



FUTURES ... FOR EDUCATION

'Education is the great engine of personal development," Nelson Mandela once said. "It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that a son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a country." Sadly, South Africa's education

system is in crisis. It has been for many years. Every day of the week 14 million young South Africans walk through the doors of schools, colleges and universities, though many of them take those steps in vain as the system is not meeting them halfway. But this can change, if we muster up the collective courage to try to see the possibility that this challenge also presents.





POOR + MEDIOCRE = INSULT!

No more excuses for not changing direction and taking the path to greatness



BY
JABULANI
SIKHAKHANE

IF YOU frame your national ambition as a vision to greatness, then everything else follows," says Dr Mamphela Ramphele.

"You are not going to be satisfied with third-class education. We are where we are because we have lowered our ambition about what it is that we can achieve as a nation."

In the past 15 years, South Africans have failed to keep their eye on their destiny as the biggest economy in Africa, the country most capable of mobilising what was a traditionally strong technological and industrial base to become a great nation.

"We've done this partly because of inexperience, but 15 years down the line there's no further excuse for not re-engaging and really moving in a completely different direction that is going to put us on that path to greatness.

"We have the money and we have the government that allocates the largest part of government expenditure to education. It's not about money, but a lack of vision, political will, and commitment by you and I as citizens."

All is not lost, though. Ramphele sees signs of hope in the opening up of space for engagement under President Jacob Zuma's administration. It has shown a greater willingness to listen, to retrace steps where things have gone off track and to be brutally honest about things that have not been done well. This presents an opportunity to rebuild the country's foundations, the most important of which is education.

"We need to focus on what is it that we want to see our education system producing. This vision of greatness, we can't avoid it. We are the largest economy in Africa. We've demonstrated our ability to overcome complexity that people thought was not possible. We have demonstrated our ability to constitute ourselves into a nation called South Africa, from the ashes of all of that ugliness," says Ramphele.

South Africa is therefore capable of transforming its education system "to be a true and a reliable ladder for all our children to walk up into this greatness".

All it would take is a solid target to have those who are going into Grade 1 next year emerge as first-class youth in 2022.

"We need to make the commitment to return to teaching our kids for the first four years in their mother tongue because that is an important foundation, but also it's a scaffold around which you build the



RAISE THE BAR: Academic, businesswoman and activist Dr Mamphela Ramphele believes people rise to the level that is expected of them – but we have lowered our ambition about what we want to achieve through education.

PICTURE: AYANDA NDAMANE

development of a child. By teaching through the mother tongue, this kid can go home and share with the mother, the grandmother, or whoever is looking after it, what they have learnt at school.

"My great-grandmother, who brought us up, was totally illiterate. She told us stories. I learnt proverbs from her, which, in turn, I used at school.

"We have severed that. Can you imagine what we've done to our children? Can you imagine what we've done to that grandmother? She's completely useless now. And then we say why... are the parents not engaged in school? How can they be engaged? There's no communication medium through which they can be engaged."

South Africa should also return to the basics of making sure that every child can hold a book, read, write, draw, play with clay, and so forth.

The problem with the current education system is that South Africans have settled for the lowest

common denominator.

"Mathematics and science should be really exciting things for young kids to do, but no, we must protect them against mathematics and we introduce maths literacy. It's worse than arithmetic. I did arithmetic during Bantu education.

"Now, in the post-apartheid South Africa, we are actively and deliberately denying the majority of young South Africans access to the language of modernity, called mathematics. Not every child should get an A in maths, but they should at least understand the principles."

She believes that people rise to the level of what is expected of them. Children do likewise.

But it beggars belief that a young person can pass matric with three 30 percents and three 40 percents.

"You are doing worse than transferring the problem on to the labour market.

"You are actually saying that those young people are not capable

of anything better. So, you are actually stamping them with a seal of mediocrity, and unfortunately, it's not just the 30 percent that puts them out of the labour market or the university. It is that you are creating mediocre citizens, mediocre parents, mediocre everything."

A mediocre education, says Ramphele, is an insult and affront to the dignity of poor people who have been humiliated all their lives.

"The piece of paper (matric certificate) says you have qualified, but there is no attention that was paid to this person's sense of self-worth, self-respect and... self-confidence.

"We've produced something that I believe is unique in the world: unemployable graduates. Have you ever heard of them? Made in South Africa. I don't believe that those kids are dumb. We failed them."

She returns to the idea of vision: "It has to do with this sense of where in our national vision we put education.

"There is a great irony that... in the 1970s and 1980s, teachers who participated in the Struggle were your best teachers. Your (Thamsanqa) Kambules, your (Lekgau) Mathabathes. They made sure that the children were taught. They held Saturday classes."

