



UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
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Faculty of Education Graduation Ceremony

In the year 2000, at eleven years old, my grandmother showed up unannounced at my boarding school on a Friday afternoon. She told my sister and I that she was there to take us home but wouldn't explain why. This was on the weekend before the last week of exams, and for that reason **I was very sure that our principal wouldn't allow us to go home before we had finalized our exams**. Even then I knew how important education was. To my surprise, after privately talking to my grandmother, our principal approved the request to take us home, and so we left school and drove home with her. When we got home, she carefully sat us down and told us the devastating news that our mother had passed away. After the initial moments of a very emotional reaction from my sister and I, I guess her logic kicked in and I'll never forget her face as she looked at my grandmother to ask **"so, who will pay for our school fees from now on?"**. Two days later, on a Sunday, I begged my grandmother to let me **go back to school to go and finish my final exams**. For the next few years of my school life, I would use books as my escape and school became even more important than it as before. On another day we can psycho-analyse whether that was a healthy response or not – but for today please allow me to tell my story.

Whenever people would ask after us, my grandmother would tell them – I am so blessed because they love school. When we came home to her for the holidays, she would excuse us from having to clean the house (except for our bedrooms and doing our laundry), on condition that we spent that time focusing on schoolwork instead. My grandmother did this because as a civil servant, who worked with juvenile offenders, she knew that one of the surest ways to guarantee us a good future – based on the risk that our trauma exposed us to – was to continue to reinforce the importance of education to us – building on the foundation that our mother had set.

Boarding school became my refuge, and there I met teachers who would individually and collectively steer my life in the right direction. It was my netball coach who identified and nurtured my talent in sports, and under her training I represented the Free State province – in primary school, high school and even later in university. It was my English teacher, Mrs Fourie, who saw the gift and love I had for public speaking and communication in general, who encouraged me in the classroom to be creative in my writing and storytelling, who encouraged me to participate in Eisteddfodd events and competitions and who gave me opportunities to MC school events and to feature in school plays. As a result of her interest in my development, I stand here today invited as a guest speaker. It was my Afrikaans teacher, Mrs Ross, who gave me the application form for the Volksblad UFS Matriculant of the Year competition and helped me fill it; who after finding out that I had been selected as a Top 14 finalist took me shopping to Exact for new clothes to wear to the event, who even sat me down and taught me etiquette and table manners in preparation for the event. As a result, I ended pursuing my studies at this very same university because of that competition.

Much later in my career – a few years after I had graduated from the UFS and having qualified as a CA(SA) – I met Professor Dave Lubbe who mentored me and supported

me in my journey of serving as a council member here at the University of the Free State.

If I had the whole day, it wouldn't be enough to describe the tremendous role that education has played in my life, and how as an orphaned child, educators became a critical part of my upbringing to provide guidance and mentorship; as well as to call out my gifts and talents based on my interactions with me. For this reason, it gives me great pleasure to stand before you today and congratulate you on your wonderful achievement of obtaining a qualification in the field of education. The career path you have chosen is a noble

Therefore, I'd like to give you my heartfelt congratulations. Today, we celebrate you and the journey you have walked in getting to this point. We celebrate how you have excelled academically, and we also celebrate the trials and tribulations that you may have had to overcome to obtain this qualification. And we hope that you will maintain a consistent commitment to excellence and growth even beyond the university gates.

Advice for the professional journey

While today may feel like the end of a chapter, we also have to remember that it is the beginning of another. As you approach the beginning of your professional journey I would like to share three concepts I shared at the graduation ceremony last night, that contributed to shaping my career.

The first one is the concept of **life-long learning**:

As we move from one chapter to another, and transition from one season of our lives to another, we ought to remember to keep on adding new tools to our "toolbox" – the toolbox of knowledge, skills, and competencies. While university may have prepared you for the next few years of your careers, you will need to continue to learn and get knowledge to remain relevant and to have longevity in your career.

This means that even though today you say goodbye to one form of learning, you are saying hello to another form. The learning just never stops, and this is because how you learned to study and to pass exams, is not the same method to apply to begin and complete a project successfully in the workplace. How you collaborated with your classmates, engaged with your lecturers and socialized with your friends may require adapting as you endeavour to work in teams, build rapport with others and build relationships in and outside the workplace. Not only that, but even the workplace itself continues to evolve. The fast pace at which we are developing and adopting the use of digital technology is changing the world of work, changing how we perform our work and introducing new jobs to organisations. For example, the typical job of an accountant ten years ago has changed completely today. And that means as an accountant myself – I've had to gain new skills to adapt to these changes. In fact, this is why I pursued a second masters after obtaining an MBA in 2019, I decided to study for a Masters in Digital Innovation and Analytics. This was to ensure that I remain relevant and responsive to the impact of technology in our world.

