



# Adu-peg EDUCATION THROUGH ACTION

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DEAR COMRADES AND FRIENDS

I am so often humbled by those who stand at traffic lights and busy intersections and who continue to smile and to tempt and encourage us "busy" motorists to buy their wares. Those involved in The Funny Money Project often bring a smile to my face, with their unique tricks and antics. This following contribution comes from the "feel good" section of Funny Money, issue 14.

A farmer had some puppies he needed to sell. He painted a sign advertising the 4 pups and set about nailing it to a post on the edge of his yard. As he was driving the last nail into the post, he felt a tug on his overalls. He looked down into the eyes of a little boy. "Mister," he said, "I want to buy one of your puppies." "Well," said the farmer, as he rubbed the sweat off the back of his neck, "these puppies come from fine parents and cost a good deal of money." The boy dropped his head for a moment. Then reaching deep into his pocket, he pulled out a handful of change and held it up to the farmer. "I've got thirty-nine cents. Is that enough to take a look?" "Sure," said the farmer. And with that he let out a whistle. "Here, Dolly!" he called. Out from the doghouse and down the ramp ran Dolly followed by four little balls of fur. The little boy pressed his face against the chain link fence. His eyes danced with delight. As the dogs made their way to the fence, the little boy noticed something else stirring inside the doghouse. Slowly another little ball appeared, this one noticeably smaller. Down the ramp it slid. Then in a somewhat awkward manner, the little pup began hobbling towards the others, doing its best to catch up. "I want that one," the little boy said, pointing to the runt. The farmer knelt down at the boy's side and said, "Son, you don't want that puppy. He will never be able to run and play with you like these other dogs would." With that the little boy stepped back from the fence, reached down, and began rolling up one leg of his trousers. In doing so he revealed a steel brace running down both sides of his leg attaching itself to a specially made shoe. Looking back up at the farmer, he said, "You see sir, I don't run too well myself, and he will need someone who understands." With tears in his eyes, the farmer reached down and picked up the little pup. Holding it carefully he handed it to the little boy. "How much?" asked the little boy. "No charge," answered the farmer. "There's no charge for love." The world is full of people who need someone who understands.

**What struck a cord with me was the final line - "The world is full of people who need someone who understands."**

The base of so much of the work that we do in schools is establishing an honest relationship and rapport with teachers, from whence there can be true sharing and where we can be better informed about the problems, issues and challenges facing teachers. We can then be those who listen and better understand, and from this platform, give the advice, assistance, knowledge and information asked for or required.

more tangible and perhaps quantifiable results. All of our trainers are themselves qualified teachers who are not theoretically trained only, but who have many years of practical teaching experience. Each individual visit to a school cluster is uniquely pre-planned, communicated to those involved, and carried out systematically and responsibly, with accountability.

It is most encouraging for me to read reports where the trainers comment that they "were received warmly with hugs and smiles" and having spent much time myself in our school clusters, I have witnessed the true warmth with which our trainers are received. Not long ago, in the Western Cape, I watched a mature coloured lady drape her arm over the shoulder of our one white trainer, as they walked companionably to the car, deep in discussion.

The massive variable is the human element, and how we see huge fluctuations from school to school within a cluster; from cluster to cluster within a province and from province to province, as well as every permutation in between. Our patient and dedicated trainers continue to encourage, support, assist, inspire, and demonstrate to teachers and then to re-encourage, re-support, re-assist, etc, all the while building relationships and offering understanding. The reliability and dependability of our trainers, as well as their dedication and commitment, while working in a very challenging field, is most commendable, and we are indeed fortunate to have such caring individuals in our employ.

I know that I have very high expectations of both myself and others, and know too that I am not alone in being disappointed that we have perhaps not achieved

*Thank you!*



We thank our generous and supportive donors for the financial support that makes possible, our work into schools. (We'd love some feedback on our reports, to ensure that we continue to meet your funding aims, objectives and goals!)



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None of us can be immune to the conflict that has arisen around the pay structure of teachers. Peter Kalloway, recently retired Professor of Education at UWC wrote an article in The Mail & Guardian of 17-23.08.07, under the heading: "The profound crisis of teaching". Some of the content of this article is contained here-in, due to its immense relevance to teaching today.

