

# We must mobilise communities if we want to improve the quality of schooling

Doron Isaacs

LAST week, Equal Education (EE) celebrated its fourth birthday. Four years ago, two groups of people came together for a discussion.

On one side were some of South Africa's most thoughtful educationists and educational academics; opposite them sat some of the country's most hard-working post-apartheid activists, including some who had been prominent in the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC).

The question to be discussed was: could a citizens' movement for education be built? In other words, would it be possible to replicate the TAC's success and involve ordinary people in the struggle for a quality and equal education system in SA?

Although the purpose of the movement-to-be was to assist the

government in making a success of education, it was understood that disagreements would arise, and that our relationship would include both co-operation and confrontation.

There was one thing everybody readily agreed upon: mobilised communities, actively involved in their schools, were the key to unlocking the progress that had been eluding the democratic government.

Delivering the annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture, Minister Trevor Manuel said the following:

"With the best will in the world, national government sitting in Tshwane is unable to monitor teacher attendance, whether teaching is actually taking place or whether students are in class learning. Without the integral involvement of communities, we don't stand a chance of improving the

quality of schooling...

"In many cases, we have been too coy about providing the institutional space for peoples' power to prevail. When we reminisce about the 1970s and the 1980s, we often remember the mass protests, the community mobilisation, the active involvement of communities in solving their own problems. Communities did not suddenly wake up and start protesting. No, they were organised by groups of young activists, mostly students.

"Where have all the activists gone... Who is doing the mobilising? Who are the catalysts for social transformation? Democracy is now begging for organised communities to fulfil their responsibilities."

EE is a small, but important, attempt to answer these questions.

What the public knows of EE are

our campaigns that have caught media attention: the calls for school libraries, the demands to replace mud schools with proper buildings, the drives for textbooks, the push to fill empty teacher posts and the annual student-driven mobilisation against late-coming.

These have been our first steps, and there will be others. But what makes this all possible – and ensures that it continues in a highly disciplined, organised, radical and peaceful manner – is the weekly and daily work that is less visible.

Each week for the past four years, young people have come together to discuss the state of their schools, their country and the world. They have studied the student uprising in Chile, have hosted conscientious objector teenagers from Israel and have mobilised against xenophobia

## Equal Education celebrates four years of civic activism

and homophobia in Khayelitsha.

And they set the example in their schools, being first to arrive and last to leave, reading extra and dreaming bigger, serving on the learner committees and attending EE meetings, volunteering in the 14 libraries we have opened and campaigning for equal resources for all, supporting their teachers' demands for higher salaries and standing at the staff room door demanding that their

teachers are in class on time.

This year, we will press our campaign for a legal framework of standards for school infrastructure. The law gives the minister the power to do this, and she has back-tracked from commitments to do so.

At the moment, there is still no piece of paper that commits provinces to equip schools to a certain standard... We intend to build an overwhelming call for this crucial instrument, in the streets and also, reluctantly, through the courts...

As we thrust forward with this national programme, we will be working carefully and conscientiously closer to home. Khayelitsha, with its 54 public schools, is a place of great educational disappointment in a province of great wealth and resources.

Less than 5 percent of maths candidates achieved 50 percent in the matric examinations, and the proportion of matriculants taking maths has dropped from two-thirds to a third over the past four years, with no commensurate improvement in results.

EE intends to harness the resources and energies of the citizens of Cape Town to invest heavily in Khayelitsha over the next decade to build – in a process led by community members, and in partnership with the government – the possibility of a different educational reality.

Over the next four years we will be looking to ordinary people in South Africa and around the world for human and material support.

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## MINDSET STIFLES PROGRESS

# White and black 'victims' are in denial

Helen Zille

WE'RE all human. That's why it's better together.

"As a prelude, whites must be made to realise that they are only human, not superior. Same with blacks. They must be made to realise that they are also human, not inferior." – Steve Biko quoted in the Boston Globe, October 25, 1977.

This quote captures the basic premise of Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement, which began a new chapter in South African politics over 40 years ago. Before then, political analysis had focused on race, or class – or both. Biko suggested it was about something else: At the heart of South Africa's social and political trauma, he suggested, was the issue of self-esteem. Only when South Africans had "freed their minds" would it be possible to build a truly non-racial society.

