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SCHOOLING REFORM IS POSSIBLE

Lessons for South Africa
from international experience

Edited proceedings of a Round Table convened
by the Centre for Development and Enterprise

The Centre for Development and Enterprise is a leading South African development think-tank, focusing on vital national development issues and their relationship to economic growth and democratic consolidation. Through examining South African realities and international experience, CDE formulates practical policy proposals for addressing major social and economic challenges. It has a special interest in the role of business and markets in development.

Series editor: Ann Bernstein

This report summarises the proceedings of a Round Table hosted by CDE in Johannesburg on 5 and 6 April 2011. The Round Table was conceived and organised by Nick Segal, Tessa Yeowart, and Ann Bernstein. They were assisted by an advisory team comprising Gail Campbell, Brian Figaji, Liz Berry Gips, Mpho Letlape, Jeff McCarthy, Sarah Morrison and Charles Simkins. The Round Table was chaired by Brian Figaji. This report was written by Jeff McCarthy and Riaan de Villiers. This document is available from CDE, and can be downloaded from www.cde.org.za.

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Cover: Temogo Moruti at the blackboard, Moretele Primary School, Mamelodi. Gauteng, South Africa.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IN APRIL this year, CDE held a Round Table on lessons for South Africa from international experiences of schooling reform. This was a sequel to two CDE workshops on international experiences of schooling reform held in Washington, DC, in 2008. The Johannesburg workshop was addressed by experts from four countries where significant schooling reforms have been implemented in recent years: Brazil, Ghana, the United States, and India. It was supplemented by a new McKinsey overview of schooling reform in 20 countries, as well as a World Bank review of African experience.

The Round Table was addressed by Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education, and Bobby Soobrayan, Director-General of Basic Education. Participants included more than 60 educational experts as well as business leaders and leaders of civil society.

'I wish to commend CDE for organising this workshop. Experiences shared during engagements of this nature yield invaluable information which are vital for transforming education policies and systems.'

– Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education

The South African education system is large and complex, comprising more than 12 million learners, more than 350 000 educators, and more than 30 000 schools in 70 districts in nine provinces. It is also very diverse, with huge differences within and among provinces, districts and schools. Any reform attempts are complicated by South Africa's legacy of apartheid and past and current issues of race and politics.

The country is struggling to turn this ship around. While some improvements had been made, the public schooling system is failing too many young South Africans. There are few experts who believe the system will improve dramatically over the next five, ten or even 20 years. Against this background, the aim of this Round Table was to explore what could be done to reform the South African schooling system, and establish what could be learnt from successful reform in other countries in the developed and developing world.

South Africa has its own specific circumstances, and CDE is not suggesting that we should try simply to replicate what people are doing elsewhere. Reflecting on other places and what they have done can help us look at our challenges in new ways, and ask different questions which are less rooted in our history and more future-oriented.

Speakers

The Round Table focused on schooling reform at the primary and secondary level aimed at improving student performance. The international speakers were:

- Paulo Renato Souza, former Brazilian minister of education, and former secretary of education of the state of São Paulo, who outlined steps taken to improve public education in São Paulo;
- Dr Ato Essuman, former chief director of education in Ghana, who described a major initiative to reform the Ghanaian education system from 2001 onwards;
- Tom Boasberg, superintendent of Denver Public Schools, who outlined a major initiative to improve schooling in the city; and
- Prof Anita Rampal, dean of education at the University of Delhi, who spoke about the introduction of a rights-based framework for public education in India.

In addition, a new McKinsey study entitled *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, which identifies lessons from 20 education systems which have significantly improved student outcomes, was presented to the Round Table.

Key insights from international experience

International experiences of schooling reform are varied, but a number of common factors emerged from the presentations.

Schooling reform is difficult. And yet, with the right leadership and approach, education systems can make significant gains from almost any starting point. Measurable improvement can be achieved in as little as six years. Success requires a sustained focus on key variables.

While minimum levels of funding and resources are essential, funds and resources are not enough in themselves to transform a schooling system. Many countries spend more money but achieve too little; other countries have less to spend and outperform those with bigger budgets.

The quality of teaching and teachers is a central determinant of student performance. Teacher quality cannot be reduced to formal qualifications, which often have little impact on student results.

School leadership, notably by principals, plays a key role, especially in motivating teachers and creating a culture of learning.

Sustained schooling reform requires a new approach to the teaching profession. Society needs to value the importance of teachers more highly, and teachers need to see themselves as professionals and behave accordingly. Incentive-based pay is essential.

There are groups and interests outside of government – especially parents and others in civil society – who have an interest in schooling reform and who can be mobilised in support of good school leadership, good teaching, and improved student performance.

Strategy and mechanisms of implementation are more important and urgent than endless policy development. The fundamentals of schooling reform are well known. The challenge is to take account of local context – politics, unions, economics – and devise an effective approach that will deliver results.

Virtually everywhere in the world, these insights or guidelines offer hope for turning around under-performing education systems. What is required is a strategy that places school leadership and effective, professional teaching at the heart of educational reform. The performance of school managers and teachers, in turn, should be judged in terms of improved learner performance.

'I found great cause for optimism in the idea that we can make a difference within six years or even sooner. This has changed my assumptions of what is possible.'

– Prof Cheryl de la Rey, vice-chancellor, University of Pretoria

South Africans reflect on international experience

South Africa does not exhibit an appropriate sense of urgency with respect to the country's crisis in education. Despite comparatively high government expenditure, and very poor outcomes in terms of student performances, the severity of the situation is not sufficiently recognised.

A business leader said South Africans, including business leaders, did not speak about the crisis in education often enough or with sufficient focus on the urgency for effective action.

'Business argued passionately against outcomes-based education, and were told we knew nothing, so we went off to focus on other things. We shouldn't have. We should have stuck with it because we've lost a decade as a result, and the human cost has been enormous. So I constantly remind myself that we need to speak with passion and urgency about education.'

– Mike Spicer, CEO, Business Leadership South Africa

The Brazilian experience should provide hope for South Africa. In a society characterised by great inequality, and much larger numbers than South Africa, political leadership made a major difference to education. Some

years ago the president mobilised public sentiment and political will throughout a vast country. As a result of introducing incentives for teachers, professionalisation, and a focus on student performance, the country has moved from being 'bottom of world class' to 'the world's fastest reforming system'.

The evidence reported from Denver is instructive. This city is only one of the many and diverse city and state experiments in schooling reform taking place throughout the United States. The Denver presentation shows decisively that improvement in outcomes is not correlated with aggregate expenditure, but rather with how resources are managed. The first major city to introduce a significant merit pay programme for teachers, it has led national thinking on how to make public, private, and charter schools more competitive, and teachers much more effective.

The Ghanaian experience shows that achieving education reforms required administrative and leadership continuity, together with a sense of urgency and political commitment from the very top. Many participants felt that these attributes were lacking in South Africa.

An overview of African and other developing country experience summarised new evidence on why education systems in developing countries are performing poorly. Funding is generally available but is inequitably allocated, both geographically and across income and ethnic groups. In addition, the funding 'leaks', with only 20 to 50 per cent of the money reaching schools. Teacher absence and significant loss of instructional time are key impediments to learner performance. Spending is poorly correlated with results, with evidence showing very large disparities between test scores and public education spend in a range of countries. South Africa is an infamous example – performing poorly in international tests, and yet spending 5–6 per cent of GDP on education.

The key to improving education in Africa is to strengthen accountability. In the case of schools, three levels of interventions are needed to achieve this: information, school-based management, and teacher incentives. Schooling reform in Africa is most effective when it starts from the ground up, and empowers those who are closest to learners, namely parents and communities.

'When parents can choose schools for their children, information increases market pressure on schools to improve their performance.'

– Ruth Kagia, South Africa country director, World Bank

The lesson about the importance of teachers – underlined by all the international presentations, especially those on Brazil, Denver, and Ghana – was strong and clear. It is now well known that no system can transcend the capacity and performance of its teachers. The importance of the school as a 'vital unit of performance and change' was also underlined. South Africans – in the view of the Director-General of Basic Education – need to understand that the school is the point at which we convert inputs into outputs. If we don't do that, we are not going to succeed.

'It is well known that no system can transcend the capacity and performance of its teachers. In this respect, the elephant in the room which mediates "the how" is the teachers' unions.'

– Bobby Soobrayan, Director-General, Department of Basic Education

Many participants felt the time was ripe for a new social movement to improve public education in South Africa. Education reformers in other countries have worked with a wide range of social allies to achieve their objectives. This country should follow their example.

Concluding remarks

The international evidence demonstrates that schooling reform is indeed possible, even in very large systems. Significant improvements can be achieved relatively quickly. However, this requires resolve, leadership, and commitment.

Management capacity is also vital. In South Africa, this is an enormous challenge. The country needs effective management of the very large public education bureaucracy, as well as bold and effective political leadership. The country requires sound management skills required to ensure the efficacy of a very large bureaucratic system. It also requires bold and effective political management that is essential if the country is to make progress.

International experience demonstrates that strategy matters. Success is not about having some grand plan at the beginning, but having a notion of what we can do first that will unleash a whole lot of other productive forces. We can't do it all. This will require some tough choices.

Continuity – of political and administrative leadership, policies, and strategies for implementation – is vital.

Differentiation is essential. Teachers, principals, and education officials all need to be incentivised, but this cannot be done in a uniform way.

South Africa will not succeed in reforming its public schooling system if it continues to have teachers in the system who are present only three days a week, but who remain employed and receive the same pay as everyone else. The rights of principals to hire and fire, and of their superiors to fire principals if necessary, should be reinforced.

South Africa needs a new social compact in respect of schooling. It is not only key officials and the department who need to be committed to a new plan. A much wider set of social groupings is needed to support both the department and political leaders.

The unions must form part of this compact. Three international experts spoke about challenges surrounding the unions, but their political leaders were able to move forward despite this. This is a complex issue, but South Africa cannot afford to be held back indefinitely in this way. National interests now need to trump minority interests.

There are some promising developments across the schooling sector, including centres of excellence (sometimes in unexpected places) in the public schooling system; the growth of low-fee private schools, which are more accountable to parents; and education projects largely funded by the private sector, which could be taken to scale.

However, these developments need to form part of an overall thrust which South Africa does not yet have. So the country has to look for synergies, partnerships, and combining the public sector and market forces without ideological blinkers on either side.

'We need teachers in class, on time, and teaching, but words and intentions are not enough. We need bold political leadership and a new social compact on quality schooling. We need firm resolve, and we need much better outcomes.'

– Ann Bernstein, executive director, Centre for Development and Enterprise

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INTERNATIONAL SPEAKERS

Paulo Renato Souza

Paulo Renato Souza, a highly regarded Brazilian politician and economist, held various important positions in Brazilian and international public and private institutions. Brazil's Minister of Education from 1995 to 2002 (in the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso), he served twice as Secretary of Education of the State of São Paulo (1984 to 1986 and 2009 to 2010). He also served as a Brazilian Congressman elected by the State of São Paulo, director of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and rector of UNICAMP, a leading university in Brazil. More recently he was the managing partner of PR Souza Consultants, which advised private, non-profit and public clients on strategic economic issues relating to education, and served on the boards of numerous companies, foundations and schools. Paulo Souza passed away soon after participating in this workshop. CDE extends its condolences to his family and friends.

Dr Ato Essuman

Dr Ato Essuman has been integrally involved with schooling reform in Ghana over the past decade. He served in the Education Ministry as chief director where he steered an ambitious reform programme for six years. He has held positions on a range of different schooling authorities in Ghana, including the West African Examinations Council, the Ghana Education Trust Fund and the Ghana Education Service Council. He is a member of several professional associations, including the British Association for International and Comparative Education, American Management Association, and the Ghana Institute of Management. Dr Essuman has extensive corporate experience with PricewaterhouseCoopers, Technoserve Inc and Nestlé, and is currently the principal consultant and CEO of Profile Consult, an education, management and procurement consultancy. He is a two-term elected member of Ghana's Council of State, a body that advises the President of the Republic of Ghana.

Prof Anita Rampal

Prof Anita Rampal is dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Delhi. She has extensive experience of schooling reform in India, and has served on several task forces and national committees dealing with education reform. She was the author of the Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) in 1999, and an adviser to the National Curriculum Framework 2005 process of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the apex curriculum and training body in India. She has worked with school teachers in rural schools to devise child-centred curricula, learning materials, and teaching strategies. She serves on a number of committees and consultation groups on higher education reform. She is a scientist of the University Grants Commission, Fellow of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, and a previous Nehru Professor of the University of Baroda.

Tom Boasberg

Tom Boasberg is superintendent of Denver Public Schools, a position he has held since 2009, and was previously its chief operating officer. In his time as superintendent, Boasberg has focused on improving efforts to retain, recruit, develop, and reward high-quality teachers and principals; increasing graduation rates, college enrolment, and the number of students in high schools on track to graduate college-ready; accelerating student growth and closing the district's achievement gaps; expanding the district's pre-school and full-day kindergarten places; increasing students' participation and achievement in advanced placement and concurrently enrolled college courses; deepening parent and community engagement in the district's schools; and turning around low-performing schools and introducing new high-performing schools.

OPENING REMARKS

Ann Bernstein

Executive Director, CDE

IT HAS become a truism to say how important education is for the future of our country. Improving the quality of South African schooling is vital for the poor as well as the previously disadvantaged majority. Education empowers individuals and communities, and getting education right will have a dramatic impact on households, cities, provinces, and the country as a whole.

