

enough and that it is the reason why there is a lack of capital investment in the country and, consequently, not enough job creation, particularly amongst the youth. It is accordingly suggested that labour law reforms (lowering the cost of hiring and firing workers, employment benefits, etc) will encourage entrepreneurs to hire more workers. This view was debunked by a respected South African law professor, Paul Benjamin, who pointed out that the view that South Africa is one of the countries with the most inflexible labour laws is premised on subjective interviews/opinions of executives, whilst the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study is based on empirical data. In terms of the OECD findings, the South African employment laws are significantly flexible.

## CONCLUSION

There is certainly much debate on the state of youth unemployment in South Africa. The two key reasons advanced are that of a 'skills gap' and lack of capital investment to stimulate job creation, particularly from amongst the youth. This article attempted to make some sense of those arguments advanced without drawing any conclusions as to the correctness thereof. The South African government continues to fail the youth of this country. It is indeed sad that, after 38 years, some of the ideals of the 1976 youth uprising in Soweto have still not been realised. <sup>LB</sup>

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# Post-school education and training

## For whom?

The commonly held belief is that education is necessary for one to get a well-paying job. But is that the only purpose of education questions **Sonya Leurquain-Steyn** who argues that education should serve humanity and not market capitalism.

‘Our schools are, in a sense, factories, in which the raw materials (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of 20th century civilization and it’s the business of the school to build its pupils according to the specifications laid down,’ Ellwood P. Cubberley (1916), Dean Stanford University School of Education.

A recent conversation with an adult learner, Molly, led me to question the role of education in the lives of ordinary South African citizens. We were talking about who is being served by education and examining the effects of this on both the broader society and local communities. This conversation formed part of a series of conversations with communities within a larger research project commissioned by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

The project, Emerging Voices 2, looks more closely at the lived realities and experiences of people in the post-school education and training sector (PSET). The projects aims to answer the question: How do rural communities experience the PSET sector? In response to an argument that PSET is positioned and biased to the needs of the market economy and the formal labour market, which as it stands cannot accommodate the growing number of graduates needing steady jobs and similarly does not prepare students for anything beyond formal employment.

Said Molly: ‘We’ve got to start opening our eyes and minds right now. The cries that we always have, that you send a child to school and when the child comes back, you’ll find out that the child knows nothing – coming from an institution. That means that it’s now all about the economy. Education is not doing something to a child, so that when the child is finished

with school, then that child can stand on his or her two legs and do something. Because you'll find out that a person has a degree but that person is sitting here because he or she can't do anything. Because when democracy came in – yes we needed a democracy – but it looks like democracy killed the passion that our parents had with us. We need to have those opinions that will make sure that we save those who are still at school now, so whenever we pass, that generation can live on their own. This thing of the economy: it's a reality that the people who are rich are getting even richer because our children, they come from school and come to work for them in our communities. They can't go anywhere. We are sitting here with graduates and we are sitting with standard 10 that don't have work. They are working for R520 but the child has a grade 12 certificate, but they're sitting at home. They can't do anything.'

This reflection captures the reality experienced by many people in South Africa and around the world who are led to believe that a 'good education' will translate into a 'good job'. With the official youth unemployment rate rising to 36.1% according to StatsSA, despite their 'improvement' in educational attainment, one has to question the veracity of statements which blame unemployment on the lack of skills, when in reality it's a jobs crisis that we are faced with. Lois Weis speaks of a 'working class without work' a situation not unfamiliar to 25.2% of South African citizens who find themselves unemployed; many facing permanent unemployment – the majority of these people being youth. So what then is the role of PSET in society? Or more specifically as this article raises, what should the role of PSET be?

This article highlights how the role of education in society cannot just be about preparing students to enter the formal labour market but instead how

the education system needs to develop actively engaged citizens who are able to think critically and creatively about their worlds. The article further foregrounds how educational institutions that form part of the post-schooling landscape are intrinsically implicated in the problems of society, not just globally but more importantly, locally as well; and that an education system which does not speak to the needs of local communities in sustainable and consistent ways is not only deficient but defunct.

We know that there is no guarantee of employment in the formal labour market; employment has also become more and more precarious forcing many people to work for low wages just to keep their jobs. The dominant discourse of our time would lead one to believe that the greatest challenge fuelling mass unemployment is the lack of requisite skills needed for these jobs, write Allias & Nathan and others. This makes it difficult for industry to employ more people as job seekers are not skilled enough – or don't have the right skills – for available jobs. This discourse deeply permeates society despite evidence to the contrary which clearly indicates that education levels over the last few years have been on the rise; forcing even graduates into unemployment, according to Baatjes.

In a country like South Africa, where youth are almost twice as likely to be unemployed when compared to adults, this gives further rise to what appears to be a youth unemployment crisis, when in fact it's just a jobs crisis that we're faced with. As Molly reflect, we need to start asking ourselves what the purpose of education is if students leaving educational institutions are not able to sustain themselves. What is the purpose of education if the apparent 'skills' learnt at school become useless in the face of unemployment?

Strong movements towards the privatisation of education seem like a worthy endeavour given the dismal state of our public schools. If education were privatised, it is argued, we would be able to manage the quality of education received at these institutions while simultaneously ensuring that educators are paid better wages. This line of reasoning is particularly dangerous for a number of reasons: it presents a superficially convincing argument which upon closer evaluation can only do more harm than good.

