

# Speculating about a utopian education system in south africa

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An utopian education system: Speculating for the South African context

When trying to associate the word "utopia", words such as perfection, purity and idealness comes to mind. When defining the word, it is described in the Oxford Dictionary (2010) as " an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect". A utopia can be regarded as " wishful images in the mirrors", or " daydreams of that which is not yet" (Halpin, 2003). One can only wonder how a utopian society would look when all the ideals are met in the future, it is within human nature to dream about possibilities and to imagine a world where wishes and dreams seem to be unrealistic are achieved and preferences granted. Applying this perception to the state of the South African education system, one can assume than a utopian system would be flawless. A scenario can be developed where teachers anticipate the best methods to employ, which underpin high achievements and immense success (Halpin, 2003). A question that can be put to mind: Is the state of utopia universal, where all related parties have the same view of what is necessary for our country? Or is it the utopian state of being unique to the individual? Let us assume the current state of the South African education is in dystopia, meaning a society in which everything is bad as described in the Oxford Dictionary (2010). Crises that the education system face, include a widespread lack of funding and resources, staff that are under qualified and lack the driving force and motivation. There are also a number of schools that are not productive. These difficulties are only the tip of the iceberg that contributes to the present state of affairs. A clear occurrence of separation is also present in terms of privilege within our society. Certain groups, such as model-C schools are accustomed to a schooling setup which

is well resourced and that provides rich learning environments without any significant, negative sociological influence. Others in the disadvantaged position are exposed to the severe reality of impoverished education. Admitting that there is a problem is the first step to realize that requirements are not met. In the hope of developing a school system that represents a utopian education, one can think about possible goals or aims that one would like this society to meet. General expectations might include that a society could become united through the process of education. In Burbules et. Al (2006) it says that this kind of speculation is not aimed at finding immediate solutions, but rather to hypothesize about future change and reformation. In a utopian state, all teachers would be over qualified to teach their respective expertise. Each teacher would possess the ability to provide much needed insight through their knowledge, while being masterful educators. In South Africa, one cannot say whether the formal education that the teachers received is valid and correct for teaching in schools. Learning would take place in a positive and stimulating environment. Learners would be engaged by their presence and will not be bored by the subjects being taught as they will be motivated to learn and eager to gain experiences that would improve their knowledge. In terms of have the proper learning material, such as textbooks, adequate classrooms and resources, will all be freely available to them. Quality education will be provided and standards will be upheld. There is a great concern in South Africa regarding the distribution of textbooks. Being situated in the Western Cape, one can say we are in a more privileged situation than other provinces such as in the Eastern Cape. In a utopian society this would not be a problem. Yet, even in

an instance without textbooks, educators should be able to display their knowledge and abilities to create opportunities for learning to take place successfully. In an ideal environment, learning could take place in a physically safe environment. Learners would be able to attend a place of learning that is, accessible, convenient and additive to the learning experience. All infrastructures would also be clean environments with suitable sanitary utilities. Where the need for transportation to and from the location of schooling is unavoidable, all transport systems would be safe and reliable for learners to make use of. There are still too much incidents in the society where learners are involved in dangerous situations. Academic support should be readily available to those who are in need. Social workers, school counsellors and psychologists will be accessible of all schools, so that learners' who need emotional support, will have these resources. It would be ideal if the educational department would introduce more funding to support these schemes. Learners would be better equipped to learn and receive knowledge, if they did not have to deal with emotional stress and hunger. Learners can place their focus on their education with the correct support. In our current state, learners do not attend school for reasons such as being responsible to care at home and are simply too tired to attend school during the week. From an administrative perception, communication between the national government and teacher unions would be perfect. Teachers will be satisfied with their salaries and any other negotiations will run smoothly. Currently in South Africa, the power that lies with the educational unions is a problematic factor. The main concerns of the unions are misplaced and more emphasis is placed on their own welfare rather than on the learners. When

