Our Vision for South African Education

Driving Education Conversations and Solutions
Our Vision for South African Education Published by Kagiso Trust and the University of Johannesburg as part of the Education Conversations’ Occasional Publication Series.

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www.kagiso.co.za

Published: July 2017

Special thanks to Prof Caroline Long for initiating and managing the students’ contribution process.
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Foreword by the Editor

Five years ago, Kagiso Trust (KT), in partnership with the University of Johannesburg’s (UJ’s) Faculty of Education launched the Education Conversations with the objective of creating a platform where society can engage on matters that affect and impact on South Africa’s education system and, moreover, propose practical solutions to challenges in the sector in efforts to afford our children quality education.

“We education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” This popular quote by Nelson Mandela sums up the importance of the role of education in creating a better South Africa. Having reviewed the Vision 2030, in particular for schooling, the Education Conversations invited society to engage on ‘our vision for South African education’.

According to the Schooling Vision 2030, “a strong educational system spanning early childhood development, primary, secondary, tertiary and further education is crucial for addressing poverty and inequality. The psychosocial wellbeing of learners from early childhood to higher education is also central to the success of a good quality education system.”

Most of our contributors agree with this approach. Beyond the visions shared, we attempt to unearth the ‘how’ by challenging our contributors to provide solutions rather than a utopian sentiment with no tangible way of being realised.

Kagiso Trust and the University of Johannesburg are excited to see such a large number of youth expressing their interest and passion for education. Furthermore, Kagiso Trust commends the University of University’s Faculty of Education for driving the Education Conversations on their Auckland Park and Soweto campuses. This publication is, as a result, populated by work from the students from UJ’s Faculty of Education, our country’s future educators.

We are honoured to host the Deputy Minister of Basic Education Mr Enver Surty as the keynote speaker. The Education Conversations panel discussion which also includes Mr Abram Kgari, Founder and Executive Director of Oratile ECD Centre and Mr Koketso Nthimbane, Education Honours Student at the University of Johannesburg may be followed on social media.

I trust you will enjoy this book and find the contributions inspirational and practical in realising our vision for South African education.

Amandla Kwinana
Communications and Marketing Officer, Kagiso Trust
Coordinator: Education Conversations
Importance of discussing the vision for education

Professor Caroline Long
University of Johannesburg

Thinkers in the education field have identified agency as necessary for effective teaching. Theorists exploring the construct agency, have identified three temporal aspects impacting on the expression of agency at any particular moment; these are past experiences, current constraints and opportunities, and future goals. The identification of goals, and the elaboration of a vision for education, fits into the third aspect, future goals. The existence of a vision has the power to motivate teachers and prospective teachers.

Agency is intrinsic to the individual. The construct of agency, comprising action, autonomy, creativity, and the ability to identify a problem, bring resources to bear on a problem, and solve the problem, is innate in human beings. Teachers make countless decisions every day, in every class, and perhaps even in every minute.

What should I include in the mathematics lesson? How much do I explain, and how much should I expect them to solve themselves? What will be best short term? Or long term? What is best for the class as a whole, for the talented mathematician, and for the methodical, though slow, learner? What other elements should I include in class? Should I teach about social issues?

Given that these decisions are just some of the decisions that teachers need to make, it stands to reason that teachers require agency, and a measure of autonomy. Because education is a public good, teachers are accountable to the public. The public are also extremely interested and even invested in what teachers do, and indirectly in what they think.

The conclusion I make from the above argument is that teachers, as an organized body, need to bring their voice into the public domain. In this regard, Kagiso Trust, together with the University of Johannesburg, have taken on the role of engaging the general public in debate.

In the July 2017 Education Conversations, an additional element has been added, and that is to give voice to our prospective teachers, current students at the UJ Soweto Campus. While we have always expected our students to attend, this time we have asked them to consider the question, “What is my vision for South African education over the next ten years?”

While 100 prospective teachers completed an assignment on the topic, eight students have submitted their visions for publication. The readers may judge for themselves whether the students’ offerings in both the written form and at the Conversations, are a force for good and for progress. The question we ask is whether such engagement enables and develops agency.
Schooling Vision 2030

The National Development Plan (NDP) “envisions a South Africa where everyone feels free yet bounded to others; where everyone embraces their full potential, a country where opportunity is determined not by birth, but by ability, education and hard work. Realising such a society will require transformation of the economy and focused efforts to build the country’s capabilities. To eliminate poverty and reduce inequality, the economy must grow faster and in ways that benefit all South Africans.”