But the bulk of the post-1994 teachers have lost a sense of what it means to be a teacher. Teaching is about modelling and that's why Julius Nyerere, the late president of Tanzania, was called a teacher, Ramphele says.

On where to start in rejuvenating the education system, she believes that businesses should adopt schools in areas where they do business.

Most importantly, black economic empowerment firms should be required to support education projects, especially in the rural areas where some of the beneficiaries of BEE come from. Religious communities should become involved and communities should contribute their sweat equity to the rejuvenation of education.

But the government must give the necessary leadership, she cautions, otherwise all other efforts will be in vain.

"It's doable. We need to walk together in the education arena, and that is what is going to make us attain our destiny to be a great nation."

“The piece of paper (matric certificate) says you have qualified, but no attention was paid to this person’s self-worth, self-respect... We’ve produced unemployable graduates.”



BY
GRAEME
BLOCH

IN A FIX

OVER TOXIC MIX

Much has been done, but several factors make change incredibly difficult

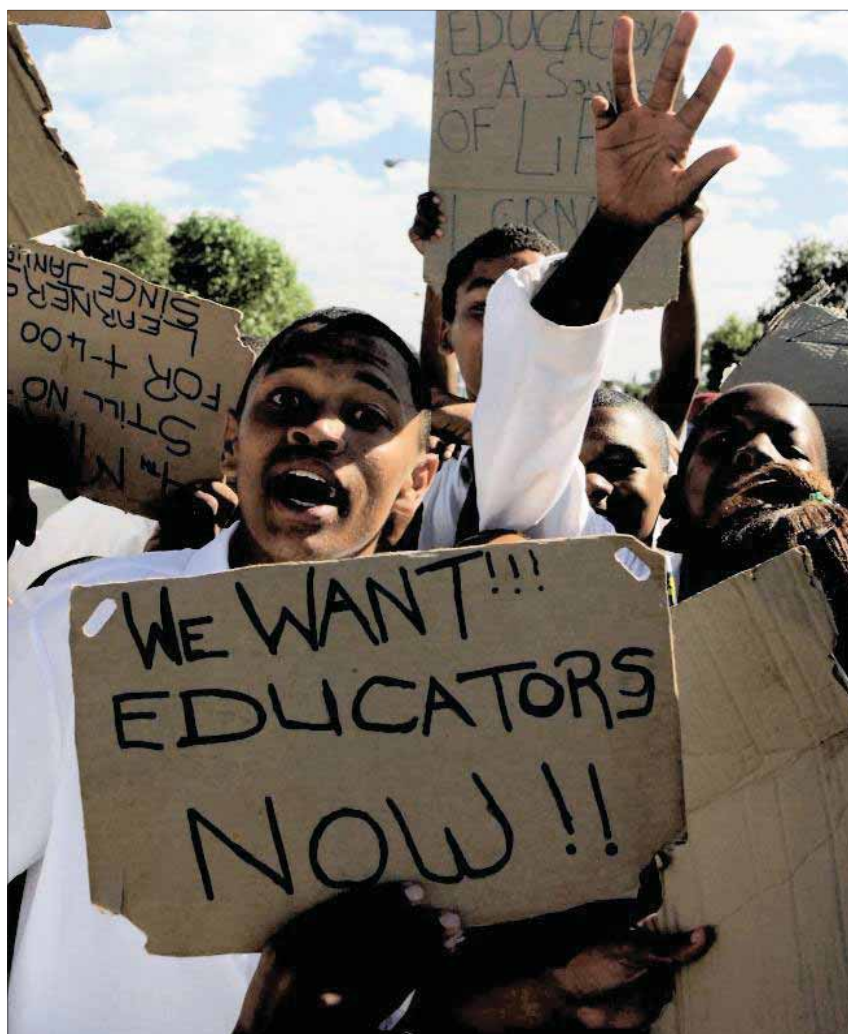
SOUTH Africa's schools are a disaster zone. Instead of being a place of academic achievement and excellence, where pupils can develop their talents and shoot for the stars, our schools have become zones of exclusion, where many pupils feel unsafe because of bullying or violence, and where the skills, attitudes and behaviours for employment and a democratic future are not being nurtured.

Our outcomes are poor, so we do not produce the engineers, doctors, accountants, teachers or managers who can help us imagine a future we have not yet lived, develop plans for it and implement the means to get us there. Worse, these poor outcomes take a racial dimension in a society where all children rightfully expect the best. Inequalities are reproduced in ways that are neither fair nor sustainable.

