

# THE BATTLE FOR THE SOUL OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION

## Naptosa Gauteng Provincial Conference

15-16 September 2017

Good morning President, Executive Director, Chairperson of Gauteng, PCEO, elected office bearers, all officials and delegates

Numbers refer to the powerpoint slides

1.

The title of this short presentation: **The battle for the soul of the teaching profession**” is somewhat dramatic.

2

It contains emotionally loaded words: **battle, soul, teaching, profession**. All four of these words should not be expected to be found in close proximity.

3

Why do I use the word “battle”?

4

I believe our profession is under attack from all around, a 360° attack

- Politicians’ agendas, NDP, NECT
- Out-of-touch, contested ideology-driven DBE officials and their policies and practices
- Check-box ticking officials tasked with implementation
- Over-zealous, point-scoring principals and HODs
- Demanding parents, neglectful parents, no parents
- Unruly learners
- Sadly, disruptive, uncommitted or even incompetent colleagues
- Hostile media

You could add a whole lot more arrows I am sure...

5

What is under attack? Our soul.

How goes it with your soul?

This is a question usually reserved for religious discussion.

What is the soul and what is its relevance in this presentation.

The soul has been variously defined as:

the spiritual part of a human being, one's life force, inner being, animating principle identity, emotional or intellectual energy or intensity, passion, vivacity, essence, epitome, warmth, energy, inspiration, enthusiasm and many more such ideas...

6

So, in relation to your job as a teacher, How is your soul?

7

Is it dancing?

**8**

**How do you feel about your teaching job?** Essentially, how are you?

What does **teaching** mean to you?

As an ideal?

In your present reality?

Are they the same?

9

It implies **teaching for learning**, not for assessing, or ticking boxes, or to pass the time until the bell rings;

Teaching is helping young people grow and develop holistically.

It is not crowd control, babysitting, being a policeman.

10.

It is not being a parrot or the victim of preying vultures

It's not merely a job to put food on the table and pay the bills at the end of the month

What did you teach this week? Did you feel you were developing the whole being, preparing your learners for life, expanding their vision and understanding of the world around them, preparing them for active national and global citizenship? Did you talk about significant events going on in SA and the world around us - hurricane Irma or for older students the Myanmar military attacks on an oppressed group of Muslims who don't have property rights or even the right to education

Teaching is the most wonderful work if we can do it as soul work – inspired, energised, enthusiastically, and passionately.

There is so much more to the word “teaching” than the dictionary ascribes to it.

Are you able to be the teacher you would like to be?

Finally, do you see yourself as a **professional or a technician?**

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I believe the **profession of teaching** is under attack.

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The hallmarks of a profession are that members of it have a highly developed, specialised and theoretical body of knowledge acquired after lengthy study and practicum, embrace the ideal of service rather than economic gain, adhere to an ethical code, intellectual work, autonomy with accountability for professional judgment made within the scope of the autonomy, entry to the profession and conduct of members controlled by the profession.

Do we see these things in evidence in our daily work?

**NO.**

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Our **Naptosa Charter of Professionalism** describe the kind of professional we should be. Yet we are constrained by so many obstacles to being the best professional we can be.

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Our ability to be professionals and to be inspired and energised by our daily work is threatened. The soul of our work is threatened.

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What are these negative forces? Teachers in many countries experience these obstacles as well. The **Global Education Reform Movement (GERM)** is partly responsible with its competition, standardisation, test-based accountability, de-professionalisation, and school choice (more complex in UK and USA than here) and in the opinion of the most respected educationist – the reason why those countries using these techniques are not improving – even worse under Trump.

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This battle makes me think of Hamlet's famous soliloquy "**To be, or not to be**". In which he thinks about what to do about his problems. To suffer the attacks or to fight against them to bring an end to the attack.

*To be, or not to be--that is the question:*

*Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer*

*The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*

*Or to take arms against a sea of troubles*

*And by opposing end them.*



In the ***Good Life of Teaching***, an impossibly difficult book to comprehend, Chris Higgins talks about the profession being so demanding and so lacking in soul, requiring self-sacrifice that teachers burn-out and then if they do not quit the profession, they burn-in and become resentful. Selfless, unfulfilling work is not sustainable.

