

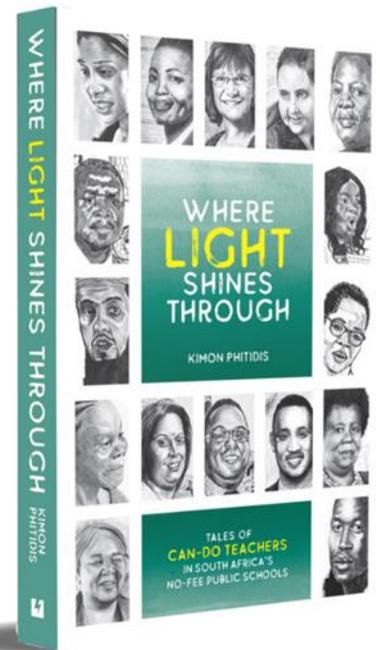
**ABOUT THE BOOK**

- The remarkable stories of **16 teachers working in public schools** who are excelling at their calling.
- Considers what we learn from can-do teachers to improve the performance of public schooling.

Two generations after democracy, South Africa’s public schooling system continues to underperform. Despite some gains, many South African children still don’t achieve basic academic milestones, and teachers are often blamed.

Where Light Shines Through allows glimmers of light to shine through the darkness of the public education story and reveals can-do teachers who are excelling despite the odds. It explores what we can learn from these teachers to build the quality of the schooling sector and the public sector more broadly – and turns our gaze momentarily away from public officials who are in power, towards those who are in service.

The remarkable stories of sixteen South African teachers from all over the country, illustrated with portraits from the Artist Proof Studio, show that while our attitude to life is often informed by our experiences, our attitude nevertheless remains our choice.



The book is available at bookstores and on-line retailers. It is also available as an e-book from Amazon. Funded copies have been made available to some schools and education forums thanks to



**DISCUSSION 1: HOW CAN WE ENCOURAGE A CAN-DO APPROACH AS INDIVIDUALS?**

**The book characterises a *can-do* teacher as follows.**

More than anything, a can-do teacher cares; she harnesses her resilience and her willingness to evolve to make things happen despite the circumstances. This agency drives her to do the best for those in her care as she helps children imagine and realise their greatest possible selves.

It expands on the traits of a *can-do* teacher and make recommendations about how we can train, select, deploy and retain more *can-do* teachers in the public education system.

**The traits of a can-do teacher are:**

1. care;
2. resilience;
3. a willingness to evolve;
4. agency;
5. bringing hope; and
6. drive.

**Discussion questions?** Think of sharing these discussions in small groups or in pairs.

- Can I see myself in the description of a can-do teacher? Do you agree with this definition, or would you define it differently?
- Can I see the traits of a can-do within me? What traits do you see in yourself that you would like to add to this list?
- Are there specific traits of a can-do teacher that you would like to develop or improve within yourself? How will you do this? How will you track if you are getting there?

**DISCUSSION 2: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM EACH OF THE TEACHERS IN THIS BOOK?**

Use one of the teacher stories as a case study to discuss during a staff meeting or in small groups. You could, for example, choose one teacher story a month and plan a series of discussions. For each one:

- What are the character traits that you see in this person that you would like to encourage in your team? How will you do this?
- Is there something you have learned about the teacher's school that you would like to bring into your school?
- What else can you learn from this teacher?

### DISCUSSION 3: HOW CAN WE ENCOURAGE A CAN-DO CULTURE AT OUR SCHOOL?

The book draws conclusions about what we can learn from can-do teachers to improve our education sector and to help build a culture of public service. It suggests learnings to improve how we better attract, select, train, deploy and retain teachers in public service. You can read this section (page 50 – 55), but here are the main points.

#### TAKE-OUTS FOR SCHOOLS

- A functional school with a deliberate culture that makes can-do the norm is more likely to attract can-do teachers.
- School culture is driven by the principal, and in highly functional schools, is sustained and developed by generations of school leadership. Within that culture, school leadership can lighten the load and create a better working environment for teachers.
- Within the parameters of what is required by the Department of Basic Education, streamline and unclutter reporting and administration systems so that these are less burdensome and so that they inform, rather than detract from, the core business of teaching.
- Create an environment in which performance becomes the norm, and in which teacher performance is recognised and rewarded.
- Make learner discipline and respect a non-negotiable priority of the school.
- Bring social security nets closer to the school to offer learners more support and lighten the load on teachers through, for example, developing working relationships with local police stations and clinics and bringing in programmes and NGOs to support the specific social needs of the school

**Discussion questions:** have these discussions in small groups or in pairs.

- Do you agree with the points above? What is your experience of your school? As a team, what can you do to build a stronger *can-do* culture at your school?
- Pick any one of these points for discussion e.g. how can you: make reporting less burdensome and more useful?; better recognise teacher performance?; improve learner discipline?; bring social security nets closer to school?
- When employing new teachers at your school:
  - does your interview panel look beyond the qualifications and experience of the teacher and look for the character traits that make up a *can-do* teacher?
  - how can you improve your selection process to consider character?