



Picture by Mark Wessels

## **Our Children**

Daily we are confronted with the parents who are experiencing problems with the education of their children. These have not improved since the demise of Bantu Education and others from May 1994.

Teachers and governing bodies who are closely aligned to the education of our children are not only responsible for the state of affairs. It is a national problem.

On the following pages are some thoughts about some of these problems:

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## SCHOOL PREGNANCIES



GIRLS OF 12 AND 13 AT SAME SCHOOL PREGNANT

# RANDY TEACHERS ON THE LOOSE

78 fired for impregnating pupils or having sexual relations with them

PAGE 2

BAFANA COACH HOPING FOR IMPROVEMENT BACK PAGE



1.

## Teenage Pregnancy

by Logesh Subramoney (frustrated teacher)

The matriculation class of 2008 is totally silent, pens are furiously scribbling, heads are bent and eyes are focused on their answer books. I walk through their aisles as unobtrusively as possible. A three hour invigilation session stretches in front of me – enough time to inspect the young adults all around me and contemplate what their future holds for them the minute they step out of the examination room for the last time. I would have to be blind not to notice that about 15 girls have bulging stomachs – 10 of them came from the 12A class.

They will be mothers soon – some of them even before their results are published. I cringe inside. What is their future? More important what is the future of those unborn children? They travel from the township to this previously “Indian” school in the hope of securing what they deem to be a better education and now in their final year on the eve of the next phase of their lives – they throw it all away.

These are not girls who have never been exposed to sex – education or are unaware of the perils of unprotected sex. Beside the media – the school has ensured that there is enough information cascaded to them. Earlier in the year medical students did workshops on how to use condoms, STD’s and other related issues. So when we unpack this “phenomenon” or should I say “epidemic” let us be clear that the teenagers I talk about are not sheltered girls, who have no idea of what the consequences of their actions would be. No, these are bright girls, stylish and vibrant ladies who have chances in lives that their mothers never had.

And that is what frustrates me! Through the 5 years of teaching them English I have not been able to empower them as women yet! I have not been able through literature to break the shackles of their patriarchal backgrounds. I have not been able to make them see themselves the way I see them: - as powerful individuals with a destiny to forge on their own. As girls who are the architects of their own future and that now more than any time in the history of South Africa they have a chance to realise their dreams.

I am the mother of 2 teenage daughters myself so I have no illusion about “raging hormones” and “mistakes” that can occur – but when they have a certain pride in their conditions and when friends start falling pregnant one after the other, almost as if it is a competition – it is then that my spirit drops.

I think of the “gogo’s” who will have to fork out from their old age pensions to look after great-grand children and shake my head. The government grant of R240 will barely cover the cost of milk! I wonder what happens next. So who is to blame? You would have noticed that I have not even touched on the teenage fathers yet (presuming the fathers are that young). When I ponder this question I look beyond culture and race and socio-economic factors. I want to look at the individual – the individual who has the right to decide what to do with his/her life.

So who is to blame? Myself maybe – for not showing these girls clearly enough that they can be complete within themselves without a boyfriend or a husband to define them. That there is a time for babies later on – when they have a job, are earning their own money and are independent, That this will ensure that they will be equal partners in any relationship and not subservient to anyone. I want them to see the beauty that is them and more than anything I want them to see their potential and power. I want...I want...– How can I get THEM TO WANT???

“5 minutes more”, the second invigilator called out. But for 15 girls and their unborn babies – I hope it’s not too late!

- Logesh Subramoney

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**Today, (5/11/2009) The Echo attached to The Witness on Teenage Pregnancy has this to say:**

## **“Your rights while you are pregnant**

### **Going to school**

“In the old days pregnant learners were sent away from school. Now the law says that everybody has a right to basic education, and this includes pregnant girls. Pregnant girls are allowed to be at school until close to the birth date, and they are allowed to write exams.

“In the last few weeks before the birth it is safest for the girl to stay at home and rest. If a school tries to exclude a girl because she is pregnant, she can complain to the Provincial Department of Education.”

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## 2. Homework? What homework? by Jackie (Ujala) Sewpersad

To most learners and I’m beginning to think to a lot of parents too, ‘homework’ together with ‘projects, assignments’ and other related terms is a four letter word. In the government school that I taught in, in Phoenix a township that reminds me of the Chinese curse, “May you live in interesting times” I estimate that only about 20% of learners did their homework. The others either copied from these diligent few or didn’t bother to do it at all. While only 20% doing their homework may seem shockingly low, from talking to educators in other government schools, this is good compared to some schools where about 5% do homework.

The reasons for this phenomenon as far as I can tell are varied. Some learners are bone lazy and won’t do any work even if you sit with them and force them to do it. A few will tell you that it’s a waste of time as they are going to be drug dealers or taxi bosses and are going to be richer than you. Others have legitimate reasons for not doing homework – their home environment is not conducive to doing school work – there is no space, no resource material and no support.

Some children are heads of their households and have to take care of younger siblings while others are parents themselves and have to take care of their own children.

Coupled with not doing homework the other major problem is dead lines. Almost 95% of learners do not keep to dead-lines. As an educator you can remind the class everyday for a week and on the due day you will get almost no work handed in. Learners never seem to understand the importance of things that we think is critical for the working world: punctuality and dead lines.

## *Footprints*

In the subject that I taught, Computer Studies (old syllabus), the matriculants had to do a project that made up 20% of their final mark. It was vital that they did well in this project in order to pass.