Biko's insight did not deny the existence, or the legacy of, structural oppression and entrenched racial discrimination. But, he argued, to overcome this legacy people had to wage a struggle inside their heads. They had to stop seeing themselves as either victors or victims, and start believing in their own (and other people's) value and legitimacy as equal human beings.

Only when they had "freed their minds" would they be able to change their own circumstances and the world and give others the space to do so too. Human beings are not merely passive victims of structural or social forces. They can choose to become agents of development and progress in their environment.

Today, 35 years after Biko's murder, many white South Africans see themselves as victims. Victimhood gives them a sense of identity and entitlement, allows them to disengage from the project of nation building and justifies their creating a "comfort zone" with other victims in which to reinforce a sense of grievance through constant complaint.

These people are "professional whites". Their whiteness is their identity and defines their alienation. It keeps them in denial, which is where they choose to be.

Equally, there are South Africans

of colour who cannot face abandoning the comfort of victimhood, or seize the responsibility for becoming agents of their own destiny. Both categories are constantly on the lookout for any incident that can reinforce their alienation. Every interaction is interpreted through the lens of their own psychological expectations of prejudice.

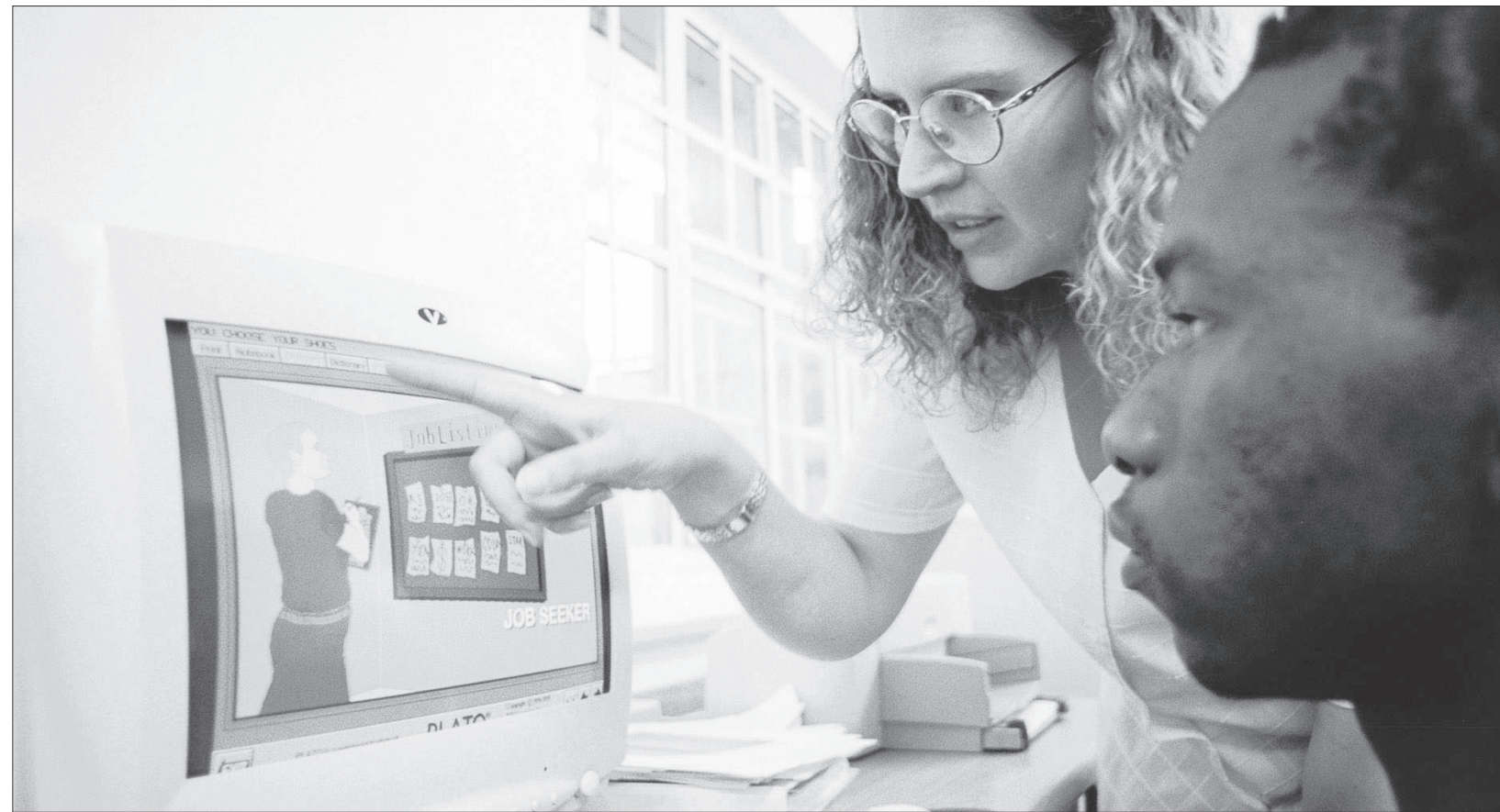
A recent example of this was the "Reverend" Kemo Waters who used Twitter to threaten to kill a "material number of whites" after being kept waiting at the bar of a busy Camps Bay restaurant for 30 minutes when he arrived without a booking at the height of the tourist season. He attributed the request to wait at the bar as racism. (He has subsequently withdrawn and apologised for his threat to "kill whites".)

