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Site:
vernondickason.com

Email:
connect@vernondickason.com

Address:
Cape Town, South Africa

What if every school had a climate resilience plan co-authored by learners?

Planning for Tomorrow, Together: Climate Resilience as Civic Learning

Author: Vernon Dickason

Opening Reflection

Resilience is not just a technical response, it is a relational stance. In South Africa, where schools face floods, droughts and infrastructure fragility, climate resilience is no longer optional. But what if it were not just engineered from above? What if, by 2030, every school had a climate resilience plan co-authored by learners, rooted in local knowledge, lived experience and ethical imagination? This would be more than preparedness. It would be pedagogy.

The Scenario

By 2030, the Department of Basic Education, in partnership with the African Climate Reality Project and Food and Trees for Africa, mandates that every public school develop a Climate Resilience Plan (CRP). Crucially, these plans must be co-authored by learners, educators and community members. Each plan includes:

- Risk mapping of local climate threats (e.g. flooding, heatwaves, water scarcity)
- Infrastructure audits and proposals for adaptation (e.g. rainwater harvesting, shaded spaces)
- Emergency protocols and communication strategies
- Curriculum integration of climate literacy and civic action
- Learner-led projects such as food gardens, recycling initiatives and awareness campaigns

Grade 10 and 11 learners use the Climate Change Curriculum to explore local stories of climate justice, while schools align their plans with the National Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development. Pilot schools in Limpopo and the Eastern Cape report increased learner engagement, stronger community ties and tangible environmental improvements. However, challenges persist: some schools lack technical support, others struggle to balance planning with academic demands.

What It Reveals

This scenario reveals the power of co-authorship in civic learning. Climate resilience is not just about infrastructure, it is about inclusion, imagination and interdependence. It also exposes the limitations of top-down planning, which often overlooks local nuance and youth insight.

From a systems-thinking lens, co-authored resilience plans are living documents, responsive, relational and rooted in place.

Why It Matters

South African schools are already experiencing climate disruption, from storm damage to heat-related absenteeism. Learners are not just affected, they are ready to act. Co-authoring resilience plans affirms their agency, builds ecological literacy and fosters democratic participation.

Philosophically, this scenario touches on eco-pedagogy, Ubuntu ecology and participatory governance. It asks us to teach not just about climate, but through it, with those who will inherit its consequences.

Reflective Responses

 **What does a learner-co-authored climate resilience plan look like in practice?**

It looks like learners mapping flood zones, proposing shaded walkways, and designing awareness posters. It means collaboration, creativity and care.

 **How do we support schools in developing meaningful plans?**

By offering toolkits, mentorship, and partnerships with local NGOs and municipalities. By embedding climate planning into curriculum, not just compliance.

 **What risks emerge if resilience planning excludes learners?**

Disengagement, missed insights and fragile implementation. Without youth voice, resilience becomes reaction, not transformation.

Sidebar: Facts and Philosophy

Insights from South African Climate Education Initiatives (2023–2025):

- The Climate Change Curriculum empowers Grade 10–11 learners to lead climate justice conversations
- The DBE is finalising the National Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, aligned with SDG 4.7

- The “Keep It Cool” project showed that learner-led climate education improves community engagement and adaptive capacity

“Climate education is absolutely essential if we want to build a bigger youth movement, where young people are equipped to lead the decisions, policies and solutions.”
- Aurélie Kalenga, *African Climate Reality Project*