



JET EDUCATION SERVICES
THINK EDUCATION. THINK JET.

JET ANNUAL MEETING AND 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION:

30 years behind us and
looking towards the future

JET: 30 YEARS ON A story of vision, courage and partnership

Speech by Cheryl Carolus
6 October 2022



Good afternoon everybody.

It gives me so much joy to be back with the JET Family to reflect, enjoy, rechallenge and reboot. So, thank you for inviting me to be here with you all.

Let me start off by saying HAPPY BIRTHDAY JET! And THANK YOU for your solid presence in the life of our country for 3 decades.

And while I'm onto it, let me congratulate everyone in this room who has not just supported JET, but for your own tireless work in education over many decades, from the days of the struggle and through some challenging and vexatious moments under democracy.

In addition to JET and other agencies, I wish to single out Equal Education, one of the few community-based organisations, to say "THANK YOU" for creating a strong platform for communities to be activists fighting for their rights and shaping learning environments and not be hapless victims.

Also, to Section 27 for their consistent campaigning and legal challenges to bring to life and enforce the promises of our constitution and the Bill of Rights. THANK YOU.

And I want to thank our Minister, Comrade Angie Motshekga for her consistent leadership in education over the decades. She was a leader in the NECC¹. She has been steadfast and present. She is one of very few Ministers who has not weaponised poor people for cheap political gain. I believe that she is one minister who really cares. THANK YOU Minister.

But I do wish to urge our Minister to work better with, to listen better to the people in this room and to civil society organisations on whom we now rely to enforce the constitutional rights of learners. Minister, please see the people in this room as key resources.

And now let me return to JET.

The story of JET is a wonderful story of leaders from across society who dared to dream of a country where we could have very different educational outcomes.

Looking at the huge challenges we are facing in education today, some may call it a mess. And yes, there are some totally unacceptable manifestations and systemic sores that are being tolerated and fueled that should have us all hopping mad and hopefully mad enough to apply ourselves with the same vigour that we set off with on the journey of the early 90s. And hopefully, we will increase our intolerance of what exists today because we ARE 30 years down the tracks, and we SHOULD expect better.

But let us allow ourselves the luxury of reflection to acknowledge success and to embolden ourselves for the next phase.

I get really furious with people who state that "things are worse than under apartheid." I urge those people to watch what my family rewatched this week – the documentary "Action Kommandant", the life of Ashley Kriel, the student leader who became an uMkhonto we Sizwe combatant. He was shot and killed with a boot to his neck in front of a former teacher of his.

I dare anyone who holds those beliefs of doom to show me where, in this country, young people in their early teens are shot and killed because they demand change in their schools and in their country. I challenge those who hold those beliefs to show me where, in our country today, the government does and can get away with banning the media from covering the truth. To deny the meaningful progress is an insult to all who fought bravely and even gave their lives for the hard-won freedoms that we sometimes take for granted today.

Similarly, I wish to remind us in this room of the vision and courage displayed when we were given the opportunity to write our own history. JET is a great example of this.

We were in the middle of a time where there was deep conflict and division, and we were a country on the verge of total collapse. For those who were not there at the time, it may be hard to imagine the levels of violence and trauma that prevailed and the courage of leaders of all constituencies to start to see that we were in an intractable situation of deadlock, where we could fight one another to the bitter end until our country lay in total ruin, or we could try to negotiate a different future.

There are many learnings from time, including things we could have done better. But I have yet to hear a coherent alternative pathway we could have followed sustainably. We had learnt many lessons from the pathways of our neighbours in Angola, Mozambique and later Zimbabwe. I'm sure others will have the benefit of hindsight about our journey too.

Key to our journey was what the formation of JET was a microcosm of.

There we were, sworn enemies – be it as bourgeois capitalists vs die-hard socialists/communists/democrats, or sworn political foes, who were all positioning themselves to claim the biggest stake in the hearts and minds of voters in the first democratic elections.

What prevailed in the end was a remarkable ability to see ourselves as people who had a common need to build a different country where we have two main drivers:

- To place our children first, and to give them a better chance in life, through appropriate, decent education that will enable them to live dignified lives through livelihoods and through skills that will enable them to be meaningful contributors to the welfare of their families, and that will ensure that the next generations will be imbued with curiosity and the confidence to create, to dream, to challenge.
- To ensure that our education system will provide the right education and skills to make us globally competitive and prosperous as a nation.

So we sat down, totally suspicious of one another initially: 14 founding business partners, 4 major political formations, 3 trade union formations, the NECC (that was recognised as the umbrella organisation of organisations in the education sector that were active in the struggle for freedom) and key representatives of black businesses that were severely constrained and oppressed by apartheid legislation and the same repressive laws that applied to anyone who questioned the apartheid system.

The leadership of all these constituencies signed up because they had a vision, they had the courage to establish a new partnership that had been unimaginable a year earlier. They were bold and decided that we needed something substantial. They were also courageous enough to recognise the strengths each constituent part brought to the table.

Those from the liberation movement brought a vision that had evolved over centuries of struggle. I remember how, in 1976, our demand was for “equal education”, and how that evolved to 1980 when we realised that, actually, the education that white children was getting was not good enough; that that education too was seeking to subjugate and was not preparing young people to be confident global citizens. So, our call became a call for “Peoples’ education for peoples’ power” – a shift that was very profound and laid the basis for what we demand of our education system today. Through the NECC, this vision of The Education Charter was brought into JET.

