

Are we disempowering our youth?

Contributed by Donna Stephen
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Two weeks ago our minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, suggested that three year degree and Diploma programmes be stretched to four years, instead of three.

There are many reasons to disagree with this thinking.

For many reasons, the extra year will merely draw out the pain of high tuition for another year. A significant number of students depending on parents to support them through their studies may not be able to do the extra year. And what about those students depending on study loans and financial aid, incurring another year's interest.

What we need to do is to empower our youth instead of finding new ways to make their pre-earning days stretch on. The sooner young people can become productive contributors to the economy, the better it is for all concerned.

Imagine squeezing in another year or two of full-time earnings into your adult working life? The self-esteem aspects are immense, as are the financial advantages.

We need to be exploring mechanisms to get young people skilled, earlier.

One skills training company exploring this possibility is Netcampus.

Netscope Training, which powers Netcampus.com has been in the IT training business for a decade. They have seen all ages, shapes and sizes pass through both their real and virtual classrooms. Many come back for additional training, and some go on to early successes. One of their ex-students sold a portion of the company he started after completing his Netcampus studies, to media monolith Naspers. Charl Norman was 23 when the sale, for an undisclosed six figure amount, was made.

Inspired by this, Netcampus has developed its Academy program. Quite simply, Academy makes Information and Computing Technologies (ICT) certifications available to secondary school level students before they matriculate.

So many colleges and tertiary institutions insist on matriculation certificates, though this is not an actual requirement to be able to study so many certifications. By Grade 10 most learners have the fundamental numerical and analytical skills required to embark on additional IT studies.

Why not leave matric with an additional certificate that qualifies you to work anywhere in the world?

The Academy program consists of a selection of IT and Design courses that qualify learners in popular and highly in demand certifications. Students can qualify as a Software Engineer, Developer or Graphic designer.

Grade 8 and up are eligible to register for these courses (with parent/guardian's consent, of course)

Why the focus on IT?

- It's a globally useful skill
- Many IT certifications are standard internationally, which makes one's employability skyrocket
- The country, at best down to the spine-end of the Brain Drain, is in the midst of a skills crisis. More IT skills are needed desperately, and soon.
- If we can start turning out certified IT professionals two years sooner than would have happened, why not? IT jobs are generally well-paid, too. So we're creating potentially wealthy young people.

It's such a simple concept, one would have expected our education department to have converged their Outcomes Based Curriculum geared towards entrepreneurial skills development and their pressing need for more ICT graduates and come up with this themselves.

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