

## TIME FOR WCED TO COME TO ITS SENSES

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- BRIAN ISAACS



THE majority of South Africans have lived under oppressive regimes for four centuries.

We were never allowed to develop as one nation. Oppressors found that the colour of one's skin and the texture of one's hair were ways to discriminate against people.

I owe it to my grandparents and parents who instilled in us that it is your humanity that counts and you are to judge people by this. The schools I attended reinforced this concept.

Unity in diversity is a slogan that was coined at the negotiations prior to the 1994 political settlement. I remember a conversation with a former principal of a Model C school in Newlands.

During a function the UCT vice-chancellor hosted in 2010, this principal said to a few principals from the Cape Flats: "I really do not want to accept Coloured students from your schools but the parents of these students want them at my school."

My reply was: "What do you mean Coloured students. I only have students at the school where I teach."

He looked astonished. I refuse to accept the notion that there are "races" in South Africa and as a matter of fact, in the rest of the world. It is a construct created by persons who think they are superior to others.

In the Western Cape particularly, the concept of race has been deeply embedded in the minds of the oppressors. It is perpetuated by the province's current regime in province.

In South Africa, the fight is between the rich and the poor – and not based on race.

Race is just a convenient way in which to control the poor. The race issue in the Western Cape keeps rearing its ugly head. Those in power have a master-slave approach.

To illustrate the point. In the Western Cape, like the rest of the country, schools are grappling to deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

On numerous occasions the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) went against the National Department of Basic Education (NDBE) – the saga of when students return to school. NDBE said June 8, 2020, while the WCED said June 1, 2020.

National government has stated Grade 12s must return on August 3, Grade 7s on August 11, on August 24 grades 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 and August 31, grades 5 and 8.

WCED is prepared to go to court over the issue and wants all pupils back sooner. I must hand it to national government for listening to the concerns of trade unions, parents and student groups who asked for the postponement of the return to school until the Covid-19 curve flattens.

I would have expected that from a humanitarian point of view, Premier Allan Winde, Education MEC Debbie Schafer and WCED head Brian Schreuder would be more sympathetic to the plight of schools and engaged schools who felt it was not the right time to reopen. True leaders go to the people. The old way of doing things is not the correct way.

WCED is threatening a brave principal Wesley Neumann with disciplinary action because he carried out the wishes of the school community. It augurs well for the future of South African education that the community has a principled leader in Mr Neumann. I sincerely hope that WCED will listen to him– a person with great integrity. A breath of fresh air.

The WCED also tried to make an example out of teacher Loren ArriesHendricks of Fairmount High in Grassy Park because she spoke at a protest on the Covid-19 issue.

Fairmount's principal informed her that he no longer has a post for her.

This is what happens in education when teachers speak their minds. There were many teachers present at similar protests.

The WCED sees it fit to take action against an innocent teacher standing up for her rights. I hope WCED will come to its senses.

The late great South African revolutionary Neville Alexander (I miss his presence) gave this advice to people: "If you face a brick wall the most progressive thing to do is reverse."

I urge the WCED to reverse now.

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