



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Keynote Address by Minister of Basic Education Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, at the Annual RCL Conference, held at the Premier Hotel

29 – 30 June 2023

Programme Director,

Honourable Deputy Minister,

Director General,

CEOs from the Private Sector, who have partnered with us,

Prof. Phaswana from UNISA,

DDGs,

Esteemed educators,

Most importantly, the future leaders of our nation,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Minister of Basic Education, I stand before you, deeply honoured to address this esteemed gathering at the National Representative Council of Learners (RCL) Conference.

It fills my heart with pride to witness the enthusiasm and dedication of young minds shaping our educational landscape's future.

This platform acknowledges the potential of learner leadership in our schools, nurtures the passion for reading, and explores the significant role that learner leadership plays in maintaining discipline within our educational institutions.

I would like to commend each and every one of you for your dedication and commitment to education.

Your presence here today is a testament to your desire to shape a brighter future for yourselves and future generations.

Your mission as the youth of 2023 is to use the words of wise African statesman Thomas Sankara: “We must dare to invent the future.”

Sankara is the most revered leader in Burkina Faso; he served as its President from 1983 until his assassination in 1987.

He believed that the youth held the power to imagine and create a new Africa, free from colonial legacies and guided by self-reliance, justice, and equality principles.

Sankara’s vision and commitment to youth empowerment resonate with many across the continent, inspiring a new generation of African leaders to embrace their role in shaping Africa’s future.

Today, I call upon our country’s youth to invent their own version of the future.

I dare young people to go beyond the heroics of the 1976 generation, the ones who participated in the 16 June Soweto Uprising.

I am throwing down the gauntlet to today's youth to go beyond the heroics of the 1944 generation that ushered in a new era for the anti-apartheid movement through the formation of the ANC Youth League.

To surpass the record of activism set by the generation of the Defiance Campaign of the 1950s.

To do something more audacious than the 1961 generation, who launched the armed struggle against the apartheid regime.

To be more revolutionary than the youth of the 1980s, who bore the brunt of the apartheid regime's pushback but rendered the country ungovernable and apartheid unworkable.

The youth must harness the power of our forebears as a reference point to guide us into the future.

I wish all the young people gathered here to embody the militancy of Chris Hani, the reconciliatory spirit of Nelson Mandela, the diligence of Walter Sisulu, the wisdom of Oliver Tambo, and the exceptional mind of Anton Lembede.

As a country, we await your magic in dealing head-on with the malaise that bedevils our republic.

From high youth unemployment to spiralling levels of crime, and social ills, including teenage pregnancies and drug use and abuse, the country yearns for the present youth to reinvent a better future.

Programme director; learner leadership is not merely a title or a badge of honour.

It is a responsibility to lead by example and to inspire others to live a life of service to humanity.

Ladies and gentlemen, let's discuss the role of youth in a post-Covid-19 and post-Nelson Mandela South Africa in the 21st century at a global level.

In the 21st century, the South African youth must play a critical role in shaping the country's future.

As the generation that will inherit and lead the nation, youth have the potential to drive positive change, overcome societal challenges, and build a more inclusive and prosperous South Africa.

The youth has the opportunity to rebuild and reshape the country's social, economic, and healthcare systems, post Covid-19.

The pandemic has exposed existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, especially among marginalised communities.

Youth can actively contribute by advocating for equitable access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

They can harness the power of technology and innovation to bridge the digital divide and promote digital literacy, enabling equal opportunities for all.

By mobilising their energy, creativity, and resilience, youth can rebuild a more resilient and sustainable South Africa and contribute to a better world.

Programme director; In the post-Mandela decade, South African youth are entrusted with preserving and advancing the legacy of Nelson Mandela, the iconic leader who fought for freedom, equality, and social justice.

Mandela's values of reconciliation, social cohesion, and active citizenship remain relevant and serve as guiding principles for the youth.

I call upon all young people aged 16 and above to obtain Identity Documents (IDs) and register to vote in record numbers for the 2024 national general elections.

It is not only the right thing to do but also a civic duty to maintain the momentum of democracy and elect a government that will carry forward Madiba's legacy.

