

Our world is in crisis

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Abalimi Bezekhaya is a voluntary urban ecofarming association which assists individuals, groups and community-based organisations to initiate and maintain sustainable ecological food growing projects at home and in community gardens, and to thereby help reduce poverty by creating selfemployment and to improve the health and nutrition of people.

Freshly harvested vegetables are sold on a weekly basis through Harvest of Hope — a provider of “freshly packed, organically grown vegetables ... grown in gardens of Cape Town’s townships”.

As part of a research project, a team and I interviewed farmers who all spoke passionately about what it is they do.

This sentiment is captured in these words said by a farmer who started farming with Abalimi in 2000: “I still love the garden, still now: I’m so passionate about it. I love it.”

Farmers we spoke with mentioned learning about “new” types of vegetables, like rhubarb, and learning to cook new and different vegetables.

They also spoke about the nutritional value of the food they grow and that working in a garden is good exercise.

For them, growing vegetables is so much more than just a technical exercise.

These, and others like them, are examples of meaningful and socially useful work involving the value of authentic vocational education.

People are participating in a variety of activities meaningful to their families and communities — and they learn (usually nonformally and informally) as they do.

These examples are not simply about people “adapting” and trying to “fit in”.

They are about ordinary people taking control of their own lives and contexts — working, learning and demonstrating that another world (as writer and activist Arundhati Roy and others have pointed out) is, indeed, possible!

Our world today is in crisis because of huge structural inequalities and the systems and ideologies that support these, not because of individuals who are supposedly inadequate and cannot adapt fast enough.

So let’s stop upskilling, reskilling and adapting to try to “fit in”.

You may just “die” anyway while you join the millions of job seekers in search of fewer jobs in a dwindling formal labour market the world over. “Enough is Enough! Ya Basta!”

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‘If the mind is fuzzy, the eyes can’t see’: a dialogue on post-schooling

Elijah Chiwota

POST-SCHOOL Education and Training (PSET) should challenge inequality and build a culture of collective and critical consciousness, argued activists and scholars at the 1st National Stakeholders Dialogue organised by the Education Policy Consortium at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University’s Missionvale Campus in Port Elizabeth in September last year.

The Consortium is made up of the Centre for Education Policy Development, Centre for Integrated PostSchool Education and Training (Cipset), Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (Cert), Nelson Mandela Institute for Education and Rural Development at the University of Fort Hare and the Centre for Researching Education and Labour at the University of the Witwatersrand.

PSET is not only about formal education but about the community where it’s happening argued Mpumi Cebekhulu from Cert.

Therefore, it should serve the purpose of broader participation, skills for livelihoods, self-employment, cooperatives, skills for health, including reproductive health, and how to access government support and services.

It’s also about challenging some of the ways in which things are being done and coming out with collective ways of solving problems.

Community education brings together theory and practice as seen in nonformal programmes on agriculture that are taking place in some communities.

In a sense PSET, which in most instances promotes the use of local languages to remove barriers to learning common in South Africa, plays a social role in the community.

Present at the dialogue were young researchers who challenged mainstream thinking on post-schooling.

The dialogue heard that vibrant debates were taking place in communities and people were not waiting for government to deal with some social issues that confronted them on a daily basis.

Local structures of organisations such as Sikhula Sonke as well as those of the Department of Higher Education and Training were being used by communities to further their interests and to address social issues.

While welcoming the advent of community colleges, one of which will be at Cipset, those at the dialogue asked why most of the experiences that were being quoted about the colleges were from the United States and not from African countries such as Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

They also wanted clarity on how community colleges will be different from the current college system.

One should try to understand the complexities in PSET and it is important to know what the youth were doing — including the literature they were reading and the

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dramas in which they took part.

The differentiated nature of the South African education system was also put on the spotlight: activist scholarship, the language issue and resources all mattered.

“There is need to keep the big picture in mind. If the mind is fuzzy, the eyes can’t see’ argued Enver Motala, emphasising the links between PSET and global inequality, labour migration, technological diffusion that is kicking out workers from workplaces, precarious work, unequal trade relations, growing inequality and relations of power. Drivers of inequality that should be understood included wars and famine.

The ideological drivers were

market fundamentalism and policy prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Racist practices, gender violence, new form of slavery, human trafficking, and xenophobia and extremism found in such organisations like Isis and the Taliban were other social ills Motala emphasised.

However, in the current crisis seeds for new ways of thinking, of livelihoods and learning were being planted. It was also time to think about socially useful work as wage labour is short term.

Thinking differently about knowledge is useful and therefore there is a need to build a culture of collective and critical consciousness.

That way societies would be able to resist relationships in which they were exploited. Human culture and civilisation had to be recaptured from the claws of capitalism and education used as one of the tools to share human values.

In that respect, educators played an important role as “organic intellectuals” (in Gramsci’s sense) and rethinking and coming up with new terms is important.

Narrow notions of development and economic growth must be rejected, added Salim Vally from Cert.

Mr E Chiwota is the editor of the South African Labour Bulletin. This article first appeared in the bulletin’s Volume 39, Number 4