“We are Africans.
We are an African country.
We are part of a multinational region.
We are an essential part of our continent.
We feel loved, respected and cared for at home, in community and public institutions.
We learn together. We love reading.
Each community has: a school, teachers who love teaching and learning, a local library filled with the wealth of books, a librarian. All our citizens read, write, converse, and value idea and thought.
We are fascinated by scientific invention and its use in the enhancement of lives.
We live the joy of speaking many languages.”

To this end, the Schooling Vision 2030 documents ways to achieve this vision through education, training and innovation.

We need to ensure that all children can access and benefit from a high quality of education. This requires a range of early childhood development services and programmes that support the holistic development of young children. We envisage schools that provide all learners with an excellent education, especially in literacy, mathematics and science. The education system needs to improve constantly. The post-school sector needs to meet the wide range of education and training needs of people over 18. Together with the higher education system it will play a significant role in producing the skills and knowledge the country needs to drive its economic and social development. It will also be an inclusive system that provides opportunities for social mobility, while strengthening equity, social justice and democracy.

(Extracted from the National Planning Commission: National Development Plan, Chapter 9)
Overcoming poverty through education development

“Education is a responsibility for all within society and that the burden to empower the next generation through education must be borne by all” – Beyers Naudé (Kagiso Trust Patron)

Kagiso Trust Vision
A prosperous, peaceful, equitable and just society.

Kagiso Trust (KT, the Trust) believes that education is a critical component to overcome poverty and afford South Africans the means to create and live in a prosperous, peaceful, equitable and just society. To this end, Kagiso Trust works with government and partner organisations to tackle critical problems in education. Over the last thirty years, the Trust has developed proven models in education that have delivered long-lasting results for our learners. Kagiso Trust invests heavily in basic education programmes.

Kagiso Trust Approach

- Interventions in life capabilities earlier in life have the greatest opportunity to impact on poverty alleviation and future prospects
- Structured education programmes have the highest impact and greatest sustainability on eradicating poverty
- Learner assistance needs to include a broader understanding of exit opportunities beyond university opportunities to include career guidance, technical training and entrepreneurship

As one of Kagiso Trust’s four strategic objectives, KT’s Education Development initiatives are focused on impacting and improving the entire education pipeline from early childhood development (ECD), Basic Education interventions (Beyers Naudé Schools Development Programme and KST District Whole Schools Development Programme) and right through to the Higher Education interventions (Eric Molobi Scholarship Programme and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme).
Aspirations for Freirian classrooms – lessons for teaching and learning

Dr Pete van Jaarsveld
Lecturer in the Wits School of Education University of the Witwatersrand

Paulo Freire’s ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ of the mid-nineteen seventies espoused an emancipatory philosophy which he conceived in the nineteen-fifties and sixties. He recognised the academically ‘unfranchised’ Brazilian proletariat as being cognitively disempowered and hence rendered mute and by an education system that was dialogically deprived. The unidirectional deposition of knowledge by teachers resulted in the cognitive alienation of learners that resided in their muteness. Reflective practice was anathema for learners and teachers alike. Freire diagnosed that his people would remain forever critically voiceless within their poverty if teaching was not replaced by education. He deemed the engagement of teachers with learners, and learners with teachers through dialogic exchange as the remedy for liberating minds and for developing conscientised learners. Freire’s educational philosophy of emancipatory education through dialogic praxis, and his unintentionally semiotic literary methodology for eliciting classroom dialogue, resulted in the self-actualisation of many of his students, and their cognitive and social emancipation. Freire’s philosophy and methodology is more relevant in South Africa today than it has ever been in terms of its value for transforming education – for envisioning classrooms of the future. As South Africans we should strive for an education system that promotes the conscientisation of all our people, teachers and learners.

