

- [Home](#)
- |
- Sections
  - [WIRED WORLD](#)
  - [SOUTH AFRICA](#)
  - [AFRICA](#)
  - [WORLD](#)
  - [BUSINESS](#)
  - [LIFE, ETC](#)
  - [SPORT](#)
- |
- [Opinionistas](#)
- |
- Special Features
- |
- [Newsletter](#)
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9 February 2015 11:19 (South Africa)

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# DAILY MAVERICK

Opinionista ORESTI PATRICIOS

## SA's education revolution - who wants in?

- ORESTI PATRICIOS



ORESTI PATRICIOS

An avid exponent of chaos theory (or so his employees claim) Oresti Patricios has long been on the cutting edge of the media and advertising industries. From a teenage entrepreneur pioneering wedding videos in the 1970's to doing his social media MBA at GIBS when Twitter was barely a twit

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When not preaching his African vision Oresti can be found tweeting at his wife's coffee shop.

- 29 Jan 2015 12:36 (South Africa)
- 

South Africa's education system is broken. We all need to do what we can to try and fix it. One class at a time. One child at a time. One school at a time.

When the World Economic Forum (WEF) published its 2014 Global Information Technology Report, South Africa's education system was lambasted. This report indicates how able a country is to apply technology for its betterment - in other words, its ability to harness information and communications technologies for economic growth, productivity and job creation.

The report rated 148 states, and South Africa's education system was ranked 146th out of the 148. This country's maths and science [were the worst of all surveyed](#), according to the WEF report. In another report by the same organisation – The WEF Global Competitiveness Report – SA did just as badly. The quality of SA's education system was ranked at 140 out of the 144 states surveyed.

The reasons for the problems are complex and manifold. They lie somewhere in between SA's inherited Apartheid schools systems, which sees a Model C school in an affluent area like Sandton, much better resourced and equipped than a school across the highway in the township of Alexandra. Then there's the issue of corruption, infrastructure problems, textbook shortages, the controversial 30% matric pass requirement, teachers going on strike, and the fact that some schools don't even have basic facilities like toilets or water.

Political affiliation is irrelevant. How you feel about SA's current ruling party or government is not of consequence here. What's vital is that the education system, that a democratic SA inherited, is hopelessly flawed. It may take decades to remedy.

Just how important is education to SA's economic growth, social development and very future? [Empirical research](#) repeatedly [bears out](#) that [education is the single biggest contributor](#) to economic growth and social development. Further, the World Bank advises that education is the only real and lasting solution to [reversing inequality](#) in SA.

It goes without saying that without good education, we won't have a decent workforce, intelligent leaders, qualified professionals or competent civil servants in the future.

So what's to be done? I would like to propose a show of force by business. I'm not talking about taking our government to the Constitutional Court (let's leave that to civic organisations who are already doing an excellent job here). Rather, what about a complementary solution that may affect fundamental and long lasting change? I'm talking

about a learning revolution.

The learning revolution I speak of is understanding that government is not going to save the education system. We need to rescue education ourselves.

It doesn't matter how big or small your business is – you have the power to do something that will change lives and improve the future of the country. The infrastructure for this aid is largely established and there are many organisations that can help you get involved.

The organisation I work with is called [Pfp](#), which stands for Partners for Possibility. Essentially this non-profit teams up business leaders with headmasters, and through a program of training and coaching, enables them to work together to overcome the challenges faced by that headmaster's school. It's not about finding sponsors with deep pockets, so much as enabling the headmaster to progress in his own right.

My own experience working with a primary school in Alexandra has forever changed me. I feel I have become a better human being through my experience with the remarkable headmaster who runs this school. My intervention at the school has been wisely guided by him – he knows best how the system works and what's best for his learners.

At the beginning of the year we worked together to set certain goals for the school, first among which was learning outcomes. In 2012, from Grade 1 through to Grade 6, in Maths, isiZulu, English and seSotho, the average results were a failing grade, in the region of 16% to 40%. By 2013, all had improved, some by over 20%.

There were six learners in Grade 6, moving to Grade 7 in 2015, who achieved over 80% in English and Maths. They have received full bursaries to go to St Mary's and St David's until Grade 12. This year's results may be even better. We are holding thumbs.

One of the major challenges was communication: teachers complained that printed notices weren't getting to the parents. We investigated alternatives, and found that all parents had cellphones – many even had smartphones. So we instituted the SMSWeb system that takes advantage of free services like BBM, Mxit, e-mail and Skype to communicate with parents.

