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# The key to restoring glory of teaching

**A**CTIVE promotion, reflection on our past and collaboration are the keys to addressing the negative view of teachers and teaching around the country.

Having worked in South Africa's education system over the past 30 years, I have witnessed first-hand the regression in the way teaching is valued across the country; the once high regard for teachers being taken for granted and even now, not being acknowledged for their vocational duties and place in society.

The negative view of teachers and teaching and the lack of credibility in educational standards are all by-products of the changing political and governmental laws.

When I began teaching in the 1980s, teachers were held in high esteem, among the noble class with chiefs and kings.

Teachers provided community services over and above their teaching duties, ranging from coaching, court interpretation, establishing moral guides, and were seen as setters of high moral standards in society.

The teachers, mainly mature women, introduced Christian education to the classroom and schools.

Then with the advent of apartheid, teachers were separated by colour, race and class. The African teacher was highly condemned, disadvantaged and poorly trained; teaching became a job, no longer community service.

At that stage, the noble profession incrementally became just a commodity.

Key structural changes are needed to transform the negative perceptions of teachers into positive ones.

To make lasting change, dialogue on the following is necessary:

- Between state and labour movement, teacher union in particular.
- To balance the work conditions of teachers with the needs of society.
- Discuss the kind of teacher that will serve society in a democratic state.
- Discuss and make important the noble profession.
- Curriculum support that will help the teacher contribute to the development of South Africa.

To bring about collaboration and the same understanding across the board, there needs to be constructive communication between society and teachers.

Traditionally, education by itself was triangular; you had the pupil, teacher and parent who were all equally responsible for their child's learning and progression.

This has now been extended to include the school community, support staff, stakeholders controlling access to education and partners who support the teacher.

It is no longer a triangular focus and responsibility, but a wide community inclusive approach that will ensure progression and lasting change in the educational sector.

In a collective partnership effort governed by the National Education Collaboration Trust (Nect), the current initiative, including the National Association of School Governing Bodies, that is being rolled out is seeing increasing parental involvement in their children's education and support of teachers.

This initiative involves pupils from Grade 8 and the committee of parents who communicate with all stakeholders the needs of the schools and teachers to effect change and uplift them.

The Nect is also encouraging dialogue about professionalising teaching.

The benefit of this will be quality learning and teaching, and thus pupils who leave school to be actively involved in the economy.

Through professionalising teaching and working together, we aim to achieve greater education that will boost the economy, empower citizens and pupils and enable our children to become critical thinkers and good citizens focused on social cohesion.

Ultimately, we need to respect teachers and teaching. If we don't, our children will also undermine them and lose respect for them.

Society at large, teachers themselves, the media and the public must change the stereotype of teachers and support the pupil.

Involvement of parents in education, with their support of the teacher who in turn supports the pupil, is a tactic that is needed.

Also, looking to the government system, concrete dialogue between the state and society needs to be implemented within current structures.

Believing in the promising impact of these initiatives, I envision future schools as bright, promising institutions with active government participation.

- *Matakanya is general secretary of the National Association of School Governing Bodies.*

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