

How young upstarts are merging education and safety

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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As we move into the 21st century, accessibility to e-learning is becoming more of a necessity than a luxury. Yet South Africa's disadvantaged youth face more problems than merely inadequate educational facilities, a lack of textbooks and absent teachers. Violence in schools is still a very real and serious issue, negatively impacting learners' lives in ways many of us don't realise. So how do we start to combat these hurdles facing our youth today?



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I caught up with UCT Upstarts entrepreneurs to find out more about their innovative startup, PlugEd, and how it aims to kill these two birds with one stone.

■ **Who are the brains behind PlugEd?**

PlugEd was founded by three young entrepreneurs: 2nd year BBusSci Analytics student Orinea Tshivhenga (20), 3rd year electrical engineering student Lindokuhle Shongwe (21) and Honours in tax student, Lebo de Jaar (22).

■ **Tell us about your startup and the inspiration behind it?**

PlugEd was started from a simple challenge posed by UCT Upstarts. "Re-educate education". Enthusiastic and excited as we were, we took on the challenge and first thing were the many assumptions about problems within the education sector of South Africa. It was only when we decided to go visit a local high school when we realised there are deeper problems than the general assumptions. We found true that most students don't have adequate resources to supplement their learning, schools are under-resourced and that their teachers are not always present, but to our surprise we found that safety is a serious concern for students. This was after we witnessed a student get stabbed from a gang-related fight. We also learned from another student that they prefer to carry two to three text books out of the recommended seven, so that they can easily run home to safety after school.

Our experience sparked a key question that led to the birth of PlugEd: why not take learning home?

PlugEd is a startup whose heart is to bridge the gap between online educational content and high school learners that need it the most. Our current prototype involves the use of a Raspberry Pi and Khan Academy Lite. The student can take the device home, plug it into their TV and *voilà*, they can learn in the comfort and safety of their home. Students can do this in groups or individually.

▣ ***Where do you plan on taking it from here?***

Looking into the future, we are working to make PlugEd the company to rely on for flexible access to resources to every learner in south Africa, both on a software levels (site that has brings educational resources to one place) and hardware level (devices for students to access educational online resources). We are currently piloting at a high school in Khayelitsha - we have given a student a raspberry pi and we are learning from the feedback. We are currently looking to testing our model by providing access to more students at the school through different methods such as USBs, DVDs etc. With the feedback from the testing, we are also looking into building the software side of our company.

▣ ***What do you feel is the importance of innovation at an educational level?***

We feel innovation is what shapes the future, it helps us build the world we idealise. Which is the similar to what education aims to do. It aims to prepare us for the future, therefore innovation and education cannot be separate; actually education must teach, if not just spark the ability for students to innovate. Only an innovative education can create innovative students, thus education should be innovative in itself. With the current yet old education system, it is only innovation that can bring it up to the times. Innovation within education allows for the discovery of convenient, fun and efficient ways of learning.

▣ ***How necessary are initiatives like the UCT Upstarts Idea Auction to the development of entrepreneurship in South Africa?***

It is not questionable whether there are entrepreneurial minds in south Africa, drawing from our own experience it seems that there are people with resources and are willing to help. Initiatives like UCT idea Auction remove the friction between the entrepreneurs and the resources. Such initiatives are vital to the development of entrepreneurship in South Africa as there is a lot of difficulty for the average young entrepreneur to find their way to the relevant resources and mentorship.

▣ ***What advice do you have for young entrepreneurs who are just starting out themselves?***

The hardest part about entrepreneurship is not the planning and drafting of business plans but rather shipping out your product /service. Young entrepreneurs get stuck in trying to perfect it before it goes out. It is more productive to work from feedback than perfecting something that could still be rejected. Basically focusing on the customer more than the idea is the way to win.

ABOUT SHAN RADCLIFFE

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