adding that, the government allegiance to the unions makes it difficult for the political body to discipline them. Therefore mistakes and gaps within the proper functioning go unchecked. In a utopian setting, the relationship between the government and unions would be a healthy one, where constructive criticism is met with appropriate reform. The focus would always be where it should; the welfare of the learners and also the future of our country. When speaking of education from a sociological perspective, the matter of language arises. Currently, this issue is a great source of controversy within South Africa. English is widely considered to be the language that will provide to most opportunities in terms of employment or academic achievement. This does not however take away the fact that there are many alternative languages in our society. Under utopian circumstances, each individual will be offered the option to be taught in the language they choose. This language could be used throughout their whole school career and textbooks and media will be at the disposition. In a utopian system, there would be a liberal view regarding acceptance of all members in the society. No discrimination would arise based on their race or ethnicity. Any prejudice would be abolished. Religious groups would be able to maintain their freedom to practice their beliefs without fear of prosecution. The education system should be responsible to accept learners with disabilities. Lastly, one can inspect a concern regarding the status that an educator upholds within society. In a utopian society it would be ensured that teachers are continually held in high esteem by others. This was often so in the past in South Africa. If this was the case, it would most likely have a ripple effect on the way that learners view and react toward their teachers. This

phenomenon is often applicable within smaller communities. A profession that is held in high regard would also attract high quality students, enticing these promising individuals into the workforce, which would ultimately increase the quality of educators in South Africa. When referencing to the question regarding the state of utopia catering to the community as a whole or the individual, it can be argued that the idea can be divided to provide to both concerned representations. To the individual, a utopian circumstance may represent an education which provides for the individual's future according to their preference, whether that is academic advancement of development and honing of physical skills for work in the trade sector. A shared utopia may suggest that each body within the community achieves the highest set standard for that community. Therefore, ' my utopia' could differ to the societal utopia. In the past, the existence of education in society is to equip individuals with knowledge, while also being central to optimum development from a social and personal standpoint (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1996). Therefore a utopian education system in our country would have to take in account for the individual needs of all races, classes and languages. Cultural divides would be conquered and everyone would have the opportunity to access high quality education to suit their needs. There might be questions if a utopian society is the answer. Certain aspects to such systems should be open to critique, as a system that solves every single problem is not necessarily a feasible option. There will be consistently obstacles to overcome. If a utopian system suggests to create academic achievers, does this imply that all those who pass through the education system end up as an unvarying group in

terms of academic ability? It could be supported that society does require an almost tier-like structure with different levels to maintain social order and an effectively functioning society. Certain professions are essential to society, even though they are often deemed as less essential. Systems in our country do not function and cannot be viewed in isolation. In order to speculate about education, one must propose that acceptance, availability of opportunity and equality will translate into the professional and social world. If a faultless education structure was achieved, where all positive outcomes were met, would this idealism translate outward into the rest of the components that make up society? What would become of the situation concerning employment? It is one thing to have utopian education, but if it does not result in the rest of the society being in a similar state of affairs, the change cannot occur. A utopian education system cannot function in isolation. All components of society, including education, health, industrial political sectors co-exist with one another. How can we find a balance between utopian expectations and a rational future for South African education? Halpin (1999) uses the term “ utopian realism” as a mechanism for envisioning change in society and especially the educational system. This is applicable in South Africa and the dynamics that make up who we are; we should shape our future according to detectable trends in actual social development. The centre of utopian thinking is that reason is able to triumph over circumstances (Halpin, 2003). South Africa should never cease to expect better, be hopeful for the future and strive for improvement. Webb (2009) calls for re-imagination to reinstate hope in our futures without employing naïve approaches to educational policy and pedagogy. Utopia

for education should mean that every child would be optimally supported and provided with the necessary resources to reach his or her dream no matter how big or small. If we improve our education system, we fundamentally improve ourselves. Bibliography