

# NAPTOSA NATIONAL CONGRESS

26, 27 OCTOBER 2016

## KOPANONG

Good evening Programme Director, Honourable Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshegka, Key Note Speaker, Bishop Paul Verryn, Leaders of sister unions and other education structures, Life Members of the Union, Special Guests, , Executive Director, Provincial and National Office Bearers and Officials, Congress Delegates.

Our Congress theme: Teach, Lead, Inspire – for social cohesion presents us all with a challenge, not only Model C schools which are closely scrutinised. Indeed, the term Model C which was supposed to have disappeared when we became “public schools”, is in itself an example of social erosion, the opposite of social cohesion. All schools have at the least ethnic, class, religious and gender diversity.

Thank you to our key note speaker for helping us understand this topic .....

I am going to handle our congress theme in the following manner:

Firstly, I am going to define the term for the purposes of this Congress’s reflection on the theme, and I will include reference to some other understandings.

Secondly, I am going to focus on how we as teachers, leaders and policy makers in education have the responsibility of teaching, leading and inspiring towards the goal of greater social cohesion. I will point out where I believe we are not being helped by current and proposed policies and practices being imposed on schools.

Thirdly, and to your great relief, I am sure, not this evening, but tomorrow morning, we shall do some interactive work on what we as teachers in schools must examine in our practices because of the diversity if we wish to contribute to developing social cohesion.

This theme is challenging because obtaining an understanding of social cohesion is difficult in itself, let alone teaching to attain it. Larson, a Danish writer, defines social cohesion as: “the belief held by citizens of a nation state that they share a moral community, which enables them to **trust each other**” (Larson, 2013).

The OECD 2011 study described a cohesive society one that works towards the well-being of all its members,  **fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, and promotes trust** (OECD, 2012).

In 2012 the Department of Arts and Culture stated that “a community or society is cohesive to the extent that the **inequalities, exclusions and disparities based on ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, age, disability or any other distinctions which engender divisions, distrust and conflict are reduced and/or eliminated in a planned and sustained manner**”.

In recent times, social cohesion and nation building have been used as a single concept by the Department of Arts and Culture. Some interpretations of this revised concept have now become nationalistic and even xenophobic. **I will restrict the congress theme to teach, lead, inspire for social cohesion focussing on inclusiveness, reducing the inequality gap, and building trust.**

Firstly, our **TEACHING** must be excellent. If we follow closely the first four bullets in the Naptosa Charter of Professionalism we will, in fact, be teaching for social cohesion. It is well known that South Africa has a Gini coefficient (a measure used internationally to measure inequality) that is very high, if not the worst in the world. It is also well known that **one of the ways to reduce this inequality is better education and higher skills levels**. We as teachers can therefore play our part in ensuring that every learner in our classrooms receives the best possible education.

We must obviously take note of the diversity in our classroom and ensure inclusiveness and equal opportunity for each learner whether the child of the powerful elite or the most disempowered, whether academically gifted or learning challenged. We must improve our level of accountability for the work we do.

When we teach we must teach for **LEARNING** not for ticking off the pacesetter or work schedule. We are responsible for ensuring learning and must thus equip ourselves with the content and pedagogical skills necessary for enabling high achievement, inclusiveness, closing the inequality gap, and in the process develop social cohesion.

We must fight deprofessionalising moves: prescribed universal workbooks, scripted lesson plans which by their centralised nature are unable to cater for the particular diversity in individual classrooms. We must be free to use the latest researched effective teaching strategies for our learners and not be imprisoned by subject advisors' obsessions with work plans.

We must take note of gender discrimination in teaching. I have made a study of the inequalities girls face whatever the type of school, which is worse in schools where patriarchy is strongly entrenched and practised. I admit that when I was a teacher in a co-educational school my teaching focused on boys' needs to ensure their engagement and I relied on the girls' natural compliance. Teachers prefer to hear boys' answers because they are shorter whereas girls' answers are more nuanced and take longer to express.

At all times we must, as our Naptosa Charter states, remember that we do not teach lesson plans but human beings. **We need time in our classes for critical thinking, the development of values, the examination of stereotypes, and exploration of factors that undermine trust.** If we stick only to the curriculum we will miss the **social and emotional learning which is equally important for success in adult life.** If we are textbook bound and disengage our brains it results in, for example, Grade 10 Life Orientation teachers using a text book which includes a highly discriminatory belief that females are responsible if they are victims of rape. The book has been in use for a number of year before this was noticed. Such a thing happens when teachers see themselves as classroom technicians or implementing clerks rather than **qualified educational professionals who must exercise professional judgment.**

**Some policies of the DBE and deaf or disinterested ears of officials who could and should assist teachers prevent teaching for social cohesion:** a curriculum that contains too many concepts, an assessment policy that in some phases is outrageous in the demands it makes of children, teachers and parents. A school sent home a letter to parents saying they would have to assist with their children's learning as 60% of it had to be done out of school time. If this is necessary the inequality gaps widens – the teacher parent can help but the uneducated parent cannot do it equally. How do we develop trust in one another or ensure equal access to education opportunities in these circumstances? Where is the space for **social and emotional** learning that will contribute to social cohesion?

**The tail of assessment is wagging the dog. Curriculum should drive assessment not the other way round.** Contrary to an agreement that unions would be invited to provide input on the assessment challenges, the reluctantly accepted Naptosa representative at the recent Assessment Workshop felt totally disrespected as department officials treated her with the distaste some people bestow on smelly cheese (her words). How does that build trust? There was visible discrimination, an attempt to exclude if not the physical body of the representative but certainly her ideas, and possibly racial and gender bias all rolled into one experience which destroyed trust and contributed to social erosion. The attitude of officials went something like: **WHAT DO TEACHERS KNOW? How clever we all-knowing officials are. We have not taught the new curriculum and most of us haven't been a classroom teacher for years, if ever, but we know better than stupid you from the union.** Clever, favoured scientists in the academic ivory towers of universities, divorced from the reality of hungry, tired, emotionally needy children, are believed rather than a teacher in the under-resourced and overcrowded rural or township school. How does this contribute to social cohesion?

