

Everyday South Africans prove education isn't limited to the classroom

By [Amy Pieterse](#), issued by [Ginkgo Agency](#)

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2020 marks the second International Day of Education. In South African classrooms, a dire lack of resources is hindering growth. But everyday people are ensuring children never lose their love for learning.



Learners in South Africa are being left behind. Over [60% of schools](#) do not have computer centres, equipped libraries, or laboratories. Along with the insufficient facilities, major hindrances to learning include everything from [unaffordable fees to large classes, a lack of books, too few teachers](#), and teacher absenteeism.

Poor circumstances inside the classroom can take the joy out of learning, or crush a child's belief in themselves. In a country desperate to break out of the cycle of poverty and advance, we cannot allow that to happen. The future depends on those who pursue and embrace education.

The state of education

According to the [World Bank](#), a child in South Africa will complete an average of 9.3 years in school by the age of 18. But in terms of the quality of education, they will only complete 5.1 years. This means at least four years of the time they spend in school is wasted. For Grade 9 Mathematics and Science, South Africa continues to be one of the [lower scoring countries](#), while 78% of learners [cannot read for comprehension](#) by the end of Grade 4.

This disastrous combination of factors is stifling children's growth. Education isn't only about resources or results. It's about a passion for knowledge, understanding the world, and developing self-confidence. Access to education is life-affirming. But the formal classroom has its limits. While we may not be able to change what happens in schools, we can still foster a love of learning.

Going beyond the classroom

There is hope. In the community of Thulamahashe, people believed it was impossible to receive an A in Maths and Science. While working as a teacher in a traditional classroom, [Jerry Mbowane](#) provided extra lessons to students in need. But he realised these learners required his full attention. So Mbowane quit his job, and committed full-time to tutoring beneath the shade of a tree. With just a small group sitting around a table, it was here that Mbowane could provide kids with the individual help they required. The results are remarkable – his pupils have gone on to receive distinctions and become doctors and engineers. “You teach one child,” Mbowane says, “you empower South Africa.”

From a garden in Jamestown, [Chanene van As](#) has grown a wonderland of knowledge for girls at risk academically. She brings learning to the outdoors with the Green Door Project, inspiring girls to go beyond the curriculum, discover their individual talents, and learn valuable environmental lessons. [Monde Sitole](#) is taking it a step further by using the mountains as his classroom. This adventurer introduces kids to activities such as climbing and hiking. By pushing their limits, he’s expanding learners’ horizons and exposing them to the world outside of school. Then there’s [Mogamat Magmoet](#). He dreamt of becoming a marine biologist, but opportunities in the Cape Flats were few and far between. A freediver today, he’s giving kids the chance he didn’t have, taking them to the depths of the ocean and teaching them how to protect it.

[Mark Jeneke](#) was a drug dealer. Then he decided to turn his life around and found his calling with a paintbrush. Today, he runs free art classes in Mitchells Plain for vulnerable kids, providing them with a safe space and the freedom to explore their creativity. [Shéri Brynard](#) demonstrates anything is possible. She’s the first person in the world with Down Syndrome to receive a tertiary teacher’s diploma without concessions. Now, she’s showing learners just like her that they too can be successful. Similarly, [Philile Shabalala](#) is shattering stereotypes with her woodworking class. As she builds up students’ skills, she challenges outdated perceptions of who can do what and encourages girls to enter typically male-dominated industries.

We’re all keepers of knowledge

It’s because of South Africans like these that children can flourish. They prove that education doesn’t need to be confined to four walls and a curriculum. When a child is given the chance to learn, the possibilities are infinite. One needs only to look at [Mbali Mahlale](#) and see what education means to someone. Born without arms, she’s the only pupil with a disability at her school. But using her feet to write and complete tasks, she keeps up with her class, working hard to achieve her goal of becoming a dentist.

We need to step up for children like her. Each of us has something of value to pass on. Whether we work in education or not, we are all keepers of knowledge. One inspired child today could be a leader tomorrow. Education is the most powerful weapon there is, and it shouldn’t be limited to the classroom.

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