# The Challenges of Education and Development in Twenty-First Century South Africa

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**Introduction**

The Chairperson, Headmasters, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, molweni, good afternoon!

Thank you for the privilege of addressing this 15th Annual Conference of the Headmasters of the Traditional State Boy's Schools of South Africa.

I have chosen to address the theme of *The Challenges of Education and Development in the Twenty First Century.*

This is not only an extremely important theme but also one that is both complex and broad and can be approached in many different ways.

With respect to complexity, the *concepts* of *education* and *development*, like the concepts of freedom and democracy, are defined in various ways and have a variety of meanings associated with them. Moreover, notions of education and development are not neutral in that they are embedded in different views of the world and society, including views on what constitutes a just and good society. Further, the choices, policies, actions and practices that are associated with particular conceptions of education and development are not benign in that they have real and differential effects on different social classes and groups in society.

With regard to the breadth of the theme, we can opt to either confine ourselves to the concepts of *education* and *development*, or we can address the *relationship between education and development*. It should be noted that the question of the relationship between education and development itself raises numerous issues. One is that of education *as* development. Another is that of education *for* development - whether individual, intellectual, social, cultural, economic or political development. Yet another is the place and role of education *in* development. Conversely, there are the issues of the development *of* education, development *in* education and development *for* education.

Finally, with respect to approach we can address each of the notions of education and development or their relationship at an abstract, conceptual and general level or we can address these in the *specific historical context* of South Africa in the early twenty first century.

For the purposes of this conference there is little value in any detailed general and conceptual analysis of the terms education and development, or of the relationship between education and development. I therefore propose to address the *challenges of education and development* and of *the relationship between education and development in the specific context of contemporary South Africa*. I also propose to deal with these issues through a number of propositions.

Before I proceed I must, however, clarify the use in my presentation of the terms 'transformation' *and* 'development'. Frequently, there is conflation of terms such as 'transformation', 'development', 'reform' and 'reconstruction', and the use of them 'interchangeably has tended to empty them of specific significance' (Chisholm, 2004:12). All four terms are associated in some way with the idea of change. However, they are not

'devoid of political and ideological content or context' (ibid.), or for that matter contestation, and while they may be related, they are also distinct. For example, it is not self-evident that what is regarded as 'transformation' in education or society is also 'development' or necessarily creates the conditions for development. To take another example, it is sometimes held that that the reconstruction or reform of institutions is a necessary element of their transformation. That may be so but it is not axiomatic that such reform will necessarily result in their transformation. In both cases it depends on many other issues and conditions

**Challenges of Education and Development**

To begin with the challenges of *education* and *development* there are two challenges I wish to address.

1. The first challenge concerns the idea of education and its purposes in relation to educational and social transformation and development.

   We inherited an education system profoundly shaped by social, political and economic inequalities of a 'race', class, gender, institutional, and geographical nature. Recognising this, our *Constitution* declared the right of all 'to a basic education' (Republic of South Africa, 1996). It also committed us to the assertion of the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of non-sexism and non-racialism and the human rights and freedoms that the *Bill of Rights* proclaims; and to 'respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights' embodied in the *Bill of Rights*.

   The 1995 *White Paper on Education and Training* entrusted the state to 'advance and protect' citizens so that they 'have the opportunity to develop their capabilities and potential'. It also directed the state to 'redress of educational inequalities among those sections of our people who have suffered particular disadvantages' and the principle of 'equity' so that all citizens have 'the same quality of learning opportunities' (DoE, 1995: 21-22). A year later the *National Education Policy Act* of 1996 stated its goal of 'the democratic transformation of the national system of education into one which serves the needs and interests of all of the people of South Africa and upholds their fundamental rights' (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The *South African Schools Act* asserted that a new schooling system will 'redress past injustices in schooling provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners,…advance the democratic transformation of society,…(and) contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society' (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Finally, *Education White Paper 3* of 1997 called on higher education to contribute 'to South Africa achieving 'political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity' (DoE, 1997)

   It should be clear that the *Constitution* and an array of laws and policies direct us to realize profound and wide-ranging imperatives and goals in and through education and schooling. It is assumed that their progressive substantive realization will contribute immeasurably to the transformation and development of education and society.

Today, however, there is a strong predisposition to approach education and investments in educational institutions from the perspective largely of the promotion of economic growth. The effect of this is to reduce education principally to preparing students for the labour market and economy and to be productive workers and contributors to economic growth. Much of the discourse in South Africa on the supposed lack of responsiveness of educational institutions to the needs of the economy, the alleged mismatch between graduates and the needs of companies, and the demand for a greater focus on 'skills' well reflects the tendency to reduce education to its value for economic growth.

