

# The Pirate teacher

**I** was born in Grahamstown from a very poor background. My father was an ordinary worker and my mother a domestic worker. I am the second child in a family of five children.

## Teaching the teacher

When I was six years old I moved to Alice where I did my primary education at Gqumahashe Primary School. I did my secondary schooling at Jabavu High School where my favourite subjects were English and Biology.

I did not have much time to study in the afternoons as I, together with my older brother, had to do a lot of household chores. In the little spare time I had, I had to look after my younger brother.

I studied to become a teacher at the Cape College of Education. I went to the college like most young people who did not have enough income to go to university or technikon. I got there solely through the efforts of my older brother who was working then. Once at the college I was assisted by the government bursary scheme.

I was conscientised at high school through the education struggles that swept the Eastern Cape and the country in the early eighties. My older brother, who was with me at secondary school then, was continuously raising questions for debate with me. He also gave me

*Etienne Vlok speaks to Mzwakhe Clay, SADTU chairperson of the Eastern Cape's western region.*

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perspective on the questions confronting me regarding the struggle. This was further concretised at the college where I joined the South African National Students Congress (SANSCO).

## Being the teacher

I am currently a teacher at JK Zondi Public Primary School in Port Elizabeth. The best thing about teaching is being able to interact with young minds at an early age - to develop them in a manner that makes them assets in the communities and help them solve the myriads of challenges and problems they face daily.

The worst thing about education is to witness daily the damage and wastage caused by apartheid education on the minds of our communities. Also the lack of resources in our country to deal with that.

## Uniting with teachers

I joined SADTU during its inception in 1990 from the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA) - the teacher union that existed before SADTU.

I joined the union because of my conviction that SADTU was going to help transform education for the benefit of the poor people in our country

I am currently the regional chairperson of the western region in the Eastern Cape. The position entails co-ordinating collectively with the other office bearers,

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the activities of the more than 7 000 members in our region

SADTU offers us a platform to contribute in the struggle to improve the conditions of service of educators and workers generally. How can SADTU be improved? We can improve its operations if we all implement the resolutions taken at all structural meetings of the union. These resolutions are primarily directed at servicing our members

### **The alliance**

We have a common objective as the various components of the alliance. The specific tactics to reach that objective might be something that we continuously discuss in the alliance. Obviously, debates are healthy and take place in the alliance. We make sure that we debate issues so that finally we all agree on the way to change conditions for people in our country.

### **The education crisis**

The education crisis developed mainly with the advent of the Nationalist rule in

our country - this does not suggest that colonialist education shares less blame. So all the reasons for the crisis I can mention are related to apartheid and colonialism

In any capitalist society there will generally be a crisis in education and in all spheres of life because there will always be few people who would get the best of everything. So a permanent solution to our education crisis would be the removal of capitalism itself as a system. This malaise has affected every facet of our education including all schools in one way or another. For our society to move out of the mess requires massive expenditure. However, capital in our country is advising against that.

Concerning the role of teachers in the crisis, they are but one factor in the whole education equation. Yes, there are teachers who go to school drunk and who don't go to school regularly. One needs to acknowledge that these teachers do not even constitute a quarter of a percentage of union members. Our union is on record as stating clearly that those educators do not belong in SADTU.

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### **Eastern Cape**

The features of the education crisis in the Eastern Cape are similar to those experienced in the other eight provinces because of the similar historic background.

This situation is, however, more critical

in the Eastern Cape and the Northern Province because of the level of poverty experienced in these provinces. As in public schools in other provinces there are Eastern Cape schools in working class areas and rural dwellings that produce good results. This is as a result of the dedication of the educators, learners and parents alike. However, these are few, unlike the results of the former model C schools all over the country.

