

UJ teaching school attracts interest from Finland

Finland's Minister of Education, Sanni Grahn-Laasonen, is visiting the Funda UJabule teaching school at the Soweto Campus of the University of Johannesburg today, 31 May 2017, to gain more insight into the collaborative research between the University of Helsinki and UJ.



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She will also address a seminar entitled, 'Competent teachers as keys to our success in education', where she will highlight the importance of laying solid foundations for teacher training, using the example of Finnish teacher education.

The Funda UJabule School, which is part of the flagship area of childhood education in UJ's Faculty of Education, is a teacher education and research school that helps bridge the so-called theory-practice divide in pre-service teacher education and is gaining recognition for its practice-based and research-oriented approach to primary school teacher education in South Africa.

Nadine Petersen, a Professor of Teacher Education at UJ, says, "The Funda UJabule School is a public school and serves as a practice site for students, who study towards becoming primary school teachers. The school is the first of its kind in South Africa and the childhood education team at UJ would like to provide a workable model for the establishment of future 'teaching schools' in the country. It also serves as a 'social laboratory', enabling research in childhood education, which is co-ordinated by Prof Elizabeth Henning, the director of the Centre for Education Practice Research and a NRF SARChI chair-holder."

“There is a misconception around the status of foundation phase teachers in South Africa. Many believe that these teachers are childminders. This implies that anyone can do it and that one does not need intellect or cognitively demanding university-level education to become a foundation phase teacher,” added Prof Petersen.

Speaking ahead of the seminar, Grahn-Laasonen said that Finnish teachers are highly educated and hold Master’s degrees in education or sciences from universities. “Our teacher education has ensured that teaching is seen as an academic profession that attracts excellent students. Teacher education is one of the most attractive programmes at the various universities.”

Prof Petersen, points out that it is important to ensure that we have excellent primary school teachers, because the foundations of learning are laid during the early years of schooling. “Through student teachers’ sustained involvement in the teaching school, they learn how children learn and develop over four years; they observe the national school curriculum and school life in action. All of this contributes to preparing them for the demands of the teaching profession.”

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