

How educators have to adapt to new social challenges

By [Kaya Nyati](#)

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"Education is the mother of all professions" is the adage that continues to provide inspiration to countless educators across the world who tirelessly serve the profession with commitment and passion. Educators affect learners' lives in a positive and profound way; they shape their minds and lay solid foundations for their future career paths. Most educators are not in it for money but see teaching as a calling. As agents for social change, they believe theirs is a profession that requires them to go beyond the call of duty. They say they find it immensely fulfilling and rewarding to see their former learners succeeding in their various spheres of influence and making a meaningful contribution to society.



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It is no exaggeration that virtually every successful person owes it to his or her educator who was always there and willing to lend a hand. In the context of South Africa, the role of educators is a bit demanding as the curriculum has been reconfigured to promote some of the key Constitutional principles.

Social issues

Educators have to ensure they teach learners to understand the importance of critical societal issues such as racial reconciliation, social cohesion, social justice and democratic values.

Although educators are passionate and keen to implement the prescribed syllabus, the practical realities and challenges that they encounter every day in the classrooms make it difficult for them to fulfill these objectives.

On every given day, educators find themselves having to deal with a range of socio-economic challenges such as poverty, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, overcrowding, poor infrastructure and other related challenges that directly impact on their learners' performance.

Two recent violent incidents highlight the difficulties educators have to deal with: in Zeerust in the North West, a learner stabbed his teacher to death while in Mpumalanga another learner attacked a driver of a school bus whilst the vehicle was in motion. Not only are the educators traumatised but they feel they cannot intervene meaningfully to resolve these situations because their training did not provide them with the necessary skills to do so. In the end, they feel distracted, overwhelmed and over-worked; leading to emotional and psychological exhaustion.

One teacher summed it up thus: "being an educator in South Africa requires you to become a police officer, nurse, social worker or a lawyer etc. all rolled into one".

Role of family structure

Various role players in the education sector concur that the prevalent school-based learner violence is a reflection of a much deeper social malaise. They believe this is an indication that the family structures have broken down and the effects of these spill into the school environment. They call on all key players, particularly parents to step up and guide their children.

Department of Basic Education spokesperson Elijah Mhlanga was recently quoted as saying violence at schools was a societal problem and "requires everyone to play their part in resolving it. Parents need to teach their children that there are other ways of resolving conflict," he said.

Mhlanga said parents should teach their children the values that focus on respect for self, others and the environment which they live in, adding that disciplinary actions need to be taken against all involved in violent incidents.

National Professional Teacher's Organisation of South Africa (Naptosa), executive director, Basil Manuel echoed Mhlanga's sentiments. He said: "Our children's lives are peppered with violence, either in the homes or on the streets; as a nation, we have simply not dealt with our violent past and the impact of societal violence on our children."

But there is a view that in condemning the learners who engage in violent behaviours we should also interrogate factors that trigger this conduct. It is believed that these anti-social behaviours signal a cry for help from children; they are a reflection of a serious emotional and psychological turmoil raging in the involved learner. These could be caused by differing family contexts where a child is exposed to either/or violence, sexual assault, alcohol and drug abuse etc. A child who constantly witnesses these anomalies is predisposed to emotional and mental instability which often gets expressed through violent behaviour.

According to experts, such children require a holistic intervention approach that entails emotional and psycho-social support. Currently schools do not have the capacity to deal sufficiently with the causes of violent behaviour. Although some schools receive psychological services from government, it is felt that these are neither consistent nor effective as they are not school-based.

Intervention and training

One of the suggestions to curb the increasing school-based learner violence includes setting up after-school recreational activities. Participation in these activities fosters learners' personal growth and development, builds social and life skills, constructively occupies learners, but also facilitates learner identification with the school.

There is also a proposal that government should continue to ramp up its intervention programmes such as School Nutrition Feeding Schemes, increasing the numbers of school-based psychologists and social workers and counsellors to address poverty and provide material support to indigent learners.

Institutions of higher learning also need to revise and design their curriculum in such a way that they train student teachers on how to effectively address these extra-curricular challenges that cripple teaching and learning.

Another suggestion relates to the strengthening of the provision of Continuous Professional Teacher Development and training programmes, which should also be reviewed constantly to ensure educators remain relevant and up skilling themselves by learning new and innovative ways of quality teaching.

More specifically; and in keeping with the current global changes; training of educators should go beyond enhancing their curriculum delivery skills and content knowledge. Educators need to prepare themselves for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by acquiring and leveraging the latest technologies to enrich their learners' classroom teaching experiences.

It is generally agreed that the fourth industrial revolution has far reaching socio-economic implications globally; and it is imperative that the South African education sector taps into it.

One way this could be achieved is through integrated ICT strategies and approaches that aim to improve Pedagogy; promoting 21st century skills. This will enhance individualised learning and peer collaboration to address learning gaps. By integrating ICT into curriculum delivery this will enhance content knowledge for both learners and educators. This approach can only succeed through provision of; and access to relevant ICT platforms. This can only be achieved through a shared vision and fostering partnerships and collaboration between the private, public sector, civil society and labour unions.

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