This workshop is not about the nitty-gritty of education, but about reforming our system of education. This is a key component in the country's national development, economic success, and the prosperity of individuals and families.

South Africa's education system is large and complex, comprising more than 12 million learners, about 400 000 educators, and about 30 000 schools in more than 70 districts in nine provinces. It is also very diverse; there are huge differences within and among provinces, districts and schools. Any reform attempts are complicated by our legacy of apartheid, and past and current issues of race and politics. No wonder, then, that we are struggling to turn this ship around.

Some improvements have been made: we have doubled the number of matriculants with university-level maths and science – something CDE has campaigned for very intensively – but this has gone almost unnoticed. Moreover, there are centres of excellence which we need to recognise, preserve, and expand. But our public schooling system is failing too many young South Africans, and not many experts are confident that the quality of the education system will improve over the next five, ten, or 20 years.

This is really the subject of our workshop: how to reform a large and complex schooling system. What should reformers do first? What has worked in other parts of the world? How does one turn things around, and start a virtuous cycle? What is the role of leadership at the level of the school, the district, and the cabinet? How do we deal with those vested interests which are benefiting from the way things are now? How do we build new alliances for reform strategies, and a political coalition for change?

Is it actually possible to fundamentally reform such a large and entrenched system? Could non-state actors play a constructive role? Should we have one national plan or many smaller pilot projects aimed at testing what might work in South African circumstances? Is there a role for markets, incentives, and public-private partnerships? How are we spending our massive education budget? Are we doing so in the most reform-oriented way, or should we do different things with our resources? These are among the questions we hope to explore.

We have distinguished speakers from four countries relevant to our enquiry. Ghana's education system is producing better results than South Africa's; its learners are outperforming ours in international tests. In 2000 Brazil came near the bottom of some international tests, but, following a decade of schooling reforms, it is now recognised as one of the most rapidly improving countries in the world. India has one of the largest low-fee private schooling sectors in the world, and has just introduced a new law about this which is being intensively debated.

The United States is a remarkable laboratory for a large number of education initiatives in which people are trying different ways to kick-start reform and make a significant difference to students' experience of learning, but most importantly to outcomes.

Improving the quality of South African schooling is vital for the poor as well as the previously disadvantaged majority

Like all other countries, South Africa has its own specific circumstances, and CDE is not suggesting we should try simply to replicate what people are doing elsewhere. However, we do believe we can learn important lessons from experiences of schooling reform in other countries. Reflecting on other places and what they have done can help us to look at ourselves and our challenges in different ways, and to ask different questions which are less rooted in our history and more future-oriented.

I hope everyone will feel free to talk frankly and honestly. This is an open-ended dialogue. CDE does not have preconceived solutions, and we are looking forward to learning as much from our international guests and the ensuing conversation as anyone else.

THE RELEVANCE OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE TO SOUTH AFRICA

Angie Motshekga

Minister of Basic Education

I WISH TO commend CDE for hosting this Round Table on the significant issue of schooling reform. You have done schooling systems worldwide a great service by bringing together these distinguished individuals to share their experiences and perspectives.

Over the years, CDE has informed government policies on how best to realise social and economic development using education as a driver. In 2008 it held a workshop on international experiences of schooling reform in Washington, DC which created a platform for interrogating concerns raised about the quality of the South African education system, and explored the value of learning from the experience of other countries on education reform.

Like the Washington workshop, this Round Table creates a climate conducive to learning from international experience on how best to improve our schooling systems, and help shape the democratic future of our societies. Experiences shared during engagements of this nature yield invaluable information which are vital for transforming education policies and systems.

There is no way of talking seriously about social and economic transformation without talking about education and its role in human development and economic growth. Many agree that education is a fundamental tool for achieving sustainable development and delivering on the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goal 1 on poverty eradication. This is what former President Nelson Mandela meant when he said: 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.'

It is imperative that our education system be well-structured to meet the needs and aspirations of all our people. This we can do best by learning from each other's experiences. Our work must be informed by practical experience, reliable data, research, and benchmarking from home and abroad. The relevance of international experience in schooling reform is therefore unquestionable.

Education systems constantly evolve to keep pace with the ever-changing needs of societies. In South Africa, the advent of democracy and non-racialism in 1994 came with new demands for institutional and social change.

Demands for education reform continue to be informed by the need to address and redress the legacy of apartheid and segregation. As we review our policies and develop strategies for improving quality, our historical context demands that we also consider the question of equity.

Our education system must be structured to meet the needs and aspirations of all our people

We have made huge strides since 1994. A few examples should suffice:

- The proportion of children completing the compulsory Grades 1 to 9 has risen from 80 per cent in 1994 to 99 per cent in 2010;
- All laws that divided learners by race under apartheid have been repealed;
- More African learners are enrolled in former whites-only schools;
- Government spending on each school child has been equalised; and
- Vital and developmental learning outcomes have been embedded in the current curriculum.

Like education systems elsewhere, especially in developing countries, we also have challenges to surmount. For instance, we still have a high percentage of learners leaving the system without having mastered the necessary knowledge and skills.

More worrying is the fact that these challenges are more prevalent among learners from poor and rural communities. To address these challenges systematically, we have developed an education sector plan called Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025.

This plan is our blueprint for improving the quality of education and for turning around the schooling system in line with our national development goals. It sets out 27 national goals, of which 13 are output goals outlining expected improvements in learner performance and school enrolment. These include:

- Increasing the proportion of learners who master the minimum language and numeracy competencies during Grade 3;
- Increasing the proportion of learners who master the minimum language and mathematics competencies during Grades 6 and 9;
- Increasing the number of Grade 12 learners who become eligible for a Bachelors programme at a university;
- Increasing the number of Grade 12 learners who pass mathematics and physical science;
- Ensuring that all children remain enrolled in school until they turn 15; and
- Improving access to quality early childhood development.

The Action Plan covers a number of key areas including teachers, learner resources, whole school improvement, school funding, school infrastructure, and support services. By 2025, we want:

- **Learners** who attend school regularly, assume responsibility for their own learning, and have access to computers, good meals, good teachers, and sporting and cultural activities.
- **Teachers** who are confident, well-trained, continually improve their capabilities, are committed to giving learners the best possible education, and enjoy job satisfaction due to decent conditions of service.

- **Principals** who ensure that quality teaching takes place as prescribed by the national curriculum; provide responsible leadership; and promote harmony, creativity, and a sound work ethic within the school community and beyond.

- **Parents** who are well informed about their children and school activities.
- **Learning and teaching resources** that are in abundance and of a high quality.
- **School buildings and facilities** that are spacious, functional, safe, and well-maintained.

In short, the Action Plan embodies a holistic approach to creating an environment conducive to quality teaching and quality learning.

In 2009 the government adopted an outcomes-focused approach to the delivery of public services. In line with this, we have signed a Delivery Agreement with the President which binds us to achieving our Action Plan.

We share social and economic characteristics with many other developing countries. We are optimistic that deliberations at this Round Table will shed light on challenges and aspects of our schooling system calling for change, including: enabling tools such as ICT solutions that we can deploy in schools to support administration, teaching and learning; teacher training and professional development

We still have a high percentage of learners leaving the system without having mastered the necessary knowledge and skills

programmes that can yield the desired teaching corps; quality educational content and resources; and effective, economical strategies for achieving our educational goals and vision.

I look forward to learning from your experiences which can only enrich our knowledge base, and help to ensure that we improve the quality of teaching and learning in our schools.

Lastly, we fully agree with CDE's conception of the relevance of international experience in schooling reform. In its policy formulation, South Africa also considers CDE's observation in its project background document that 'there will be value for the country's policy-makers and the education sector generally to understand what has been attempted, and why, in selected places around the world, and what the impacts have been and why, and to explore the implications for national and provincial/local education policy and practice.' In this respect, the Round Table is a valuable intervention.

Once more, on behalf of government, we are grateful to have this discussion on our shores, and thankful to all the international guests and speakers who have made it. Working together, we can change the world using quality education as 'the most powerful weapon.'

SCHOOLING REFORM IN THE STATE OF SÃO PAULO

Paulo Renato Souza

Former Brazilian Minister of Education, and former Secretary of Education of the State of São Paulo

THE BRAZILIAN education system is huge; we have more than 42 million students in high schools alone. It is basically a public system; 90 per cent of enrolment in basic education is in public schools, which belong to states and municipalities. While there are some overlaps, it is essentially a decentralised system. The Federal government is responsible for policies and for some special programmes, and states and municipalities are responsible for running the schools, paying the salaries, and determining the curricula.

Access to education has improved significantly since 1992. Attendance of children improved from 87 per cent in 1992 to 97 per cent in 2003. More significantly, attendance of children in the poorest 20 per cent of households improved from 75 per cent to 95 per cent.

This was achieved by way of a fiscal reform. The Brazilian constitution states that 25 per cent of state and municipal revenue should be used for education. We then linked 15 per cent of that revenue to the number of students in municipal or state schools. As a result, in order to access the revenue, mayors took active steps to ensure that children went to school.

In line with this, the proportion of children aged 7–14 out of school has reduced from 9,8 per cent in 1995 to 2,3 per cent in 2007. However, after reducing from 33,4 per cent in 1995 to 18,9 per cent in 2001, the proportion of youths aged 15–17 out of school has only reduced further to 17,7 per cent in 2007, so this remains a problem.

The São Paulo state schooling system is also very large, comprising 5 300 schools, 5 million students, 220 000 teachers, and 40 000 school staff. Of the 220 000 teachers, 140 000 are permanent and 80 000 are temporary. This is only the state system; then you have the municipal system. The state system accounts for 52 per cent of enrolment in grades 1 to 9, and the municipal system for 48 per cent. Many other students attend private schools.

Our enrolment rates are very high – 98 per cent of children aged 7–14 are in school, 86 per cent of youths aged 15–17 are in school, and 69 per cent of youths aged 15–17 are in high school. São Paulo

'We fully agree with CDE's conception of the relevance of international experience in schooling reform'

occupies first place in the national schooling rate ranking for people between 15 and 29 years. And in 2009, São Paulo achieved second place on IDEB, the national quality index. As these figures show, the problem of access has largely been resolved. Our challenge now is that of quality. Brazilian learners perform very poorly in international assessments, and are also not performing well enough in our national assessments.

Effective assessment system

This is a Latin American problem. Most Latin American countries have made remarkable progress in terms of quantity, but not in terms of quality. Moreover, while most Latin American countries have significantly improved their inputs in respect of quality, such as teaching material, infrastructure, and teacher training, students' performances have not improved at the same rate.

In order to address this challenge, we have to take three major steps. The first is to consistently implement an effective assessment system. Most Latin American countries have made progress in this respect; however, the various systems are not always comparable, and we should ensure that they are. The second is to improve the performance of teachers in the classroom, and the third, to improve school management. We have concentrated our efforts in these areas over the past four years.

The issue of the quality of teachers' education remains unresolved. Again, there is consensus in Latin America that teachers are badly trained. Following legislative changes, teachers' training has now been extended; however, we feel their education is far too theoretical, removed from reality in the classrooms, and insufficiently focused on the content they are supposed to teach. As a result, teachers are not confident about what to do in their classrooms.

It will take a long time before changes in teachers' education will percolate through the system. Therefore, it is necessary to think about measures that would have an immediate impact. In Brazil, we have 2,5 million teachers in public classrooms, and we cannot replace them overnight. Therefore, we need to find ways of helping them improve their day-to-day teaching practices.

School management

As regards school management, there are good and bad public schools even in the same neighbourhoods. The key difference is the quality of their principals. We have learnt that good principals play a vital role in improving schools; in fact, studies have shown that merely training a principal without taking any other steps can lead to major improvements in the performance of learners.

Good principals actively lead their schools and engage with their communities of parents, who then apply pressure on the school to achieve good results. In our view, the training of principals is far too bureaucratic; instead, they should receive the same management training as people in the private sector.

What we did in São Paulo to address these challenges was to develop an educational policy along four axes. The first, implemented four years ago, was to establish state-wide standards for teaching the curricula – to say to teachers, you are going to teach this subject in this way, using this method, and following this sequence. We then provided teachers and students with the necessary materials, and trained teachers how to use them. This is common in other, more organised societies but was not the case in Brazil, where teachers previously had the freedom to teach their subjects in any way they wanted.

We delivered textbooks to them, of course, but this was an additional element: defining a teaching method, giving teachers exercises to be passed on to the students, and organising the teaching process. This included a reading and writing programme for grades 1–4, and a support programme for grades 5–8 and high school. In the reading and writing programme, continuing education, curricular orientation, and auxiliary teachers were supplied for grade 1, and support material for students and teachers in

The problem of access has largely been resolved. Brazil's challenge now is that of quality

grades 1–4. Among other measures, we distributed 1,8 million reading books, as well as 818 titles from 80 publishers. As a result, the percentage of literate learners in grade 2 increased from 87,4 per cent in 2007 to 90,2 per cent in 2008.

The second programme comprised new curricula and support material for teachers and students in grades 5–8 as well as high school. A total of 192 million books and other material were distributed to teachers and students over the past two years. Thirty hour training programmes were created for teachers in all the disciplines covered by the curricula, using video conferences and distance learning. Some 54 000 teachers subscribed in 2008, and some 32 000 were approved. Subscriptions in 2009 rose to an estimated 150 000.

