

# Early Years

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**W**ith World Book Day having been celebrated this week, it got me thinking about one of my pet dislikes – the pretentious use of language to impress.

This has bothered me for a long time – the misuse of language and words. What is particularly irksome is the way that individuals use long and complicated words and fads to impress others. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the academic world where it appears that academics strive to “outsize”, or is it “supersize”, colleagues with longer and more complicated words, as if this enhances one’s argument. This reminds me of the Archbishop Desmond Tutu comment that shouting does not make an argument any stronger.

So what are these words? Below follows a list. The bulk of the list is from an unknown source that was tweeted to me recently. I have added some of my own.

**binary - space - self-actualise - get your ducks in a row - reaching out - thought leadership - helicopter view - feed it back - low-hanging fruit - blue-sky thinking - flipped learning - on my radar - unyielding integrity - going forward - idea sherpa - negative territory - the human aspect - game-changer - incentivising - touch base offline - strategic staircase - look under the bonnet - lean ninjas - deep dive - friends in the tent - thought shower - imagineering - the aha effect - agency**

An interesting game to play is to listen to a formal presentation, lecture or speech either from an academic, from a politician or business person, and to identify how many of these words are used.

I have also noticed that when political parties (for example, the majority party in the Western Cape) wish to introduce a new programme it is never just a “new programme” but rather it is a “gamechanger”. Some donors have now followed suit. Also “disruptive” is regularly used. It appears now that everyone must be a “disruptor”. If this is so, then my question is: Who is doing the work?

So let us get “back to basics” (this phrase was inserted intentionally) and use simple language which expresses an idea and which is understood. Long words and jargon do not impress.

Enjoy reading this edition of EARLY YEARS.

ERIC ATMORE  
Director

# LETTER: BABY ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

~ Paul Hoffman

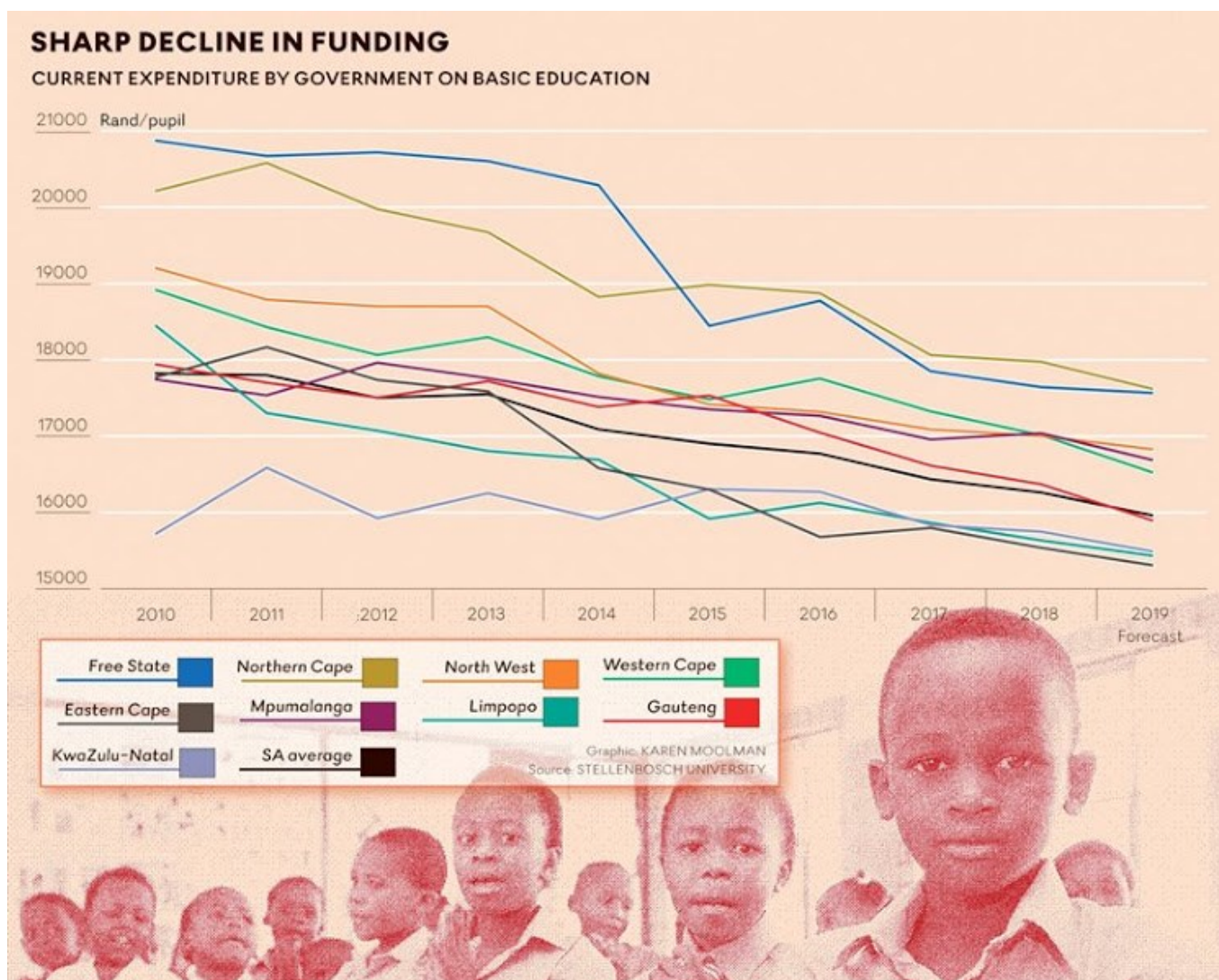
Nic Spaull's alarming analysis (Basic education thrown under the bus, April 17) of the drop in per pupil expenditure in the South African education system since 2010 will have many of your readers reaching for their favourite pain-relief tippie, but he does not cover the baby elephant in the room, namely the neglect of early childhood development by the state.