Our democratic project requires the nurturing and injection of youthful exuberance.

We seek to build a non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic society.

Our historic mission is to fight both poverty of the stomach and poverty of the mind.

By embracing these values, young South Africans can work towards a society that upholds human rights, rule of law, fosters unity, and dismantles systemic injustices.

They can engage in peaceful dialogue, challenge prejudice and discrimination, and promote social harmony, laying the foundation for a more inclusive and harmonious future.

Most importantly, the South African youth in the 21st century have the opportunity to redefine the country's narrative on the global stage.

With their diverse backgrounds, innovative thinking, and intercultural understanding, they can contribute to South Africa's position as a leader in Africa and promote a better world.

Through entrepreneurship, art, academia, and diplomacy, youth can drive economic growth, cultural enrichment, and diplomatic relations.

Their active participation in global issues, such as climate change and sustainable development, can influence policies and contribute to building a better world for future generations.

Having sketched the global role of the youth today, Programme Director lets us turn our focus to the miniature.

Today, I would like to shed light on two crucial aspects intersecting in this context—learner leadership and the power of reading.

These elements shape the personal growth and success of our students and contribute significantly to fostering discipline within our educational institutions.

Learner leadership serves as the cornerstone of a thriving educational environment.

It empowers learners to take charge of their learning journey, instils a sense of responsibility, and nurtures the skills required for effective collaboration and problem-solving.

Learners, like yourselves have an unparalleled ability to understand the challenges and needs of their peers.

You possess the unique insight to identify areas that require improvement and the passion to drive the necessary initiatives forward.

By actively engaging in leadership roles, learners can transform their schools into innovation, inclusivity, and excellence hubs.

Recognising and cultivating learner leadership provides a platform for students to voice their ideas, concerns, and aspirations.

Through student councils, clubs, and various leadership programs, we create opportunities for you to make meaningful contributions to the development of your schools and communities.

Now, Programme director, let us delve into the power of reading—a passion that can ignite the flames of knowledge within each of you.

Books can transport us to different worlds, broaden our perspectives, and unleash our imagination.

Inculcating a love for reading from an early age enhances language skills and cultivates critical thinking, empathy, and creativity.

As learners, your passion for reading can serve as a catalyst for positive change.

Through books, we learn about different cultures, understand diverse perspectives, and develop a deep appreciation for the value of knowledge.

I encourage each one of you to embrace reading as a lifelong companion, for it is in books that you will find the inspiration and wisdom to shape a better future.

Programme director, the role of learner leadership towards discipline in our schools cannot be overstated.

Discipline is about enforcing rules and fostering a culture of respect, responsibility, and self-regulation.

Learner leadership plays a pivotal role in achieving this.

When entrusted with leadership responsibilities, learners learn the importance of accountability and integrity.

By actively participating in decision-making processes, they understand the rationale behind rules and policies.

This sense of ownership drives a shift from mere obedience to a genuine commitment to maintaining discipline.

Learner leaders have a unique ability to influence their peers positively.

Through their actions, they set an example of responsible behaviour and encourage others to follow suit.

By fostering a sense of ownership among learners, we create a harmonious and disciplined school environment where everyone feels valued and accountable.

In conclusion, learner leadership and a passion for reading are two powerful forces that, when harnessed effectively, can transform our educational institutions into vibrant centres of growth, discipline, and academic excellence.

I urge each of you, as the leaders of tomorrow, to embrace the opportunities before you.

Nurture your leadership potential, advocate for the power of reading, and uphold discipline with utmost dedication.

Remember that your actions, both big and small, can shape not only your own educational journeys but also the collective destiny of our society.

Together, let us create a generation of compassionate, informed, and disciplined leaders who will navigate the complexities of our world with grace and resilience.

Former US President Barack Obama was correct when he said: “Young people can be the agents of change in our society. They can drive progress, challenge the status quo, and create a better world.”

Obama added: “It is their idealism, energy, and passion that inspire me and give me hope for the future.”

Thank you, and may your leadership journey be filled with endless possibilities and remarkable achievements.

I am inspired.

Thank you!