There are plenty of facts to show that we are just not getting value for our spend – despite vast resources and a high budget for education. In Europe, 75 percent of children can do what only our top 10 percent can, yet we have to compete in a cut-throat globalised world. More than half of our children drop out before matric. They routinely come last or near the bottom for all international tests on literacy and numeracy, with only about 35 percent reading or counting at appropriate levels. Where half of white matrics go on to university, less than 12 percent of blacks do; where 62.5 percent of Grade 3 pupils in former Model C schools could do maths in 2003, only 0.1 percent of township kids could! Neither university nor vocational skills systems have found their measure. Our kids are not getting it. We are failing generation after generation of young people.

The Education Roadmap, co-ordinated by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), identified the interplay of complex factors in this toxic mix that makes education change enormously difficult. The first factor is historical and real – HF Verwoerd's refusal to allow blacks to be shown "the green pastures in which they will not be allowed to graze" or to study maths "when they would not be allowed to use it" has left us with a poor educational heritage and a shallow layer of maths skills among teachers. It can't disappear overnight, despite our best plans. Hiring Zimbabwean teachers or putting Indian experts in rural schools may at best be short-term fixes. What future black maths graduate will choose teaching over accountancy, business or politics?

Similarly, pupils are often hungry, have worms, have lost parents to HIV/Aids, and learn in schools without laboratories, libraries, computers or sports fields and sometimes even electricity. These historical legacies have been compounded by serious policy mistakes in post-democratic South Africa – from inexplicable teacher retrenchments to closure of teacher colleges to the over-optimistic ideals and regressive impacts of



TIME TO ACT: South Africa's children rightfully expect the best education – and part of that is more and properly trained teachers.

PICTURE: BATHINI MBATHA

outcomes-based education.

The three levels that interact to hold us back are:

- **In-class:** our teachers are neither prepared nor disciplined. Nor have they the content knowledge to teach effectively. Unions have become locked in confrontational labour relations mode, at war with education departments. Teaching is the only profession with no agreed supervision. Year after year the SA Democratic Teachers Union

complains about results in poor schools, but is seldom seen to mobilise its members in those poor schools. A culture of victimhood prevails.

- **Support to school:** there are limited management skills among the 27 000 principals and inadequate support from the government and education districts – compliance and forms substitute for pedagogical, social and administrative support that helps

teachers get on with the job of teaching.

- **Societal:** whether because of infrastructure backlogs, gangs, hunger, low parent involvement or a society that fails to value educational aspiration and achievement, education has not found its accepted place as the tried and tested route out of poverty. Recent plans to make education "priority No 1" do give hope. So a "toxic mix" makes it hard

and complex to change education outcomes. Very few countries in recent times have succeeded. Yet South Africa expects better and to be different, as it creaks under the unchanged weight of its apartheid past. In-class and teacher-based issues; poor technical, administrative and political support around the school; and the limitations of society – from gangs to lack of books in the home – all combine to reinforce the past, to encourage division and mediocrity. Instead of a learning nation going forward, a deep mix of history and sociology, of bad choices and unsatisfactory delivery, of institutional failure and social deficit, holds back our country and stops schools from doing what they should.

Much has been done in 15 years. It took enormous effort to unify education departments. There is the logistical achievement of a single national matric exam and high levels of budgetary allocation to education, realigning spend to pro-poor norms. A raft of praiseworthy programmes aim to improve teaching and conditions of learning. Measures support teacher training and bursaries, school nutrition, infrastructure improvement, pupil transport and school safety initiatives, and acknowledge the need for learning strategies around basic literacy and numeracy. Where there were only 1 200 black matrics nationally in 1976, now more than 600 000 write matric.

Many schools and communities – from Colesberg in the Hantam, to Bitou/Plettenberg Bay to Soweto to deep-rural Limpopo and historic church schools – daily face their issues and come up with action-plans. They draw on maths support, sports possibilities such as Dreamfields or NGOs that make a difference in extramurals or citizenship classes. Even in the poorest circumstances, there are well-managed schools that get results. Graduates from poorer schools "plough back" to provide networks and assistance to disadvantaged children, and corporates have adjusted funding models to encourage better partnerships and contribute skills such as management and resources in a longer-term, more hands-on approach.

There is much to give hope. Yet without a massive change in mindset, an agreed vision and a clear plan with priorities and targets, unless our society mobilises around education as the priority, we will continue to fail generation after generation of young people. There is nothing wrong with our youth – our young people rightfully expect the opportunities and possibilities that quality education can bring.

There is a brief window of opportunity, a "policy space", in which we are all called to come forward, to put shoulders to the wheel and take responsibility together; urgently and with commitment, to renew our education and to help our children shoot for the stars.