We also created the São Paulo Network for Teachers' Education, or REDEFOR, comprising 16 specialisation programmes at the graduate level for teachers, principals, and co-ordinators, again utilising distance learning. The network is being managed by the state universities, with the content defined by the department. The target is to educate 60 000 teachers and specialists.

Additional policies included improving the learning abilities of lagging students by means of intensive tuition in the first six weeks of the school year, and curricular diversification at the high school level including vocational programmes, general preparation for labour, and preparation for higher education.

The second axis was to create an assessment system, and establish clear performance targets for each school. We developed an index in terms of which Brazilian schools can be compared with schools internationally. We then defined a long-term target for each school in terms of which they would have to reach the level of a school in a developed country, and a series of annual targets working up to this goal.

Bonuses and incentives

The third axis was a bonus system for principals, other managerial staff, and teachers, pegged to students' performances as well as repetition and dropout rates. The bonuses consist of 2,4 times salaries at schools that reach their performance targets, and 2,9 times salaries at schools that exceed their performance targets. Poor attendance may result in bonuses being reduced or even eliminated. In 2010, 210 000 of 227 000 eligible teachers and staff received some kind of bonus.

The fourth axis was to create new career paths for teachers, involving promotion along five new levels, and larger salary increases for each level. Conditions for promotion include improved attendance, permanence, and further studies.

The new promotion system comprises five levels. Promotion to the next level involves a salary increase of 25 per cent. This means that the salaries of teachers could increase fourfold in the course of their careers. Twenty per cent of all teachers may be promoted yearly, and each teacher may be promoted once every three years.

In Brazil, teacher attendance has been a huge problem. Four years ago, teachers might have been absent every other day for purported family and other reasons while still continuing to draw their pay. The regulations have been tightened, but levels of absence are still very high. Teachers are allowed to be absent for a certain number of days. We now say, you don't necessarily have to take all those days, and will be promoted if you take fewer than the maximum number.

As regards permanence, teachers – particularly those from the poorest communities – tended to move very quickly among schools. In order to be promoted, teachers now have to stay at the same school for at least three years.

Lastly, teachers have to pass an exam in their own subject, depending on their teaching level. These conditions are stringent, but the rewards are high, and we have already promoted almost 45 000 teachers, or 20 per cent of the total. A second batch of teachers will be promoted in July this year. This was

We developed an index in terms of which Brazilian schools can be compared with schools internationally

the most controversial part of my administration, and I had a lot of trouble with the unions because of these and other measures.

We have established a teacher's training college, which also trains principals and other school administrators, and changed the rules of entry for permanent teachers. Candidates now have to pass an exam, and complete a four-month training programme which is again based on the curriculum they will eventually teach.

To summarise, teachers' careers are now enhanced by two complementary instruments: the bonus system, which recognises the collective work of school teams, and could enhance teachers' income by up to 25 per cent a year; and the promotion system, which recognises the efforts of individual teachers to improve their knowledge and performance.

I was criticised for basing some of these incentives only on the knowledge of teachers, and not their ability to teach. My response was, if people don't know their subjects, they can't teach them in any case. The World Bank conducted a study in which it correlated the results of teachers in our first promotion exams with the performance of their students in the students' assessments. The correlation was very high, showing that improving teachers' content knowledge has a definite impact in the classroom.

Teachers' careers are enhanced by two complementary instruments: a bonus system, and a promotion system

DISCUSSION

In response to questions, Paulo Renato Souza made the following additional points:

- The international PISA assessment system tests reading ability, mathematical reasoning, and the basis for scientific knowledge. PISA is organised by developed countries. In the process, they are signalling that what countries need to develop economically is school-leavers who are literate, numerate, and able to assimilate scientific knowledge. In the modern world, knowledge is renewed very rapidly. Rather than trying to transmit the current body of knowledge, the mission of basic education is simply to develop children's ability to learn.
- Brazil's current assessment system was developed by specialised foundations in the United States. It enables all Brazilian schools to be compared in time and space, and links learning to educational policies. It also provides a basis for international comparisons, which is essential as all countries are increasingly interlinked in a global economy, and everyone has to conform to standards set by developed countries.
- During his tenure, two programmes were launched to stimulate the participation of communities. The first gave state funds to PTAs, and the second was a national campaign aimed at stimulating parents' involvement in schools. The assessment system had shown that parental involvement was strongly correlated with performance. As a result, the authorities launched a national day for parents' participation in schools, which was very well attended.
- Paradoxically, while the authorities themselves are generally dissatisfied with public schools, Brazilian parents are very happy with their children's schools, as they regard them as far better than other public services. Also, many children attending Grade 6 have already surpassed the educational levels of their parents, who don't really know what schooling is supposed to be about. This means that the impetus for school reform has to come largely from government, and parents cannot be relied on to contribute.
- Teachers' unions have strongly resisted certain reforms, notably the incentive systems. Where vested interests are involved, it is very difficult to find compromises. The best way to deal with this kind of resistance is to stimulate a public debate, and create broader public support for the intended reforms. In this way, one can create a constituency in one's favour. In the process, it is important to talk to other interest groups, such as the business sector, and build good relations with the media.

- The São Paulo state public school system has 220 000 teachers for 5 million students, translating into a teacher:student ratio of about 1:20.
- The Brazilian constitution specifies that 25 per cent of all state and municipal revenue should be used for education, and that at least 60 per cent should be used to pay active teachers. As a result, teachers' salaries have increased substantially, especially in very poor areas. Unions are playing an active role in monitoring whether governors and mayors are really spending 25 per cent of their budgets on education, and 60 per cent of these amounts on teachers' salaries.

SCHOOLING REFORM IN DENVER, COLORADO

Tom Boasberg

Superintendent, Denver Public Schools

DENVER HAS been one of the leading sites of schooling reform in the United States over the past decade. We were the first major city to introduce a significant merit pay/incentive pay programme for teachers. We have led thinking about how to make our schools more competitive. We have signed a nation-leading compact with charter schools, and hosted a national conference with other leading cities on new ways to think about public education and the intersection between district-run schools and charter schools.

We are also one of five cities that, utilising generous donations from the Bill Gates Foundation, are pioneering new ways of evaluating teachers and providing them with feedback, coaching and support.

Our goal is to prepare our students for college or for careers. When we look at our economic statistics, the importance of high school and college graduation is very clear. The unemployment rates of people with college degrees are less than one third of those without high school diplomas. The average college graduate in the United States will earn \$1 million in the course of his or her career – far more than someone who does not graduate from college. Up to 80 per cent of jobs becoming available during the next decade will require a college degree. Even those jobs that do not require a college degree – including trades such as plumbing and electrical contracting – require the same kind of literacy, numeracy, and communication skills which people need to go to college. These are our aspirations, but we are falling far short of them in our public education system.

Our public system is deeply troubled; hence a lot of the discussion and push for reforms in recent years. The results of our efforts over the past three or four decades are very disappointing. Real per capita expenditure on education has almost tripled over the past 40 years, but our results have barely improved. Whereas two decades ago America led the world in the number of high school students who went on to post-secondary education, we are now about 12th. And we are well down the pack in international assessments such as PIRLS and TIMSS. So I speak to you not as someone who has a lot of successful experiences to share, but as a learner who recognises how much change we require in the United States for our education system to be successful.

Denver is a typical large urban district in the United States. We have about 80 000 students in our public schooling system. About three quarters come from poor families, and are eligible for free lunches. About 80 per cent are people of colour – African-Americans, Latinos or Asian-Americans. Only slightly more than 50 per cent of high school students reach grade 9 within the minimum of four years,

Denver has been one of the leading sites of schooling reform in the US over the past decade

and only about 70 per cent of students who start with us will graduate from high school, or acquire a general education degree. These learners are accommodated in 150 public schools.

As in the rest of the country, we have very stark achievement gaps of 25–35 per cent between our Anglo or white students and our Latino or African-American students, in terms of being at grade level or above. Next month we celebrate the 57th anniversary of Brown versus Board of Education, the Supreme Court decision that desegregated America's schools, and the fact that we have those achievement gaps almost 60 years later is a stark indictment of the failures and shortcomings of our system.

Almost half of the students come from families where English is not the first language spoken at home. Like many American cities, we have a very large number of immigrants, and the work we have to do with students who are learning English as a second language has some commonalities with the situation in South Africa.

When thinking about the types of reforms we are seeking to implement, we need to start with the end in mind, namely that all students graduating from our high schools should be ready for college or for careers, and work backwards grade by grade. In other words, if this is the standard we need in grade 12, what does that mean for grade 10, grade 8, grade 6, grade 4, all the way back to kindergarten and early childhood education?

Standards and assessment

At this point I want to make a strong plea for early childhood education, of five-year-olds in kindergarten, four-year-olds in preschool, and if at all possible, three-year-olds as well. The data in the United States about the importance of early childhood education is compelling, particularly for families in poverty. However, most states do not have significant funding for early childhood education. We do have limited federal funding for preschool education, but this remains one of the biggest shortcomings of our system.

A major advance during the past year, which the Obama administration has helped to drive, has been the adoption by almost all states of the Common Core State Standards. The No Child Left Behind legislation introduced 10 years ago required that all children be assessed every year in terms of state standards. In order to show good results, states dumbed down their standards, so where our national assessments were showing that 30–40 per cent of students were at grade level, some states were showing 80–90 per cent of students at grade level. In response, we adopted the Common Core Standards, which we're all very proud of. It's a huge step forward, for a number of reasons.

First, the standards are fully aligned with college and work expectations. Importantly, those standards are not just for 12th graders but go down grade by grade all the way to kindergarten, and state very clearly what is expected of students at each grade level.

Moreover, they don't emphasise rote learning or memorisation; rather, they emphasise problem-solving, rigorous analysis, deeper thinking, the ability to argue and to articulate on both the mathematical and literacy side, and focus on higher-order thinking skills. They are also narrower and deeper than our previous smorgasbord of standards, which asked people to know too much in too shallow a fashion.

So, from a reform standpoint, the first objective is to begin with the end in mind. One has to have clear standards of success, and articulate them very clearly, so that schools know what it means to be successful. Success must be tracked and measured at every grade level, and published for every school, to ensure that parents and families are fully informed about the performance of their children as well as their school.

In the United States it's vital to disaggregate this data in terms of socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, and learning disabilities, so that we make sure that the results of the majority of students do not outweigh those of students who had previously been denied full access to educational opportunities.

We need to start with the end in mind, namely that all students graduating from our high schools should be ready for college or careers

Focus on outcomes

To return to Denver, we're very tight on outcomes. We care very much that our students and schools are achieving the kinds of outcomes on a year-by-year basis that will enable them to graduate from high school prepared for college or career, and we do that by having common assessments across all our grades. These are not just year-end assessments but also what we call formative or interim assessments, so that we can see throughout the year how our students are doing.

We also believe strongly in best practice. We don't necessarily believe that schools ought to devise their own curricula. However, we do believe there is room, in collaboration with principals and teachers, for adopting best practice in a whole range of areas, including curriculum materials, interventions for struggling learners, teaching English literacy to second language learners, pedagogical practices, assessments, work with students with disabilities, and so on.

That being said, I also firmly believe the school is the unit of change, and that we ought to give our schools far more authority to manage themselves and instruct their children.

The education debate in the United States has often been one-sided, with school districts saying to schools, because you're not achieving good outcomes, we need to control your inputs. On the other hand, schools, teachers, and teachers' association are saying, just give us the power to do our jobs, and stop being so draconian. I think this is a false debate from both sides, and that you can't ask for accountability from the district side if you don't empower your schools.

Likewise, you can't hold a principal or teacher accountable for their performance unless you defer to their professional practice and their need to be empowered to lead their schools and their classrooms. Empowerment and accountability are two sides of the same coin; you can't have one without the other, and you actually need both. Because of that false debate, our schools often have neither.

The areas where we would like to give schools total flexibility, within the constraints of our collective bargaining agreement, are those of people, time and money. Every successful organisation needs authority and autonomy over how it manages its people, its time, and its dollars.

Much of the education debate is like an iceberg. We talk about the 10 per cent that's above the water, namely the curriculum, the assessments, and the academic programme, and we don't talk about the 90 per cent that's below the water, which is the who. Who are the people? How are they trained? How are they hired? How are they retained? How are they rewarded? How are they dismissed? To me, it's the 'who' that really determines academic success.

Our successful schools don't use a different curriculum, different books, or different assessments. They have better leaders, better teachers, and better fits as organisations. Within 20 minutes and sometimes 10 minutes of walking into a school, you know, from the people you meet and the sense of organisation, whether or not it's a successful school.

We think it's very important for principals to have the ability to hire and dismiss teachers. This is the most fundamental right of leading any organisation – the right to make sure your people are on the bus, and going in the right direction. Any organisation that does not have the flexibility to determine who works or does not work for it will be a troubled organisation. Part of that is determining, within the school, the roles and career paths of individuals, and ensuring that we are able to give our teachers leadership.

We have a very successful teacher leadership academy where we try to inculcate and develop leadership in teachers, because as important as school leaders are, leadership must be shared – it must be collaborative. Therefore, it's important to develop and promote leadership among teachers, allowing them to remain in the classroom but to develop a career leadership role.

It's very important that schools have more room to determine how they use their time. We have some schools that have longer school days and longer school years. Time on task is vital. If learners

Empowerment and accountability are two sides of the same coin

fall behind, one of the most important ways of allowing them to catch up is to give them more learning time.

