

# Key takeouts from Global Education Skills Forum (GESF) 2019

 By Dorcas Dube

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I had the privilege to attend the Global Education Skills Forum in Dubai, which took place from the 22nd to the 24th of March 2019. Organised by the Varkey Foundation, GESF is attended by more than 2,000 delegates from across the world who are eager to share, debate and shape new ways for education to transform our world.



GESF 2019 brought together leaders from the public, private and social sectors including 1 head of government, 7 former heads of government, 40 ministers of education, 297 speakers, 124 public sessions, 200+ media, 144 countries, 2000+ delegates, 100+ teachers and 64 grant-making organisations. Amongst the attendees was Dubai crown prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mahmmmed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, former UK prime minister Tony Blair, vice chancellor of the University of Cape Town, Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng, former minister of education in Zimbabwe, David Coltart, Juan Manuel Santos, former president of Colombia and Sizwe Nxasana, founder and CEO of Future Nation Schools South Africa amongst others.

Being amongst people who are dedicated to shape new ways of education and to transform the world I was reminded of my quest towards contributing to improving the education system in South Africa and Africa at large and provision of quality education for all children. Undoubtedly, education is the key to solving global issues!



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Below are my 4 key-takeouts from the GESF conference:

## 1. Leadership: The biggest component missing in education?

In South Africa, we have 20 000 schools and school principals thereof who have been teachers and have been promoted to be the school principal without any knowledge, skills or training to lead one of the complex organisations, a school. School

leadership remains a concern that has affected the entire schooling system. The country's education system is characterised by severe underperformance and is failing the majority of young people in South Africa.

- Approximately 75-80% of students are attending largely dysfunctional schools
- 66% of Grade 9 students cannot do basic maths
- After a full 4 years of education, 78% of SA children cannot read with comprehension

There is increasing recognition that the role of school principals is not only critical but highly specialised and that school leadership is the critical factor in turning around an education system in crisis. What if every principle of a school had a strong team of supporters?

## **2. What makes a 21st-century education?**

The world is changing faster than ever before, and there are huge global challenges that need to be overcome. The volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world requires learners to be able to continually adapt to it, and they need to learn the skills necessary to change the world for the better.

Adaptive teaching is one of the components that make 21st-century education. It is an approach that requires teachers to “micro-adapt” their instruction on a continuous basis. Teachers perform a continuous and often informal assessment of their students' strengths and weaknesses and modify their teaching accordingly. The key aspect of this approach is that it makes children become responsible for and drive their own learning.

Adaptive learning is a concept which I believe has the potential to assist society on how to rethink on how schools are organised and to equip everyone with competencies to reach their full potential.

We don't know what the future will look like, we can certainly be sure that it will change again and we will have to re-adapt!

## **3. Who can be a change maker?**

The world is enjoying unprecedented social, economic and technological progress, which is transforming how we interact on a global scale. Regardless of the obvious leaps which we have made in recent years, challenges remain, with millions of people still being failed by the systems supposed to serve them.

It is evident that the solutions to these challenges won't be found merely by looking to the traditional models of global policymaking, business and philanthropy. Instead, a new generation of ordinary people is taking some of the world's biggest issues head-on – and finding innovative solutions. They are the change makers! Everyone has the potential to be a change maker.

Changemakers are philanthropists and innovators who focus on transforming the world around them into a better place for all. They are those who grasp opportunities, come from any walk of life and from anywhere on the planet. Everyone has the

potential to be a change maker. What if we are the leaders we have been waiting for?

## 4. Teaching the world how to be 'one human family'

Education is a vital tool in helping us reach the goal of one human family through providing access to success and progress in building bridges between human society and breaking down barriers as well building mutual trust and cooperation which are all basic requirements for global progress and world peace.

The big question remains: how do teachers teach tolerance and equip their students to be accepting of differences between ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds?

The 2018 Global Teacher Prize winner, Marjorie Brown from South Africa encourages listening and empathy among her students and this has been influential in transforming the country's history syllabus. She mentions that everyone has to understand themselves and be prepared to grow. In order for diversity to prevail, we have to have a growth mindset.

Social justice and the need for dialogue are embedded in South Africa's new constitution, but Brown says the world has to ensure that dialogue and freedom of speech don't lead to more segregation and more hate.

What is your contribution towards teaching the world to be one human family?

## ABOUT DORCAS DUBE

Dorcas is the National Marketing and Communications Manager for Citizen Leader Lab. She holds a Masters in Strategic Communication, Honours in Strategic Communication and a BA Corporate Communication all obtained from the University of Johannesburg. She is passionate about Social Justice, Education, Leadership and Humanitarian Work amongst others.  
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