

Bridging the education gap to fulfil basic human rights

 By Jackie Carroll

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Education is a fundamental human right and the foundation upon which other rights are built on. Without education, an individual cannot realise their full potential. Basic education is one of the focus areas identified by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) in order to fulfil its mandate of promoting, protecting and monitoring the realisation of all human rights in South Africa effectively.



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UNESCO outlines, “Education promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits. Yet millions of children and adults in South Africa have been deprived of educational opportunities.”

SAHRC published its Charter of Children’s Basic Education Rights in 2012, which was created to provide a benchmark of where South Africa was in terms of fulfilling the right to a basic education and where the country needs to be to ensure that every child receives a quality education.

“The right to a basic education is a constitutionally protected right that is unequivocally guaranteed to all children in South Africa. It is considered a central facilitative right that is not qualified by expressions such as ‘available resources’, ‘progressive realisation’ or ‘reasonable legislative measures’, which are applicable to other socio-economic rights enshrined in our Constitution,” wrote Commissioner Lindiwe Mokate of the SAHRC in the foreword of the charter.

While the intent of this charter is admirable (and necessary), many educational authorities have wondered how this charter will encourage schools and educators to take their responsibilities more seriously. It will take many years for learners to be provided with a decent, solid education while the charter's ambitions for literacy and numeracy take root.

It has been five years since the charter was published, yet matriculants continue to enter the workforce with very limited literacy skills - virtually illiterate without the skills to pursue either a tertiary education or an artisan career successfully.

Corporate responsibility

With this shortfall, responsibility has fallen on corporates and big business in South Africa to train and educate current or prospective employees who are equally deserving of their human rights.

Several blue chip businesses and multinationals in South Africa have realised that Adult Education and Training (AET) is the only way currently to bridge the gap between what should have been achieved at school and what needs to be learned to function as an employee, contribute to the economy and society.

Catastrophically, the majority of those who have completed matric are being placed on AET levels that are below Grade 9, with low levels of literacy, which means there is significant work to be done. The role of businesses in providing proper bridging education to their staff can be seen as corporate citizenship and indeed one of the only ways that many South Africans will be able to function successfully in the workforce.

By corporates providing skills and undertaking training programmes, they are assisting employees in realising their human right to a decent education.

AET includes life skills

An established AET service provider is an ideal solution for a corporate citizenship programme. Employees are individually assessed for their specific capabilities and areas for improvement with a variety of multimedia tools being employed. Locally developed courses with culturally sensitive content understand the needs of South African learners and often yield the best outcomes.

Learners should be equipped with improved literacy and numeracy but also the life skills necessary to apply their newfound knowledge to their working environment. Special AET courses are now also available for those with vision or hearing impediments – the right to an education is not just for a select few and can be attained whatever the restrictions one may face.

South Africa is not yet providing every child with a substantial education; however, there are moves towards improving the state of education, as can be seen in SAHRC charter.

It is only through decent education that the country will see a significant amount of social change and a decrease of poverty. A literate workforce is an empowered and more valuable society with fires in their hearts, food on their tables and their right to an education fulfilled.

ABOUT JACKIE CARROLL

Jackie Carroll is the CEO and co-founder of Media Works, South Africa's leading provider of adult education and training for over 21 years.

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