Conscientisation presupposes thought which presupposes language, and its vocabulary. Without the words that constitute concepts we have no capacity to engage at any meaningful cognitive level to enquire, critique or contest what we are taught. And this largely, from my mathematics vantage point, is where our learners find themselves. Our pedagogies are procedural and our expectations of our learners therefore cannot exceed a rote reproduction of fallible knowledge. As teachers if we cannot expound a concept with an appropriate and exact language peculiar to the content then we indulge, sometimes inadvertently, in deceiving our learners. It results in a depositional pedagogy that is responsible for muting learners because they do not have the words with which to think, or the language with which to become engaged in the process of education. Our charges trustingly receive contaminated knowledge that finds little cognitive resonance that ultimately renders them mute. Education requires of teachers their devotion and dedication to firstly emancipate themselves from their traditional perceptions of what teaching is about and secondly to relinquish the impoverished models of teaching which they witnessed and inherited while seated and facing their own youthful chalkboards. The reciprocity of the teaching-learning interchange stimulates engagement and conversation, and opportunities for learners to ponder content and question meaningfully. Ours is a vocation – a service to humanity that requires the growing of a rapport that facilitates mutual trust between teacher and learner to ask questions that provoke thought and debate meaning. Our learners so often have the answers to the most searching of questions. We need to ensure that what we say means to our learners exactly what it means to us. Teachers and learners are equal participants in the educative process – we learn and teach each other. The implications are that we need as teachers to cultivate a humane mood of caring in our classrooms. We need to grapple with our subject content to the extent that nothing about what we teach is mysterious or intimidating. We need to learn how to ask questions that even challenge us. We need to develop our agency – and in critical realist terms challenge the status quo as revolutionised change agents. So it is the imbibing of knowledge, internalising it and making it the cognitive threads of our corporeal fabric that moves us towards our self-realisation. Our classrooms need the invigorating contributions of its singular and collective minds. And the responsibility falls to our teachers to strive for cataclysmic metamorphoses. Students in initial teacher education programmes need to be nurtured in the development of their potential agency and their subject prowess – ingredients that will breathe life into learning. And as classrooms become crucibles of teaching and learning so our teachers and learners will find their lost voices – and a confident identity. There will be time for questions, and time for answers. Life will take on new meaning where poverty will be one stepping stone closer to heaven, closer to the dream each one has for realising the freedom of knowing who they are and the aspirations they hold.

We need to hold dear the Freirian philosophy of education where dialogic classrooms provide for authentic conversations about who and what we are, teachers and learners alike. To be free to experience what it means to be heard and understood, and free to question until our minds are satisfied. We should never underestimate our charges, never be afraid of their questions. We must challenge them beyond the height of their potential. And to achieve this we must always remember that our expectations of our learners are directly proportional to our understanding of what we teach.
Fostering self-reliance, economic activity and the construction of a knowledge inventory for future generations

Koketso Andile Nthimbane
Bachelor of Education Honours Student, University of Johannesburg

On a global scale, South Africa has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world. In 2017 Statistics SA released the latest figures and they revealed that 27% of the population is unemployed. Coupled with this a study conducted by Ilifa Labantwana, the Children’s institute at the University of Cape Town, estimated that "about 63% of young South African children live in poverty". The study further unearthed that poverty affects young learners’ physical, cognitive and emotional development. These factors have a negative impact on the learners’ academic performance and subsequently their motivation to even attend school. In my view, the only way for our country to relinquish this ‘double trouble’ of unemployment and poverty is through a skilled population. In order to achieve this strong skills base we need to diagnose the major pitfalls of an inherited colonial education system under apartheid. In essence, colonial education was founded on the principle of capitalism and not socialism. In simple terms, we provide the best to the few and the remainder to the many. I believe that a progressive education system equips those who go through it with the knowledge and vocational skills to be employable independent units of a collective society.

My vision for the South African education system is the adoption of an African vocational approach for the African child, in the African context. Biesta (2009) sternly proposes that “we need to shift the focus of the discussion from questions about the functions of education to questions about the aims and ends of education”. As such I believe the aims or purposes of our education system should be to foster self-reliance, economic activity and the construction of a knowledge inventory for future generations from the early grades. Beginning from grade 1 and ending in grade 12, learners should be engaged in the process of exploring a wide range of vocational, academic and artistic skills that enable them to be employed or self-employed with the sole aim of building and giving back to their country through service. I believe that these specific aims speak directly to the two challenges facing the South African society, poverty and unemployment. Practically engaging young learners with initial concepts in agriculture, electrical engineering, business management and Information technology, to mention a few, are the key to creating productive citizens. Advanced skills in farming and entrepreneurship could help graduates directly combat poverty and unemployment and, in 2017, IT and engineering are crucial skills for the development of future innovations in all modern societies.
Fostering self-reliance, economic activity and the construction of a knowledge inventory for future generations (continued)