Flexibility on budgets

Schools have a lot of flexibility on how to spend their budgets. Unlike many other school districts, we don't prescribe staffing. For example, – we don't say, you have 500 students, therefore you will have x number of teachers. Instead, we give schools cash, and full flexibility on how to use the cash. Our budgets are weighted to take into account conditions such as poverty or special education, both to make sure that schools with higher numbers of students in poverty or English language learners have significantly more resources, and that there is no disincentive to taking students with greater academic challenges.

Dollars follow learners, whichever schools they go to. Families can choose where they want to send their children, and schools have total flexibility about how to use those dollars in terms of class sizes, interventionist programmes, arts, music, sports, librarians, school supplies, and field trips. We want those decisions made at the school level closest to the students, so the schools can respond most flexibly to the actual needs of their students. Finally, it's a matter of holding school leaders accountable for their outcomes, and giving them more control over the inputs.

What does this mean at a system level? One of our abiding beliefs is a fear of monopoly. When we look at both the public and private sectors, we see monopolies generally providing significantly poorer services, lacking innovation, being more rigid and bureaucratic, and focusing not on the needs of their customers but rather on the internal stakeholders in that monopoly, whether owners or workers.

Beware of monopolies, and also be very cautious about claims of economies of scale. Many of those claims are false, and when we try and do things on a system-wide basis, we often end up with diseconomies of scale rather than concentrating resources at the school level, and allowing for greater control there.

This new approach is central to President Obama's agenda. It is controversial, and has provoked considerable resistance. Among others, our national teachers' associations disagree with many aspects of this agenda, but it is fundamental to turning around what has been a low-performing and unresponsive system. It starts with choice, and so, in a state like Colorado, any parent can choose to send their child to any school in the state.

Students from the immediate neighbourhood get preference. To the extent that there are additional slots, any student may go there. All of those choices are done by lottery to ensure fairness, and there is no selection of certain types of socially advantaged students.

We think it's very important for principals to have the ability to hire and fire teachers

Charter schools

I need to say something about charter schools. The charter school movement started about 20 years ago out of dissatisfaction with district-run schools. Charter schools are non-profit, private entities that receive a charter or permission from a school district to establish a public school. So charter schools are public schools, they receive funding from public sources, and they serve all students, but the organisation receiving that money is a private, non-profit entity set up to run that school.

We as a district give them a charter. We say, you are entitled to run this school in this neighbourhood, and the charter is effectively a performance contract. It says, if you are able to achieve these performance standards, you may continue to operate this school. Should you fail to achieve these standards, we may revoke the charter.

Much of the discussion about charters has been about whether they serve selected students only, and they have been legitimately criticised on this score. Moreover, their average performance nationally is no better than those of district-run schools – primarily because of inadequate quality control by the entities that grant and monitor the charters. In Denver, we have been more aggressive than any

other school district in the country in closing down poorly performing charters, amounting to 20 per cent of the total over the past three years. We also have rigorous standards for opening charters. As a result, our charter sector significantly outperforms our district-run segment in terms of the growth and development of individual learners.

We have three principles in respect of our charter sector, which are closely interrelated. The first is equity of opportunity. We treat charters and district-run schools equally, as public schools. They receive exactly the same public resources on a per student basis, and have the same access to district facilities. The second is equity of access and responsibility. All our schools are public schools, and must therefore serve all our children regardless of socioeconomic status, disability, or native language. The third is equity of accountability. We hold all schools equally accountable in terms of the same criteria, primarily based again on student performance from one year to the next. And charters are just as eligible to be closed down as district-run schools.

Charter schools differ from district-run schools in one important respect, namely the vital issue of who we bring into our schools and how we develop, reward and replace them. Current practice in state-run schools is far from ideal. By contrast, the charter sector has much greater freedom and flexibility in respect of hiring, developing, promoting, and dismissing staff. Successful charter schools don't use fundamentally different textbooks, curricula, assessment systems, or academic programmes. They do have fundamentally different and more practical systems for developing and managing their staff, and allowing them to operate.

Teacher quality

The factor with the greatest impact on student achievement by far is the quality of teachers. A few years ago, a seminal study was conducted in Dallas which traced the development of two groups of students from grade 3 to grade 6. Their performance at grade 3 level was identical. Half subsequently had effective teachers, and half had ineffective teachers. After three years, 75 per cent of students in the first group were at grade level, compared to 25 per cent in the second. This is bigger than the achievement gap in any city in our country, and goes to show that we can close our achievement gaps and dramatically change performance by focusing above all on the quality of teaching in our classrooms.

The factor with the greatest impact on student achievement by far is the quality of teachers

DISCUSSION

In response to questions, Tom Boasberg made the following additional points:

- Teach For America recruits graduates from the best universities to teach in public schools in urban and rural areas for a period of two years. It has been very successful, and Denver participates in it actively. Many graduates wind up teaching for longer than two years.
- In the United States, prospective teachers are drawn from the bottom third of high school graduates. Instead, teaching should be a prestigious career that attracts the best school and college graduates. Moreover, teacher training at colleges of education tends to be too theoretical. As a result, Denver has worked very hard to diversify its sources of recruitment. Besides Teach For America teachers, it has a residency programme under which mid-career professionals are brought in to teach for a year. They first work in the classroom of a master teacher before getting their own classroom. Retired professionals and civil servants are involved in the same way. This has been particularly useful in subjects such as science and mathematics.
- The most effective professional development is one on one, followed by on-site training in schools. The traditional method is in-service training in terms of which teachers attend lectures at

centralised facilities. This approach is very ineffective; instead, professional development has to be based on the actual practice of teaching.

- Working closely with teachers and their associations, Denver has developed a rubric of what it means to be an excellent teacher. It has 18 indicators, ranging from classroom management to ensuring that students are displaying initiative on their own. Unlike other rubrics, it focuses equally on what teachers and students are doing. It is detailed, concrete, and constructive, and helps teachers to understand what excellent teaching means in practice.

- Denver has gone from a system under which teachers were formally observed once in three years by their school leaders to one where every teacher receives at least four observations and feedback sessions a year; two from their school leader, and two from a pool of master teachers with expertise in their particular subjects. Observers work with 50 to 100 teachers in the course of a year, visit their classrooms at least two times a year, and have extensive post-lesson feedback and debriefing sessions with the teacher in question. We have a cadre of coaches operating at the district level, who focus particularly on young and new teachers. We also have a cadre of peer observers and evaluators whose observations form part of the formal evaluation process and counts equally with those of the principal.

At the school level, each school has a leadership team, led by the principal, and comprising elected teachers and parents. It meets regularly and helps to take vital decisions around budgets and expenditure, hiring of staff, use of time, and the operation of the school.

In case of a deadlock, the principal has ultimate authority. But principals work very closely with their parent/teacher communities. These school leadership teams are not independent governing bodies with the right to hire and fire principals, for example – those rights vest in the superintendent.

- The district has three main functions. The first is to hold schools accountable for their outcomes, and to have a clear accountability framework in terms of which we can effectively judge performance and have both positive consequences for good performance – such as incentive pay for schools that perform well – as well as interventions for low performance.

The second is capacity-building. We need to develop the capacity of our principals to exercise their instructional and operational leadership, including devolved budgetary authority – if you have \$5 million in your budget, how do you spend it, and how do you prioritise it. We have finance people who operate the spreadsheets and help them with the nuts and bolts of their budget.

The third is coaching in best practice. We have experts in the district, be it in mathematics or English as second language, who work intensively with schools. Wherever possible, this professional development is also site-based; we don't bring teachers to the district level, but take district-level experts to the schools. This allows the coaches to deal with particular problem areas, and gives the schools in question greater ownership over those issues. Pulling teachers out of schools does not help to create the ability to solve problems collectively which is generated by site-based professional development.

- The charter sector nationally is still quite small; it comprises less than 5 per cent of all public schools in the United States. In Denver it encompasses about 12 per cent of public school students, and in cities such as Washington, DC, where the district-run system has performed particularly poorly, it comprises 30–40 per cent of the public system.

Charter schools are largely concentrated in lower-performing urban districts, partly because the charter organisations regard them as the areas of greatest need. There are far fewer charters in suburban areas, where perceptions of the quality of public schools are more positive.

Some charter schools have been established by relatively inexperienced people, and are badly managed. Also, many of them are once-off charters established by a group of individuals. They are often very passionate, but lack the ability to hire good teachers and deliver consistent quality.

The most effective professional development is one on one, followed by on-site training

When we have successful charter schools, we try to turn them into networks – to establish charter management organisations which replicate our most successful schools. The Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), one of the most successful charter organisations in the United States, manages about 100 schools countrywide, and Achievement First Aspire about 15 or 20 schools. This is a relatively new development. We intend to take our most successful charters and have them replicate their schools in terms of very rigorous standards. At this point we only issue new charters to about one in four new applicants – the others do not have the managerial capabilities and experience to operate a successful school.

Charters are disproportionately represented at the high or low end of the quality spectrum. This is largely determined by the quality of the people who run those organisations. Charters are not allowed to charge tuition fees; like all public schools, they must be free and open to all students. So no district-run schools or charter schools may charge any tuition fees.

Charters have been more successful at establishing career ladders for their teachers, including positions such as lead teachers, master teachers and deans. They have different pay scales that are primarily incentive-based. The pay scales in the public system are based almost entirely on years of service and on qualifications. Unfortunately, much national research has shown that there is virtually no correlation between years of experience and advanced degrees on the one hand, and quality of teaching on the other.

Career ladders

This means we pay tens of millions of dollars on things that have little or zero correlation with what we care about, namely student results. Therefore, one of the most important things we can do is to provide stronger career ladders for our teachers, and this is one of the aspects we are negotiating very actively with our teachers' association. We want to ensure that we retain our best teachers by giving them opportunities for advancement and additional responsibilities while they stay in the classroom. One should not have a situation where, if you want a higher salary and more responsibility, you have to leave the classroom.

- Educational theory and the science and study of effective pedagogy have a very important place in education. Unfortunately, our colleges of education give too much weight to academic study, and too little to the actual practice of teaching and leading a classroom.

One of the most important things we can do is to provide stronger career ladders for our teachers

SCHOOLING REFORM IN GHANA

Ato Essuman

Former Chief Director, Ministry of Education, Ghana

I would like to start by outlining the development of education following independence in Ghana in 1957.

Kwame Nkrumah had a threefold vision for education: a tool for producing a scientifically literate population; improving productivity; and producing the knowledge needed to harness Ghana's economic potential. As a result, in 1961, he introduced free compulsory education, and invested heavily in teacher training.

This resulted in a well-trained and motivated teaching force, with teachers enjoying salaries comparable to those in other professions. Nkrumah established the Ghana Education Trust, and in 1961

introduced an Education Act which set out the country's new vision for education and outlined the main structures for delivery. The result of Nkrumah's vision and action plan was a rapid expansion of access to education at all levels.

In the 1980s the education system went into a sharp decline. Ghana was experiencing a major economic downturn. Following the discovery of oil in Nigeria, there was a mass exodus of teachers to that country, and there was a shortage of teachers, textbooks, and other learning materials throughout Ghana's schools.

As a result, in 1987, the then military government introduced a set of education reforms with two main components. The first was major curriculum reforms, with an emphasis on vocational and technical subjects. This was meant to produce a critical mass of middle-level manpower; however, this goal was not achieved, largely because of low demand. Parents wanted their children to attend grammar schools. Moreover, the economy was emerging from a major crisis, and there were no industries, factories, or jobs. As a supply-driven initiative, this policy failed to recognise the prevailing macro-economic conditions.

Secondly, the government introduced too many subjects at the primary and junior secondary school level. Given the shortage of qualified teachers and learning materials, these subjects were poorly taught, resulting in many learners failing to acquire basic literacy and numeracy.

These events point to two key lessons. First, it is dangerous to sacrifice depth in the pursuit of breadth in education. And second, extending a schooling system too rapidly has adverse consequences for teacher training and teacher supply.

In 2007, following the report of an Educational Reform Review Committee headed by Prof Jophus Anamuah-Mensah, the education system was extensively reformed. The committee presented its report in October 2002. The government then took two years to produce a white paper, and the reforms were finally launched in 2007. So a lot of time was wasted. This points to the lesson that 'walking the talk of reform' requires political commitment and drive, as well as stable political leadership. From 1999 to 2009, Ghana had no less than seven ministers of education, and I worked with six ministers during the reform period from 2001 until I left in 2009. Effective reform is very difficult under these circumstances.

Lessons for policy learnt from this process include the following:

- **Education reforms need time to plan, but also require a sense of urgency and political commitment.** In managing any reform, it is important to slow down the rhetoric of initiating reforms and to show more commitment to the implementation process. When, as a result of political expediency, educational reforms are rushed, they may fulfil our process expectations but may not lead to beneficial outcomes of improving teaching and learning.
- **Political coloration of educational reforms should be avoided.** The impression has always been created at the inception of reforms, that everything has to be started from scratch. However, there are commonalities in almost all the reforms introduced by various governments. Recognising the positive outcomes of past reforms and building on them could have saved the country enormous resources.
- **Reforms should be informed by situation analysis and future national development goals.** Education is a public good, and has to reflect the needs and aspirations of the nation. This implies that reform initiatives should move beyond ad hoc measures and parochial party-political manifestos to medium and long-term plans. Planners need to consult and build consensus among all stakeholders, which will ensure a more sustainable education development agenda which is not linked to the tenures of governments.
- **The pivotal role of teachers should be recognised.** As in other countries, our experience has shown that teachers play a central role in education and that the quality of education is determined in the final instance by teachers' performance in the classroom.