● *Graeme Bloch is an education policy analyst at the DBSA.*

WALKING TOGETHER

Shared goal to create excellence in the townships

BY MARGARET MURPHY... provinces do not have administration blocks. Once you see others have no libraries or laboratories...

The government is keen to increase the pass rates to 80 percent through the provision of textbooks and standardisation of lessons across the country.

The Teach Fund, for example, is currently funding the construction of a new administration wing at 'Thebediso Primary School...

That was in 1974, long before the Dinkler Seminars, but even then there was a need to 'walk together'...

It's about more than just bricks being thrown up with energy and motivation. It's about building an institution, a professional house of learning...

In recent years, the government has stressed that the education system must be based on merit and not on tribalism...

Improving in these two areas. Some of his Grade 4 and 5 pupils are writing maths exams at district level and are successful...

Not content to stop there, he wants all his students to be adults of tomorrow, why not?

With the Teach Fund, Mokgopla's plans to build a science lab after the admin block has been completed.

There's clearly a need for private and public partnerships to create a better South Africa.

CROSSING THE RIVER OF DREAMS



DAILY RISK: Pupils cross a river on their way to school in Mangweneni, near Bergville in KwaZulu-Natal. The government has achieved very little in alleviating pupils' transport challenges in KZN.

Determined quest for education spurs pupils through perils

WALKING APART

The reason for this has been blamed on the 'walking apart' by some of the stakeholders involved in the education department...

In areas like eGwensha near Umthi, for instance, where a bridge serving a nearby school was recently built, there have already been positive spin-offs...

What is needed is to have a system in place where all should be given the same approach to bring projects based on transport to fruition...

The department has only managed to provide transport to 1 738 pupils out of the 9 000 targeted for the transport programme...

WALKING BEHIND



As a child growing up in a township, your experience of life can be limited. Mine was. And my school years were no different, writes Zonke Mpotulo

The cane instilled fear in our hearts

I ATTENDED primary school and secondary school in Langa in Cape Town. It was just one long constant threat of punishment.

I wasn't getting beaten for walking late to school or for not bringing my school bag. The slightest step out of line would put me on the receiving end of three strikes of the cane or the plastic pipe.

Punishment coloured my existence. I would fear some and cope with others. It was the kind of fear that prevented any real learning.

By the time we got to high school we were already on shaky ground. I figured the reason why so many of us struggled in our first year was because we had left primary school without a good grasp of everything we had learned.

So I worked hard. I studied hard and I learned a lot. I put in a lot of work, but that school gave me the support I needed.

THE BIG DEBATE... NEWS CHANNEL... PRIME TIME ALL THE TIME... This week on The Big Debate, host Redi Direko chairs an expert panel as they unpack the complexities of education in a post-democratic South Africa.



Improve quality and grow at the same time – it has to be done

BY FIONA FORDE

IT'S ONE of the most critical government departments. Or rather, they are the two most important departments, as the education portfolio has been split in two: the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Department of Basic Education.

The latter is running on a budget of R21.287 billion while the former is working off a R20.698bn allocation.

Combined, they receive the biggest chunk of public expenditure, in keeping with education spend of the past few years.

What is expected in return of the two ministers – Blade Nzimande and Angie Motshekga – is that they make a lasting and positive impact on the 14 million young South Africans enrolled in the country's education system.

The irony is that South Africa is one of the biggest spenders on education in the world – forking out roughly 5 percent of gross domestic product – but has one of the poorest-performing education systems in the world.

Under Nzimande's watch are 780 000 students scattered throughout 23 universities, two national institutes of higher education, 22 sector education and training authorities, 50-plus further education training (FET) colleges spread over 263 campuses accounting for 380 000 young people, as well as all those enrolled in adult education programmes.

According to Nzimande's policy adviser, John Pampallis, the focus will be on the FET colleges between now and 2014.

"There has been a historical neglect of the FET colleges. They've also been massively underfunded. And subsequently our apprenticeships have been declining dramatically since the 1980s," he says.

The current FET population is half that of the university population, a worryingly low figure in a country that is seriously lacking in basic skills. So the plan is to double the headcount to 800 000 between now and 2014 and to 1 million soon after.

"The FETs are an absolute priority," he says. "But they have a terrible success rate and the problem is that there are no real standards across the sector, which we have to try to change.

"It's very difficult to improve quality and grow at the same time. But we have to do it. We can't carry on with an FET sector that's half the size of the universities."

The other growth area they've earmarked is the university population. In 2007 only 15.8 percent of all South Africans aged between 18 and 24 were attending universities, well under par by international standards.

Of the R20.69bn budget allocated to Nzimande's department, R17.5bn is allocated to universities to meet the needs of the 800 000 students registered on their books.