This ideology is premised on the works of Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the former and founding president of the United Republic of Tanzania. Such publications include: education for self-reliance (1967), education never ends (1969/70), our education must be for liberation (1974) and adult education and development (1976). An educator himself President Nyerere developed and implemented post-colonial Africa’s most successful education system during his time as head of state. Nyerere (1967) viewed the purpose of education as being to transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, to prepare the young people for their future membership in the society, and to promote active participation in its maintenance and development (Hinzen&Hundsdorfer,1978). On a similar theme, Biesta (2009), defines Socialization, one of his functions of education, as “the ways in which, through education, individuals become part of existing socio-cultural orders”. The views of both authors are aligned with my ideology of equipping learners from a young age with skills that are not only for the benefit of their survival (self) but for the common good of society as the centre of education. The themes mentioned above constitute the “good education” that I look forward to implementing and seeing thrive when I become the Minister of Basic Education in the year 2030.

References


Embracing the learner as an individual

Thapelo Masemola
4th Year Education Student, University of Johannesburg

A lot of people have different views on what good education is, what it entails and how we get to conclude that it is good education. Despite these varied views, it is my personal view that good education is one that is inclusive. Inclusive education means that all learners are welcomed to learn and are supported to learn, to contribute and to participate in all aspects of the life of the school. Good education promotes the notion that learners should learn in an environment that caters for all their needs and ensures that learning is inspired by the imagination and creativity of each of our learners.

You might be sitting there wondering how all this relates to intermediate phase mathematics. The truth is that for many years, our ‘curriculum’ has enclosed many learners in a ‘box’ as I like to put it. Learners are subjected to what we call ‘curriculum standards and guidelines’ which limit their creativity and the usefulness of their imaginations when solving mathematical problems. The question that recurs in my mind as an aspiring mathematics specialist and teacher is: why are we so obsessed with doing things the systematic way as prescribed by the policies and guidelines of curriculum designers that we let our creativity stagnate?

Why don’t we engage our minds hard enough to come up with our own ways of solving sums the best way we know how? Of course, some will argue that we have to promote the strands of mathematical proficiencies such as procedural fluency, however two other strands are adaptive reasoning and strategic competence. Let me show you what I mean:

a)\[
\begin{array}{c}
5 & 3 & 4 \\
\hline
- & 4 & 8 & 6 \\
\hline
1- & 5- & 2 \\
\hline
100- & 50- & 2 = 48
\end{array}
\]

b)\[
\begin{array}{c}
5 & 3 & 4 \\
\hline
- & 4 & 8 & 6 \\
\hline
1- & 5- & 2 \\
\hline
0 & 4 & 8
\end{array}
\]

(extracted from Facebook page, Math: An Integral Part of Happiness. Posted 6 April, 2017)
Embracing the learner as an individual (continued)

Although the working at ‘b’ is considered the most favourable answer due to procedural fluency and conceptual understanding ‘a’ is “much nicer” and 1-5-2 is “considered to be a totally acceptable and right answer”. It shows 100 minus 50 minus 2, which is equal to 48. Why do I say so? Not only was the child strategically competent but was highly creative and imaginative which takes us back to my view of good education and leads us to my vision for South African education as follows:

Education has been identified as a central component of our country’s history due to the role it has played in creating an inclusive society, which provides equal opportunities for all, aiding all South Africans to reach their full potential. My vision is to see high quality education across all phases of learning, especially in the intermediate phase as it is the bridge between creating the foundations, welcoming ‘newcomers’ into the wider world of learning, and then to equipping them for further education and training.

The mathematics curriculum assessment policy statement (CAPS) identifies areas that I personally would like to view as big ideas in learning, thus supporting my vision of education in a broader subject. It defines mathematics as “helping to develop mental processes that enhance logical and critical thinking, accuracy and problem solving that will contribute in decision making.”

Thus, the big idea is to have confidence and be strategically competent. Let your mind not be only subjected to the classroom teachings, but critically think of the different ways to think about things. Our learners need to be motivated at all times, given the recognition for a job well done and encouragement to dismiss the fear they have, and so enable them to be lifelong learners.

The second big idea is the recognition that mathematics is an essential creative part of human activity, therefore creativity should at all times be embraced. Mathematics is part of our lives, from knowing the amount of water to drink on the day or how many people you are cooking dinner for. Although we are not directly aware of it, our mental processes are already aware of our environment and activities we partake in. It goes from wondering how I can share three sweets amongst the two of us to getting one and a half sweet each. These are the skills we grow up with and are not subjected only to the classroom but occur in our social environments.

