

The bright side of education

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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There has been a considerable amount of criticism of South Africa's basic education in recent years. Some has been justifiable and some ill considered.

The thing is, merely standing on a soapbox and decrying the state of education is not going to fix the problem. It is, I have to say, an unfortunate South African habit - wailing and gnashing off teeth accompanied by vociferous criticism and particularly of "addressing issues" with a paucity of solutions and lack of action.

"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again ...who spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly".

There is very little media attention given to those who are actually in the arena, perhaps because by their very nature they are far too busy doing what is right to have time for any form of adulation.

Even the most superficial glance behind the scenes in this country will show a vast number of NGO's and philanthropic organisations devoted to improving the standard of basic education and the quality of teaching.

Outstanding examples

Just have a look, for example, at what Professor Jonathan Jansen is doing at the University of the Free State with its inspiring outreach programme that is hugely successful in improving the quality of teaching.

Look at what Dr Ramphela Mamphela has done in creating a far-reaching organisation that devotes much of its efforts to improving education.

And even on the commercial front, companies such as MasterMaths and MasterScience with their almost 150 personal tutoring franchises spread throughout the country, have for many years been turning maths and science failures into scientists, engineers and so forth.

A meaningful collaboration among businesses such as Capital, TSB Sugar, NYDA, Metro FM, SuperSport with the specialist education company, Argo, launched the "Future Stars" campaign, designed to inspire the youth to believe in their

power to change their world through education.

Providing authentic role models

"Stars in Education" is another call to action campaign developed by Argo, to enable brand leaders to recognise the leadership role that teachers play in our communities. This campaign provides authentic role models to motivate teachers and encourages society to respect the role that teachers play in developing our youth and positively influencing our communities, as they are recognised to be well educated in their communities.

The "A+ Schools" campaign is a project that is in final development stages and has already attracted the support of Capitec Bank, which recognises that schools are at the centre of any community, where education is recognised as a way of creating a better future. Capitec shares Argo's belief in the Ben Zander - author of the Art of Possibility - philosophy of respecting the fact that we want to achieve our potential and draws on Peter Block's philosophy that we create our own solutions. This campaign recognises the top 2,000 high-performing schools in the under-resourced areas (quintiles 1-3) and encourages school leaders to develop school improvement plans to achieve better results in the Annual National Assessments.

"The ONE" campaign recognises that leaders need support and need to work together if they are to deliver on the "walking together" option of the Dinokeng Scenarios.

And to ensure that these campaigns are credible and relevant to government policy and support transformation, Argo partners with leading NGO's, government and union leaders and CSI and corporate communication leaders to develop well researched campaigns for nation building impact.

It's time to tell a different story

One has to wonder if South Africans are getting frustrated with hearing negative stories all the time? And whether they will ever realise that bad news and dwelling on what's wrong, won't fix the problem.

Right now, every dinner party and office conversation seems to focus on "what's wrong with the country/education and now even leaders are talking about "the crises in education" , which is showing the level of burn-out from the recession, which the World Economic Forum calls the Great Stagnation.

There is now an urgent need to tell a different story - one of possibility and a future, where leaders need to take the lead in building confidence in our ability to create a better future. Leaders and achievers need to inspire confidence, so that the country can regain its energy to create growth, which brings with it employment and a reduction in poverty, crime and other social issues that undermine our confidence in our nation.

To quote Richard Branson quoting Nelson Mandela: "Education is the number one driver of social development and what we need now are achievers, who are prepared to create the energy to inspire us towards action."

We need to work together

Criticising government and looking for people to blame is important in terms of healthy oversight but that alone won't help solve the problem. As individuals, the challenge is too big and it cannot be met by working alone or in silos. There is a need for people of action to find others who want to create a different story and build a tribe of positive leaders, focused on action, not talk.

They need to create campaigns that inspire belief in South Africa's ability to overcome daunting challenges, just as they did when the country hosted the World Cup in spite of so many saying this was impossible and proving themselves wrong?

We need to stare down the challenges and focus on what is working, and on working together.

In his book, *Screw Business as Usual*, Richard Branson writes: "We need a new way of doing business to get out of the present crisis." Absolute greed has come close to bankrupting the world. Thanks to the crisis that certain businesses have dumped on everyone, a lot of people are going to suffer on a global scale. All of us must learn. It is all the more important that those business leaders who are left standing try to be a force for good."

A recent survey by LEAP, a South African social software organisation, found that three-quarters of employees wanted their companies to balance commercial success with social responsibility strategies. Another survey, conducted across 10 of the world's largest countries by GDP, revealed that 93% of consumers say they would buy a product because of its association with a good cause.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).
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