Teachers with expertise, who are close to learners and understand the factors that build social cohesion, need to be heard on committees such as the subject committees. This is not happening.

Trust is reducing like water in a leaking dam. We are close to running out of trust. **The dam is almost dry and it is not the teachers' fault.** I will not refer to the ANA Task Team matters here.

The **post provisioning regime** that does not weight learners with special needs in an ordinary school and the erratic attempts to develop acceptable policy backed with appropriate financing for LSEN schools is detrimental to building social cohesion, as is the absence of sufficient learning opportunities for the severely disabled.

Our second obligation proposed in our congress theme is that we must **LEAD** for social cohesion. **Leadership must always be driven by moral purpose, and social cohesion is indeed a worthy moral purpose.** We need a definition of leadership that embraces imagination, creativity, innovation and partnership or collaboration. The lone ranger, autocratic leader has no place. We need **servant leadership in schools and in the whole system.** Every teacher is a leader and must not feel reduced to a manager or clerk implementing policy.

We all have some of idea of what we mean by the word “lead”. Implicit in the word is that one must move from one point to another **but the new point must be better than the present.**

Why is it important to lead? It is through our words and actions that we show the way; we model and our learners follow. **If we do not provide the model to follow, our learners follow other role models whose may not take them to a better place.**

We must therefore **LEAD** well. Our learners will enter the future, the adult world, with what they learned in the school system. We have to lead and model conduct and policy that build social cohesion. What an awesome responsibility we have.

In our endeavours as teachers we need the **support of DBE, PEDs and all officials.** We need to be leading in the same direction. Teachers need the support **of genuine morally driven** district and provincial leaders who do not disparage a whole sector of teachers by saying there are too many white teachers in Model C schools (true as that may be but have the reasons been properly explored or has the mistrust evident because of our low levels of trust and stereotypical thinking overruled rational thought?). This sort of statement demonstrates social erosion and is a statement that undermines attempts to develop cohesion. It sends committed teachers, especially the best of them, into the independent sector. A public good is lost to the private sector. Responding with the media in tow to a student protest and not responding to a lack of water and its ramifications for schools in Hammanskraal erodes social cohesion, destroys trust, shows disregard for learners who are already struggling with many discriminatory and unequal conditions – far more in fact than the “Model C” protesters. Equal attention needs to be given to all problems and with the same urgency.

Dodgy, so-called, leadership appointments need to be stopped. How can trust be developed when teachers know that appointments are based on patronage, or union connection rather than merit? Officials who have the responsibility for supporting schools need to have the capacity to do so and, just as teachers, must, recognise diverse identity and needs, and lead their schools in appropriately diverse ways rather than via a single checklist applied to all schools.

Lastly teachers have the responsibility to **INSPIRE** their learners and colleagues whoever they are. We have to be the eternal cheerleaders who present **HOPE** and motivate learners, despite the unequal conditions and opportunities.

We, the teachers, must show **FAITH/ BELIEF** in every learner. We do not have the right to limit people's aspirations. We must tell stories that demonstrate **POSSIBILITIES**. Being able to inspire depends on having a trusting relationship with the learners. They need to sense we care for them and that we come to work daily for them and not just for the salary. We have to role model being the best teacher/human being we can be if we want to inspire our learners to be the best they can be.

In order to help teachers inspire for social cohesion we need evidence of closing the **inequality gap in school resources**, challenging as that may be. We need to be able to present **education alternatives for academic strugglers**. For social cohesion we have to include all learners in the possibility of entering adulthood with some prospect of success. A matric certificate with the minimum pass marks is not as useful as an appropriate alternative which leaves a learner with enhanced self-esteem and the prospect of being an independent self-sufficient adult because he/she has a vocational or technical skill

The current college offerings do not meet the needs of let us say a 13/14 year old grade 8 learner who cannot achieve the pass or even progression requirements and is very unlikely ever to do so. Such a learner would be much more motivated to study something that is less abstract and more practically relevant, however not in an environment with 20 year old students. **We need vocational schools for the 13-18 year olds staffed by teachers who understand adolescents and do not expect the fifteen year old to be like the 20 year old.** The curriculum and qualification need to be appropriate. Such possibilities will inspire these learners. Rather than coming last in class, continuously receiving failing assessment results and gradually whittling away any self-esteem the child may have had. The technical schools are not suitable for most of these learners. The curriculum is not appropriate. Girls have also consistently not been taken into account. They do have different inclinations from boys which may fit stereotypes of girls' careers such as child care, catering, hairdressing and beauty therapy rather than mining, welding and technicians.

**Unless policies and practices provide for and model social cohesion we are being dishonest and hypocritical.**

Social cohesion is the glue that sticks us together. In broader society I think we are on a losing wicket. Research on this topic indicates that state and civil servants have to serve as the role models, and that there need to be economic equality and inclusive economic growth for social cohesion. In countries where there is a high degree of social cohesion (the Nordic countries) the citizens answer the World Value Survey question “Can you trust most people or do you need to be careful?” with a **YES we can trust most people**. We are a long way off at present as a broader South African society.

However, more encouragingly we can work towards inclusiveness, equality of opportunity, and trust in our sphere of control – our classroom, and our sphere of influence – our school.

We will, in an interactive way, tomorrow morning, consider the how teachers can **TEACH, LEAD and INSPIRE – FOR SOCIAL COHESION**. I look forward for some challenging thinking and transformative ideas tomorrow.