What if climate resilience became a core curriculum strand?
Learning to Live Lightly: Education in an Age of Ecological Urgency

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Opening Reflection

Curriculum is more than content, it is a compass. In a world shaped by droughts, floods and ecological disruption, education must do more than prepare learners for exams, it must prepare them for survival, stewardship and solidarity. What if, by 2030, climate resilience were not a theme tucked into Geography or Life Orientation, but a core strand across every subject, every phase, every school? What if we taught not just about the climate, but through it?

The Scenario

By 2030, South Africa's Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) has been revised to embed climate resilience as a cross-cutting strand. This includes:

- Interdisciplinary modules on sustainability, adaptation and ecological ethics
- Community-based projects on water conservation, food security and waste management
- AI-supported simulations of climate scenarios and localised risk mapping
- Teacher training in climate pedagogy and environmental justice frameworks

The Department of Basic Education, in partnership with the Department of Environmental Affairs, rolls out a national strategy aligned with SDG 4.7 and the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework. Learners begin to see themselves not just as students, but as stewards.

What It Reveals

This scenario reveals the power of curriculum to shape consciousness. Climate resilience is not just scientific, it is social, emotional and ethical. It also exposes the limitations of siloed learning. Real resilience requires transdisciplinary thinking, local relevance and active participation.

From a systems-thinking lens, climate education must be integrated, experiential and justice-oriented. It must connect the classroom to the community, and the learner to the land.

Why It Matters

South Africa is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world. Schools are already facing storm damage, water shortages and heat-related disruptions. Teaching climate resilience is not optional, it is urgent. It equips learners to adapt, respond and lead.

Philosophically, this scenario touches on ecopedagogy, Ubuntu ecology and transformative learning theory. It asks us to teach not just for knowledge, but for kinship, with each other, and with the Earth.

Reflective Responses

- **What does climate resilience look like in the classroom?**

It looks like learners designing greywater systems, mapping local risks, and debating ethical trade-offs. It means learning that is rooted, relational and real.

- **How do we ensure climate education is not just theoretical?**

By embedding it in lived experience, through school gardens, community partnerships and place-based inquiry. By making resilience a practice, not just a principle.

- **What risks emerge if climate resilience is ignored in education?**

Learners may inherit a world they are unprepared to navigate. Schools may become sites of disruption, not adaptation. Education may fail its most urgent test.

Sidebar: Facts and Philosophy

Insights from DBE and Climate Education Research (2024–2025):

- The DBE is finalising a National Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, aligned with SDG 4.7
- CAPS currently lacks explicit climate resilience content, especially in Intermediate and FET phases
- The Keep It Cool project showed that climate education improves learner agency and community engagement

"Education must not only recover, it must reimagine. Climate resilience is not a subject. It is a survival skill." - *Cheryl Weston, DBE Director for Curriculum Strengthening*