Other goals this headmaster achieved included improved attendance at Saturday classes, obtaining sponsorship from Anglo American for the creation of a computer lab, overhead projectors and TV sets, and sponsorship from other companies for a CCTV system.

What did it cost me? Not much. A little time mostly, which forced me to schedule my life better; but the excitement and motivation I received from being part of this was priceless.

PfP has been awarded a contract by the GDE (Gauteng Department of Education) to support 66 school principals from township schools. Part of the drive is to recruit professionals in IT, HR and Finance to assist with administration in these schools – a task that often lands on the shoulders of the headmaster. The GDE is allocating R30,000 to each of the principals, but there are still citizen partners needed for some of the schools.

[Olico](#) is another organisation that makes a huge difference in the field of education. This non-profit runs several education initiatives, including a computer lab in the Diepsloot community centre. Here, children can enrol for after-school programs that target their maths; the computer lab has software that tracks each learner's progress, and initially the lessons were provided by the [Khan Academy](#) – a comprehensive set of YouTube instructional videos on most aspects of primary and high school maths. Olico has subsequently produced a

number of videos along the same lines, to fit in better with the South African curriculum.

The video lessons are short and easy to follow, and this year learners showed an amazing 47% average increase in their maths marks. Imagine if we could build something similar in every under-served area. Olico has made the blueprint – their materials are all open-source, so no-one has to reinvent the wheel. Admittedly, it will take some money and manpower. Who is up to the challenge? **DM**

Similar organisations abound – there is [SAEP](#), the South African Education and Environment Project; the [School and Educare Assistance Project](#); [REAP](#), the Rural Education Access Programme, [Youth Cafés](#), the [Kusasa Project](#) – the list is long. All these organisations are doing something for education, and need help in some form or another. There's also [Equal Education](#), which has done remarkable work trying to force education offices in government to set standards and norms, and to keep them accountable.

Whether it's building a school hall or taking some time out each week to lend a hand, there is little that is more rewarding than knowing you are changing lives for the better, permanently. What is important, though, is to not see yourself as the solution, but a helper willing to be led by those already at work in this field, who will have infinitely more experience rebuilding the system than you do.

Let's do this together. Not for the CSI points or the BB-BEE certificates. Let's do this because it's an investment in the future. Let's do this because it's the right thing to do. Mostly, let's do it because it can make a very real difference to the future of South Africa. **DM**

*Oresti Patricios (@orestaki) is CEO of [Ornico, a Brand Intelligence® firm](#) that focuses on media, reputation and brand research. Follow Ornico on Twitter: @OrnicoMedia*

*For more information on Ornico go to [www.ornico.co.za](http://www.ornico.co.za)*



X

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- ORESTI PATRICIOS



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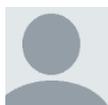
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**vashthi nepaul** • 11 days ago

Sounds cool but what's the plan to manage SADTU?

9 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**Harold Porter** → vashthi nepaul • 11 days ago

SADTU is in my opinion (as a teacher) the biggest single problem in SA education!

12 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**Eugen Straeuli** • 11 days ago

Thank you for this really positive contribution to what is probably the biggest challenge we face in our country. I can also attest to the fact, that being involved in similar ventures since the late 80's, has had a big positive effect on me.

The PfP idea is fantastic. Partnering and sharing expertise and experiences, where both

parties benefit, is so much better than "mentoring" in my opinion. When I began working with Maths teachers, it was all about "mentoring" them. It took me many years to realise why this approach failed ( I simply put it down to the teachers being lazy and/or disinterested) and how patronising I had been.

Good Luck Oresti for future endeavours in this regard.

8 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Eric Schollar** • 11 days ago

I don't dispute what the author says but he does need to explain why billions of Rands already spent on improving the outcomes of education by both the state and the private sector over so many years has had no effect.

13 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Sarel Botha** • 11 days ago

Step1: remove the ANC

Step2: Remove politicians and ideological challenged twats from the education system.