The business partners mobilised funding and, equally importantly, insights into the skills needed to build successful businesses and a competitive economy.

I want to pay tribute to that giant, Mike Rosholt, who peacefully passed on in 2018. Mike had this vision, and he sought out and convinced Tata Nelson Mandela, who then joined him in this quest to convince the key role-players to come together in the partnership that became JET. May their brave souls rest in peace.

The big corporate partners under the leadership of Mike Rosholt raised R500 million. JET used these funds to leverage a further R680 million from international donors. The funds were disbursed to over 400 service providers over 10 years with tangible, outstanding results.

I want to pay tribute to JET for constantly and boldly reviewing where our country was at, what the needs were and defining what the most meaningful contribution was that JET could make. In this process, there were often difficult choices to be made.

It requires a lot of courage to make changes that are outside of your comfort zone. Many credible organisations saw their demise because they were not bold enough to move with the times. JET did. That is why we can come together after 30 years of phenomenal changes and celebrate the fact JET is alive and still contributing meaningfully to educational outcomes in our country, and increasingly more and more in SADC² and in Africa.

So, for all of us gathered here in celebration of JET, it was necessary to reflect on that distinguished past and to take courage from that and to learn from that so that we can all support JET in its constant reinvention and realignment that is necessary for the next 30 years.

I want to assert that none of us understood the full complexity of how to manage a painful transition from inequality, deep poverty and conflict to a prosperous, harmonious future.

And education is highly contested terrain because it is not only about skills, it is at the very centre of also transmitting the values that produce and sustain the values and social relations that are necessary to produce the society you wish for. Today, the challenge remains – how do we move from that unacceptable, difficult past to a more equitable, modern, empathetic country?

Since inception, JET identified a few key building blocks.

- Teachers are at the heart of our education system. Their training must equip them to develop appropriately skilled citizens who are confident and curious to learn more. It is critical to offer ongoing development and training to teachers in the system to enable them to keep abreast of the needs of a modern, globally competitive nation.
 - The importance of early childhood development for all, but especially for children from backgrounds of poverty.
 - Adult basic education and training.
 - Vocational and further education.
- and
- Creating pathways in and through the education process and system to create pathways and livelihoods for young people.

It has been amazing how JET constantly renewed itself to play the best possible role in an evolving democracy, as our country and the various government and non-government/civil society organisations evolved, and as new civil society players evolved in keeping with the new situation (e.g. JET was a driving force in the establishment of the NECT³).

JET remained nimble-footed and adapted through these phases. So, JET has evolved into JET Education Services, an organisation that is self-funded on the basis of providing world-class services.

I wish to sound a word of caution about this. Please continue to be vigilant, do not let demand only shape your offering. Please retain your courage to remain visionary (about what our country needs), and please, never lose your courage to innovate and reinvent yourself. Nimble-footed partners are what key role-players and stakeholders need. It is ever more necessary for JET to retain its ability to lead key players to see beyond their own little patches.

Today we find ourselves at another crossroads in our country. (And there will be many more because that is what movement forward is about.)

Some may feel afraid, tired or even hopping mad. I would like for us to be careful what we wish for – we wanted freedom, now we have it. We have many learnings, many scars on our backs, but most of all, we HAVE taken our country forward – our country IS a different place. Maybe not the place we had hoped for entirely, but we cannot dispute we have the tools to create and shape. Freedom is now in our hands. And we will

stumble along the way because we are human.

A few days ago, Minister Motshekga announced very important and very necessary expansions to the school curriculum. If successfully implemented, these expansions will contribute greatly to rebuilding our capacity for artisanal training, so necessary for the reindustrialisation goals we have set for ourselves. This will also offer young people a range of employment options in sought-after fields that will make them employable and contributors to their families.

Some of JET's current work is already fit for purpose for supporting these changes. The work with SETAs⁴ and the work around in-service support training of teachers as well as the pre-service teacher education work must hone in on helping teachers to see the new proposals as exciting opportunities to produce better outcomes for the children in their care. We need to get the entire value chain in education, from learners to parents to teachers, employers and society aligned on this.

We need to assess what partnerships are needed.

JET is so well-positioned to play a leading role in bringing this curriculum to life and in ensuring that all key stakeholders are well equipped to take up their place in this journey.

It is time to consider the nature of the social compacts we need to take our country forward with this curriculum. It is time to place the future of our children uppermost in our minds again. It is time to reassert that social solidarity is what is needed in order to attain social cohesion.

Let us look at well-intentioned policies like BEE⁵ and the instruments created but abused shamelessly, like Social and Labour Plans (SLPs), BEE scorecards. If these are applied well, there are some powerful opportunities for institutions like JET to reclaim and reshape those in partnership with government.

There are good companies that desperately need help with these. JET can do it. The new education direction Minister Motshekga is now leading us in provides great opportunities.

There is work to be done. Our country is again dangerously perched on a precipice of further division and increasing poverty. We once again need vision, courage and partnership. We can do it! I leave JET with that challenge. And know, we in this room are right behind you and look to you for leadership.

Thank you.

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1 National Education Coordinating Committee
2 Southern African Development Community
3 National Education Collaboration Trust
4 Sector Education and Training Authorities
5 Black Economic Empowerment

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