The introduction of private schools will only serve as an additional means to create inequality within our already unequal society. Private 'better quality' schools will only be attended by those who can afford to do so, marginalising a large group of people who cannot afford to send their children to these schools. This marginalisation extends far beyond the obvious stratification of those who can afford to attend private schools from those who can't, but further sets the latter group of scholars up for failure in a number of spheres of life after school.

If schooling is to prepare one for life beyond the confines of the classroom, and the schooling system itself is divided between private and public schools – the latter of which is by implication of a perceived lesser quality than the former – it becomes glaringly obvious who the greatest beneficiaries of 'schooling' will be. A final nail in the proverbial coffin of public schools, lies in the implication that the best teachers will be drawn to private schools that are able to pay them better salaries – public schools, which desperately need good teachers, cannot compete. Society would be far better served by good quality public schools, which have equal access to resources, funding and support – thereby nullifying the 'need' for 'better' private schools.



*Upskilling on technology: Workers undergo training.*

Sapon-Shevin & Schneidewind accurately capture what generally happens in classrooms when they said: 'The typical classroom is framed by competition, marked by struggle between students (and often between teacher and students), and riddled by indicators of comparative achievement and worth. Star charts on the wall announce who has been successful at learning multiplication tables, only children with 'neat' handwriting have their papers posted for display... Competition encourages people to survey other people's differences for potential weak spots... We learn to ascribe winner or loser status based on certain perceived overt characteristics, such as boys are better at math... The interpersonal outcomes of competition – rivalry, envy, and contempt – all encourage blaming the loser and justifying their "deserved" fate.'

Educational institutions are breeding grounds for individualism

and competition, two characteristics upon which capitalism thrives and which ensure its survival. This is not to say that individualism should be repressed or that competition in and of itself is necessarily bad – but when unwittingly cultivated as a means to advance one's social standing at the expense of others, these virtues become vices – especially within a society where many are blamed for their living conditions – despite it being an overt manifestation of the iniquities of capitalism. Our education system is driven by competition and individualism – feeding into this global common sense which sees people as 'human capital' and not human-beings.

We also need to be very clear in our understanding of the nature of this system which churns out labourers and not citizens. Capitalism and this particular form of capitalism – neo-liberalism – requires a large body of workers prepared to work for minimum

wages. There is no mention of cultivating active citizens, or developing an equitable society, or investing in social well-being (unless there are profits to be made). Capitalism can only ever reproduce inequality. It is a system which places profits over people. It is a system of consumption and greed. These are the very characteristics which have led Evo Morales to state that: 'Competition and the thirst for profit without limits of the capitalist system are destroying the planet. Under capitalism we are not human beings, but consumers. Under capitalism Mother Earth does not exist, instead there are raw materials. Capitalism is the source of the asymmetries and imbalances in the world. It generates luxury, ostentation and waste for a few, while millions in the world die from hunger..'

Indeed this is a system which is so engrained within the fabric of our society that we barely notice its effects on our everyday choices



until we're forced to step back and assess the disastrous state of all aspects of our world.

The role of post-schooling becomes clear when one examines the lived realities of people living in poor communities. What is the use of degrees and diplomas and world-renowned experts in fields of varying specialisation if those very same skills aren't able to solve basic, everyday problems faced by many

economy) which makes fickle use of students exiting these institutions and does not consistently sustain the communities that fuel it.

Mainstream hegemony dictates that education be for the labour market. We go to school, university, college and are told to learn as hard as we can, to get the best possible grades so that we can find a 'good job' which will pay us a 'good salary' and our lives will essentially be

about the economy. Education needs to be more relevant to people's lives so that when the economy fails to deliver the jobs it promises to provide, people are not automatically resigned to a status of indefinite poverty.

At the core of this debate is the structure we find ourselves in. It is a structure of oppression which conceals the fact that we are all slaves to the economy, for without serving it in one form or another, we are in fact condemned to a life of struggle. The privatisation of education (and a plethora of other commodities) is just one of the means of maintaining the status quo: the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, to paraphrase Molly's statement. What education needs to do is conscientise society to this truth. It needs to open our minds to the reality of our oppression and how our oppression and subjugation are reproduced through a neo-liberal education system – indeed to global neo-liberalism. It needs to help us become actively engaged citizens of the world and of our local communities so that we can denounce this system which enslaves us. Simultaneously, we need to announce a new, equitable society where everyone has access to resources fundamental to our survival. Once we have moved beyond this, we will no longer need to ask who the post-schooling sector needs to serve; as the answer will become clear: post-schooling must serve humanity. <sup>LB</sup>

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South Africans? One need only think here of poor housing infrastructure and the lack of access to basic amenities such as clean electricity, running water or flushing toilets. PSET institutions are fundamentally implicated in the problems of society if their teaching and learning, research and community engagement are delinked from problems experienced by communities. These institutions cannot stand as a beacon of hope, privilege or status – existing outside of the community it is meant to serve. PSET needs to move beyond fuelling a system (the market

set. Reality, however, couldn't be further from this. Despite countless examples which challenge this commonly held belief, society continually circulates students through this broken system which depicts the transition from school to work as a linear one.

The result being, as Molly describes, 'educated' youth unable to sustain themselves; ultimately culminating in a massive body of unemployed adults for whom education has become worthless. From this, one has to acknowledge that if education is to serve a social purpose, it cannot only be