

# Visions of a quality education

July 12 2012 at 09:00am

By Graeme Bloch, Piyushi Kotecha and Peliwe Lolwana [Comment on this story](#)



In these desperate and challenging times, it is instructive to hear the optimism and spirit of young voices, children fighting for a quality education and a better future.

Recently, we were privileged to be involved in the launch of the first congress of Equal Education in a dusty hall in Tembisa. Delegates have arrived from the Western Cape, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and elsewhere. They will be debating at the University of Johannesburg and Soweto, as they create a new social movement to serve their needs and advance the demands of the poor and excluded.

While Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba called for a new vision for the future, and Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi challenged the basis of a discriminatory economic system, it was the young voices that truly inspired. A young Grade 11 learner from Tembisa acknowledged her parents and siblings in the front rows of Sam Hlalele Hall and told us her story. Why is she so optimistic, given the poverty and unfair inequality she faces?

Doron Isaacs, co-ordinator of Equal Education, reminded us of Mnoneleli Ngubo, known as Mylord, murdered in his shack in Khayelitsha while policing deteriorates. About five young Equalisers have died in the brief years of Equal Education's existence. As Isaacs asked: "How much is the life of a young black person worth?"

Today the Minister of Basic Education tells the NGOs to stop taking her to court and issues affidavits saying proper norms and standards for schools are in her remit to reject or approve. She chooses not to issue the norms, avoiding monitoring of the provinces and not addressing the basic educational rights of our young people.

Yet the crisis in education mounts. Mud schools in the Eastern Cape; the disdain shown by provincial and national departments of education towards teachers and their needs; textbooks in Limpopo; closure of schools in the Western Cape. All of these problems have a peculiar logic and sadly, part of the logic appears to be vast sums in tenders that drive many politicians and officials.



Why stay at school? Why not join a gang where employment, income and learning are more secure?

Yet the demands of the Equal Education congress are simple and easily met.

Norms and standards for school infrastructure; a judicial inquiry into the textbook crisis and the end of new contracts with the offending firms.

We don't want to be accused of ignoring the desperate needs, for example, of young learners in Limpopo, without textbooks for six months. But where were the teachers for six months? Will our youth get employment anyway? Today, half of our young will never get a job. Are results in other parts of the country, where kids have textbooks and can still hardly read or count, anything to write home about?

The problem is only partly "technical". Better teacher training; improved matric and foundation phase results; textbook delivery; equalising of resources, or at least a targeted plan to move forward. Politicians and officials, especially at district levels, who do their jobs.

Most important is a debate we have never had as a country. What is education for? Must everyone get a matric? (Yes.) Must everyone go to university? (No, many more need to do vocational training at FET colleges.) How does citizenship, social cohesion, relate to good results, and why do white youth still do so much better than black? What about "extramural" activities like sports and culture, where young people learn discipline, how to perform and be the best? How do we give everyone the opportunities they deserve in a new democracy where the constitution guarantees a quality education, now?



Author Graeme Bloch at the launch of his book. Picture Jeffrey Abrahams in/lsa

This is about the future of our country. If, as adults, we continue to betray the young, will we be surprised when their optimism explodes? If, as a country, we ignore the inequalities the poor face on a daily basis, will we be surprised when social cohesion remains a pipe dream, when politicians turn to anti-democratic “populism”?

Yet the young remain optimistic, basically still patient. They ask why the Equal Education Board still wants to meet and respect the ministers of education, and what benefits it will bring. They march peacefully, as 20 000 in Cape Town on Human Rights Day last year or during the day of protest to be held in Tembisa. Yet five people who burn down a school get more media attention.

There is much we can do. We need to hear the voice of the young, of the new revolutionary generation.

We don't need another 1976, just adults who will take responsibility and nurture the young, so that their dreams do indeed become reality. There is much to do in our beautiful country.

<http://www.iol.co.za/the-star/visions-of-a-quality-education-1.1339641#.VCEd-hacxfg>