Or to put it differently, it costs the taxpayer nearly R22 000 to put one student through university each academic year.

Yet the dropout rate is high, which raises several questions. It assumes a low return on tax rands, and highlights the fact that the

FURTHERING EDUCATION LET TOGETHER



NEW PRIORITY: John Pampallis wants to stop the neglect of FET colleges.

PICTURE: BOXER NGWENYA

system is not working.

Either the universities are failing the students or the students are not prepared for the demands of tertiary education.

According to the recent publication *Perspectives*, 56 percent of students leave higher education without graduating.

Pampallis doesn't have the university dropout figures to hand,

though he talks of the department's plans to increase intake substantially in the next five years so that one in every four young people are availing of a university education by the time Nzimande leaves office.

The minister sparked controversy earlier this year when he talked about lowering the bar to increase the headcount, stoking

fears that he would lower standards in the process.

"He was misunderstood," Pampallis now says. "He was not talking about lowering exemptions for everyone. Just in certain cases, such as adults returning to education or in exceptional circumstances."

Yet when the issue of widening access at the expense of standards

was put to the minister earlier this year, his words left little doubt about his meaning.

"That argument is exactly like the one against affirmative action and it's offensive," he told *The Sunday Independent*.

"It is a new form of a racist attack. Increasing access means you are taking in more black people. But people who are used to institutions that have been exclusively serving a minority say we are lowering standards. There's an attitude that they are getting students who are poorly prepared.

"The reality is that, in 2009, these are the students we have, so our universities need to be creative. If our schooling system is bad, what are the universities doing to train teachers for those students? That question gets buried," he said.

The sobering fact is that the system only churns out 6 000 qualified teachers a year, according to 2007 figures, a supply figure that is far off demand.

Even if there were enough teachers to do the job, up the performance and churn out well-trained matric graduates, a ballooning student headcount will require not only an increased budget but an immediate address of the hot issue of student fees.

A ministerial committee is looking into the National Student Financial Aid Scheme to see how best they can stretch the current budget of R1.85bn, Pampallis says, while Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan has asked that they be creative and also look at the National Skills Development Fund, which has accumulated more than it can spend in recent years.

The challenges don't stop there. There are still too few African students in the sciences and engineering; in general too many students, regardless of colour; are taking too long to graduate; and a dwindling and ageing academic population raises questions about the future of research. It is also a fact that half of the research is carried out by white men older than 50. But it is being carried out.

The problem Motshekga is faced with is that many of her teachers don't turn up at all, don't turn up on time, or don't turn up in a state in which to teach. According to the Centre for Development and Enterprise, teachers spend an average of just 40 percent of their time teaching. Yet their salary bill swallows up the bulk of the budget.

The knock-on effect is disastrous. Of all the pupils who enrolled in 1995, 66 percent had dropped out before Grade 12. Of those who started in 1999, only half made it to matric.

Of those who failed matric last year, 39.5 percent were black, 1.6 percent white. The spread of exemptions was as skewed: 10.9 percent of black pupils, 52 percent of white pupils.

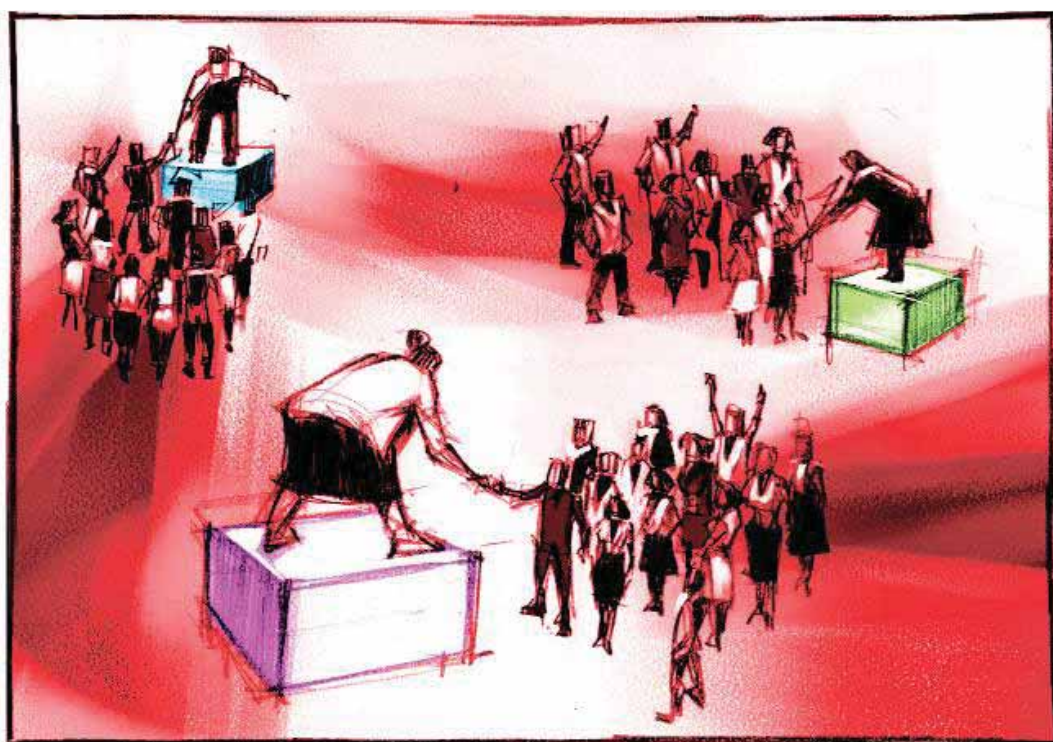
Of all children in this country, 68 percent live in poverty. When broken down by colour, 75 percent of all African children live below the poverty line, while only 5 percent of white children fall in the same social category.

