participating schools was 10,9%. What is more, in 20 of the schools facing the biggest challenges, the results improved by 50% or more.

“It is important to mention that this programme plays a supporting role – it is not a replacement. We are here not to replace anyone, but to lend support in three critical areas: to schools and teachers; to parents, who have high hopes for their children; and to learners, to help them build their own future.”

Prof Botman encouraged learners to go to university and if that isn’t possible, to go to college. “Because the future lies in knowledge. And this technology assists in opening the door of knowledge even further. People with knowledge are the people who lead in this world. Our country’s education sector faces many challenges. The question is what you DO about it. We all have a responsibility: to NOT sit back and do nothing; to NOT just point fingers at somebody else; but to stand up and DO whatever we can.

He concluded with saying that success starts with respect for knowledge. Teachers are knowledge workers. That’s why learners should respect knowledge and also respect knowledge workers.

In welcoming guests, Mr Daniel MacPherson, Headmaster of Dr Blok, said that those present have a common purpose – that of education. Only through education can we break the cycle of poverty, he said.

Vivian Carstens, a Grade 11 learner of Heatherdale Secondary School, said that the broadcasts helped her to a great extent in her schoolwork. “It helped me to answer my papers quicker and I understand the work better now. She would like to become an air hostess.

According to Bernard de Vries, who considers a career in human resources, the broadcasts helped him in especially the subject Afrikaans. I now know how to answer questions on cartoons in newspapers and those on advertisements.” Bernard is a Grade 11 learner at Petunia Secondary School.

Both said that is not a huge deal to walk to attend the classes at Dr Blok as they know it is in their own interest.

In congratulating the various partners in the project, the Deputy Director General of the Free State Education Department, Mr Fani Sithole, expressed his support for the project and added that the most important thing in life is to develop partnerships. “We welcome this opportunity to work with Stellenbosch University. No matter what the challenge, we will succeed.”

In addition to learners, postgraduate SU students who cannot attend classes on campus also benefit from broadcasts from the Stellenbosch studio. This takes place through the **HOPE Project** initiative of the Division of Telematic Services, called **Virtual Postgraduate Learning Support**. This initiative makes it possible to create a virtual classroom where students can participate in lessons and interact with their lecturers.