

Books critical to learning and teaching

The call for the resignation of Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga is reasonable



Nkosana Sibuyi

THE RECENT enigma and reality around the distribution or loss of textbooks raise the search for new voices and perspectives that inform education transformation. It is a reflection of the leadership whose posture has proved to be blasé and narrow-minded, devoid of any respect for the democratic gains made since the end of apartheid.

This includes the Eastern Cape and the long-term impact around the way in which the resignation of advocate Modidima Manny, former superintendent-general of the Department of Education, was handled. Without any doubt, the SA Democratic Teachers Union exerted undue pressure on Manny to resign.

These issues provide the critical laboratory for critical thinking, soul searching and collective resolutions of the challenges facing the school education system in totality.

It is not the measure of the nation's limited and fragmentary grasp of issues or delinquent form of knowledge that would permanently resolve this riddle.

The call for the resignation of Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga is reasonable under the circumstances.

The consequences and silences of this mystery raise the fundamental question: What are the relevance, significance, limits and possibilities of education transformation in the face of the late or non-delivery of textbooks to schools?

In honestly responding to this question, it needs to be appreciated that this challenge provides a dynamic set of tools for engaging in the national discourse around the horrible dilemmas of our nation.

First, the constitution posits that the Bill of Rights is a cornerstone of democracy in SA, enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom.

Furthermore, the constitution imposes an obligation on the state to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the Bill of Rights, including the right to a basic education.

The Bill of Rights enshrined in the constitution establishes the critical objectivity and ideological impartiality of constitutional democracy marshalled in 1994.

This is an intricate and contradictory reality that policymakers have to somehow unravel, accommodate and transform, to set the tone for education policy direction in SA.

This may sound complex, changing and contradictory in vocational education and training.

In essence, this will help the nation to negotiate an understanding of our predicaments and discomfort to meet the demands of a modernising economy.

Linked to the above, one cannot discount the significance of the 1981 De Lange Report on education in SA, which claimed to be gravitating away from racial discrimination to equal education opportunities for all.

Written by Professor Pieter de Lange, former president of the Human Sciences Research Council, the report on the provision of education in SA points out that "this stage represents the last effective opportunity of modifying the values of the majority of children in a developmental situation in a better accord with the world they live in".

A well-developed human personality requires a moral code, religious belief as well as a career code including, for instance, diligence, accuracy, and punctuality.

This can be achieved by developing them in conjunction with vocational skills so that they become an integral part of the career skills of the individual.

Second, it needs to be appreciated that books constitute one of the important elements in teaching, learning, intellectual enrichment and development. Books have something of ascetic naturalness about them.

Practically, books have, to a remarkable degree, come to stand as a metaphor for knowledge, education and attentiveness: they are



LIFELONG STUDENT: Musician Sipho "Hotstix" Mabuse went back to school and finished his matric. He plans to study anthropology next year.

PICTURE: DUMISANI DUBE

Why I went back to school at 60 to get my matric

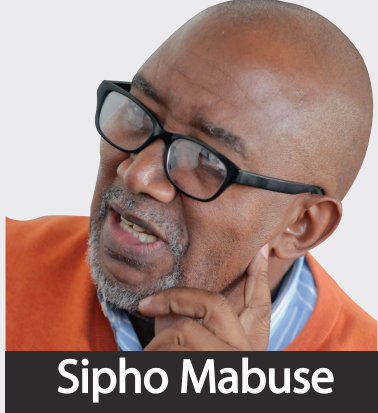
I BELIEVE that if you deny children education you disempower them. Therefore, we need to look deeper as a society and ponder how we empower and help our youth through quality education.

I am neither a seasoned scholar nor a commentator. My opinion and observations come from the journey called life, and an urge to help my fellow young South Africans.

The challenges facing them have been well documented, and it would be foolish of me not to acknowledge that more work needs to be done by our government, but I would also ask parents to come to the party.