This is an extreme example of a mindset that puts the brakes on South Africa's development because it creates a paralysis that prevents people from recognising or using their opportunities.

Having said this, it is still sadly true that some people have far more opportunities than others. It is also true that some people do much more with the limited opportunities they have than many who are born with the proverbial silver-spoon-in-the-mouth. Paradoxically, the more opportunities many people have, the less they recognise or use them.

What is the government's role in addressing the legacy of disadvantage and inequality? The primary role is to ensure that every person has real opportunities and resources are directed towards equalising opportunities as rapidly as possible. This is the only sustainable form of affirmative action, because it enables people to use their opportunities and requires them to contribute to development and progress in order to live a life they value.

This is the polar opposite of manipulating outcomes for the politically connected few. Affirmative action that degenerates into political patronage is the fastest road to the failed state. The goal of rapidly expanding opportunities depends on government playing a key role, particularly through providing excellent education, health care, and an



NATION-BUILDING: Every person must have real opportunities and access to resources directed towards equalising opportunities, says the writer.

environment for economic growth – the most effective way of increasing job opportunities.

But even the best government in the world cannot change the circumstances of people who are determined to remain victims. A government can provide opportunity but it cannot save a person from the chains of his own psyche.

In the years I have been in government, I have seen how disproportionately resources are used to pamper passive victims and reinforce their marginalisation – rather than extend opportunities for those who will use them well.

I vividly recall an experience when I was the provincial minister of education in 2000. I visited a state-of-the-art school called Eureka in Rawsonville. It was designated a "special school", accepting only pupils who had been convicted of

## Who are we? Race & Identity

crimes in court, but given a second chance because of their youth, in what used to be called a "reform" school. I had never seen a school so well equipped with everything from computers to technical equipment and vocational apparatus of all types. The buildings and boarding facilities were in mint condition. The young people had every possible facility they might require to have a second chance at a decent start in life. I was delighted to learn of the school's successes, but saddened to hear that a certain rate of recidivism remained.

Afterwards, I visited a local primary school on a farm in the area and was stunned by the contrast. This school did not even have run-

ning water or flush toilets, let alone the best facilities, equipment and technology. But it felt like a stab in the heart when one of the mothers approached me and asked:

"Mev Zille, ek wil weet hoe ek my kind in Eureka skool kan kry sonder dat hy 'n misdaad pleeg." (Mrs Zille, I want to know how I can get my child into Eureka school without him having to commit a crime.)

Here was a responsible mother, seeking to give her child every opportunity, and wondering how it would be possible if he remained in a school without even rudimentary facilities. She could not understand how it could be that young people first had to commit a serious crime, and notch up a criminal conviction, before being able to get access to a state-of-the-art education facility.