It is not disputed that education must cultivate the knowledge, competencies and skills that enable graduates to contribute to economic growth, since such growth can facilitate initiatives geared towards greater social equality and social development. However, an instrumental approach to education which reduces its value to its efficacy for economic growth is to denude education of its considerably wider social value and functions.

For one, education has an intrinsic significance as an engagement and partnership between dedicated teachers and students around humanity's intellectual, cultural and scientific inheritances (in the form of books, art, pictures, music, artefacts), and around our historical and contemporary understandings, views and beliefs regarding our natural and social worlds. Here, education is the pursuit of learning in and through language/s of nature and society, which is undertaken as part of what it means to be human (Oakeshott in Fuller, T. ed., 1989).

For another, as Martha Nussbaum (2006) argues education is intimately connected to the idea of democratic citizenship, and to the cultivation of humanity. Nussbaum states that 'three capacities, above all, are essential to the cultivation of humanity' (Nussbaum, 2006:5). 'First is the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions'….Training this capacity requires developing the capacity to reason logically, to test what one reads or says for consistency of reasoning, correctness of fact, and accuracy of judgement' (ibid, 2006:5). The 'cultivation of humanity' also requires students to see themselves 'as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern' – which necessitates knowledge and understanding of different cultures and 'of differences of gender, race, and sexuality' (Nussbaum, 2006:6). Third, it is, however, more than 'factual knowledge' that is required. Also necessary is 'the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have' (ibid, 2006:6-7).

Finally, education also has profound value for the promotion of health and well-being, the assertion and pursuit of social and human rights and active democratic participation.

My first proposition is that if our goals are indeed educational and social transformation and development, we have to refuse notions of education that conceive of it in purely instrumental terms and reduce it to the promotion of economic growth. Instead, we are bound to protect and promote a much richer and multi-faceted conception of education that views it as also having intrinsic as well as social and political value.

2. The second challenge relates to our ideas of 'development'.

There is, of course, a huge literature on development, penned from within divergent social theoretical and ideological frameworks. Suffice to say that there are what may be described as, on the one hand, "thin" conceptions of development, and on the other hand "thick" conceptions of development.

"Thin" conceptions of development are essentially economistic, and tend to reduce the idea of development to economic growth and enhanced economic performance as measured by various indicators. Development reduced to economic growth gives rise to goals, policies, institutional arrangements and actions that focus primarily on promoting growth and reducing obstacles to growth.

In contrast, "thick" conceptions of development extend beyond a concern with economic growth to embrace issues of a wider economic nature as well as social, cultural and political issues. At their most extensive, the concern of goals, policies, institutional arrangements and actions are with structural economic change which widens ownership and eliminates or reduces income inequality, unemployment and poverty; greater social equality; equity and redress for socially disadvantaged and marginalised groups; expansion of human, economic and social rights and civil liberties; the institutionalisation of a substantive democracy and vibrant civil society; deracialisation and decolonisation of intellectual and cultural spaces; and extension and the deepening of political and citizenship participation.

The title of the Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen's 1999 book, *Development as Freedom*, embodies well the "thick" concept of development. Sen writes that

> Development …is …a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. Focusing on human freedoms contrasts with narrower views of development, such as identifying development with the growth of gross national product, or with the rise in personal incomes, or with industrialization, or with technological advance. . . (Sen, 1999:3).

This leads me to my <u>second proposition</u>, which is that we have little option but to choose a "thick" conception of development if we seek to realise the goals of both educational *and* social transformation and development. Without a "thick" conception of development, it will be nigh-impossible to eliminate the historical and structural economic and social legacies of apartheid, transform economic and social relations, erode and redress inequalities in patterns of wealth and ownership. It will be also extremely difficult to achieve the 1994 *Reconstruction and Development Programme* goals such as 'meeting basic needs of people'; and 'democratising the state and society', and to ensure that development is simultaneously intellectual, cultural, social and political rather than just economic in nature.

**Challenges of the Relationship between Education and Development**

3.  The third challenge concerns the role of education in social transformation and development.

    In South Africa it is a widely-held view that education is an important instrument for social transformation and development. The late Harold Wolpe and Elaine Unterhalter have noted that

    > education is accorded immense and unwarranted weight as a mechanism of …social transformation…In these approaches the extra-educational conditions which may either facilitate or block the effects of the educational system or which may simultaneously favour or inhibit them, are neglected. (1991a:2-3).