The graph used to illustrate Spaull's piece (*below*) reveals that government expenditure on basic education ranges from the best-performing province finding nearly R21,000 per pupil per year in 2010 to the worst performer in 2019 having budgeted to spend just over R15,000 per pupil. This is hardly what one expects from a country in which the Bill of Rights guarantees access to basic education to all — without the "progressive realisation" and "available resources" limitations that apply to other socioeconomic rights, including the right to higher education.

The fact that a further R57bn will go to higher education over the next three years to meet the demands of the #FeesMustFall lobby is not going to make matters easier for the provision of basic education. The unpalatable but unavoidable truth is that those receiving higher education have the vote, and most in the basic education system do not. A general election is due by mid-2019.

The provision of early childhood development still languishes in the "care" of the dysfunctional Department of Social Development, which cannot get its act together to pay welfare grants, let alone educate pre-primary school children. Too many children of the poor are not exposed to early childhood development, and the quality of much of that on offer in SA leaves much to be desired, despite being the area of education in which the best return on investment is possible. Indeed, literacy levels generally, and pass rates in the first year of higher education, would be obvious beneficiaries of quality early childhood development for all.

The National Development Plan (NDP) recognises these facts, but the political will to act on its proposal to move responsibility for the provision of early childhood development to the Department of Basic Education was not forthcoming in the



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Zuma years. Instead, early childhood development continues to languish in the neglectful custodianship of a department not designed, equipped, skilled, properly staffed and funded to provide any education effectively and efficiently.

Perhaps the "new dawn" will attend to the NDP proposal that: "There should be a policy and programme shift to ensure that the Department of Basic Education takes the core responsibility for the provision and monitoring of early childhood development." In the meantime, ventilation of similar research to that revealed in Spaull's gloom-inducing but eye-opening opinion piece is required in respect of early childhood development.

*Article available at*

<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/letters/2018-04-20-letter-baby-elephant-in-the-room/>

## GOVERNMENT INACTION ON EDUCATION IS A DISGRACE

*~ Luke Folb*

Cape Town - Professor Jonathan Jansen is not as concerned about the decolonisation of education as he is about how the government has failed schools.

Speaking at a "Decolonising Education" seminar organised by the Robben Island Museum, Jansen, who is Distinguished Professor in the Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University, slammed what was happening in schools as a "disgrace".



"I come to this project of decolonisation with a lot of scepticism. Not because I don't believe we were colonised, of course we were.

"The effects of colonial rule are still with us. But in the way that

we politicise this (decolonisation) we take away from the strategic things that we can do to change the status quo."

He said for change to occur, greater action was needed from the government to solve the problems in education.

"We just discovered that almost eight out of 10 children cannot read in Grade 4 - for understanding. They see words but they don't know what it means and we can have a long debate about who caused this - maybe it was the colonial rulers - but it's been 20-odd years into our democracy and we still have this problem.

"In my part of the world, a kid just drowned in a hole in the ground and suffocated in human faeces. I don't want to blame colonial rule for that; I want to know what my government did." Jansen believes decolonisation in education needs to begin from the ground up, rather than at university level.