Lastly, mathematics as the acquisition of skills necessary for the application of mathematics to our physical, social and mathematical problems. I will refer you back to the workings of the learner. We are taught integers, and addition and subtraction with “borrowing” (a strange term as we are not going to give anything back), but we are told that these concepts are separate, and not how they relate to one another (which is what I would like to think). 3 - 8 in a mathematical sense is – 5. However, we could also borrow from our neighbour to make three larger than 8. Already this reasoning might create misconceptions, as we are firstly dealing with subtraction not integers, then all of a sudden, we go back to integers and we are told “No, it is a positive small number so you have to take the sign of the big number.”

Why don’t we allow our learners to apply their intuitions the way they want and focus on the end product not the process because no two learners are the same and what works for learner A will never work for learner B, thus let’s embrace the individual learner instead of the whole cohort. Keeping in mind that we are promoting inclusivity.
Education is one of the basic needs in this country therefore it is important that citizens are provided with good education. Education is a way of igniting and enlightening the thought of individuals. The type of education that I would like to see in South Africa is education that promotes inclusivity such as learners’ needs being taken care of according to their ability to learn. Learners with disabilities should be equipped with education curriculum that will enable them to go as far as they wish in furthering their studies. Inclusivity should also cater adult education where uneducated adults must be given opportunities to go to schools.

The education of this country must be one of high quality. Education that will enable learners to be competitive within the global knowledge economy (Biesta 2009:6). This could be done by creating programs which will enhance skills and learning new skills that are needed in workplaces and that can help them to survive. This is also supported by Biesta (2009:7) that good education should qualify people to do something and that people need knowledge and skills in order to be employable. He also says that the education that people must be given is a liberal education which should be the way of liberating them from oppression. The more people know how to do things for themselves is the more they become emancipated.

Independence and autonomy is promoted by giving people good education because educated citizens can stand and do things for themselves and they know their rights and responsibilities. Therefore, good education will set people free from any kind of segregation. This is what Biesta (2009:8) called individuation; that good education will help people to be themselves and it is also hints at independence from orders, a way of being in which an individual is not simply a slave of encompassing orders. This will also benefit the country in terms of economic development and in terms of having educated citizens that can partake in making informed decisions.

According to Biesta (2009:7) good education should include socialisation where people can become part of existing socio-cultural, political and moral orders. He continues to say that schools should engage socialisation in the form of citizenship education, character education and values education. This is important to be included in education because people will know what is expected to them as citizens and the advantages of being citizens. They will also learn values and morals of how to behave in society.
A more authentic and accommodative approach to teacher and learner development

Mmabatho Mokoena
4th Year Education Student, University of Johannesburg

The type of education I hope for in South Africa after seven years, is one that is useful, authentic, fair and accommodative in promoting effective learning and skill acquisition. My vision is that education should be a priority for all individuals in the country. Our leaders should value education to the extent that they get educated themselves and encourage young people to get education. I see teachers and the education system focusing more on embracing diversity in schools instead of seeing diversity as a problem that arises from these differences. Effective resources such as teaching and learning aids should be delivered on time in all schools. Resources should also be reserved for experiments, excursions and other fun educational activities.

The focus of education should be teachers and students. Teachers are the main resources in the process of teaching and learning and they should be encouraged to do their job passionately. Their opinions and ideas should be taken into consideration in connection with the system as a whole. Overloading teachers with administration work and underpaying them is not a good way of promoting commitment and passion for the profession. It is almost impossible to give learners individual attention when there are more than fifty of them in one classroom.

The debate on mother tongue education should be resolved. The decision whether learners should learn in English or their mother tongue throughout their schooling should include parents.

Teachers should allow and promote independence and uniqueness in their classroom. They should never encourage negative thoughts or make learners believe that any learning area ‘is difficult’. As a mathematics teacher, I believe the best way to teach mathematical concepts is to make mathematics fun. Educational melodies and games are very important. My teaching philosophy is based on making learning less formal and more interesting for both me and the learners. Teachers should also contextualize the content and show learners the importance of learning. Learners who are more musical and creative should not feel stupid just because they have a different type of intelligence. This way teachers can also prepare good lessons that accommodate and include learners with different learning styles. Contextual disadvantages should never obstruct children from receiving a good education.