It is dangerous to sacrifice depth in the pursuit of breadth in education

- **Periodic reviews of educational systems may be a better option than waiting too long for major reforms.** As regards the teacher factor, quality begins with teacher training. In Ghana, many trainees opt for teaching by default – in other words, because they are unable to qualify for other careers. So many of them have some kind of deficit. Numerous steps have been taken to improve teacher training. These include access to courses and top-ups in the first year of teacher training, structural reforms and upgrading of the teacher education curricula. All tutors were given four years to upgrade themselves academically to masters level in the subjects they teach. Also, all teacher training colleges have been upgraded to diploma-awarding tertiary institutions.

As regards the professional development of teachers, this did not receive much attention until recently. In-service training has now been mainstreamed in the education strategic plan, and forms part of the continued professional education of teachers. A new teacher development and management policy has been adopted, focusing on the specific competencies that teachers at all levels are expected to achieve in relation to their classroom practice. A programme has also been introduced to train all untrained teachers. Qualified teachers are not willing to teach in the rural areas, so untrained teachers play an important role in that respect. Interestingly, some untrained teachers perform better than trained teachers. So far, 30 000 pupil teachers have been trained under this programme. Despite our efforts, the proportion of trained teachers is shrinking. The problem is that many trained and qualified teachers leave the profession, and we have not been able to halt or reverse this trend.

Importance of teachers and management

Our official pupil/teacher ratios seem very favourable, but the real situation is very different. Classes in the rural areas are very large. Teachers have to teach classes of up to 60 children, or more than one class at the same time.

By contrast, there are many teachers in the cities, largely because of political influence. These are the wives or relatives of people in the ministry and the education service; everybody wants to be in Accra or Kumasi. So while the statistics look good on paper, in reality there is a wide disparity between the ratios in the cities and the under-served areas.

We have introduced a number of motivational incentives, including professional allowances; responsibility allowances for head teachers; rural location allowances; teacher accommodation in rural and underserved areas; roofing sheets; home theatres and cooking utensils for rural teachers; quicker study leave for teachers who teach in the rural areas for three years; and annual best teacher awards at the national, regional and district levels.

The 1987 and 2007 reforms introduced major management and organisational processes aimed at improving schooling performance. Oversight is provided by district education oversight committees, school management committees, and parent-teacher associations. These are supported by district education planning teams, and accountability is strengthened by school performance appraisal meetings and circuit supervisors.

These structures seem to be working in the cities and some peri-urban areas, because of the availability and quality of resources. However, they are not working in the rural and underserved areas, where about 60 per cent of our schools are located, because of deficits in social capital. In response, we have stepped up training, and increased our budgets for sensitising communities.

Introducing systems and structures without providing the necessary resources undermines school and teacher accountability. Circuit supervisors are expected to visit each school at least three times a term, supervise the work of heads of schools and teachers, and provide them with coaching and support. However, this function has been weakened by a shortage of qualified circuit supervisors; a lack of resources, including transport; delays in reimbursing expenses; and the inaccessibility of some schools.

Steps taken to address these challenges include increasing budgets for supervision, fast-tracking the processing of personal vehicle loan applications, creating ownership schemes for motorcycles, and

Introducing new systems without providing the necessary resources undermines school and teacher accountability

paying rural location allowances. Remaining problems include the slow release of funds, and limitations on district directors' authority to discipline officials.

School leadership should receive more attention. Our experience shows that effective school leadership is vital. Therefore, head teachers are key change agents, and must be adequately remunerated. We should really regard them as managing directors or CEOs.

Education sector plans are valuable vehicles for co-ordinating development assistance, and all potential funders should be persuaded to buy into them. NGOs can be helpful, but can also distract attention. Because teachers' salaries are low, they will jump at every opportunity to attend workshops and conferences and so on, because of the per diem. Time on task is involved, and we need to manage this.

It's important to account for one's stewardship of the education system. Every year, the Ghanaian ministry of education holds an education sector review, attended by the minister, the chief director, and other senior officials. This is where accountability is demanded by stakeholders and questions asked, such as: where is all the money going? And, how much are we investing in pro-poor policies? When I look back, I think of what could have been done in the classroom with the money spent on fancy vehicles.

Lastly, in dealing with teachers' unions, don't promise things you can't deliver, and avoid entering into agreements when you're under pressure.

DISCUSSION

In response to questions, Ato Essuman made the following additional points:

- Formerly, any teacher who went to a rural area was welcomed by the chief and other elders and provided with accommodation. As the economy deteriorated, everyone became more careful about spending money, and we realised that people were unwilling to go to the rural areas not because they did not want to go, but because there was no proper accommodation and no piped water, for instance. We therefore introduced our incentive programme. It was supported by the World Bank, DfID, and the government of Ghana, but like many of these interventions it was not properly mainstreamed to assure sustainability. This is a common problem: we are quick to accept assistance and start a programme, but less good at sustaining it. So people are again not willing to go. It would have been advantageous to continue this programme.

- There seems to be a strong donor influence in respect of the language policy. The policy is to teach children in their local language for the first three years, and then introduce English. However, rightly or wrongly, parents want their children to speak English. To many in Ghana the quality of education is measured by the ability to speak English and progress on the academic ladder from basic to senior high school. If you are given a letter to read in a village, and you cannot do so, your mother or grandmother calls someone else. I'm not saying it's right, but this is the reality.

- Qualified teachers are in short supply, so we draw on unemployed people who have finished high school and are willing to teach. Some of them have taught for more than 20 years. However, we don't have a system that is flexible enough to accredit them. We have now introduced the untrained teachers' programme in terms of which these teachers attend training colleges during the vacations.

- Students attend training colleges, are taught, and start teaching. After 15 or 20 years, the curriculum would have been changed in concert with the various reform agendas. However, these changes are not matched with the requisite professional teacher development. As a result we have introduced a programme of continued teacher professional development. It is supported by the World Bank, DfID, JICA, and the government of Ghana. We have now mainstreamed it in our education sector plan.

- We used to work with individual donors on different projects, which was unco-ordinated and often confusing. However, because we needed the money, we always agreed. We then met with our

Head teachers are key change agents, and must be adequately remunerated

development partners and decided that we should no longer be pulled in different directions by different agendas. As a result, in 2003 we introduced a co-ordinated sector plan which is fully supported by our donors. Among others, it contains clear priorities, outcomes, and indicators. Once a year we meet with the entire donor community to review progress and refine the plan.

- We have many trade unions in the education sector, but this has not been a major issue in recent years. Teachers' associations tend to strike soon after a new minister has taken office, but the strikes are not sustained. We also work with them behind the scenes. When pressures do develop, ministers are quick to sign MoUs with trade unions – perhaps because they know they won't be in the post for very long, and won't need to keep their promises. So I'm saying, if you cannot provide, don't sign.

- There is a drop in enrolment between primary and secondary education. We have about 14 000 primary schools, 7 000 junior high schools, and 500 senior high schools, which attests to this. Many of these find themselves in the informal sector which is a large sector of the economy. This has prompted the government to focus on vocational and technical training, but this has been introduced in the wrong way and may stifle the initiatives already taken by the informal sector practitioners. Also, in very deprived areas, students who progress from basic schools to high schools attend boarding schools elsewhere outside the village, while others who are not able to continue their education remain in the village. This is not a good incentive for younger children to continue their schooling. They see greater value in helping in their parents farm, fishing, and so on. People also move away from school in times of economic difficulties. This is one of the reasons why we are trying to give more attention to the rural areas.

In dealing with teachers' unions, don't promise things you can't deliver, and avoid entering into agreements when you're under pressure

SCHOOLING REFORM IN INDIA

Prof Anita Rampal

Dean of Education, University of Delhi

I WOULD LIKE to share with you some insights from the debates, policy formation, and educational reform in India in recent years – at the national level over the past five years, which has been a very exciting period, and at the state level before that.

What we have learnt and implemented is that, if you want better performance, if you want education to play a democratic role, if you want education to address issues of social justice and social cohesion, your goals really need to be redefined and implemented through a rights framework.

What is exciting in our own country is that 60 years after adopting a democratic constitution, and many radical policies, we have, for the first time, introduced a Right to Education (RTE) Act, which declares education to be a fundamental right. Given that India is a rapidly developing country, why has it become important for it to re-examine its own educational goals and introduce this Act which contradicts the way in which schooling has traditionally been structured and organised? It also contradicts the notion of introducing competition in education – the approach which wants to utilise the market principle in education, which says that competition, monopolies, and choice play a vital role.

Our minister has met with representatives of various social sectors, and many of these issues have been deliberated. It has been decided that we will not adopt this approach, and that voucher schools and charter schools will not be offered as options in our education system.

The RTE Act basically states that there will be no discrimination against children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. More specifically, it states that there will be no selection, no

screening, and no profiling. Many of our well-known schools profile parents and interview them before deciding whether they are going to admit their children. Also, many schools, including government schools, identify fast and slow learners. Not surprisingly, the slow learners all come from economically or socially challenged homes.

All these forms of privilege and discrimination will go. During the first eight years there will be no expulsion, no capitation fee, and no grade retention. Children will be comprehensively and continuously evaluated, but not in competitive board exams.

This goes against the traditional approach in which children were segregated or selected at an early age, and placed into separate tracks or streams. Our own Education for All programme, which has now been radically changed, was doing some of these things. Under this programme, hundreds of thousands of para-teachers, many of whom were unqualified, were recruited on a contract basis, and alternative learning centres established for the children of the poor.

The RTE Act is addressing many of these issues. Children can come in late, and there will be special training for those children and for teachers to ensure that they catch up and are placed in age-appropriate classes. When a child comes in late, say, at the age of ten, the most natural thing for the system to say is that this child does not know anything, and will not cope in a class with other learners of the same age.

The new approach fundamentally rejects the notion that there are some children who are teachable and others who are not. In fact, the national curriculum framework says we must recognise the right of every child to learn, that every child is an active learner, and that it is the system or the schools which are responsible for not having achieved this.

The framework has also abandoned the notion of minimum learning levels, which were strongly outcomes-based. Instead, profiles are kept of what is expected from children when they finish various grades, but not in terms of the exact details of what they are learning.

Earlier theories of learning held deficit views of learners – in other words, if learners failed to achieve certain standards, this meant that there was something wrong with them. This conception was reflected in definitions of intelligence, ability, and competence. Instead, contemporary theories look at how children learn in collaborative ways in diverse environments, and how the system in question helps or hinders this. Learning should be assessed, but in non-threatening ways.

Research in the United States has shown that if you suggest to university students that a test they are about to write is aimed at establishing whether there is any difference in the performances of children from different racial or ethnic backgrounds, for example, this can dramatically alter their performance.

Therefore, many of the same people who previously talked about competence are now talking about confidence and motivation, and the negative impacts that stereotyping and expectations could have on the performance of learners. In the 1960s there were classic studies in which teachers were given random lists of students said to be their best and poorest students at the start of a school year. At the end of the year, it was found that the teachers had categorised the students in exactly the same way.

Teachers' expectations

There have been other classic experiments which demonstrate the impact of teachers' expectations on children's performance. As examples I will refer to two states in India which have drastically changed their methods of assessment, and achieved very different results. The whole process of comprehensive and continuous assessment is aimed at achieving an assessment not *of* learning, but *for* learning. These are assessments which are not trying to rank people and tell them that they are competing with others, but simply to assess whether they have improved.

Reform is a huge undertaking, and the danger of losing focus is ever present

Kerala has the highest levels of school enrolment, literacy, and social indicators in India, comparable to those of many developed countries. Despite this, about ten years ago, at the time of the Education for All programme, it said it was not satisfied with its performance, and embarked on a major programme of education reform.

Besides classroom practices, teacher training, and teachers' incentives, it also changed the examination system – one of few states to do so. This was based on the principle that every evaluation activity should be a learning activity; it should be non-threatening (i.e., it should not be a formal exam paper); and should be devised by rigorously trained teachers. Also, before an evaluation activity you have a non-evaluation activity, so that you put the child at ease. You put the child in a mode of thinking and understanding, and then proceed with the assessment.

Language of instruction

Kerala began to teach children to read and write in their own languages. The Right to Education Act states that children should be taught in their mother tongue 'as far as possible'. This phrase was added later, because there is a debate in India about the role of English in education and in other spheres.

Research has shown that, for a few years at least, children learn best in their mother tongue, and also make a more successful transition to being taught in English. Papua New Guinea is now teaching children in 400 languages in primary school, and has dramatically reduced the number of children who drop out of the system.

Kerala has very active and very strong teachers' unions, which strongly opposed some previous education reforms. In this instance, teachers were involved in the reforms in a participatory way, and there was a lot of interaction between them, parents, and communities about new approaches to learner assessment as well as teacher evaluations. Malappuram is a poor, under-served district with a large Muslim population. It always came last (out of 15 districts) in any standard assessment. Within a few years, it came second only to Trivandrum, which is the capital district.

So in districts where communities have been mobilised, and a high level of participation of teachers and parents have been achieved, the reforms have resulted in major improvements. In some districts, the number of scholarships won by students have grown three times, because many more children from poor families felt they could write the scholarship exams without feeling threatened or intimidated.

Questions – even in mathematics – are based on real-life situations and experiences which make them more meaningful for learners, provide a different basis for assessment, and help us to achieve educational goals beyond basic literacy and numeracy.

Many of these reforms are benefiting from experiments in the 1970s when the government sent academics, members of NGOs, and professional people to poorly performing schools in the rural areas and elsewhere in an attempt to improve them.