There are more than 18 million children in South Africa – nearly 40 percent of the entire population.

Unfortunately Motshekga's policy team could not be reached to tell us how they plan to turn the system around.



South Africa needs more academics. This will require major private sector involvement as well as dealing with public prejudices



NOTHING ADDS UP!

THOUGH I would not push it too far, we could say higher education is an unusual being in that it reproduces asexually: the sector is expected to develop and nurture the next generation of young academic professionals labouring away at new approaches to knowledge and – unique among education institutions – reproduce and replace its own academic and professional staff.

Our racial politics guarantees that this process of self-reproduction will be far from simple or straightforward. The emerging knowledge economy demands expanded access to higher education for all South Africans. This in turn requires a growth in university teaching and research staff that draws on where the supply is greatest, principally among our black population.

In 1990 African students made up but 23 percent of university enrolments, concentrated in the humanities and education. The total number of student enrolments has nearly doubled since then, from 386 000 in 1991 to 720 000 in 2006. Today African students comprise the largest proportion at 61 percent. But what about the teaching and research staff?

The pre-1994 Balkanisation of the country makes it difficult to compile staff data before that date, so we must settle for the period 1995 to 2006. This data tells an interesting story.

In 1995, black teaching staff made up 21 percent of the 13 946 academic staff members, researchers included. By 2006, that figure had climbed to 38 percent of all the 16 077 academics then registered in teaching and research

positions. The 79 percent of white academics captured in 1995 dropped only to 62 percent by 2006.

The most obvious and perhaps most dramatic part of the story is not the colour tone, but that the 15 percent expansion in the number of teaching and research staff has not kept pace with the 86 percent growth in student enrolment.

That is cause for concern as it raises the problem of massification: lecturers are overloaded with teaching large classes and have too little time for research.

The Department of Science and Technology's research and development surveys provide an even more troubling picture of the university researcher population over the same period by showing near-zero growth in university researcher staff.

From an equity perspective, the proportion of black teaching and research staff has risen from 21 percent to 38 percent, a doubling in the black staff complement. This is a notable achievement.

The space for these additional staff members has come through the filling of posts vacated by white staff whose numbers have declined by 10 percent over the period.

Some were no doubt lost to retirement, but the decline in white staff is not necessarily a good thing even though it has created



BY
WILMOT
JAMES

space for emergent black staff.

Still, the overall conclusion is that there has been no significant growth in academic staff.

It is interesting to compare the situation at the universities with what prevails in the science councils and government laboratories.

Here the total number of researchers has shown a small increase, but the proportion of black researchers has risen more dramatically from about 5 percent to 50 – and this in the hard sciences, where black people were excluded before 1990.

So there is a stronger flow of black talent into the science councils and government labs than the universities, but it comes at a price, as it amounts to substitution, with a loss of institutional memory and possible loss of capacity.

No doubt stronger political control and directed, decisive and even authoritarian management over this sector has made it easier to push affirmative action hard,

though of course financial inducements clearly played a role. It is also true that the unpleasant side of teaching – voluminous marking demands and inability to mentor large classes – make these jobs more attractive.

Universities therefore face two crises: pressure on the staff because of the increase in student numbers; and pressure to become more representative. Both problems are linked to the availability of financial resources. Ideally, the next generation of staff to a university is provided from the flow of doctoral graduates from universities, supplemented with experienced staff nationally and internationally, but this is far from secured.

