



Education is still the future

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Education matters in many ways and for many reasons. A couple of years ago me and my Doctoral student then crunched numbers to try and answer whether education really matters. The [journal article](#) we published in 2016 is attracting a good number of citations. Numbers confirmed that it is not just education that matters, although education has its own intrinsic value, but the quality of education matters greatly.

We know that we have a challenge of the quality of education in the context of South Africa. This, barring the impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, is one of the reasons why unemployment has remained very high in South Africa. It also partly explains huge inequalities in South Africa. Of course, the poor quality of education in South Africa is largely because of the country's political history: education for Africans was deliberately poor and the agenda was to ensure that Africans remain inferior. This was the hallmark of Bantu education. As argued in a recent book chapter, the Bantu Education system effectively pursued the same objective as slave education, albeit perpetuating subjugation and disempowerment with much greater vigour and disdain.

Indeed, the successive democratic administrations since 1994 have not been able to sufficiently reverse this terrible legacy whose ramifications have dire consequences for the society. There have been many policy mishaps and implementation glitches that have conspired to keep the quality of education low. The inefficiencies in the South African public sector have worsened the situation. Not all is lost though.

Back to what this blog/reflection is about: education is till the future. Presenting to student teachers at the University of Mpumalanga recently, I went down the memory lane trying to remember my teaching practice encounter. I had initially trained as a teacher in the early 1990s. The teaching profession was held very highly those days. I changed to be researcher later on. I ended up as an academic, after a relatively long detour as a government official. The opportunities for tutoring and working as assistant lecturer made me wish to be an academic. I saw an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution as an academic. Was it not Mandela who said that "Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world"?

Education plays an important role in the advancement of wellbeing in many ways. It interrupts intergenerational transmission of poverty. It contributes to technological improvements. It advances socio-economic development. At an individual level, education enhances one's chances for success even in instances where it is difficult to secure employment. Education just makes you better in some way. Of course, there are many

“educated idiots” out there. In the Godfather trilogy, when his son decides to drop formal education for music, the Godfather pleads with him that “education is insurance”.

Teachers do not only impart knowledge but inculcate a value system especially in contexts like our society where communities have largely disintegrated and families are falling apart. It is in schools that young ones can be molded to be responsible citizens. In many instances teachers find themselves in unfortunate circumstances. Because of the troubled nature of our society, mainly due our repulsive political history and its ramifications, teachers are sometimes unable to play the roles that they should be playing. Schools have become playgrounds for all social ills manifesting in our society. This does not mean though that teachers should not continue to do their best. Teachers have to be responsible and accountable like everyone else in society, but more so when one is a teacher. Accountability, in various forms, should be the mainstay of any profession.

Teachers have a critical role in ensuring that the future citizens of any country are properly raised through arming them the requisite skills, knowledge and values. A failing school system is a disservice to a nation, for being entrusted with the education of future generations is a huge responsibility. Some teachers sometimes see themselves as teaching learners without critically reflecting on the extent to which they are accountable to society.

Part of the problem that affects teachers is that those responsible for education may not know enough about what they are dealing with. We have seen, for instance, the confusion that frequent changes in the curriculum have caused. Education policymakers can take wrong advise and implement inappropriate decisions. It is important that that which is not working is corrected but don't fix that which is not broken.

So, even though teachers need to be more responsible, policymakers should not make it difficult for teachers to do their best. Like lecturers, teachers have to improve themselves and ensure that a student is the main focus of his/her attention. If teachers/lecturers are unable to make the necessary sacrifices that the education sector demands of them, it would be good that they explore other professions.