

LACK OF RESOURCES MUST BE CONFRONTED HEAD-ON

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I WAS a teacher in that difficult year of 1976 in the political history of South Africa.

UWC was a hive of political activity. Black consciousness was spreading like wildfire through the campuses of the marginalised in South Africa.

The pupils were crying out for political freedom. Here one cut one's political teeth and was made aware of the injustices in the country.

Many pupils, because of their political conviction, never completed their degrees in 1976. I sometimes wondered what happened to these bright men and women who sacrificed their education for the Struggle.

Today, the youth are faced with another struggle – against an invisible enemy, Covid-19. This has been a tough year for the students, parents and teachers. Since the lockdown started on March 27, 2020, everybody has been faced with the problem – when do we resume the day-to-day practicalities of life?

Many parents have out of necessity returned to work to finance their living. Covid-19 has caused many job losses in a country where unemployment is high. I live in Wetton, and I see the masses of unemployed at the Wetton traffic circle, hoping somebody will provide work for them. I live opposite a park and I see how men, disillusioned with life, just come to lie or sit in the park. This is the reality. Students are returning to school, also out of necessity. What else can they do? We do not have the capacity in high schools to accommodate all next year's Grade 8s. Forty percent of the students presently in Grade 7 will never see the inside of a Grade 8 classroom. What a shame.

There has been a robust debate about children returning to school. Private and Model C schools have encouraged their students to return mainly because of the payment of school fees. There was a recent report that private schools had requested that government make financial contribution to them because parents are not paying school fees due to the coronavirus.

The majority of schools in the poor areas are struggling to make ends meet. Covid-19 has given this country a wake-up call.

The stark reality is that our schools are under-resourced. We must confront this reality head-on. No longer can we wait for resources to arrive at schools of the poor in 20 years' time. It must happen now.

The communities want to see action. We all have to address it now. We are sitting on a time bomb ready to explode.

Students in poor communities have for decades not been adequately prepared to write matric examinations because of the lack of physical resources and teachers.

However, the resolve of these students to overcome the barriers has been astonishing.

We have to find the political will to assist our children as they confront these inequalities. I am optimistic that we will overcome all the challenges placed in front of us. History and justice are on our side.