The problems are compounded by what the University of Stellenbosch's Centre for Research on Science and Technology describes as the "piling up" effect on the flow of postgraduate students who complete their degrees. "Piling up" occurs when students spend much longer than expected to obtain their degrees. As a result, master's and doctoral enrolments have increased faster than graduation. The Centre for Higher Education has called for better supervision models but this demands more, not fewer, staff.

Reasons for this may be financial (students have to find jobs and thus have less time for their studies) and

staff have to supervise many more students, so will spend less time on each. Part-time work for students is an important learning experience, but too much time chasing money spent working compromises their focus.

The number of PhD students graduating each year has shown a modest year-on-year increase of about 7 percent. But more than half of this increase is due to the enrolment of foreign students. In and of itself this is good – universities benefit from the wider pool of talent. Few of these students are allowed to stay on for immigration or personal reasons once they have qualified.

The government should look carefully at this issue. If a graduating PhD student from Uganda wants to stay on as a postdoctoral fellow or junior lecturer in, say, immunology, why not? Recouping the investment becomes even more compelling for students from Southern African Development Countries (SADC), for they pay the same subsidised (by taxpayers) fees as South African students do. Our taxpayers annually subsidise SADC country students in the order of R500 million.

The most fundamental challenge is new funding for posts (there is none in the fiscus at this time) and finding a new source of highly qualified lecturers (we would have to supplement local talent with foreign recruiting from countries such as India, for example). And we certainly have to walk this one together; for any expansion plans requires major private sector involvement as well as dealing with public prejudice.

● Dr Wilmot James is the DA shadow minister for higher education and training.

“ The most fundamental challenge is new funding for posts and finding a new source of highly qualified lecturers. And we certainly have to walk this one together. ”



BY
JOHN
GILMOUR

SAVING OUR SCHOOLS

THE SYMPTOMS and consequences of the crisis in education in South Africa have been defined, diagnosed and redefined endlessly in the past 15 years.

The cold truth is that there are two education systems in one country. The minority have access to sufficient income and can afford a reasonable education for their children while the majority have to make do with an inferior system that does not provide hope for young people.

What is the right way forward given these realities?

The only way to change the education landscape is school by school. Individual schools will change when leadership is strong and when the intent of the teachers is focused on developing and caring for the children in the school.

Principals must be clear in their understanding of responsibility to exercise legitimate authority in such a way as to create high expectations, inviting discipline frameworks and effective teaching and learning processes in their schools. Principals need direct support, mentoring and coaching as part of this recovery process.

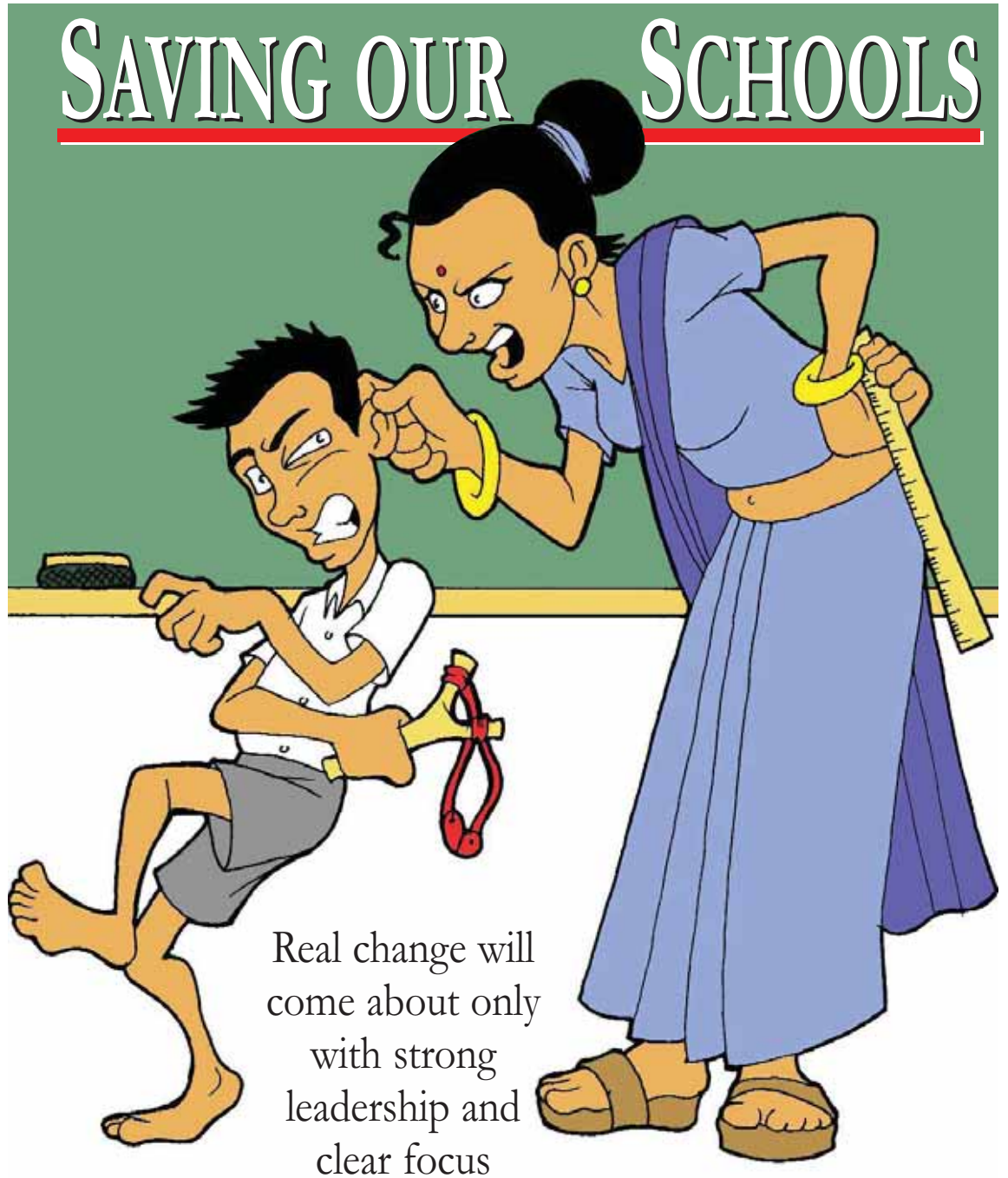
Leadership development programmes in education must shift from skills development to integrated personal development. More caring systems of leadership and teaching development need to be implemented. An effective and efficient performance appraisal system needs to be introduced, school by school. This strategy will require support and alignment of expectations of the Department of Basic Education and teacher unions. The need for a facilitated multi-stakeholder process to achieve this alignment has been identified as a priority for the first six months of next year.