They engaged with teachers in a participatory way, living with them for weeks on end, and working with them in their classrooms in very high temperatures. They met with a lot of resistance from teachers who had been teaching for 20 years or more, and thought there was nothing more they could learn. The visitors then learnt that their major challenge was to engage with these teachers, and reinvigorate them.

The current reforms at the national level have been introduced by people who played an active role in those experiments, and the same teachers went as teacher trainers to other states. This has helped to break through traditional training hierarchies, and provide teachers with new incentives.

Teacher education remains our biggest challenge. The numbers involved are staggering – we are talking about 200 million children, and therefore need to train about 800 000 new teachers. However, while we need to address the issue of numbers, we need to do so with equity, and ensure that education maintains its transformative and equity agenda.

Research has shown that, for a few years at least, children learn best in their mother tongue

DISCUSSION

- Prof Rampal was asked to comment on the fact that large numbers of students have moved to the private schooling sector, which seems to be growing rapidly, with reports of some 60 per cent of learners moving to these schools in urban areas. Prof Rampal said parents wanted quality education for their children, and would try to send them to private schools if the public system failed. However, 80–90 per cent of schools in various states were still public schools, and the main challenge was really to offer good quality and equitable public schooling. The RTE Act was a response to this challenge.

- A participant asked what had happened to plans to build 600 high-quality, world-class schools, and how this fitted in with the new framework. Prof Rampal said the Prime Minister had announced this scheme prior to the RTE Act, and it had been intensively discussed since then. The schools were meant to be built by public-private partnerships in remote areas. A model had been developed which was acceptable to government agencies, but less so to private partners. As a result, little progress had been made.

- Asked to comment on a new law which stipulates that 25 per cent of places in private schools would be paid for by the state so that they could be taken up by poorer learners, Prof Rampal said this was meant for all schools, including well-resourced government schools, and demonstrated the insistence on having children from mixed backgrounds at the same schools. Court cases were in progress over whether or not schools had the right to screen these students. However, the underlying principle was that children could not be segregated on the basis that some paid fees and others did not.

- A participant asked Prof Rampal to comment on reports of widespread absenteeism among teachers at Indian schools, which had led to the huge expansion of low-fee private schooling, and seemed to contrast with her positive depiction of the public education system. Prof Rampal acknowledged there were reports along these lines; however, instead of ‘teacher bashing’, the challenge was to solicit the active participation of teachers through carefully worked out mechanisms. There were numerous examples of countries that had achieved quality education via the continuous development of teachers which enhanced their self-image and capacities, and these examples had to be studied and followed.

- With respect to teacher development within the new rights framework, Prof Rampal said the new approach had necessitated a fresh look at teacher education. Educationists were asking for longer and more professional development, which went against many other recommendations. More specifically, they wanted to move towards a four-year integrated programme of elementary teacher development. Delhi University had developed a programme which gave students enough time to understand child development, social realities, liberal options, pedagogy, and other relevant elements in an integrated way. It was very effective, and had been taken as a benchmark.

- Educationists also wanted to develop teachers as reflective practitioners. The challenge was to change the conventional conception of teaching. At the moment, teaching was understood as the delivery of lessons, but the national curriculum framework said knowledge was not really delivered in this way. Knowledge had to be constructed by the child; moreover, it was not constructed alone, but through work and activity in a collaborative setting.

So the challenge was to change these conceptions so that teachers did not automatically start labelling children as slow and fast learners, which the system did currently, but to foster an understanding of how those abilities were socially constructed.

- A participant asked how targets such as literacy could be measured and defined in a rights-based framework. Prof Rampal said there was widespread consensus in India that it did not want to get involved in the international assessment race, but wanted to concentrate on more inclusive education instead. ‘Do your own assessments; trust teachers, and enhance their capacity. Don’t have independent

The new approach has necessitated a fresh look at teacher education

agencies which come in inspection mode to see what teachers are doing. Learning will only be understood when teachers themselves understand what assessments are about.'

- Moreover, India did not want to differentiate between ability in terms of knowledge and skills, with knowledge associated with high ability and skills with low ability, as had been done traditionally. This was a very hierarchical system. 'Instead, we want to look at emergent literacy in the context of verbal communication and how children start reading without first focusing on alphabets, and certainly not on grammar. The textbooks and teacher training have addressed these issues, and there are no targets set in this way.'

- A participant asked Prof Rampal to comment on the rationale for India's move to contextualised knowledge, given that this was an approach that South Africa had recently abandoned. Prof Rampal said the basic rationale was to address issues of quality together with equity. The understanding was that the state had been compromising on quality, especially in respect of the most disadvantaged people who needed it most; that merely delivering information was not really effective teaching; and that India needed a better understanding of the process of learning by learners from diverse backgrounds, and in ways that developed their full capacity. 'The Right to Education Act has a radical chapter which says that education has to be free of fear, anxiety, and trauma, and that this is essential for the development of the child, so these aspects have been linked.'

SURVEY OF IMPROVING SCHOOLING SYSTEMS AROUND THE WORLD

Judy Malan and Chinezi Chijioke

Principal and associate principal, McKinsey & Co

IN 2007, McKinsey published a well-known report entitled *How The World's Best Performing School Systems Come Out On Top*, in which we examined the best performing school systems in the world, and identified their common attributes. In this new study, entitled *How The World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, we asked ourselves what it takes to get there.

Put differently, our research was aimed at trying to understand what it takes to improve student achievement in a systematic, sustainable way, in a range of starting conditions.

We analysed 20 systems around the world, all with improving but differing levels of performance, examining how each has achieved significant, sustained, and widespread gains in student outcomes. Based on more than 200 interviews with system stakeholders, and the analysis of some 600 interventions carried out by these systems, this report identifies the elements that are replicable by school systems elsewhere as they move from poor to fair to good to great to excellent performance.

The systems we studied were Armenia, Aspire (an American charter school system), Boston (Massachusetts), Chile, England, Ghana, Hong Kong, Jordan, Latvia, Lithuania, Long Beach (California), Madhya Pradesh (India), Minas Gerais (Brazil), Ontario (Canada), Poland, Saxony (Germany), Singapore, Slovenia, South Korea, and the Western Cape (South Africa). We have distilled eight lessons from our findings which are summarised below.

A system can make significant gains from wherever it starts, and these gains can be achieved in as little as six years. Many education systems have either stagnated or regressed over the past ten years. However, our sample shows that substantial improvement can be achieved relatively quickly. Even

A system's context might not determine what needs to be done, but it does determine how it is done

systems starting from low levels of performance, such as Madhya Pradesh in India, Minas Gerais in Brazil, and Western Cape in South Africa have significantly improved their literacy and numeracy levels within just two to four years, while also making strides in narrowing the achievement gap between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. So improvement can start from any level, irrespective of geography, culture or income.

‘Process’ receives too little attention in the current debate. Improving system performance ultimately comes down to improving the learning experience of students in their classrooms. School systems do three types of things to achieve this goal: they change their structure by establishing new institutions or school types, altering school years and levels, or decentralising system responsibilities; change their resources by adding more education staff to schools or by increasing system funding; and change their processes by modifying curricula and improving the way in which teachers instruct and principals lead. All three of these intervention types – structure, resources, and process – are important along the improvement journey. However, due to their stakeholder implications, the public debate often centres on structure and resources. Moreover, we found that the vast majority of interventions made by the improving systems in our sample were ‘process’ interventions, and that these systems generally spent more time on improving how instruction is delivered than on changing its content.

Each stage of the school system improvement journey is associated with a unique set of interventions. All improving systems implement similar sets of interventions to move from one particular performance level to the next, irrespective of culture, geography, politics, or history. For example, systems moving from fair to good focused on establishing the foundations of data gathering, organisation, finances, and pedagogy, while systems moving from good to great focused on shaping the teaching profession so that its requirements, practices, and career paths are as clearly defined as those in medicine and law. This suggests that systems would do well to learn from those at a similar stage of the journey rather than from those that are at significantly different levels of performance. It also shows that systems cannot continue to improve by simply doing more of what brought them past success.

A system’s context might not determine what needs to be done, but it does determine how it is done. Though each performance stage is associated with a common set of interventions, there is substantial variation in how a system implements these interventions with regard to their sequence, timing, and roll-out – in other words, there is little or no evidence of a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to reform. One of the most important implementation decisions is the emphasis a system places on mandating versus persuading stakeholders to comply with reforms. For example, while all improving systems make substantial use of data to inform their reform programs, only a subset of our sample systems translate this into quantitative targets at both school and classroom level, and then share this information publicly (United States, England, Canada, Madhya Pradesh, and Minas Gerais). By contrast, Asian and Eastern European systems refrain from target-setting, and only make system-level data available publicly. Instead, they prefer to share performance data with individual schools, engaging them in a private dialogue about how they can improve. The systems we studied have adopted different combinations of mandating and persuading to implement the same set of interventions. For example, a system will tend towards persuasion when there are stark winners and losers as a result of the change, it can afford a longer implementation time line, the desired change is not a precursor for other changes, the system and national leadership is at a tenuous moment of credibility and stability, and/or the historical legacy of the nation makes enforcement of top-down decisions difficult.

Six interventions are common to all performance stages in all systems. These are: building the instructional skills of teachers and the management skills of principals; assessing students; improving data systems; facilitating improvement through the introduction of policy documents and education laws; revising standards and curricula; and ensuring an appropriate reward and remuneration structure

A system can make significant gains from wherever it starts, and these gains can be achieved in as little as six years

for teachers and principals. However, they are manifested differently at each stage. For example, while Armenia (on the journey from fair to good) has relied on centrally driven, cascaded teacher training programmes, Singapore (on the journey from good to great) has allowed teachers to select the topics most relevant to their development needs.

Systems further along the journey sustain improvement by balancing school autonomy with consistent teaching practice. While poor and fair systems improve themselves by prescribing instructional practice for schools and teachers, good or excellent systems improve themselves by increasing the responsibilities and flexibilities of schools and teachers to shape instructional practice. Thus one third of the systems in the ‘good to great’ journey and just less than two thirds of the systems in the ‘great to excellent’ journey have decentralised pedagogical rights to the middle layer (e.g. districts) or schools. However, the centre mitigates the risk of these freedoms resulting in wide and uncontrolled performance variations across schools by establishing mechanisms that make teachers responsible to each other for their own performance and that of their colleagues. For example, these systems establish teacher career paths whereby more highly skilled teachers increasingly help their juniors to achieve instructional excellence. They also establish collaborative practices between teachers within and across schools. Although teachers in our studied systems receive 56 percent of all support interventions, they receive only 3 percent of accountability interventions. In other words, collaborative practice becomes the main mechanism both for improving teaching practice and making teachers accountable to each other.

Leaders take advantage of changed circumstances to ignite reforms. Across all the systems we studied, one or more of three circumstances produced the conditions that triggered reform: a socioeconomic crisis; a high-profile, critical report of system performance; or a change in leadership. In 15 of the 20 systems studied, two or more of these ‘ignition’ events were present prior to the launch of the reform efforts. By far the most common event to spark the drive to reform is a change in leadership: every system we studied relied upon the presence and energy of a new leader, either political or strategic, to jump-start their reforms. New strategic leaders were present in all our sample systems, and new political leaders in half. Critically, being new in and of itself is insufficient for success – these new leaders tend to follow a consistent ‘playbook’ of practices upon entering office to lay the foundations for their improvement journey.

Leadership continuity is essential. Leadership is essential not only for sparking reform but sustaining it as well. Two things stand out about the leaders of improving systems. The first is their longevity: the median tenure of the new strategic leaders is six years and that of the new political leaders is seven years. This is in stark contrast to a norm: for example, the average tenure for superintendents of urban school districts in the United States is just three years; the average tenure of education secretaries in England is just two years; and that of education ministers in France also just two years. Secondly, improving systems actively cultivate the next generation of system leaders, ensuring a smooth transition of leadership and longer-term continuity in reform goals. This second observation lies at the heart of how a handful of our studied systems (e.g. Armenia, the Western Cape, and Lithuania) have managed reform continuity despite regular changes of political leadership. The stability of reform direction is vital to achieving the quick gains in student outcomes outlined above.

Beside these lessons, the study has yielded numerous important insights. One of them is that significant investments in education have often not yielded increases in student achievement. For example, while, from 1970 to 1994, France, New Zealand and Australia increased their real expenditure per student by 212 per cent, 223 per cent, and 270 per cent respectively, student achievement in maths and science declined by 7, 10, and 2 percentage points respectively. Similarly, while, in the period 1970 to 2005, real expenditure per student in the United States increased, and the student-to-teacher ratio improved, literacy in three age groups from 9 to 17 years failed to improve.