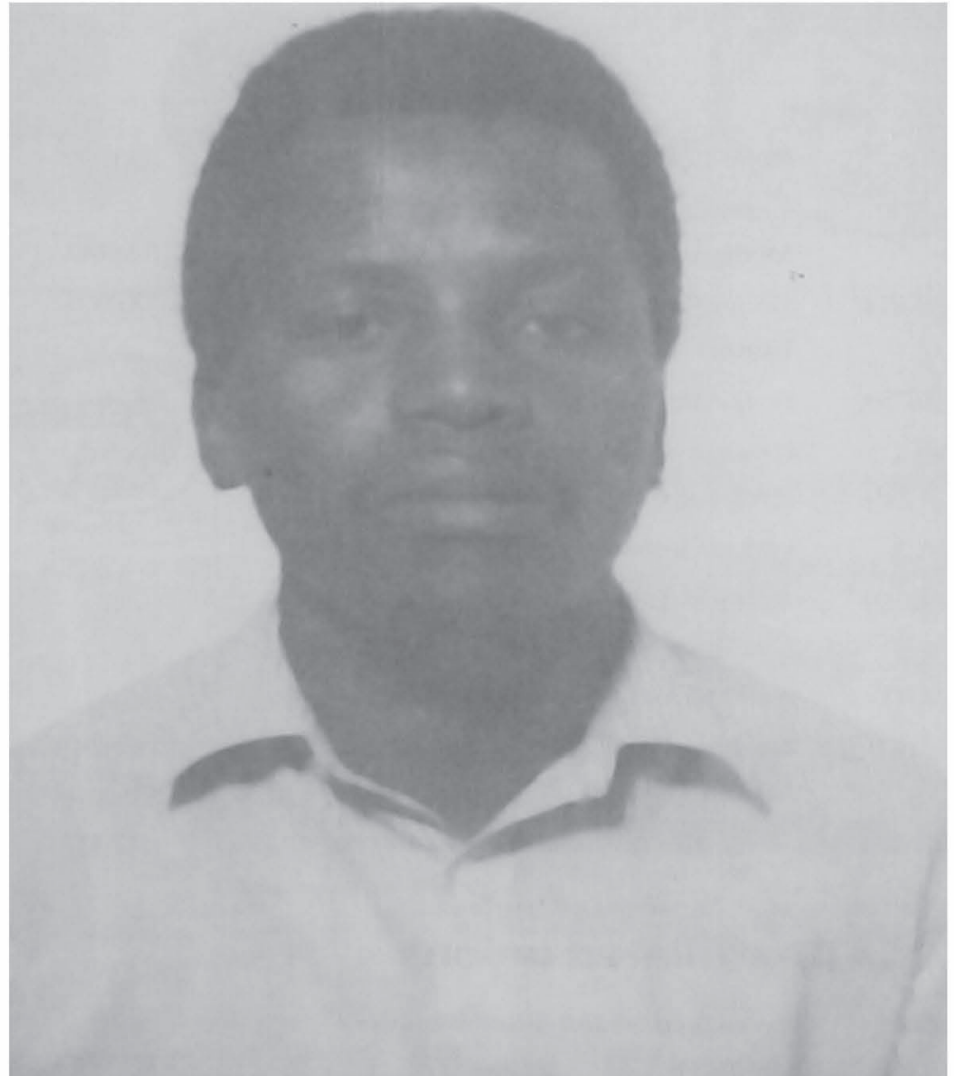
An issue that affects the province is the availability of basic resources. The things that normally make schools run, are scarce. This is coupled to the reduced spending by the government as advocated by the macro-economic policy.

### **The state of education**

Outcomes-based education will go a long way in producing critically minded learners. These learners will address our country's skills shortage, particularly if their education is coupled with career-orientated degrees and diplomas at institutions of higher learning. This, however, will not happen if government insists on cutting spending on social services as it is currently doing.

### **The 1999 public sector dispute**

We were completely taken aback last year by the manner in which government concluded the dispute in the public sector around salaries. We don't believe that it was the best way to conclude any




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bargaining process, especially if there is serious disagreement.

Government set a wrong precedent to the private sector that if you disagree you use bully-tactics.

I live in Zwide, Port Elizabeth and most of my time is spent on community activities and programmes. During my spare time I watch sport on TV and do a lot of reading. By the way, I support Orlando Pirates strongly' ★