What is the Future Without Education

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Every child needs to go to school because it is a basic right, but for some children, their parents close the door on this chance. While other children carry their school bags in the morning, these children carry responsibilities. This is the reality for some children in Swaneville, Kagiso, west of Johannesburg.

School is more than a building with books and classrooms. It is where a child learns how to read, write, count, and understand the world around them. School is also a place where children learn to speak for themselves and dream big.

School gives children an opportunity to pursue careers such as teaching, nursing, medicine, policing and other professions they may wish to enter. It also helps protect children from risks such as early marriages, drugs and crime.

Ongeziwe Gqola, aged 22, is a resident of Swaneville, Kagiso. Gqola says that the issue of children staying at home does not sit well with her. She adds that young people no longer take their studies seriously, which stresses her because they are gambling with their futures.

Gqola says there could be ways to address the problem of children bunking school. One suggestion is to build centres that accommodate young people and allow them to participate in different activities, such as the arts, including acting, dancing and music, as well as sports such as netball, soccer and volleyball.

One community member, who wishes to remain anonymous, says there is a Grade 7 child in her neighbourhood who bunkers school regularly, and this has even become normal in his family. The community member says the child is not academically strong, and perhaps this has caused him to lose interest in school because he does not understand what he is learning.

She adds that the boy loves playing soccer, and perhaps his passion lies there rather than in books. She says it would be much better if parents observed their children and identified what they love and what they can do so that they can help guide them onto the right paths in life.

The community member also says that if the community supported the arts in the same way it supports young sports players, children would have something to do. There would be centres where they could keep busy and participate in different activities.

Muneiwa Khoadi, 24, is a resident of Swaneville, Kagiso. Khoadi says that poverty in families leads some children to become breadwinners. She adds that it is not that some of these children do not want to be at school; they do. However, they have a lot on their plates. Having to balance the responsibilities of being a learner and a breadwinner at home leads them to fall short in one of these areas, which is often their studies.

Khoadi continues to say that some children are not at school during school hours but are instead in the township hustling and doing piece jobs. Some even go as far as selling goods during school hours, which disturbs their studies. Others cannot even go to school because they have to look after their siblings while their parents go to work.

Khoadi says that social workers need to intervene in these matters by conducting check-ups, investigations and follow-ups to find out what is happening in these children's lives and then make sure they return to school like other children.

Keeping a child at home to work may help a family for a few years, but sending a child to school helps them for a lifetime. Parents, therefore, need to choose their children's futures wisely.

The unfortunate part is that when parents say, "My child must stay at home and work because school does not pay," they think they are helping the family. However, they are not. Instead, they are taking away the child's future. While other children are busy learning how to read and write, these children are working in the fields, shops or kitchens.

Education can help change lives and communities. Going to school gives people knowledge and skills that can help them improve their lives and contribute to society. However, some people do not want to go to school, while others cannot afford to attend. Despite these challenges, education gives people the power and knowledge to bring about change.

Renown popular education proponent and educationalist, Paulo Freire observed that education cannot change the world on its own, but people can change the world, and education gives them the knowledge to do so.

To change our schools and communities, we need to help one another and find ways to work together. We must also take responsibility for keeping our communities clean and making sure that our surroundings are healthy and safe.

Some children struggle to learn because they live in overcrowded and unhealthy communities. They cannot learn properly when their classrooms are overcrowded or their environments are unsafe. Schools also face challenges such as a lack of teachers and support staff, overcrowded classrooms and deteriorating school buildings.

Education opportunities and resources vary considerably depending on where people come from and their social backgrounds. Students from working-class families are particularly affected by a system in which access to further and higher education is limited. It is unfair that a person's background can determine how far they can go with their education.

Some communities need to come together and fight for better conditions in their schools. Buildings are sometimes run-down or unhealthy, while students face increasing uncertainty about their futures.

Education is therefore important not only for individual development but also for improving our schools and communities. By supporting one another, demanding better educational conditions and taking responsibility for our communities, we can use education to create positive change.

No child should be deprived of the right to go to school because education is a right, not a favour.

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