It did not make sense to her, and in that moment, although I believe in

the importance of a "second chance", it did not make sense to me either.

The most difficult aspect of governance is deciding how limited resources should be spent. There is always a difficult trade-off. And the best policy analysts battle to weigh up the consequences of budget decisions, both intended and unintended.

Over the years, this conversation has played itself over and again in my head at budget time: should we be spending more to create good opportunities for people who will recognise them and use them? Or are the needs of the "second chance" too pressing, from juvenile criminals to drug rehabilitation? This question is complicated by the fact that most of the "second chance" expenditure has to compensate for dysfunctional parenting, especially fathers who refuse to take responsibility for, or maintain, their children. This failure

costs the state billions each year.

I also recall from my brief tenure as MEC the special schools in Constantia that were then still called "reformatories", one for boys and one for girls. Working on the annual budget, it became apparent that we were spending 10 times as much per child in the Constantia reform schools than we were on children in ordinary public schools.

And the outcomes of our efforts were not particularly encouraging. We then took the decision to turn the "Constantia School for Boys" into the Cape Academy of Maths and Science in order to give real opportunities to children from disadvantaged communities who showed aptitude and ability in these disciplines.

In my years in government, I have come to the conclusion that our policies and budgets must aim to create more opportunity, and support people who are prepared to use their opportunities. Progress happens when people, who are active agents, reinforce each other in using and creating opportunities.

And while we must always seek to ensure that young people have a "second chance" we must avoid a situation where policies and budgets entrench permanent victimhood. That is why we must work to prevent diseases that are preventable, so that more resources are available for treating unpreventable conditions. That is why we must partner with families and communities so that they play their part, with the state, in developing sustainable settlements. That is why we must look at the key levers – such as a broadband backbone – that will open more opportunities in every area, from job-seeking to business expansion.

This is what we mean when we say "Better Together". It is the basis of sustainable progress and requires us to free our minds, recognising that we are all only human, not superior or inferior, engaging each other in the great project of building one nation with one future.

● Zille is leader of the DA. This article appears in her online newsletter and is published as part of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation/Cape Times series on race and identity.

## ANCYL a necessary voice in SA

THE wings of the ANC Youth League have been clipped.

The mother body of the ANC has sent out a very clear message to the ANCYL that it can no longer do and say as it wishes.

The saga of the ANCYL shaking up the mother body began at its very inception when Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and other ANCYL leaders went to then ANC president Dr Xuma and told him to support the ideas of the league or they would find another ANC presidential candidate to replace him. Dr Xuma was so astounded at the audacity of these young men that he chased them out of his house for daring to give him an ultimatum.

True to their word, the youth league leaders found another candidate, James Moroka, who would replace the Dr Xuma, whom they viewed as too much of a pacifist. That was the inception of the youth league as the absolute kingmaker in the ANC. From then on, whichever candidate the ANCYL picked for president would be the eventual winner.

Perhaps 2012 will be the end of the road for the league's influence.

Cyril Ramaphosa's fighting words clearly pointed out to the ANCYL that it is answerable to the mother body. The arguments in its

### In My Arrogant Opinion khaya dlanga



appeal against the rulings by the Disciplinary National Committee before the Disciplinary National Committee were based on an assumed autonomy, as if the youth league was an entity independent from the ANC.

To say the least, the arguments brought before the disciplinary national committee were bad, lazy and smelled of desperation. There was no clear strategy.

The general strategy of arguments involved the league throwing everything that could be thrown in the hope that something would stick. Something did, but it was a minor charge and a hollow victory for the young lions.

The ANCYL will never be as powerful as it once was. The young lions have become the young pussy cats.

Perhaps Julius Malema got drunk with power. He began to believe that he was more powerful than he really was, and this has mostly to do with the role he played in the demise of Thabo Mbeki. He believed that he and the league were responsible for the end of one pres-

ident and the start of another. The quiet encouragement given by the elders of the ANC when he said outrageous things about Mbeki gave rise to the myth of Malema. He could say and do anything he wanted without consequence.

The people who have shut him down are the very same ones who encouraged him to be the man he has become. He has become a renegade and needed to be reined in.