Leadership is essential not only for sparking reform but for sustaining it as well

DISCUSSION

In response to questions, Chinezi Chijioke made the following additional points:

- Failed reform programmes display two main characteristics. While they introduce the same sorts of interventions as successful ones, these are not implemented in a co-ordinated way. Second, successful systems have all shifted from an emphasis on policy and compliance to improvement, problem-solving and support. In the case of the role of districts vis-à-vis schools in the United States, this has involved a shift from policing administration and compliance to focusing on teaching, learning, and outcomes. These shifts are less effective across systems that have not improved.
- Many of the systems studied are fairly heterogeneous in terms of language, background, and socioeconomic status. Heterogeneous systems in all four categories have succeeded by adopting differentiated strategies. Thus the Western Cape (poor to fair) has given extra attention to poor to fair schools, and Ontario (good to great) has provided extra support to failing schools.
- While building the technical skills of teachers and principals are one of six interventions common across all journeys, this has been done in different ways across the various systems and performance categories.
 - Building partnerships with professional organisations and unions have played an important role in numerous improving systems, notably in respect of developing the capacity of professionals. Much of this has been done behind closed doors.
 - Even in school systems with eight hours of learning, children aged 8 to 18 only spend 15–20 per cent of their time at school, and 50 per cent of their time at home and not asleep. As a result, parents can play a very important supportive role in their children’s education.
 - The use of technology such as computerised distance learning systems has not played a major role in successful reform. System leaders interviewed in the course of the study said these systems were too often about hardware, software and connectivity, and did not deliver much in terms of substance. The best way to use technology is to start by defining the issues or problems that need to be resolved, and then determine how technology could help to resolve them.

Significant investments in education have often not yielded increases in student achievement

COMMENTS ON THE INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Prof Cheryl de la Rey

Vice-Chancellor, University of Pretoria

I HAVE extracted ten lessons from the presentations thus far. The first is that education is transformative. Although this may seem self-evident, some South Africans have regarded education – and particularly higher education – as a private rather than a public benefit. Education has the capacity to transform the lives of individuals as well as the prospects of communities and a country or nation as a whole.

The second is that, while minimum levels of funding and resourcing are essential, funds and resources are not enough in themselves to transform a given schooling system. The third, which is also confirmed by the literature, is the primacy of the quality of teaching and teachers. This is a pervasive lesson for all of us. However, exactly what this means in practice is still a matter for debate and investigation. The fourth is that the quality of school leadership, notably by school principals, plays a key role.

The fifth is that teaching must be valued as a profession. Some people refer to the status of teaching, but I want to talk about the value of teaching. What has emerged clearly is that the value of the teaching

profession in a given society is not only indicated by salaries alone; this could include different types of rewards, as well as financial incentives to improve performance. I am serving in an international group which is examining science education. Finland performs consistently well in maths and science, and we have been trying to analyse what factors in that society leads to this consistent performance. A major finding is that teaching in Finland is highly valued.

The next lesson is that school reforms should not be introduced in rapid succession. Change needs to be incremental; when a number of small changes are made in an incremental fashion, this seems to lead to positive outcomes. A related lesson is the importance of continuity in the political framework and political leadership, as well as at school management level. Another universal lesson is the importance of equal access and opportunity.

We also need to think anew about the reform process. In many cases, and in South Africa as well, we have tended to view reform as policy reform, with a set of regulations to follow. So we have Acts of Parliament, sets of regulations, and a legal framework which accompanies school reform. While this may be useful, it is a limited perspective, and our discussions of process issues indicate that we need to focus more actively on enabling mechanisms as well.

In thinking about the reform process, it important to understand what students, parents, and sponsors really want. Good intentions are often difficult to implement because the measures involved are not wanted by teachers, parents, or students themselves. Therefore, there is also a lesson about context – most of us would agree that context matters, but we don't know enough about *how* context matters. One of the lessons from the McKinsey study is that context matters not so much in what needs to be done, but how it needs to be done. So while there are universal lessons, context matters, particularly in respect of the process and the how.

In thinking about the how, it's important to understand that policy and regulations are only one part of the reform equation. Another part is understanding how people make sense of those policies and regulations. How do they interpret them in relation to their own value systems in their own communities? The issue of language policy is one example.

In developing democracies or developmental societies such as South Africa, we look closely at the capacity of schools, and everything that accompanies the schooling system. However, a decision to decentralise decision-making aimed at empowering teachers and parents may in fact be experienced as disempowering if the community in question does not have the capacity to take those decisions effectively.

This is one example of how context matters when we look at the implementation of universal or international lessons. Another is that the school and everything that makes up the school has potential for dealing with a major problem we are struggling with in South Africa, namely what one study has referred to a 'sense of social fragmentation or decay'. Thus schools have the potential to influence dysfunctional families and a whole range of other social problems manifested within the classrooms and at the school on a day-to-day basis. It's a question of how we think about that possibility.

To summarise, we can identify a series of universal or international lessons, but these need to be implemented in a differentiated way. I found great cause for optimism in the idea from the Mckinsey report that we can make a positive difference within six years, or even sooner. This has certainly changed my assumptions about what is possible.

I found great cause for optimism in the idea that we can make a positive difference within six years, or even sooner

Ruth Kagia

Country Director for South Africa, World Bank

WHY DO we need schooling reform? Why is this an important topic in South Africa and globally? The first part of the answer is not obvious; it lies in the issue of extreme heterogeneity, when you effectively have two or three countries in one.

A second reason for schooling reform is new evidence that what really matters is not quantity but quality. Huge investments have been made in education for all, but empirical evidence has demonstrated that what really matters are the outcomes, and that well performing schooling systems in terms of international test scores are associated with significantly higher rates of economic growth.

The third issue, which relates to heterogeneity, is the tremendous variations in the performance of rich and poor students in a range of African countries, regions in those countries, and even in the same schools. The final issue is global competitiveness. As President Obama has stated, 'In a world where countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow, the future belongs to the nation that best educates its people.' When you put these issues together, they give a new dimension to education reform.

There are some key ingredients for successful reforms. The first is a strong national vision and leadership. The second is a systemic approach to education. Sometimes we make the mistake of focusing on higher education, primary education, or another sector instead of adopting a systemic approach.

The third is adequate resources which are efficiently and equitably allocated. The fourth is strategic partnerships among civil society organisations, the private sector, parents, and communities. The fifth is a focus on outcomes and results instead of inputs. This is new and important: focus on outcomes, not inputs; focus on results, not the factors of production. The last is to benchmark one's schooling system, allowing comparisons between schools, districts, and countries, and to recognise and reward achievement.

New evidence has emerged, supported by impact evaluations, on what really makes schools work. It has been summarised in a book entitled *Education Quality and Economic Growth* just published by some of my colleagues. The essential point is that funding is generally available but is inequitably allocated across districts, income and ethnic groups. There is a lot of leakage, with only 20 to 50 per cent of intended funding reaching the school level in Uganda, Zambia, Ghana, and Brazil. Another major factor is teacher absence, amounting to 20 per cent across nine developing countries in 2004.

There is also a significant loss of instructional time, with only 39 per cent of class time in Ghana and 66 per cent in Brazil used for teaching. Lastly, spending is poorly correlated with results; evidence shows very large disparities between primary maths test scores and public education spend in a range of countries. This is highly relevant to South Africa which is performing poorly in international tests, but spends 5 to 6 per cent of GDP on education.

So how does one align inputs with outcomes? In 2004 we produced a report on making services work for poor people. We found that 'services fail when the voice and power of clients are weak' and that the key to improving services was to strengthen accountability. Our report was based on a conceptual model incorporating two routes to accountability – a long route, from citizens / clients through the state to service providers; and a short route from clients / citizens directly to service providers.

The South African civil service has a set of principles for delivering services called Batho Pele, or People First. How does one put people first in the delivery of education services? Using the framework from our earlier study, three levels of interventions are needed to strengthen school accountability: information, school-based management, and teacher incentives.

Huge investments have been made in education for all, but evidence shows that what really matters are the outcomes

Information is vital to increasing choice, voice, and participation. When parents can choose schools for their children, information increases 'market pressure' on schools to improve their performance. One prominent example is Chile's voucher system, which basically allows parents to shop for schools that work. As regards voice, information helps to empower parents and communities in respect of schools as well as local authorities. As regards participation, when parents have a voice in school management, information can make their participation more effective.

To summarise, school reform is most effective when it starts from the ground up, when you empower those who are closest to the learner, namely parents and communities. In this way you enable them to adopt the short route to accountability instead of the long route via policy-makers.

There is a wealth of evidence in favour of this approach. In Pakistan, learning outcomes in both public and private schools improved after the authorities began to distribute report cards to parents on the schools' performance. Uttar Pradesh in India has launched an awareness campaign about the roles, rights and responsibilities of school oversight committees, as well as village-specific score cards. Liberia has begun to disseminate the results of early grade reading assessments to communities. And Uganda has begun to publicise details of capitation grants distributed to various districts in the media, so parents know exactly how much money is going to their schools, and hold the teachers and head teachers accountable for the results. As a result, leakage of funds has decreased substantially, and a far larger percentage is being spent in schools.

My last point is about teachers. This is a controversial issue, particularly in a country like South Africa where you have very strong teachers' unions. However, as this workshop has again underlined, teachers really are the linchpin of the school system. How do you motivate them to work harder, and spend more time interfacing with learners in the classroom? The key here is to reward teachers for results, either by renewing their contracts or via performance bonuses. Many developing countries have moved towards utilising contract teachers, and only renewing their contracts if they produce good results. Similarly, many developing countries have introduced bonus systems linked to students' test results. Once again, the basic point is that school reform is most effective when it creates a dynamic around the classroom, and when success is measured in terms of outcomes.

When parents can choose schools for their children, information increases 'market pressure' on schools to improve their performance

DISCUSSION

Participants entered into an intensive discussion of the various presentations, seeking to identify key lessons and relating them to South African circumstances.

- The various contributions had identified obvious fundamentals across all systems and countries. Given that virtually everyone agreed on the levers of change, the major issue was which strategy to adopt to set them in motion. South Africa had major choices to make in respect of strategy, but displayed a surprising lack of urgency in this respect. Paulo Souza's presentation had shown that Brazil was nearly at the bottom of the world class, and then took action with a great sense of urgency, taking some risks in the process. Recent studies of South African education had deepened anxieties about its performance as a country, and the connection between this performance and the challenge of unemployment and employability. Analysts were starting to say that South Africa's extremely high rates of youth unemployment could lead to growing unrest which could once again destabilise the country.
- The workshop had reinforced the finding that South Africa had not approached education reform in the right way – it had proceeded with radical reform, and fixated on content, without understanding the importance of process and continuity. It had sought to empower people and institutions without building capacity, and as a result it had not been able to achieve accountability. The presentations by Paulo Souza and Tom Boasberg had underscored that South Africa had not invested in professionalising

the system. Many areas of society that ought to have been professionalised had become politicised and largely dysfunctional. The workshop helped to provide a clear diagnosis and clear pointers to the future. South Africa now needed to build new strategies that would be substantial and sustainable, and have robust outcomes.

- A major difference between other countries and the local situation was that teachers in other countries had emerged from a single system of education, whereas teachers in South Africa had emerged from the apartheid system which had resulted in underqualified and underprepared teachers. Many people were reluctant to acknowledge this, and deal openly with the consequences. Reformers had to face the fact that the teachers' corps was a major obstacle in the way of reform. Teachers were not hungry for change, but frightened of exposure. Unless this was brought into the open, no reform strategies would succeed.

- While the South African education debate was often confused, and facts and conclusions were often tentative, the presenters all had hard data and could provide concrete proof of what they were saying. They had clear experiences of which strategies had succeeded and which had failed. This sort of discussion should start in South Africa as well. Change could best be introduced in a setting of long-term stability, and with stable strategies. Chopping and changing reform strategies merely created havoc. South Africa's leaders did not place enough emphasis on the value of education. 'Generally there's a feeling that we can just rush through things and find a solution.'

- The impact of South Africa's past was being underestimated. South African society was still seriously fragmented. Four or five generations of migrant labour had caused havoc. Moreover, it was unrealistic to talk about parental involvement in education when so many families had absent fathers and were headed by working mothers. These were real problems which required real answers. 'We can't keep flying at 10 000 feet when we discuss these things.'

- The workshop had not produced any insights that were so new or so difficult that South Africa could not aspire to achieving them. However, the country seemed to lack the resolve to stay the course when it had decided on a course of action. 'What we now need to do is decide again what we want to achieve, and how we want to achieve it, and develop the resolve to see the process through.'

- The assumption that education could reduce inequality and poverty – that once children had been brought into schooling, everything would develop along a path of prosperity – was questionable. Instead, poverty and inequality prevented people from accessing education. 'If we don't address this, we will perpetuate this situation forever. Strategies need to be developed to deal with poverty and inequality directly.'

- Education did not function in a vacuum, and learners were strongly influenced by the outside world. They performed poorly, and even dropped out of school, because the state of society and particularly the job market outside the school gates had diminished their hope for the future. These external factors had to be identified and addressed.

- A participant drew other participants' attention to the World Bank's Africa Development Indicators for 2010 which focused on the impact of 'quiet corruption' on African development. This term was used to describe services which had been paid for by governments but were denied to beneficiaries. Among other things, the report had found that some 20 per cent of teachers in rural Kenya and some 20–30 per cent of teachers in Uganda were missing from work at any given time.

Teachers were not hungry for change, but frightened of exposure

COMMENTS BY INTERNATIONAL SPEAKERS

Paulo Renato Souza

HOW MUCH freedom of teaching should one give to teachers at the school level? This is an important issue. I would agree that teachers should have freedom if they are competent and are knowledgeable about their own subjects, but this is generally not the case.

As regards international assessments, they certainly aren't assessments of knowledge, but assessments of the ability to learn. In that sense they play an important role in telling us how to organise our systems of basic education.

Social participation plays a vital role in helping us to implement policy. In Brazil, the first thing President Cardozo did was to launch a programme called 'Wake up, Brazil, it's time for school', which called on all segments of society to help transform education. Following Cardozo there was a lot of confusion during President Lula's first term in office, but his administration got things back on track during his second term. This was because business leaders approached the president and the Ministry of Education and told them, let's get back to reality. They were really responsible for education policy during President Lula's second term. This demonstrates the important role social constituents can play in helping to formulate and implement education policy.