Perhaps a chord will be struck and the mind stimulated to do something differently to empower our nation and its younger generation.

If our nation is to strive for an educated society, we should start that journey from our homes, our neighbourhoods.



Sipho Mabuse

I was fortunate to have an enquiring mind at a young age. And fortunately, my parents recognised it and helped me to strive to achieve my goals.

You may argue that it was back in the day. Yes, apartheid was alive and well and we got subjected to inferior schooling, but I wanted to excel and to reach for the stars.

We started a school band called The Beaters, which later became

Harari, and my musical contribution is well-documented.

The fame and fortune made me leave school, as we became stars.

But for 45 years, something in the back of my mind kept on telling me to go back to school. It kept on nagging me about a matric certificate. I couldn't ignore it. It was a powerful urge.

I finally gave in, and I swapped my musical instruments for books (not quite, as I am still blowing my saxophone). But I listened to that something that kept on prodding me for more than four decades.

Did I feel ashamed to go back and study with children who could well be my grandkids? Not at all.

It made me proud to go for my second dream.

In my mind, my musical success was equivalent to my peers' academic achievements.

Despite all my artistic achievements, I missed that piece of paper that could open more doors for me. That paper called a matric certi-

cate. My matric certificate is more important to me than all the gold and platinum discs I have won over the years. This is primarily because I can further my education wherever and whenever I want to, and I can become an even greater citizen of my country.

With education, I have more options in life, not just the university route. I could be an electrician, a plumber, a craftsman... the choice is mine.

We seem to place such a huge emphasis on university, yet this country is crying out for skills in all areas, especially for artisans.

Our youth needs to understand the importance of artisans. On a lighter note, they must never underestimate what a qualified plumber running a sound business can earn.

However, for the youth to understand the importance of education, schools and primarily parents must play a crucial role.

Parents cannot leave the teaching to teachers alone.

They are integral to the success of the learners.

They need to get involved in school committees and hold teachers and principals accountable. After all, it is their children's education at stake here.

They must set concrete, attainable goals for their schools.

Parents, pupils and schools should form a solid triangular relationship.

For instance, it doesn't cost a cent for parents to encourage and help their children to read, to listen to news and arm themselves with good, relevant knowledge to nourish their enquiring minds.

It enables children to engage, apply reason and to debate with friends and school peers. Even when discussing sport, such children will offer a great historical and in-depth knowledge of their respective teams.

Acquiring relevant knowledge is important given that we seem to live in an instant-gratification era

of *Idols* reality shows.

We need balance between such quick social gratifications and a need to work hard (and keep trying).

Having spent four decades in the music industry, believe you me, I still practise playing the saxophone for an hour every day to improve my skills.

Some of my fellow musicians and peers have stopped working, but at 60 I am busier than ever. Why? because I love learning. I am inquisitive.

We therefore need to push ourselves. Why did I succeed in achieving my lifetime goal? I had a drive to achieve.

Yes, I had failures in my life, people saying no to me. But you know what? I got up and did it. After almost half a century, I came to realise that life is not a sprint, it's a marathon, a journey. Education is power.

■ *Mabuse is a musician*

resources for human civilisation, philosophy and development.

Books evoke a priceless and precious vision of possessions highly focused into the future, with hope, unrestrained with distracting baggage. They are rooted in their irrefutable capability or capacity to enrich and broaden the mind in the midst of adversity. They offer an attractive vision to the future and make it a light of humanity for our common nationhood. This will assist the country to appreciate the importance and fascination of this mystery.

Our unabashed delight in venerating books is a concrete affirmation of an appreciation that reading has the possibility to discipline our conduct in a rapidly evolving global society.

The devotion to books contributes to the values, skills and knowledge of state educational policy thus aligning SA with international trends in a highly competitive global village.

It is unacceptable for textbooks to be dumped in a river without taking any corrective action.