Lastly, the education system should not only channel the learners’ knowledge and skills into one specific domain of work, instead it should make them as flexible as possible. Forcing learners to do what they do not like makes them feel like instruments who are being used, and they will ultimately lose interest in education.

Education should not only aim to instill one particular capability that is assumed to be a need to them, it should also enrich their abilities to allow them to do what they are able to do. This will enable them to enjoy being educated.
Creating learners who are responsible for their own success and future

Omphemets Lancelott Moeng
4th Year Education Student, University of Johannesburg

My vision for South African education is to have an education system that emphasizes independence, and success in life. Biesta (2009) supports this view. He proposes that education in about how we welcome ‘newcomers’ into our worlds. I have a strong belief that our education system would achieve its objectives if it focused on making learners know that they are responsible for their own success and future.

Learners, as well as adults that are in school, need to accept that the school is a place of learning, as stated by Biesta (2009). In the South African context, if the learners understand what the school is and how to conduct themselves in this place of learning, then they will be aiming to learn as much as possible at school. However, learning does not only end in the classroom, and so it is the responsibility of the teacher and the entire school community to ensure that learners are equipped with various skills that will allow them to gain independence.

Basic skills such as cleaning, cooking, and washing are just a few of the skills that allow independence in adulthood. In the context of our country, since democracy was established, everyone has some sort of education, and as people get better jobs there are fewer domestic workers, therefore these domestic skills are important for each individual.

South African education should support and highlight achievement in life because most of our people are struggling financially. Biesta (2009) also states that “any education worthy of its name should allow for forms of individuation and subjectification that allows those being educated to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting”. I have to agree with him in particular because I like to think that a good education system gives people the sense of independence that they deserve.

In conclusion, the type of education that we give to all our learners in our country should be striving to make them successful in their adult life, while keeping in mind that all of us are life-long learners - everyone learns something every day. We should value the lessons that we learn so that we can make informed decisions about our own success and future.

Reference

My vision for South Africa is to have a good education system. Good education is evident when learners become responsible for their own learning. Biesta refers to the creating of empowerment for their own education agendas as good education (2009:3). Teachers should develop creative ways to support learners, and scaffold to fill the gaps between content and knowledge. Pretorius (2014) suggests that teachers can learn skills such as identifying high-frequency words automatically, making the learners pay attention to the meaning of what they are reading instead of words they don’t understand (2014:53).

I would like to see the country’s literacy improve and for our learners to be able to compete with top countries, such as Finland, in education. Good education should be achieved all over South Africa and we should build a literate nation. The current predicament in the South African education system is that there is a low literacy rate in the entire country, especially amongst learners who are not taught in the learners’ mother tongue. Learner’s also have a problem with their reading levels, causing the low literacy rate in schools (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016:2). Therefore, producing learners who want to improve their own learning and further their education is a key objective. Producing teachers who are passionate enough to push our learners to achieve excellence is a factor which needs addressing.

The goal of education should be to improve South Africa’s literacy rate in every subject. One of the general aims of the CAPS curriculum is “equipping learners, irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability, with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment, and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country” (Department of Basic Education, 2011:4). To do that, everyone needs to understand what good education is. According to Biesta, good education consists of an educational setting in which learning takes place, with specific roles, responsibilities and relationships (2009:4). Equality provision is the only advantage of standardization but is also one of the purposes. Therefore, I urge South African education academics to find a system to create a fair test of reaching a level or standard when testing. Teachers have the most knowledge and experience of what the learners struggle with and understand, hence I state that they should make their own judgements about what is necessary and desirable situations. Instead of doing international tests, South Africa should create their own tests taking into account the contexts of the learners.

In conclusion, improving learners’ standards is the most important outcome. Looking at improving learners’ marks in different subjects, teachers should motivate all their learners. Learners’ should set realistic goals for themselves, and with the help of the teachers they should achieve them. Teachers need to implement time in the classroom for learners to re-engage in content they have issues in, while challenging learners that understand the content. Teachers have to assess themselves and learners and do reflections, which could address problems faced in the classroom. One other way to help the academics of the learners, is to ensure that the teacher uses pedagogy content knowledge (PCK) thoroughly. PCK was been introduced in 1987 by Shulman and focuses on teacher education and content, thus focusing primarily on pedagogy which emphasises classroom practices (1987).