We cannot have a cohort of resentful people developing the next generation. What kind of world will result? We need people with lively, passionate souls for teaching.

## 18

### What must we do?

I believe we have to **take up arms** and resist all de-professionalising moves. We must oppose them.

This makes me think of the Bible verse:

*Put on the full armour of God that you can stand against the devil's schemes.*

We need to arm ourselves with our professional armour to withstand attacks of deprofessionalising agents in the form of department circulars, principal and HOD unreasonable demands; prescribed use of work books or lesson plans, files to be organised in a particular way. Just as in the Bible understanding the devil is sneaky, wily, crafty in his attack on the soul so are the agents of deprofessionalism also sneaky.

Listen carefully to this:

They offer things that seem helpful and time-saving but they in fact are undermining you, deskilling you, intensifying your work in meaningless ways and destroying the elements of creativity and individual care for learners that give the profession its soul, its heart and meaning. They are making fools out of you.

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We need to BRAVE to BENEFIT, to restore the soul of teaching.

What can we use as armour to deflect the arrows?

We must be **activist professionals**.

I have been speaking about this for years but teachers have been bullied and become more compliant as each year passes. Our provincial policies have taken away so much of the pleasure of our work and added threats for non-adherence that so many have given in, too weary to resist.

It is time to say “Enough is enough”.

Be professional activists. Activists for the profession

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We must believe in our professional worth and adopt an ACTIVIST professional identity. The characteristics of an activist professional are demanding, and include:

- ▣ Autonomy based on knowledge and accountability for actions
- ▣ Commitment to improving achievement for all learners
- ▣ Critical and creative thinking not reproducing the same social curriculum
- ▣ Reflective practice
- ▣ Collegial and collaborative team work
- ▣ Life-long learning
- ▣ Exercising leadership
- ▣ Modelling the right way every day
- ▣ Membership of a professional learning community

Where must we apply our activism?

1. Conceptualising our role as an **empowered professional teacher – an agent and activist for quality education for all** – don't need others to give us things, don't need to be pushed to do things, we do the right things because we use professional judgment and take responsibility for what we do.
2. Raising professional standards
3. Demanding professional relationships with education officials
4. Implementing the curriculum in a more appropriate and relevant manner
5. Understanding the true nature and purpose of assessment
6. Insisting on more time for the important things
7. Resisting attempts to prescribe everything
8. Rejecting repetitive and unnecessary checklist and paperwork accountability measures

AND MUCH MORE

We can learn from the anti-GERM strategies of some improving countries:

Collaboration, creativity, trust-based responsibility, professionalism and equity.

I urge you to take up the struggle. Use all the structures available. Don't continue resentfully working for an employer that diminishes the value of its human resources. Research describes employers/bosses as either diminishers or multipliers. Those that diminish get 50% of the value of their people but multipliers get double the value. No wonder our large education budget is not yielding the returns it should.

We have to use our professional capital which is our intellectual power.

Demand that Naptosa leadership fight against the moves that take away the joy of our work. There comes a time when we cannot be conciliatory and be the nice guys.

We are on the course for education failure if we do not utilise our teachers as professionals but treat them like technicians applying routine solutions to routine situations. Every day and every child in every classroom in SA is different. How can we then apply the same practices in every situation?

Jonathan Jansen tweeted this morning that "The problem in SA education isn't money but turning key resources into results. We put money in the wrong places."

Teachers are the key resources. How much more would teachers want to give and be better at their jobs if they were respected as professionals and supported appropriately?

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Don't allow ourselves to be treated as monkeys fed peanuts for performing the tricks of our masters/bosses.

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GO to school on Monday and arm yourself with **professional armour**, such as moral purpose, knowledge, professional judgment, responsibility for actions, professional conduct. Live up to the expectations of an ideal professional so that teaching can be respected and be given the status we desire. Fight to restore the SOUL of the teaching profession.