"In every province you can drive and within 30 minutes you can go from a school like Michaelhouse or Bishops to a school in a shack. No amount of analysis is going to change that, except for the action of people, and that action can't just be at universities."

"If you want to change the education system in a country you don't go to universities - less than 20% of our young people go to universities - you start with the preschools.

"There's one debate that no education expert in the world has and that is that if a child goes to a poor-quality school and another a high-quality - you already start at a disadvantage," Jansen said..

*Article available at*

<https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/government-inaction-on-education-is-a-disgrace-14183989>

## WHY MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION IS THE BEST

*~ Somikazi Deyi*

For many decades Africa has been the only place in the world where most children are taught in a language that is not their own. This places African languages at the centre of the discussion as far as education is concerned.

The discourse starts from – whether they have enough terminology and vocabulary to be languages of teaching and learning; the economy and wealth; law; and health – and leads back to whether they can make enough academic sense for intellectualisation.



Research shows that these languages are frequently used by teachers to interpret knowledge from an English curriculum to African-language pupils.

Sadly, this practice is likely to grow the language barrier between these pupils' material printed in English, such as textbooks, assessment questions and briefs.

### The importance of African languages

Languages form a pivotal role in our lives as they are inclusive of our different cultures and identities. An African language is not just a series of words but includes certain African nuances that emerge in the form of idioms, metaphors and euphemisms, as well as praises. Language is therefore tied intrinsically to a sense of belonging, which is in turn linked to society and its values.



Teaching in African languages is critical as it can help pupils grasp concepts more easily, pass well and support their success later in life. This is a great advantage.

But resources are a concern.

Improving the existing materials usually means translating from English to an African language, not necessarily developing original African language materials.

Direct translation opens itself up to much criticism, potential for error and dysfunctionality in the process.

### African languages and identity

All humans define themselves by the language they speak and the people that use the same language. Their values, ways of socialisation and dignity are exhibited in that language. The heritage of the group of people is also displayed through a language.

### What does this mean for African languages?

I believe African languages embody within them a wealth of knowledge that is not articulated well by African-language users and sometimes suffer mis-appropriation and representation by

those foreign to them. This suggests that if we are committed to decolonising our education system, African-language users need to play a leading role in designing a curriculum that is inclusive of their languages and that this becomes something more than just a promising ideology.

### Do African languages have enough terminology to occupy the academic space?

This debate has been characterised by two views. The first endorses African languages as languages of teaching and learning because they have enough vocabulary and terminology. The second maintains African languages do not have the capacity to be used as languages of teaching and learning. This view has been backed up by sentiments claiming that intellectualisation of African languages will be expensive and/or a waste of time for African-language speakers themselves, who appear less keen to use the languages because of a lack of economic value.

I believe African languages embody within them a wealth of knowledge that is not articulated well by African-language users and sometimes suffer misappropriation from conclusion deduced by those foreign to the languages and their (African languages') representation. This suggests if we are committed to decolonising our education system, African-language users need to play a leading role in education design that is inclusive languages that would have an insightful perspective which is more than a promising "ideology".

Access to print material in African languages is equally important in preserving and promoting mother languages. One of the literacy organisations in South Africa that is promoting the importance of mother language is Nal'ibali – this national reading-for-enjoyment campaign advocates reading and hearing stories in the language we speak and understand. Nal'ibali prides itself in contributing towards promoting multilingualism in South Africa – each week 53 000 literacy supplements are distributed free of charge directly to reading clubs, community organisations, libraries, schools and other partners in the Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Gauteng, Free State, Limpopo, North West and KwaZulu-Natal.

A limited number of free supplements will be available at select post offices in Limpopo and North West. Visit [www.nalibali.org](http://www.nalibali.org) to see a list of these post offices.

Deyi is a lecturer at the University of Cape Town school of languages and literatures: department of African languages. Each week Nal'ibali bilingual literacy supplements are distributed to reading clubs, community organisations, libraries, schools in Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Gauteng, Free State, Limpopo, North West and KwaZulu-Natal. To download digital copies of the supplements and more information about the Nal'ibali reading-for-enjoyment campaign, visit [nalibali.org](http://nalibali.org), [nalibali.mobi](http://nalibali.mobi), or find it on Facebook and Twitter: [nalibaliSA](https://www.facebook.com/nalibaliSA)

*Article available at*

<https://www.news24.com/Columnists/GuestColumn/why-mother-tongue-education-is-the-best-20180420>