

Who owns the gap?

By Dr Sandy Geyer
Allcopy Publishers

This week, I received an invitation to explore an international networking community made up largely of South Africans living and working abroad.

The invitation was thoughtful and genuine. Someone had clearly taken the time to look beyond my profile photo and surname and decide that I might be a good fit for the community they were building.

Perhaps they saw an entrepreneur. Perhaps they saw a business owner. Perhaps they saw a South African trying to make her way in another country.

All those things would be true.

So, I spent some time looking around. The network looked impressive. There were successful entrepreneurs, business owners and corporate executives. People supporting one another across countries, industries and time zones.

The founder's videos spoke about connection, growth, opportunities and relationships.

All valuable things.

And yet, after about twenty minutes, I found myself staring at the screen thinking, "I am so tired." Not because there was anything wrong with the network. Quite the opposite. I could immediately see why people would find value there. The problem was that I couldn't quite find myself in it.

My work does not sit comfortably in the business world, but it doesn't sit entirely in the education world either. It lives somewhere between the two.

The longer I sat with that thought, the more I realised that this is where the tiredness comes from time to time.

Because it is a space that nobody quite seems to own.

A few years ago, I was invited to speak at a conference in New Zealand. The organisers had brought together school leaders, business leaders, politicians and professionals to discuss the future of education.

Over two days, I listened to people from very different worlds talk about the future waiting for young people.

The educators spoke about preparing students. The business leaders spoke about preparing future employees. The politicians spoke about preparing future citizens.

Different language. Different priorities.

Yet beneath the conversation sat a common concern. How do we prepare young people for what comes next?

The more I think about it, the more I wonder whether this is where the gap exists.

Schools do many things extraordinarily well. They help young people acquire knowledge. They help them develop academically. They prepare them for examinations, qualifications and future opportunities.

But who helps them prepare for themselves? Who helps them understand how they respond under pressure? Who helps them understand their influence on others? Who helps them understand trust, responsibility, conflict and collaboration before life begins teaching those lessons in its own way?

For decades, we have largely assumed that these things will develop naturally. And many of them do. Eventually.

But when I speak to school leaders, business leaders and young adults themselves, I often hear different versions of the same story.

People are frequently well prepared academically. What they are less prepared for is the complexity of being human. The relationships. The setbacks. The uncertainty. The responsibility. The reality of working with people who think differently from them.

Perhaps this is the gap that interests me most.

Not the gap between school and work. The gap between education and adulthood. The gap between achieving and navigating. The gap between knowing and becoming.

And perhaps the question is not whether that gap exists. The question is, who owns it?

It is also the reason Leadership Literacy 4 Life exists. Not to create better student leaders. But to help young people understand themselves before the world starts telling them who they should be.

Because the future leaders we hope for are already sitting in our classrooms.

The question is not whether leadership development should happen. The question is whether we are willing to start before the title arrives.