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I had a dream about the Intermediate Phase Mathematics classroom of South Africa

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It is a well-known fact that the education system of South Africa is one of the lowest ranked education systems in the world. An article published by the Centre for Development Enterprise in 2013, stated that in 2011, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) showed that South African learners had the lowest performance among all 21 middle-income countries that participated. That is not the end of it, according to News 24 (2017), an international news publication ‘The Economist’ has reported that the country ranked 75th out of 76th in a ranking table of education systems drawn by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2015. In 2016, the World Economic Forum (WEF) released its global information technology reports, which ranked South Africa last (no. 139) in Mathematics and Science education quality. These rankings are very staggering, so where exactly is the education system of the country going wrong?

One possible reason might be that the country is still developing and thus some schools are under-resourced, another might be that teachers are not competent in what they do, whilst another reason might be that some learners come from impoverished families and that tends to affect their performance at school. Nevertheless, the quality of mathematics education in the intermediate phase classroom will improve because I have a dream!

I have a dream that the schools will redress the imbalances of the past whereby they will provide access to all learners enrolling at a school irrespective of their social status, religious background and ethnic group. As a result, schools will be inclusive and diverse. From that diversity learners will learn from each other and from those who are different from them. So, mathematics classrooms will be full of learners from all walks of life and that will in turn aid the learning of mathematical concepts. This is because different people have different perspectives about things, so it is always a good thing to have learners who are coming from different backgrounds as they will hold different views and will see things differently, thus even when the teacher teaches a mathematical concept they will all interpret it differently, and it is those different interpretations that will promote deep learning instead of surface learning.

I have a dream that mathematics classrooms will be occupied by teachers who are competent, well-trained and with mathematical savvy. One of the key factors to successfully learning mathematics is to learn it from someone who knows and understands it very well. So, it is important that teachers model good mathematical practice for learners. Teachers of the future will be able to teach using various methods without teaching misconceptions and errors, as using different methods will allow them to check that a procedure is performed correctly. Thus, I envisage a classroom that will have teachers that have practical knowledge and understanding of mathematics, and they will be able to meet the different needs of the learners. Those teachers will have skills to promote the five strands of mathematical proficiency which are: Conceptual understanding, Procedural fluency, Strategic competence, Adaptive reasoning and Productive disposition. They will be able to teach learners in a way that allows them to understand the concepts, they will teach them how to perform procedures correctly, they will teach them strategic ways when approaching mathematical problems, they will teach them to reason and justify why their methods worked and they will instil a positive attitude towards mathematics in them.

I have a dream that mathematics classrooms will be full of resources and multimedia that will promote learning. Mathematics is sometimes difficult to understand because some teachers use minimal resources to teach concepts and that creates a barrier for learners. It will be helpful in the future to have a vast amount of resources and tools in the classrooms that will help teachers contextualise mathematical concepts in order to make it easy for the learners to grasp. Another factor that makes the learning of mathematics difficult is that teachers often use only one mode of communicating the concepts, usually the chalkboard and worksheets, and that becomes monotonous for the learners. I envisage a mathematics classroom that will make use of videos, electronic devices, games,
smart-boards, etc. In this way learners will not just complete worksheets, but will get to interact with those electronic devices, engage in fun games and activities, watch educational videos and learn using smart-boards. This will make the mathematics classrooms more fun and exciting, resulting in learners developing a positive attitude towards mathematics and subsequently producing good results.

I have a dream that parents will be more involved in the education of their children. One of the reasons why the mathematics education of the country is poor is the lack of parental involvement in the studies of their children. Parents will seldom attend parents’ meetings at school where teachers often give feedback and recommendations about their children’s performance, resulting in them missing an opportunity in assisting their children improve their education. Another thing is that some parents do not bother to check the school work of their children and even if some of them do they cannot assist them with homework as some of them are illiterate. It is an advantage for learners when parents are involved in their education, because they have an extra hand that assists them and they will be motivated to please them with good grades and performance. Thus, I envisage an education system where parents will be involved in their children’s education, parents who will help their children practice and better their mathematics.

Therefore, the quality of mathematics education in South Africa will improve and be optimal when schools redress the imbalances of the past, when mathematics classrooms are occupied by proficient educators and are resourceful and use multimedia. It will also improve when parents start to play their role in the education of their children. As a result, this will enable schools to produce learners who are efficient problem solvers, who possess critical thinking skills and who are able to make informed decisions.