"The majority of teachers are confused and angry because they are being asked to do the impossible: to bear the brunt for the non-delivery of a quality mass education system for all that was the promise of the new government. And this they are expected to do for a salary that places a qualified teacher on a par with semi-skilled or untrained workers in the labour market.

Unstructured and unplanned "progressive education" robs our youth of the elements of literacy and numeracy that they need for the lives of empowered adults in a modern society, and lacking the skills that might find them a place in the job market.

complexity and the challenges of meaningful classroom teaching, and the particular challenges of working-class schools and children where teaching is as much about personal relationships with students as it is about "delivering knowledge". Indeed it is the gross under-estimation of the difficulty of the task that teachers face that lies at the bottom of the crisis we are facing.

Public education finds itself in a profound crisis as the schools for the disadvantaged are broadly expected to compete on equal terms with middle-class schools. In the process the public good is largely neglected. Teachers are the messengers and deliverers of new policies that are promised to be in keeping with the ideas of democracy, equity and redress, but the reality of delivery is far from the promise. In general the relationship of teachers to the new policy regime is complex and contested.

The new policies cast teachers' roles in technological terms. They are seen as "delivery agents" of a pre-planned policy that they had no hand in shaping. Aside from that, teachers have not been adequately trained for the new policies. If they have had training, it has taken place in short workshops that assume a technical formula will be adequate to equip teachers for the complex tasks necessary for teaching in new and innovative ways. But the new policy initiatives require massive injections of educational resources, books, libraries, laboratories, extra or specialised classrooms and so on - if they are to be viable and promote effective learning.

The teaching profession is in profound crisis because teachers are angry and consider themselves to be undervalued and underpaid. Teachers are the most maligned, frequently criticized, widely misunderstood and grossly under-rated professional group in our society. They have not been given a substantive chance to be heard when it comes to establishing priorities and setting goals for policy reform. Yet they are blamed when things go wrong.

The new policies are not directly connected to the teachers own experience and "common sense" understandings of what a "good education" is - either in terms of their own educational backgrounds or in terms of their experience from years in the classroom. Few teachers have the general educational background to deliver progressive conceptions of classroom practice adequately, given their own experience of unadulterated teacher-centred or textbook-bound classrooms and largely rote learning pedagogy. Planned and informed "constructivist" teaching assumes a great deal with regard to the teacher's educational background and skills, and if those skills are lacking, it leaves the teacher without legitimacy and the learners without structure. Formal knowledge does matter!

The new innovation of assistant teachers is a band-aid strategy to cover up the degree of crisis that exists in many classrooms. If progressive notions of education, which were celebrated during the era of Peoples' Education, are to have any chance of success it is essential that schools and teachers are placed in positions to make critical decisions about the nature of classroom and curriculum practices. To dictate such practices from above is to court disaster.

There is wide agreement on the basis of international research that top-down policy solutions, which seek to bypass teachers, and the complex problems of pedagogy and human relationships in schools are not going to bring the desired results. Equally, policies that neglect teachers' knowledge and insights are not going to work. External managerial solutions to these problems and the manipulation of teachers' work from outside the schools, are deeply damaging to schools, teachers and students.

To assume that under-prepared teachers can deliver educational programmes based on conceptions of progressive education in simple and easy terms is to misunderstand the

There can be little doubt that if we do not address the cause of alienation and disadvantage in our schools we will bear the consequences in terms of increasing alienation of students from schools and education, escalating drop-out and crime rates, substance abuse, inter-generational unemployment and entrenched poverty."

Having read this article from The Mail & Guardian, one can perhaps understand why progress is somewhat slower than expected. What is also of relevance, is that the model which we have adopted, is one where we work with teachers, alongside them in their classroom, and not at all in a top-down approach.



**It is very encouraging that there is movement towards all children being afforded the opportunity to attend Grade R - the year prior to the commencement of more formal teaching and learning.**

**At present, so many youngsters enter Grade 1, particularly in the poor communities, where poverty, abuse, alcohol abuse, malnutrition, and harsh living conditions have already taken their toll on these young individuals. For these children to be able to concentrate (for any length of time), to have skills, opinions and abilities, is almost impossible. Yet they need to fulfill certain criteria in the Foundation Phase. As they enter this phase so handicapped, it is a real challenge for both educator and learner. A formalized Grade R for all, that is regulated and where the teacher is properly qualified, and paid, will be a huge step forward.**