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Harold Porter** → Sarel Botha • 11 days ago

..if only it were that simple! Let's be honest here, the state of education in SA is a serious and complex problem; and the ANC certainly has failed insofar as they have not employed SA's best and brightest to solve it....but even if your steps were followed tomorrow, whoever took over would still find Education to be a difficult challenge.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Sarel Botha** → Harold Porter • 9 days ago

Agreed, difficult but solvable in reletivaly short time.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Russ Wood** • 11 days ago

Actually, post basic education, there IS a silver bullet. It's called 'apprenticeships'. A company takes some kids each year, and they work alongside older guys who know what they're doing. The kids do night school to learn the theories behind their jobs, and after 5 years, if the kids have learned and can manage, they get permanent jobs. This works, and has worked, for centuries. (I went through the mill myself in the 1960s, doing a part-time degree). BUT (and this is a big but) it requires that the intake is CAPABLE of learning, and of furthering their knowledge without much spoon-feeding. And I'm afraid that the children coming out of the SA national school system don't seem to be taught how to learn. Other countries, other ages have managed this - so why can't SA today?

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**vashtni nepaul** → Russ Wood • 11 days ago

You make a good couple points, Russ. Learning is a skill too and we've retarded the national appetite for it. And apprenticeships can be a good stopgap in a number of industries/types of job if the right system is designed.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Ann Knight** → Russ Wood • 9 days ago

I couldn't agree with you more. Apprenticeship is the only way, and we are in desperate need of these capable young people. I once, when I was a councillor, had two young men come into my office looking for work. They said that they were qualified electricians. On questioning them I discovered that they had done a six week course at a college and were now told they were qualified. I could have wept. I told they were only capable of changing a plug. Unfortunately I could do nothing for them, But how absolutely shocking.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Biloko** → Russ Wood • 10 days ago

Even here in the UK, employers find that many learners who have completed their schooling do not have the required skills for work - many of these include "soft skills", e.g. turning up on time, wearing appropriate clothing for business, being able to manage a business conversation and making notes for further action, accepting and carrying out instructions, and so on. However, many of these entrants to the world of work are almost unable to write a legible/comprehensible sentence, and have illegible handwriting.

K. Robertshaw

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Ann Knight** → Biloko • 9 days ago

I have had a lot of dealings with children in various townships. And one need to understand the background that they come from. Often the parents, usually just the mother are half educated themselves. they are not able to help their children. They are not read to. They do not do puzzles or colouring in at an early age. They start school with a disadvantage and many of them cannot catch up. Yesterday we were discussing in the township about teaching the children manners, we are going to start a programme in the township, of teaching basic manners. But that is just the start. I believe that they need to be good at English, at the moment it is the language of the world, and the sooner they grasp it, the easier to get a job.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Johan Kruger** → Biloko • 10 days ago

O dear! Tell that to Mamlukoff. Another of his pet theories down the tubes.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Michael Naidoo** • 11 days ago

Orestis, thank you for making a difference in SA. If more people can use your rationale and donate some time and effort....South Africa will move forward alot quicker. I salute you sir!

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Andrew Taynton** • 11 days ago

The Consciousness-Based education programme (CBE) provides a practical, proven

approach to prevent anti-social behaviour and other educational problems by developing the creative intelligence and inner happiness of every student.

<http://www.cbesa.org/>

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**garg** → Andrew Taynton • 11 days ago

That looks a lot like [Woo](#).

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Andrew Taynton** → garg • 11 days ago

More than 350 peer-reviewed research studies on the TM technique have been published in over 160 scientific journals.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**garg** → Andrew Taynton • 11 days ago

And you couldn't cite one?

I've got two citations for you on TM Woo

<http://skepdic.com/tm.html>

<http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/T...>

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Andrew Taynton** → garg • 11 days ago

Full list of all 350 peer reviewed research studies and the scientific journals they were published in available here:

<http://www.tm.org/research-on-...>

>>

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Johan Kruger** → Andrew Taynton • 11 days ago

Transcendental Meditation is not science.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Andrew Taynton** → Johan Kruger • 11 days ago

Correct. The BENEFITS of Transcendental Meditation ranging from improved intelligence, improved creativity and learning ability, improved academics, improved school behavior, as well as major health benefits have been verified using the scientific method. Full list of all 350 peer reviewed research studies and the scientific journals they were published in available here:

<http://www.tm.org/research-on-...>

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**garg** → Andrew Taynton • 11 days ago

W/O-----

VVUOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Johan Kruger** → garg • 11 days ago

Hooooooooooooooooo! Woo - Transcendental Meditation - hooo!