The second concept is **the power of mentorship**:

As you navigate your professional life, remember that you cannot do it alone. In order to succeed, I encourage you to glean lessons from those who have walked the path before you – to study how they have navigated the way – even as you carve out your own unique path.

In the world of work you will learn that intelligence alone, and hardwork alone is not enough – as Prof Bonang shared earlier in another session (and I paraphrase) – if hardwork alone was enough to guarantee success – African women would be drenched in wealth. Seeking mentors in your career will ensure that you have people that can advocate for you in rooms where you are not present, who can connect you with the right people and opportunities to spur you in your journeys and who can encourage you along the way.

The third concept is about **investing in your professional network**:

If you go on to my LinkedIn profile you will see that I am a part of many different networks. One Young World, Global Shapers, Mandela Washington Fellows, the list goes on. As students and as professionals, you will be part of a network of people in and outside of your field, who have skills that are different to yours, who come from a diverse background, and who think differently than you. Your ability to build a solid network that is mutually beneficial will play a big role in how much success you can attain, and how wide the reach of your career can be. Be intentional in how you build this network – ensuring that you fill it with people who will encourage your ideas, challenge them, and make them better – and with people who will collaborate with you to bring those ideas to life. Most importantly, ensure that you contribute to these networks by bringing yourself, the uniqueness of your ideas and your resources for the betterment of others – in order to position yourself as someone that is of value to your network.

Advice on Leadership

We are all aware of the current challenges that exist in the South African education system. In 2020, Amnesty International published a [report](#) titled “South Africa: Broken and unequal education perpetuating poverty and inequality” and described in detail shocking statistics of failure of “crumbling infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms and relatively poor educational outcomes”. In an [article](#) published on LinkedIn, Bathabile Masile to described challenges such as outdated curriculum and teaching methods, as well as safety concerns in schools – especially impacting those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. As I shared with your colleagues who graduated last night in the faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, the need for them to actively participate in growing the South African economy and in ensuring that the constitutional imperative of economic transformation is achieved – the reality is it cannot be so without your participation in solving the challenges faced by the educational sector. We know that some of the world’s advanced economies invest the most in education because education fosters economic growth and contributes to a more equitable and prosperous future. Simply put, education is imperative for personal, national and global development.

Often times when we talk about the challenges that exist in our country, we want to put all the responsibility on the government to solve them. But today, I want to challenge you, my dear brothers and sisters, who have been baptized today into the calling of education to take it upon yourself to be the change that you want to see around you.

In preparing for this talk, I asked my friend and fellow alumn of the Mandela Washington Fellowship – Thejane Malakane – to share stories of how he and other teachers are innovating to improve the learning experiences of students and he shared the following examples:

- He explained how he was using a platform called Scratch to teach students in rural communities how to create learning material, and to simulate complex subjects and to share with communities of other learners online. Through his Coding and robotics program he also teaches students to develop solutions to real-life problems.
- Thabiso – uses music to simplify complex topics in mathematics and physical science.
- Mme Phuti – who is a retired teacher and uses augmented reality – where she uses digital technology to bring still objects to life. In this way, she can turn pictures to life in order to give students exposure to experiences that they wouldn't otherwise have access to.

What these educators have in common is that they identified the challenges in their environments, and decided to upskill themselves so that they can solve these challenges in non-traditional ways, and most importantly they have partnered with private sector and non-governmental organisations to amplify the impact of their initiatives.

Conclusion

As you walk out of here today, let it be with the awareness that with great success comes even greater responsibility. I'd like to leave you with the words that my late mother had written at the back of a picture of her 8 months pregnant with me: "Likeleli, ngoanaka, tlou ha e hloloe ke moroalo". This is a Sesotho proverb that means that the responsibility that lies on your shoulders as graduates is well-placed because you are indeed born for such a time as this. Don't let the headlines you see on the news about the state of our nation fill you with fear – however, let it be a challenge for you to ask yourself “

Most importantly, celebrate yourselves, celebrate your successes and victories, and embrace and celebrate your failures.

Congratulations to you all.

Thank you.