

TEACHING AND LEARNING – WHAT IS THIS IN TROUBLED SPACES?

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Teaching for five, 10, 15 years. Why are you still teaching? Why are you still teaching science subjects?

So, what is it about teaching that attracts you or in other words – What is in it for you? Most importantly, what is in it for the learners, the community and the world?

Teaching is a double-binded affair with yourself and with others (learners, colleagues and others). With every aspect of what you do the introspective and reflexive questioning and responses to why you teach how and what you teach has a historical and almost umbilical cord to your first days of teaching or even learning how to teach or becoming a teacher. Reflecting on these days may reveal much about the decision to teach or was it just an act of putting pen to the teacher degree application form because there was nothing else? Or was it – “My daughter has been working for an insurance company for five years and she is now unemployed. I told her to do teaching because she will always have a job” (a conversation with a school principal).

What have we come to where teaching is regarded as an economic security option? But wait, maybe this has been happening all along and we have just blissfully gone on with life not seeing the leaves from the branches, or the trees. When teachers can decide to leave school at 10.00am in the morning because it is pay day; when teachers can decide that they will be absent for two days every month; when teachers can decide that they will sit in the staff room and only go to class to teach for 10 minutes of a lesson. Note the use of the word can be no mistake, it is that they decide to do this and they have the option to do so. Where is the responsibility, accountability and the true essence of what it means to be a teacher?

What learning is taking place in schools where many of these teachers are “found”? Large groups of learners enter the school gates, bags on their backs and friends on their sides, all in time for the first lesson. Five minutes, 10 minutes into the lesson, no teacher arrives. In fact, no one arrives. Left to their own devices what should these learners do? Take out textbooks to study. Oh wait, they have no textbooks, in fact the very classroom that they are sitting in has windows where 15% of the frames have glass. It is winter and the classroom is as cold as outside, learners sitting with threadbare jerseys. Really, what better actions to do than to huddle together and sing – cultural songs, modern music and to send WhatsApp messages. So where is the responsibility, accountability and the true essence of what it means to be a learner?

Idealism – is there an ideal teacher and ideal learner? How can there be in a country where the actions of the past has had treacherous influences on the “psyche” of people to the stage of them believing that they have to look to others for ideas and their very survival. They are not good enough! Questions are asked, “Can’t they think for themselves”. Who asks and who is this they that is referred to here? It is in this othering that we see ourselves removed from the thinking and actions of “these” people.

What if we ALL decided that teaching and learning is for all. ALL teachers and All learners matter. Who should and who must take the first move to improving the contexts and enhancing the teaching and learning for all. It takes leadership and in the words of a past principal, “During the first two years of being a principal at the school I really had a hard time,

but I persisted. I had to work with the community and all the political conniving that was going on. It was really not easy.” Leadership grit. “The school and the community turned around and I was the principal for eight years at the school – a wonderful experience.” How many principals can say this; How many principals have this grit or can they even use it in the political spaces where the teacher union calls for teacher meetings during school times and can decide who gets employed where. Where the Education department with political alignments suggest that teachers should find ways for passing learners.

Teaching, learning and citizenry – how do we prepare teachers and learners for being wholesome citizens, who can actively use their potentials to participate in developing our “rainbow nation”? Can this happen with waving a wand and wishing the reality of the injustices, inequalities – past and present – away? Wish all we want, this cannot be, not now and maybe not in the next five years, or even ten. So do we despair and fold our arms – we are TEACHERS and we have a role and responsibility to the current students – undergraduate and postgraduate. Raising awareness, challenging the contexts, taking action for the better good, as silence means we are complicit in and to what is currently taking place in education. Silence is a killer – a killer for a future South Africa, where all citizens matter, where that learner’s future matters more than the teacher cashing a cheque on payday.

Current global and local events have major influences on schooling and higher education. Political, social and economic factors – at the heart of these is education. Whose education system is the best – but wait for whom? Is it the marks, which are the indicators of performance for learners that decides this? Or is it the development of learners who can think for themselves and share their ideas in a fearless manner, who care and respect themselves and others that they interact with and act for sustainable living in whatever contexts they engage in. And it is in - I becoming that others become.

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