However, for as long as I can remember teaching the subject, a substantial number will not hand in the project for assessment. I, as the educator cannot give a learner zero, as the moderator will want to know from me what I as the educator was doing for the whole year that I couldn't get any work from the learner. So every year I would be driving around to learners' houses to pick up their work or to find them as some don't come to school when work is due. This is after having the computer room open from 07:00 to 19:00, including weekends so that those learners who don't have computers at home can use the school ones.

Even when you get the project, you sometimes know immediately that this was not the learners work but that they got it from somebody in the previous year. When you push the issue of dishonesty, the learner will bring a parent or guardian who will swear that the work is the learners own. What kind of example are we setting for our children? We let them get away with lying and then complain about crime and corruption?

Thankfully, outright dishonest parents are a small number. Some parents are bullied into lying for their children, one mother showed me bruises and bite marks on her arms inflicted by her son. Others do the homework and projects for their children because they want their children to get high marks and be high achievers. They don't see that they are setting their children up for failure and defeating the purpose of the task, which is to teach independence, research skills, creativity etc.

At parent meetings, most of the few that attend have a common complaint, "I do everything for my child, all he/she has to do is school work but he/she refuses to study. I don't know what to do." My friend Prema who is an educator as well as a parent of three girls, says that parents need to create a culture of learning and doing homework as soon as the child starts school so that by the time the child reaches high school he/she doesn't have to be supervised. She also thinks that it's important to teach children about delayed gratification for long term goals – give up pleasures for a while and reap the benefits of a good matric pass.

If parents have not inculcated these values they have to resort to doing homework and projects for their children or lying about their children copying or even to buying projects which some enterprising individuals are selling.

As an educator the buck stops with you. Committed educators, especially those teaching matrics, get burnt out. You have no April, July or September holidays, all your time is spent in getting your learners to pass. After 19 years, 15 years of which I taught matrics, I resigned from teaching. I couldn't cope with the work load and the responsibility of being educator, parent, councilor, police woman and entertainer.

**To my fellow educators on the front lines of the chalk wars aluta continua!**

- Jackie

3.

## Matriculation Dance: 'Passage into Adulthood'?

by Sandhia Panchoo

The matriculation dance is mostly a much anticipated event in a student's life. Elaborate preparations are put into motion months before the actual event. Choosing fabric, seeing the designer, choosing shoes and accessories, generally takes precedence over everything else. There are other rituals too – such as booking a hair stylist, facial and manicure and of course there is the flurry of excitement and racing pulse when choosing the partner.

To most - this is an exciting time – yet to others (perhaps the shy, retiring ones) this is an ordeal.

Exactly how important is this event?

In a modern world that possesses few meaningful ceremonies that formally mark a teenagers passage from teenage-hood to young adulthood, the Matriculation Dance can be seen as a rite of passage.

## *Footprints*

On this day, the teenager gets to taste centre stage and bask in the spotlight. There is the magic of walking the red carpet as one's name is called – and in that moment, the teenager is the star in his/her own movie and is provided with an image of self as a 'successful' person.

It is however not the best model of an authentic rite of passage. The materialistic nature of the event precludes this. This is not a situation that fosters team spirit or co-operation, or discovery of one's inner resources of strength and resolve – rather it allows for subtle competition to simmer. Parents go to great lengths to ensure that their child has the best outfit.

I even know of a parent that flew over to Dubai to buy her daughter's dress. Those in this so called "big-league" have been known to throw elaborate "Before Parties". For the uninitiated – this is a soiree where a photo-shoot is done. Of course only the affluent can afford the services of a professional photographer – leaving the "commoners" feeling inadequate.

For some, the Matriculation Dance itself is the highlight of their school career – a really treasured moment, respected and anticipated. Others just go with the flow and invest more energy in making plans to exit the function as quickly as possible in order to hightail it to the "After Party". Unfortunately, some of these after parties have been notorious for booze and bad behaviour. As this can be done at anytime, the Matriculation Party is debased.

The student with limited financial resources sometimes puts great pressure on the parents – who would indeed not want their child to feel left out. Others are happy to do odd jobs to earn money for this special occasion. Some have a more practical approach – preferring to go simple and be given the money to do something they really want to do. Shy guys suffer agonies – tongue-tied as they do not know who to or how to ask out as a partner. Hopefully there will always be some compassionate friend or adult who will facilitate a match. Those unaffected by such an affliction spend many happy moments with their chosen partners, co-ordinating their outfits and indeed they do look smashing together on the great day.

Unfortunately, in the less advantaged schools, the Matriculation Dance is used as a foil for fund- raising for the school. Called a "Debutantes' Ball" it is a good opportunity to raise funds for their not - so – fortunate



## *Footprints*

schools. Sadly, this becomes an open function as tickets are sold to the public in an endeavour to raise as much money as possible for the school. Thus outsiders infiltrate – many of them wait for such opportunities as it brings them into contact with easy targets – schoolgirls. Still, it is a day much looked forward to by the debutantes and each debutante vies to be the Queen – by trying to raise the most money.

I personally do not believe that a fund-raising dance should be confused with a Matriculation Farewell Dance. It is important to give that student a glittering farewell.

The extra touch of excitement and experience that comes with the students pooling together to hire a limo or an ice-cream truck or a horse and cart to make their dramatic appearance to the ball, brings a special warmth and smile and smile I do however I draw the line at the fond mother who paid a whopping R15 000 to hire a helicopter so that her son could make his dramatic appearance at his ball. All this – so that it could compensate for his “suffering” due to his fathers’ early death – she was quoted in the article that was published in the Sunday Times.

- Sandhia Panchoo.

## **Are we in “Alice in Wonderland” ?**

Phyllis Naidoo  
5/11/2009  
Durban