

Jovial Rantao's incisive article "Money won't solve problems in (mass) education - parents must be active" (The Star 27th Feb) is very correct - factually and politically. After all, it is very safe pointing fingers at parents. And very necessary. But rather futile. Because fingers have been pointing for a long time, without effect.

It poses the question: Why are so many education officials, parents, learners and teachers unmotivated? And is there anything that can be done with a realistic hope of success?

The 'Why?' is not so difficult to answer.

The affected public officials see seemingly insurmountable problems in the absence of any believable strategy and end up concentrating on the national pastime of devising imaginative ways of spending funds.

Parents are usually too busy with their own issues to devote much energy on offspring all emancipated and immersed in peer groups, who in addition question, with some justification, the authority of their elders to give guidance.

Learners continually get told that we are busy destroying the planet, that unemployment, especially of the young, is rising worldwide, but particularly in South Africa, and that making money is not about what you know, but about who you know. And that actually being good at your job and working many hours will probably prevent you earning the real money.

Lastly, teachers are underpaid (for the reason check my comment about public officials), as a consequence often of unsuitable caliber, hamstrung by officious regulations and faced with ill-disciplined learners in what has become one of the most unpleasant occupations.

The common thread is attitude. A hopeless attitude.

A widespread attitude change must start at the top. Yes, with our state president. Somebody who clearly stands against corruption and for work ethic, and gets respect. Somebody like the ex-president of Brazil, Lula da Silva.

Such a president, supported by his like-minded kingmakers in the ruling party, can stop ruinous imports in competition with local business, stop the entry of WallMart, ensure that the proceeds of South African work stay in the country and do not disappear into foreign bank accounts, and can also ensure that the country truly reaps the benefits of having the cheapest thermal coal in the world, and with that the cheapest electrical energy.

If that sounds like counter-globalization, correct. Because globalization is a phenomenon designed to benefit the countries without sufficient mineral and energy resources - while a country like ours is taken to the cleaners, with the inequality gap widening daily.

In a climate of 'Proudly South African', officials will start spending funds unimaginatively, parents may think they are not wasting their time, learners look forward to a job based on work performance, and highly paid teachers enjoy their work.

Of course that is all highly unlikely to happen as long as the decision makers revel in their fringe benefits and have as their only worry concerns about reelection by a more equal, more informed electorate.

That is why we need an opposition party strong enough to really challenge at the polls. Only then may we win the benefits of a democratic dispensation and again experience that heady feeling of our Soccer World Cup days, 'Proudly South African'.

Letter in The Star, 1st March 2012