    However, as they stated, 'education *may* be a necessary condition for certain social processes, but it is not a sufficient condition, and hence cannot be analysed as an autonomous social force' (1991a:3). The historian Bill Nasson has expressed the role of education in social change in similar terms: 'education (is) an important participating force, but not…an arbitrating one' (cited in Chishom, 2004:13). Wolpe and Unterhalter go on to argue that 'from the standpoint of…social transformation, the importance of this conclusion is that structures and processes of educational change must be linked to changes in other social conditions and institutions (1991a:3).

    Wolpe especially appreciated 'the legacy of historically produced, deep-rooted racial and class divisions' (1991b: 3). He also suggested that 'the economic and other resources which would be required to redress the effects of the apartheid system in all spheres of education and training are not immediately available and are extremely unlikely to be available, except in the very long term' (1991b:7). In the light of this, Wolpe argued that 'education… policies have to be framed explicitly in relation to political and economic development strategies…if they are to contribute to the construction of a new South Africa' (1991b:1). He went on to warn that unless this happened education could 'reproduce powerfully entrenched structures generated by apartheid' instead of 'serving as instruments of social transformation' (1991b:16).

    In a seminal 1978 article analysing the relationship between education and development and sub-titled 'From the age of innocence to the age of scepticism', Hans Weiler advanced a similar argument:

    > There is little evidence to suggest that education, even with a tremendous effort at reducing…its own internal disparities, is likely to have an appreciable impact on the achievement of greater distributive justice in the society at large, as long as that society is under the influence of a relatively intact alliance of economic wealth, social status and political power which is interested in preserving the status quo (1978:182).

During the past thirteen years of democracy there have been some important economic and social gains. Yet the reality is that South Africa continues to be one of the most unequal societies on earth in terms of disparities in wealth, income, opportunities, and living conditions. The Presidency's *Development Indicators Mid-Term Review* released last week reveals that the Gini coefficient, which is a measure of income inequality, increased from 0.665 in 1994 to 0.685 in 2006 (2007:22). This indicates that the social grants that are provided to 12 million people and new jobs that have been created have been insufficient 'to overcome widening income inequality' (ibid.).

The Theil index, which 'is another measure of inequality', has risen from 0.880 in 1994 to 1.030 in 2006, and 'while inequality between races has declined' (from 0.532 in 1994 to 0.416 in 2006), it has increased within 'race' (from 0.348 in 1994 to 0. 613 in 2006) (Presidency, 2007:22). The percentage of income of the poorest 20% of our society has fallen since 1994 from 2.0% to 1.7%; conversely, the percentage of income of the richest 20% of our society has risen since 1994 from 72.0% to 72.5%. At the same time, the per capita income of the richest 20% has risen much faster than that of the poorest 20% (Presidency, 2007:21). 43% of our fellow citizens continue to live on an annual income of less than R 3 000 per year (down from 50.5% in 1994) (Presidency, 2007:23).

The cleavages of 'race', class, gender and geography are still all too evident. Hunger and disease, poverty and unemployment continue to blight our democracy. Millions of citizens are mired in desperate daily routines of survival while, alongside, unbridled individualism and crass materialism, and a vulgar mentality of "greed is cool" runs rampant in our society. Patriarchy and sexism continue to stifle the realization of the talents of girls and women and the contribution they can make to development. The rape and abuse of women is a pervasive, morbid ill that destroys innumerable lives and wreaks havoc in our country. HIV/AIDS exacerbates the fault-lines of our society, intensifies our social challenges and has over the past decade reduced life-expectancy from almost 60 years to about 47 years.

There is an undeniable and powerful link between social disadvantage and equity of access, opportunity and outcomes and achievement in schooling and education. Currently 60% of African children in South Africa come from families that earn less than R 800 a month; conversely 60% of white children are from families whose income is more than R 6 000 per month. The consequences of this have to be and are indeed manifest in differential school performance and achievement. Without appropriate and extensive interventions on the part of government to significantly improve the economic and social circumstances of millions of working class and rural poor (and primarily black) South Africans supported by an effective developmental state, the experiences of school drop-outs, poor retention, restricted educational opportunities and outcomes will be principally borne by these social classes. The elimination of extreme inequalities of income, wealth and by association also opportunity are not only moral and social imperatives but also an economic necessity, as currently thousands of jobs cannot be filled because the capabilities of unemployed and working and rural poor people remain unrealized.

This leads me to my third proposition - that with the best will in the world education on its own cannot transform and develop our society. Education is a necessary condition of transformation and development but is not a sufficient condition. That is to say, there must be simultaneous transformation and development initiatives in other arenas of our society if education is to make an effective contribution and if those who receive education are also to derive maximum benefits from it.