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**garg** → Johan Kruger • 11 days ago

I see your levitation classes are going well

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Andrew Taynton** → garg • 9 days ago

Transcending HIV / AIDS with meditation

"My CD4 T-helper cells [cells that fight infections] were declining, and they were declining rapidly. I began doing Transcendental Meditation... The effects were amazing—they were profound in a matter of months." So said Michael Rouppet. Watch his interview with other HIV patients, HIV specialist Dr. Kamiar Alaei, and Bob Roth of the David Lynch Foundation. According to a new study, Transcendental Meditation twice-a-day may help people with HIV feel better. The first-of-its-kind randomized controlled study, published in the journal AIDS Care, compared a group of meditating HIV patients with those not practicing meditation. Participants who learnt TM got sick less frequently, were less fatigued and more energized, and had better general health and physical functioning." Watch video:<https://kd961.infusionsoft.com...>

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**garg** → Andrew Taynton • 9 days ago

If I believed in such ignorant crap I would keep it to myself. This just clearly shows how desperately South Africa needs an education revolution.

By the way, this is what peer review has to say about TM:

*We found low evidence of no effect or insufficient evidence of any effect of meditation programs on positive mood, attention, substance use, eating habits, sleep, and weight. We found no evidence that meditation programs were better than any active treatment (ie, drugs, exercise, and other behavioral therapies).*

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pu...>

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Andrew Taynton** → garg • 8 days ago

@Garg. You make the same mistake most skeptics make.

The 'meditation programs' you refer to above are not Transcendental Meditation (TM). There are hundreds if not thousands of different meditation programs available. Transcendental Meditation (TM) is unique.

Scientific research has found TM to be effective in increasing intelligence, creativity and benefiting education, as well as very effective in the field of health care including chronic disease.

Full list of all 350 peer reviewed research studies on Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the scientific journals they were published in available here:

<http://www.tm.org/research-on-...>

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**garg** → Andrew Taynton • 8 days ago

There's no mistake.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Johan Kruger** → garg • 10 days ago

He! Flap! He! Flap! He!

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Ann Knight** • 9 days ago

I couldn't agree with you more. I feel desperately sorry for the children from these disadvantage schools, who have no hope for the future. But never one to sit back and moan. I have started a campaign for our small Sea Vista village at St Francis. I want a CHILDREN'S library that stays open until 18:00 every night except Sundays. I want properly trained librarians. I want a proper building of bricks and mortar that the children can take pride in and use as their own. IT IS NOT A LIBRARY FOR ADULTS. On the 10th February we have a meeting in the township hall because I need buy in from everyone in the township. It will not be about ones political affiliation, but about the children. Then we will have to find trained and retired teachers to help with the maths and science. I am already interacting with various companies to contribute.

As a Rotarian I will also be looking for help once the building is up. We already have a small system going with computers and it is so busy, that we have outgrown it. SO HERES TO THE FUTURE OF LIBRARIES.

Ann Knight

St Francis Bay.

0422940590

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Biloko** → Ann Knight • 9 days ago

Brilliant initiative, Ann Knight. It will surely help the schoolchildren.

↳ Robertshaw

N. KODERISIAW

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Leon Verheem** • 11 days ago

I'm not saying that we don't have massive problems with education in this country but if I see one more article referencing the WEF report on the state of our education I'm just going to stop reading.

The guys at Africacheck have done an excellent job pointing out why it is useless (<http://africacheck.org/reports...> I've read both reports and they both reference the same survey of around 50 members of the Chamber of Commerce giving their opinion. Ask any random sampling of old white men and you'd probably get the same result.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Tony Fisher** → Leon Verheem • 11 days ago

Really, the WEF report is not entirely useless. It is certainly one-sided, and statistically weak, but it points to a valid problem.

Setting up a subjective pecking-list of which is "the worst" is futile at best but there remains at the core a very serious problem which is somewhat exacerbated by the business attitude of demanding a totally job-ready product from education (the "instant coffee" syndrome). Inconvenient as it may be, the traditional on-the-job training mode still has much to recommend it.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Eugen Straeuli** → Leon Verheem • 11 days ago

Other reports indicate similar results. The most recent one that I could find without searching too much is

<http://www.section27.org.za/wp...>

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Leon Verheem** → Eugen Straeuli • 11 days ago

And having read the executive summary of that report, it is orders of magnitude better than the WEF report. It makes use of international measurements and statistics and everything. Not the opinions of 50 guys. Had the author referenced it in his article I would have had no problem.