Malema was really a creation of Zuma. And it would take Zuma to destroy him through the structures of the ANC.

The argument by some that the ANCYL must be nothing more than a desk in the ANC will now gain ground, but whether those who want such for the league will succeed or not is another matter all together.

The ANCYL has too much history for it to be allowed to descend to a mere desk. It would be a disservice to the party. It is an important, if uncomfortable, voice in the country. We should not allow our discomfort with it to blind us from the truth that it reflects. It shows the underlying anger of the so-called masses, which in turn points the government to do what it needs to do.

The country needs the ANCYL even if people want to deny that truth.

## How SA misread the views of AU voters

WHY DID Home Affairs Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma lose last week's election for the chair of the African Union Commission – and so badly?

Since the ballot was secret, one can't be certain.

Nonetheless, the Institute for Security Studies has a pretty good idea how the voting went. And some conclusions can be drawn from that.

First of all ISS executive director Jakkie Cilliers believes Pretoria failed to discern the deep divisions that remain in Africa. And one may add that those fissures follow lines of geography, colonial history, language, size, ideology, etc.

For example, SA professed to believe the Francophone-Anglophone divide was inconsequential. But in the end almost all the many Francophone countries voted for Gabon's Jean Ping, one of their own.

Cilliers and Liesl Louw-Vaudran, also of the ISS, have also identified another reason for SA's defeat – the foreign policy blunders made by SA under President Jacob Zuma, especially during 2011.

### Window on Africa peter fabricius



incumbent Laurent Gbagbo, which especially angered Nigeria.

In Libya, SA also crossed swords with Nigeria which was quick to back the rebels who ousted Muammar Gaddafi, while SA dithered over some power-sharing solution.

Significantly, SA's main motive for opposing Nigeria and Co was its objection to what it saw as foreign meddling for "regime change" in both conflicts. And this was also its main sales pitch for Dlamini Zuma to replace Ping, whom it branded a "pawn of the West."

Cilliers believes this pitch did not go down well, because it smacked of an old anti-Western, liberation movement mentality that most other African countries now considered passé.

One can discern something of that in the fact that the three "Arab Spring" countries, Libya itself, Tunisia and Egypt, all evidently voted against Dlamini Zuma, presumably because they perceived SA to be lukewarm to their revolutions and too sympathetic to the ancient regimes they toppled.

Cilliers and Louw-Vaudran, though, believe the main reason for Dlamini Zuma's defeat was that SA flouted the unspoken AU rule that big powers should not occupy the continent's top official job. That provoked resistance from other big powers, such as Nigeria, principally, but one could also add Senegal, Egypt and Kenya.

And perhaps running through all these reasons is a visceral resentment and envy of Africa's Big Brother.

These many likely causes of SA's defeat make it hard to figure out precisely what went wrong. Some of the causes overlap: Nigeria, for example, perhaps SA's key adversary in the election, could very well have voted against SA for all three reasons.

So what should SA do? If Dlamini Zuma was mainly defeated just because she entered the contest – or if this was chiefly about other Africans not liking us – then SA should logically just quietly pull out of the re-election in Lilongwe, Malawi, in June/July.

But if other factors were more important, then SA needs to understand these more clearly first.

Pretoria has already pre-empted such re-examination by proclaiming last week's election a "victory"

because it says Dlamini Zuma succeeded in knocking Ping out of the contest.

Now, officials say, Dlamini Zuma will have a clear run at the AU Commission chair in Lilongwe.

If that was not just a face-saving interpretation, Pretoria should now be re-examining its "foreign meddling" sales pitch.

Before the election, anonymous SA officials were quoted as saying their tactic was to urge the Francophone countries, for example, to state publicly their support for Ping – thus placating the supposed bogeyman France – but to vote in secret for Dlamini Zuma.

But those countries did pretty much just the opposite.

Was that because they were too scared of France even to oppose her in secret?

Or was it because they are "collaborators" whose interests, as leaders, are intertwined with those of France anyway?

Or was it perhaps because they were deeply insulted by SA's implication that they are nothing more than puppets of Paris?

There are questions SA needs to answer before it embarks upon another foreign policy adventure – which could easily become a misadventure – in Lilongwe.