4. The previous discussion leads on to the fourth challenge. This is, as far as it is possible under the given circumstances, to creatively push the bounds of possibility and enhance the transformation potentialities of education, while also minimizing its reproduction of various kinds of economic and social privileges and inequalities.

It must be accepted that education is the object and outcome of ideological and political contestation between different social forces that accord it various and often diverse and even paradoxical social functions. Thus, under contemporary conditions education is bound to play a contradictory role, simultaneously conserving and reproducing certain aspects of extant social, cultural and economic relations and practices while possibly eroding and transforming other aspects of these relations and practices.

For example, under certain circumstances education could play an important role in the erosion of racism and racialism and in building a non-racial and more diverse culture. Concomitantly, it could play no or little role in undermining class privileges or patriarchy or sexism and may even contribute to reinforcing these through its own institutional structure, culture and practices. Many similar examples could be provided to demonstrate that education could be simultaneously reproductive and transformative depending on historical and institutional circumstances.

The fourth proposition is that we must avoid two equally flawed logics. One is 'determinism' - the notion that denies the education sphere any autonomy and rules out the possibilities of any internal changes on the grounds of constraints imposed by allegedly all powerful and determinant external political, economic and social structures. The other is 'voluntarism' - the notion that any and all changes are possible and it is all simply a matter of political will or lack of will. A variant of voluntarism is populist 'immediatism – the pretence that all and every need and desire can be immediately and simultaneously met irrespective of available financial resources and human capabilities.

5. From the previous comments it should be clear that it is *not* my argument that until social inequalities are eliminated or seriously reduced there is nothing that can be done in terms of development interventions in education and schools. This brings me to my fifth and final challenge, which is that the same time as we attempt to progressively realize wider economic, social and political goals we can and must also creatively and determinedly labour to remake our schools and education. If our goals are indeed to transform and develop education and to optimise the contribution of

education to development, this entails a number of inter-locking, systemic and long-term initiatives.

First, early childhood education has immense educational and wider social benefits and its extensive provision must be a policy priority. The Nobel Prize winner for economics James Heckman writes that '…it is a rare public policy initiative that promotes fairness and social justice and at the same time promotes productivity in the economy and in society at large. Investing in disadvantaged young children is such a policy' (cited in Sayed, 2007:6).

Second, the social exclusion of illiterate adult poor South Africans that was a characteristic of apartheid is also manifest in our democracy and will continue unabated unless there is a substantive (as opposed to a symbolic) state-led national literacy initiative. In the absence of widely available literacy programmes millions of South Africans will continue be denied opportunities for development and effective political participation.

The third is that despite almost universal formal participation in schooling, our schools continue to evince significant problems related to drop outs, retention, progression and successful completion. 2 out of 10 students drop-out after Grade 3, 4 out of 10 after grade 9, 6 out of 10 after grade 10 and 7.3 after grade 11, so that only just little more than a quarter of the students that begin grade 1 complete grade 12 (DoE, 2008:21).

Fourth, despite almost universal formal participation in schooling, our schools continue to evince significant problems related to drop outs, retention, progression and successful completion. As has been noted, 'the simple reality is that enrolment is not the same as attendance and attendance does not imply learning' (Sayed, 2007:8). South African school students perform extremely poorly on a range of international assessment tests, in terms of which '65% of school leavers…are functionally illiterate' (Sayed, 2007:6). In the 2003 TIMMS study 'only 29% of South African 8th grade students were able to answer correctly a basic subtraction question. Random guessing would have yielded a 25% correct answer' (ibid:6).

One measure of our formidable challenge is that currently 10% of our some 7 000 secondary schools – the independent and Model C schools - produce 60% of all (total of 86 531 in 2005) senior certificate endorsements. Another 10% of the historically black schools, which include the Department of Education's Dinaledi schools, produce a further 20% of all senior certificate endorsements. Thus while 20% of secondary schools produce 80% of senior certificate endorsements the remaining 80% of secondary schools produce only 20% of senior certificate endorsements.

It should be clear that the fundamental challenge is to improve the quality of education in schools. To be sure, resources for equity of access for poor students, targeted nutrition programmes, facilities, toilets and the adequate remuneration of educators are important, but they are not a sufficient condition for effective schooling and education. There are also a number of other necessary conditions.