It is in this context that SA's position in the Global Competitiveness Report 2011-12 is more worrying.

To recapitulate, the report ranked SA 72nd in the world for its gross national savings rate, which is

equivalent to 20 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

The Global Competitiveness Index as the accepted tool for evaluating a country's potential for growth, provides insight into the economic and social well-being and measures the set of institutions, policies and factors that set the sustainable current and medium-term levels of the country's prosperity.

This is supported by Manuel Castells on the development of intellectual and cognitive capabilities in a rapidly globalising knowledge economy.

He observed that "the new competitive environment has brought with it new education and training demands, for example, the need for a highly skilled sector of the labour force able to employ the new technologies and add value to existing goods and services. They require broad problem-solving skills to anticipate flaws in production."

Third, Professor Peter Kallaway argues that the "centrality of educational discourses and practices in establishing a new language of resistance and democracy in the form of people's education was a necessary condition for the political transition of the 1990s".

Even if, as it played itself out, there may have been some misgivings around the wind of democrat-

ic change blowing in the country, education is an imagery from which the majority citizens were emancipated from apartheid servitude.

In this context, the daily lives, practices and experiences of the pupils and the nation at large was placed at the centre of education transformation.

It is in part a reflection of the schooling of black majority that had always been disconnected from white education and thus became unjustifiable and untenable.

It is a deliberate mismanagement of our school education system.

Staccato confusion and rhetorical commitment to different kinds of approaches to the education riddle informed the education governance under state control after the 1951 Eiselen Report and the Bantu Education Act of 1953.

In brief, the variety of school curriculum for different racial groups was an expression of Dr HF Verwoerd, whom President Jacob Zuma recently criticised around the current state of education and the distribution of books.

Fourth, the (non-)delivery of textbooks to schools calls for good and active citizenship as well as patriotism in building a better future for the children.

Necessarily, this creates a possi-

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bility for a radical shift in the state social engineering and economic survival in educational policy and ideology in SA.

Thus, through this brevity and simplicity, this will mark an essentially new and discrete educational beginning for the sustenance of constitutional democracy. This calls for a scientific social analysis of the challenges of the school education system.

The appointment of Professor Mary Metcalfe created a possibility to grasp the significance and fascination of the (non-)distribution of books in Limpopo.

The driving idea of the Metcalfe

Report revolved around the distribution and receipt of textbooks in schools while assessing the efficacy of the textbook distribution strategy. The focus should logically be on content development and essence of the school curriculum.

A preoccupation with textbooks distribution is not desirable and should be avoided in a country that has clamoured to box above its weight and become a leader on the continent through the AU Commission chairpersonship.

There has been a variety of reports that were aimed at reconfiguring the school education system in the light of worldwide experience on the economic significance and contribution of education.

These are the 1981 De Lange Report, and the 1990 inquiry that laid the basis for the education renewal strategy, chaired by Dr SW Walters.

This also includes the Fagan Commission and the De Villiers commission reports. These reports have brought to the fore the role, nature, character and content of the school curriculum.

What lurks behind this grand narrative is to tell the multiple and complex stories that created a gradual shift away from mediocrity to excellence in teaching, learning and discipline.

SA was intrigued by the announcement of the unbanning of political parties in February 1990, including the vigour with which the ANC grasped the nettle to shape the education policy in accordance with democratic and developmental imperatives.

Dr Andre Kraak points out that key ANC policy documents stress the need for curricula to reflect the obligations of the state towards the development of an empowered and equal citizenry while also recognising the need for curricula to be responsive to market forces and occupational structure.

Inactivity on the part of the department has considerably weakened the provision of quality education to affirm the constitutional values of human dignity, equality and freedom.

The supreme mystery lies in everything to do with institutional and national education development plan for the country.

The solution lies in the rigorous implementation of education reports, reopening colleges of education, reconfiguring the school curriculum, implementing the education renewal strategy and values in education beneficial for the country.

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