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Art is defined by many as “a way of showing expression”, but there is more to the word ‘Art’ than just that. I believe there is no significant meaning of art; it depends on the content you want to use it in since art is everywhere. In my understanding, art is human effort to imitate, supplement, alter, or counteract the work of nature. Art is beautiful, but society is changing so fast that we choose to take art for granted. Art is labelled ‘boring’ by society. Is our generation really neglecting the importance of art?

Art is important creative work of a human being. We do not really want to neglect the message Shakespeare wanted to tell us using poems and plays. We can’t afford to look down on the famous Mona Lisa painting that Leonardo da Vinci painted to show the world a lady by the name of Lisa Gherardini. All artists do their work to tell a message or express themselves and as the public, we are supposed to receive and acknowledge their work because it educates us most of the time. A good example is music; lyrical music used to be emotional, or educate us about things or alert us about challenges that society is facing.

To show that art is not respected anymore, music has changed; it is now full of vulgar and unnecessary content. Music videos show naked girls and people “popping bottles”. That does not conform to what ART stands for.

Art is the act of making something visually entertaining. Ever walked into a theatre? See the beauty of art in all the four walls. Remember the definition that everybody uses about art? It applies well here: ‘Art is a form of expression’. Theatre teaches us how to express ourselves more efficiently. The plays in theatre are there to entertain and sometimes share important messages. Fine Art is a type of art that can entertain and make us appreciate the beauty of art.

Sometimes art contains a hidden message we need to understand before drawing conclusions. “A picture tells a thousand words”, is a famous statement made by most artists. Yes, we must appreciate the beauty of a form of art but we must also be broad about it. For example, the Statue of Liberty found in New York, USA. We see a beautiful statue in the middle of New York, but the person who came up with the idea had something different in mind.

The statue of liberty is a universal symbol of freedom. I also didn’t know that until I did my research. It is conceived as an emblem of the friendship between the people of France and the United States and as a sign of their mutual desire for liberty. That’s amazing! So, in art we have to admire the physical state and the hidden message. If our generation could still respect the art, we would be wiser because it forces us to react and empathise with situations that we are not accustomed to. That is growth.

I conclude and say art is a powerful influence that cannot be ignored. People express themselves in different ways to share knowledge and we must appreciate that. If all of us can acknowledge art, we can get educated and make more informed decisions in our lives.
A critical review of our current and previous curricula to produce competent professionals

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Education in the South African context is a complex, misunderstood and complicated vehicle. These complications are a result of ineffective policy implementation which fails to understand the context of the learners and their diverse communities. This failure violates the theme of the South African constitution which strives for a democratic and accommodating learning environment. However, these complications can be remediated through various methods and strategies.

These difficulties can be remediated by means of critically reviewing the current and prior curricula in order to find the positive and negative factors. We can use the data retrieved to formulate a curriculum which is accommodating and which embodies democracy. This is one of the strategies which curriculum planners can use to facilitate their desires for an effective curriculum which will support social justice.

The introduction of a new curriculum which strives for radical social transformation in all aspects of living is a priority. The curriculum should accommodate learner’s strengths by means of allocating classes for both art (activities such as music, dance, painting) and sporting activities (such as soccer, cricket, and rugby). Each sporting/art course should be made a compulsory subject depending on the learner’s strengths in that particular sporting/art course and the number of learners interested in that sporting/art course. These classes could be conducted on a daily basis and be supplemented by two language subjects and one to two other subjects which will be offered depending on the learner’s performance and interest in the subject. This curriculum should be implemented and practiced after primary level, preferably in grade 8, as these subjects and classes will be offering learners valuable skills needed for knowledge and product creation, for critical thinking and for developing the country’s skills and knowledge base.

Through this curriculum each sector and department will be flooded with competent professionals who will develop the country and make drastic changes to our failing economy and our moral compass. The once misunderstood and complicated vehicle will be remediated and redeem its reputation in the global community due to the introduction of a curriculum which understands the context of the learners and the socio-economic factors, which are currently providing obstacles, and inhibiting them from reaching success in all aspects of living.
About the Education Conversations

The Education Conversations is an initiative by Kagiso Trust and the University of Johannesburg (UJ) aimed at encouraging the country to talk and create space for debates and discussions through which diverse voices can be heard focusing on what works and how to collectively advance the agenda for an improved and performing public education system.

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