One is to ensure that there exists a culture of effective learning and teaching and where this is absent to move diligently restore this culture. A key element here is purposeful and effective educational leadership and management on the part of a range of actors that include the Ministry of Education, provincial ministries, district offices and, especially school heads. Indeed, it is argued that a key distinguishing feature between the 10% of the historically black schools that produce 20% of all senior certificate endorsements and the other 80% of public secondary schools that produce only 20% is effective leadership and management.

A second condition is 'qualified, motivated, and committed teachers', who are 'the single most important determinant of effective learning' (Sayed, 2007:7). A third is the availability of high quality learning material and textbooks. It is argued that '(e)ffective assessment is (also) at the heart of ensuring that learning is effective', and that '(d)eveloping robust monitoring and assessment systems to monitor student performance is key to improving learning' (ibid.). Finally, it is suggested that 'the more schools are held to be accountable the more effective they are', which raises the importance of efficacious school governing bodies.

If, these are indeed the necessary conditions for effective education and schooling, then it is necessary to honestly debate whether and to what extent these conditions are in place, and in what percentage of South Africa's schools. If they are not in place or are in place in only a small proportion of our schools, we must confront why this is so. Without doubt, the apartheid legacy in education and schooling, as in other social domains, is pervasive as it is pernicious.

Yet, we cannot forever hold apartheid alone culpable, and if we are not to permanently cast ourselves solely as its victims and are to exercise human agency we must not abjure certain hard questions. These hard questions include:

1. Whether, as leaders, managers and educators, we fully comprehend the importance of knowledge and education and the profound intellectual, moral, political and organisational responsibilities associated with educating our people.
2. Whether we fully grasp what is at stake and the implications of our choices, decisions, actions and non-actions for our society and current and future generations?
3. Whether we have in place the essential value orientations, policy frameworks and policies, strategies and mechanisms to progressively realize our transformation and development goals? Are these substantive and material as opposed to largely symbolic in nature; good words and intentions but little in the way of effectual interventions and practices!
4. Whether we have an effective and efficient developmental state in the domain of education at national, provincial and district levels, with a public service that possesses the educational know-how and leadership, management and administrative capabilities to support schools? A public service that, in the words of the Minister of Finance is not 'a self-serving elite, interested only in their own welfare, their own empowerment and their own bank balances', but sees its vocation as 'a calling and a responsibility', which choose(s) to serve…(and) is professional, skilled' (and)

humble…(and shows) humility towards the poor (as its) greatest attribute (Minister Trevor Manuel, 2004)

5. Finally, whether we possess the social consciousness of what development in education and society in South Africa in the twenty first century fully entails. This includes the understanding that development does not flow from above and cannot be done to schools by outside experts or officials but requires, within a framework of common values and goals, unassuming, respectful, sustained and mutually reciprocal and beneficial partnerships which puts people (teachers, students) at the centre and draws on and supplements their knowledge, wisdom and resources and enables them to ultimately become the authors of their own development.

If, these are indeed the necessary conditions for effective education and schooling, then it is necessary to honestly debate whether, to what extent and in what percentage of South Africa's schools these conditions are in place. If they are not in place or are in place in only a small proportion of our schools, we must confront why this is so, and not abjure certain hard questions.

The fifth and final proposition, then, is that despite some achievements we continue to be plagued by various stubborn and persistent realities that thwart the realization of constitutionally and legally enshrined educational and imperatives and goals. It is necessary to openly acknowledge failings, shortcomings and weaknesses, honestly identify what accounts for these and creatively and courageously confront them. Unless and until we do this we will continue to deny millions of South Africans an education that develops their capabilities and affirms and advances their human and social rights and we will block a key avenue to social transformation and development. As it has been noted, 'although education cannot transform the world, the world cannot be transformed without education' (cited in Chisholm, 2004:13).

**Conclusion**

To conclude: the political and citizenship rights that were one element of the struggle against apartheid have been won. It is now the infinitely more arduous and protracted battle of creating an equitable, just, and humane society in which the promises of human rights and equality are progressively translated into substantive realities that must be joined and won.

The post-apartheid South African social and education order is not yet indelibly defined. Ultimately, transformation in education and society will be shaped by the choices and decisions we make about economic and social development and by the character of human agency outside and within education and its institutions. If we are serious about social transformation and development we must refuse, as the Palestinian scholar Hammami puts it, 'to accept the logic of inequality and the repression that it involves', and continue to 'search for human agency, for the means through which inequality can be undone' (2006:32).

It has been noted that 'effectively to give birth to the new, we must be angry at our past'. However, a wonderful Sotho proverb says: 'No matter how hot your anger may be, it cannot cook'. Our challenge is to 'make the real fire that cooks' (Mbeki, 2004), both with respect to education and development and education's contribution to development.

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