Effective education in a school depends on the quality of the teachers. It is the intent, energy and commitment of the teachers that are the indicators of quality, rather than the qualifications and years of experience. This energy needs to be generated from within the school and strengthened by effective interventions from leaders who have and understand a clear mandate to lead.

Communities of practice in education streams and in subject areas need to be created, broadened and made inviting and accessible. There are so many teachers who have great ideas, great projects, great practices – these are rarely shared.

All teachers should be required to engage directly with other teachers in their field and to be willing to share resources in the form of notes, lesson plans, project ideas, problem-solving approaches, assessment tools and effective classroom practices.

The integration of computer



Real change will
come about only
with strong
leadership and
clear focus

technology in schools is another one of the parallel streams necessary for the revitalisation of education. As a priority, all teachers must have access to computers and be trained to be technologically literate, to access and use education portals and resource-sharing sites to bring new energy into their classrooms.

Parents have every right to demand from schools a safe and quality-driven education for their children. The growing social movement developing around the notion of walking together must extend into communities, where parents need to reclaim their rights and responsibilities as citizens and

parents to have a direct impact on the regeneration and rejuvenation of schools.

Each parent needs to step across the threshold of the school and ask, "What can I do in this space that will help the process?" or "How do I need to use my voice to begin to create accountability in the school system?"

It is iniquitous that so much testing happens in this country for statistical purposes and the information is never passed on to the schools or to the parents.

They need to be brought in from the cold to fully appreciate the years-long process and not just measure education at the

point of exit.

Underresourced schools are often "pathologised" as powerless and dependent, and a shift in expectations is needed.

All schools need to become nodes of social action to be extended to become centres of social development.

Children need to find themselves in school contexts where they can engage with the problems of community and begin to see themselves as agents of change, making a small difference, later to make a larger difference.

There are so many ways in which people are working to improve the education system.

There is a history of walking alone and the creation of small nodes of excellence spread across a barren landscape. We need to galvanise and share the good ideas. We need to continue the conversations, particularly the ones that are so difficult.

We must share the responsibility for rebuilding what is so broken.

More than ever before, as citizens, we must each embrace the roles we must play in this struggle for the hearts, minds and economic futures of the children of SA.

● *John Gilmour is the executive director of the LEAP Science and Maths School and chairman of the Board of BRIDGE*

Over the past five weeks we have looked at the critical issues of Civil Society, Race and Transformation, International Relations and the Economy, all through the prism of the Dinokeng Scenarios. Today's Education edition is the last in the 5-part series. All the supplements can be downloaded from www.iol.co.za/dinokengscenarios while further information on Dinokeng is available at www.dinokengscenarios.co.za. It's over to you now to take that first step and begin to walk together.

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