And based on the information in the Section 27 report you might have arrived at a different plan of action to combat the problems in our education system. Although mentoring and instructing individuals may have a high feel-good factor for the people volunteering, a more effective use of time might be to increase the knowledge and ability of the teachers involved in classes that perform poorly. One of the scariest quotes from that report is this:

"... it is shocking to note that the top 5 percent of Grade Six pupils in South Africa (565 pupils) scored higher marks on the same mathematics test than the bottom 20 per cent of Grade Six mathematics teachers in the sample (80 teachers) ..."

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

[al.viljoen@yahoo.com](#) → Leon Verheem · 11 days ago

So I assume you feel the education our kids are getting is great and doesn't need improving.

When kids matriculate and cant read or understand figure properly we have a major problem.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

[Leon Verheem](#) → [al.viljoen@yahoo.com](#) · 11 days ago

What part of my comment made it sound like I feel our education is great? The very first line of my comment is "I'm not saying that we don't have massive problems with education in this country".

What I am saying is stop referencing useless reports. If we stop referencing them, or at least point out how terrible they are, then hopefully they'll start producing good ones. Those we can then use as a basis to make decisions about improving our education system and best use our limited resources to achieve the maximum improvement.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

[al.viljoen@yahoo.com](#) → Leon Verheem · 11 days ago

It may be "the same old white men" but you seem to dispute the state of our education system being useless. Their opinions are very valid despite your opinion.

The only other reports are done by ANC sycophants and don't feel changes are needed.

Nobody expects the education system to turn out people who can do a job with no further training - what they do is to get people who have sufficient numeracy and literacy they can be trained - to a huge extent this is not being done.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

[Leon Verheem](#) → [al.viljoen@yahoo.com](#) · 11 days ago

"but you seem to dispute the state of our education system being useless"

How much clearer can I make this. We have massive problems in our education system.

"Their opinions are very valid despite your opinion"

They are obviously entitled to whatever opinion they like. An opinion is not the same thing as a measurable statistic and it shouldn't be treated as such.

"The only other reports are done by ANC sycophants and don't feel changes are needed."

No, Eugen Strauli post this link above to an excellent report by Section 27 (<http://www.section27.org.za/wp...>

"Nobody expects the education system to turn out people who can do a job with no further training - what they do is to get people who have sufficient numeracy and literacy they can be trained - to a huge extent this is not being done."

Agreed.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Tony Fisher** → [al.viljoen@yahoo.com](mailto:al.viljoen@yahoo.com) • 11 days ago

Al, we all agree there is a problem. The difficulty is largely to decide which silver bullet solution will fix it.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**al.viljoen@yahoo.com** → Tony Fisher • 11 days ago

There is no silver bullet.

It will need soul searching, admission that things are wrong and an effort made to fix it.

None of these things are going to happen.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Sergei Mamlukoff** → [al.viljoen@yahoo.com](mailto:al.viljoen@yahoo.com) • 10 days ago

There IS a silver bullet, it's called RECOLONIZATION of Africa by Europeans.

"White supremacy, in the sense of a society in which key decisions are made by white Europeans, is one of the better arrangements History has come up with. There have of course been some blots on the record, but I don't see how it can be denied that net-net, white Europeans have made a better job of running fair and stable societies than has any other group."

- John Derbyshire

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Johan Kruger** → Tony Fisher • 11 days ago

No silver bullets. Only lots of common or garden lead ones will do the trick.

1. Teachers to work a full day.
2. Keep their trousers on.
3. Learn to count at least as well as their students.
4. School inspectors to have regular unannounced visits.
5. Basic infrastructure.
6. Etc.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Tony Fisher** → Johan Kruger · 11 days ago

Johan, Thanks. Your "etc" covers a "multitude of sins". To quote Al Viljoen's comment above, none of these things are going to happen...

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Johan Kruger** → Tony Fisher · 11 days ago

I only point out what *should* happen, including some etceteras. I agree they are unlikely to happen.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Eugen Straeuli** → Tony Fisher · 11 days ago

There probably is not just a silver bullet. What I like about the article, is that it encourages each one of us to get their hands dirty. If we simply wait for somebody else to fix it, nothing will happen, as can clearly be seen.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Sergei Mamlukoff** → Eugen Straeuli · 10 days ago

There IS a silver bullet. Read my comment above.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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