Lastly, when we talk about the negative role played by trade unions, we have to distinguish between the unions and their members, because the latter don't always agree with their leaders, and sometimes co-operate with reform initiatives on their own.

Prof Anita Rampal

TESTING REGIMES don't always help education; they can actually distort what the education system is supposed to achieve. Learning can be assessed, but not necessarily by means of centralised and standardised testing regimes. We have a lot of experience in this respect.

The influence of external factors on schooling is a vital issue, and it is correct to say that they should be addressed directly. In India, the right to education has come after the right to employment, the right to information, the right to forest lands, and so on. All these rights are connected. At the same time, one is not saying that a country has to address poverty before children can be educated. The poorest learners often have the strongest aspirations, and the people who demand the best possible education are those who are most disadvantaged.

We should not dismiss teachers' unions and teachers' perceptions. Any teacher would be appalled by the notion that one should dictate to them exactly what they have to do every day of the week, and their views should certainly be taken into account when we formulate education policies and processes.

Ato Essuman

I FULLY agree that change needs to be incremental. Reform is a huge undertaking, and the danger of losing focus is ever present. Apart from the major financial outlay, I think we will achieve more by doing a number of smaller things with assured outcomes rather than waiting for an opportunity to do things in a big way.

Teachers' views should be taken into account in formulating education policies and processes

I agree to some extent that reform should be introduced from the bottom up. However, given the lack of social capital and resources in many of our rural and deprived areas, elite capture remains a danger. We should recognise that there are major deficits in certain areas that require the introduction of certain ideas. At the same time, the views of local communities should be considered, and we should have the patience to help them understand these ideas and make some kind of contribution. This is a middle way, and we should really try to strike a good balance.

There are two major teachers' unions at the pre-tertiary level in Ghana. Over the years, the minister of education and chief director have always tried to attend their conferences. They would invite us, and we would treat this as a priority. We would solicit their views on certain issues, and also provide them with sponsorships when they requested this. Every year we have at least two formal meetings with the union leaders. These things are taken very seriously because we don't want to create the slightest impression that we are not interested in going there. We have also sponsored their attendance at international conferences, including conferences on industrial relations, and the government has even provided them with vehicles. These are among the steps we have taken to engage with the unions, and ease the pressures they can exert.

Tom Boasberg

Decentralisation only works when it is coupled with capacity-building and accountability

WE DON'T believe in decentralisation on its own, or decentralisation for decentralisation's sake. We've had the experience of what we used to call site-based management in the United States which proved to be a disaster. Decentralisation only works when it's tightly coupled with capacity-building as well as accountability.

One needs to assess whether there are significant gaps in the ability to have accountability, and the ability to build capacity. If there are, one should be a lot more cautious about the scope and pace of decentralisation.

It might make sense to decentralise some functions, such as personnel, but there may be areas where one would really want to retain tighter control in terms of some of the inputs until systems of accountability and capacity-building have been strengthened.

One of the most difficult aspects of our jobs is dealing with the conflict between two major factors. The first is a sense that our systems fall far short of where they need to be for the children and families we serve, and the sense of urgency that this engenders.

The other is the fact that we are public actors, where everything we do affects either someone's job or their children. There are few things more important to people than their jobs or their children. They are therefore very sensitive to how we talk about education, and how we approach certain problems.

Our ongoing dilemma is how we should convey that sense of urgency and the need for change while celebrating the efforts and achievements of the many people who work so hard in our systems. It is difficult to strike the correct balance in this respect.

I think we're most successful when we really manage to focus the discussion on the children themselves, and least successful when we focus the discussion on adults' rights and privileges. The more the data and dialogue can be focused on our children, the more successful we will be in rallying public support and achieving consensus around the things we need to continue doing, but also the kinds of things we need to change and improve.

LESSONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Bobby Soobrayan

Director-General, Department of Basic Education

WHEN CDE representatives approached me about this workshop, and asked me whether I thought it would be valuable, I said the discourse on educational change was readily available and had been debated for a long time. So the question of what to do was not unfamiliar; there was broad consensus on this.

If this workshop merely sought to identify some universal tricks or lessons that could be applied in South Africa, it would not be very useful. Its value would lie in trying to answer the question of how, and improving our understanding of the ways in which these universal lessons are mediated by the how.

There are many factors that mediate the how, or moving from the what to the how. One is context, and in South Africa we're essentially talking about political-economic issues.

We've had very rich insights from a range of countries about how exactly local conditions, political economies, unions, and other factors have influenced their reform interventions, and we have to acknowledge that this is the case in South Africa as well.

Before I get to the how, I want to look at some of the key lessons that have emerged, just by way of reinforcing the global discourse on what one needs to do to turn around an education system. The first is the need for consistent and stable policies, as well as stable political and administrative leadership. Clearly, in South Africa we have not had policy stability; in fact, we have often fashioned grand sets of policies, got stuck during implementation, and then revised them again. The mistake we have made is to constantly believe that there's a gap in the policy.

No policy is perfect, and no policy is entirely implementable. The lesson that has been confirmed today is that even if a policy isn't perfect, consistent implementation is even more important. Indeed, policy review or policy change has become a swear word in the ministry.

Our national political and administrative leadership has been fairly stable, but this has been a huge problem at the provincial level. Among other things, we have had to invoke a constitutional intervention in the Eastern Cape, and assume responsibility for running that department. The Eastern Cape has had seven political heads of education over five years, and three heads of department, so the situation in that province is a striking example of what can happen if you don't have stable leadership.

The lesson about the importance of teachers – underlined by Paulo Souza and Ato Essuman – is clear and abiding. Again, it is well known that no system can transcend the capacity and performance of its teachers. In this respect, the elephant in the room which mediates the how is the teachers' unions, which I will return to later.

The third issue is the management of schools. Among others, Tom Boasberg has spoken eloquently about the school as a 'critical unit of performance and change'. Again, unless we understand that the school is the process, the point at which we convert inputs into outputs, we are not going to succeed.

Anita Rampal has cautioned that assessments on their own are not enough unless one looks at the processes in terms of which schools convert inputs into outputs. The lesson that emerges for us today, and again this has been well researched, is that wealthier schools are better at doing this than poorer schools. Therefore, Anita's point is that if you only measure and reward outcomes, you run the risk of increasing, rather than reducing, inequality. This, in turn, brings us back to the importance of political economy.

Even if a policy isn't perfect, consistent implementation is even more important

The other point made by several speakers as well as the McKinsey study is that you have to start with your existing system. And if your system is in the state that ours is in, you have to focus on literacy and numeracy.

Participants have pointed out that, because South Africa is a highly unequal country, we have many different systems. So again we have to understand the different levels of development in different parts of the system, and devise appropriate interventions.

The final major lesson is that process is vital; that unless one focuses on process, you are not going to succeed. One can adopt a rationalist framework and say, the lessons are there; all you have to do is develop a sense of urgency, and grasp it. If you have sufficient will, you will succeed. However, we have learnt again that we need to understand what it is about our context that is making this so difficult.

Without making excuses, what in the South African context is making it so difficult to implement these lessons? Is it a lack of political will? The power of the unions? The nature of politics? While I can't deal with this in detail, there have been some interesting developments on this score.

South Africa is politically stable in that we have a ruling party that has won every election since 1994, and will probably win every election for the foreseeable future. However, dynamics within this movement have created a kind of instability which is not based at the ballot box, but still has a huge impact on what's going on.

This has had positive as well as negative effects. There have been interesting splits between the leaders of teachers' unions and their constituencies; splits between teachers and parents in terms of which poor parents are increasingly asserting their rights for their children to be educated properly; and interesting and worrying shifts in the relationship between learners and teachers which have required our urgent intervention.

These are among the most recent factors defining the political context which will shape what we can and cannot do.

Michael Spicer

Chief Executive Officer, Business Leadership South Africa

I THINK I am the only person speaking from a business perspective. I agree that education in South Africa is in crisis, and we don't speak about this with enough urgency and passion, partly because we have become inured to the enormity of the challenge. I and my colleagues in business have also fallen prey to this. We argued passionately against outcomes education, and we were told we knew nothing, so we shut up and went off to other things. We shouldn't have; we should have stuck with it because we have lost a decade as a result, and the human cost has been enormous. So I constantly remind myself that we need to speak with passion and urgency about education.

We have made significant progress in some respects. The access box is more or less ticked, but the quality issue remains, which resonates with the Brazilian experience. I think policy is back on track, and accords with the McKinsey lessons. We are now in a mode of getting the basics right, focusing on issues such as time in school, time on task, and numeracy and literacy.

Education is transformative, as some speakers have remarked, and a good in itself, but it cannot be entirely delinked from what young people will face as they emerge into the world of work. This is not the world of work as it used to be; it's the world of work as it is now, which differs dramatically from the old white collar/blue collar industrial state of the 1950s and 1960s. We now live in a very different situation.

We've all made the points about the importance of stability and consistency, and the need for incremental reform. We've been reminded that we really went off on a wrong tangent with grand plans and dramatic reforms, and messed up the implementation.

Education in South Africa is in crisis, and we don't speak about this with enough urgency and passion

I take the points made about differentiation. Every system has its complexities, and is heterogeneous to some extent. In South Africa we have a relatively privileged and well-resourced minority of schools which will benefit from decentralisation and they should not be made to march in lock-step with some of the disciplines that have to be applied in the broader schooling system. In this respect, we can learn some valuable lessons from experiences in the United States and elsewhere.

For a business person, incentives is always an interesting issue, and interesting examples have been cited from Brazil and from the United States that we could think about in terms of rewarding the behaviours we are looking for, rather than having systems that reward the worst things, the opposite of what we're trying to achieve. In my view, continuing down the present path of tenure for teachers is inconceivable.

I also take seriously the need, mentioned in respect of Ghana, to adequately reward our principals. Beside teachers, principals play an absolutely vital role. When one finds badly resourced schools in remote rural districts which perform year in and year out in a superior way, the first thing you will find is a good principal. That is the sine qua non, so we need to find some incentives there.

One of the incentives I was particularly interested in speaks to the need continuously to pass tests in terms of the grades that you're teaching. When we suggested this to a senior official a few years ago, a look of horror crossed her face, and he said we could not possibly introduce this. I said, why not; it's proven internationally to be a useful tool. Her reply was that far too many teachers would fail, which could simply not be contemplated.

While it's important to achieve a balance between rewarding and valuing teachers, we also have to seek accountability, and if we want to promote quality we should accept that, after interventions, retraining and so on, some teachers may have to leave the profession. If you're not prepared to think in those terms, you're going to get stuck with a poorly performing system, and the consumers, the learners in this instance, will pay the price.

Except for the Brazilian presentation, not much was said about the linkage with employability. This is a very important component of any education system, the more so here given our levels of unemployment. Given the current world of work, many people will have to go into self-employment, where they will need a range of entrepreneurial and technical skills.

It's also important to think about the linkage between education and post-education training on the job. At the moment, businesses often take in matriculants who are barely literate and numerate, and have to be given a basic education. Without a sound basic education, cumulative training thereafter becomes much more difficult.

I take very seriously the issue of quiet corruption mentioned by our colleague from the World Bank. We spend a huge amount of money on education, but spend it very inefficiently. The Eastern Cape is an example of enormous wastage, with corruption of the worst kind permeating the whole system. This is something we simply cannot afford.

While it is important to achieve a balance between rewarding and valuing teachers, we also have to seek accountability

Mzimkhulu Hlalokane

National Association of Parents in School Governing Bodies

I WOULD like to speak about the transformation of education in South Africa. We started out as parent/teacher and student associations under apartheid. The government that was going to assume power in 1994 was meant to adopt this as policy - to emphasise parental involvement in education. This was legislated in the new South African Schools Act of 1996.

But this transformative principle has not been realised over the years. Since this Act was adopted, we have not witnessed the meaningful devolution of power to the schools. The Act states that schools have the right to determine their own budgets, and the schools are supposed to be run by the principal

and the chairperson of the governing body, together with parents. But the government has repeatedly amended the Act to give it greater control over schools. This makes it difficult for us to see transformation in education.

A UNESCO document states that: 'The teaching profession should enjoy academic freedom in the discharge of professional duties. Since teachers are particularly qualified to judge the teaching aids and methods most for the pupils, they should be given the essential role in the choice and the adaptation of teaching material, selection of textbooks and application of teaching methods within the framework of approved programmes and with the assistance of the education authorities.'

Since 1994 we have had four ministers of education, each with a different approach. As a result, educational development has been very inconsistent. This has disturbed teachers, with the result that we have children who cannot read or write. Why can our children not read and write after 20 years of transformation in education? A major reason seems to be a lack of professionalism among teachers, or a lack of professional status. The first interest of teachers' unions is not educational development, but to protect their members. Teachers have been reduced to mere workers, which is why they responded with such anger during the recent teachers' strike. This lack of professionalism, lack of human respect, and lack of human dignity is being transmitted to our children. This is why learners are stabbing their teachers; there is a lot of violence in our schools because of the system. The root cause is that the government wants to control everything.

As a result we have huge corruption in education. The unions are employing principals that are not competent. They are pushing because the driving force now is unionism. In the process, inequality has been worsened. We are seeing a new class of elites among teachers, nurses, and other government workers. This elitism is taking over, with negative effects on education.

The South African Schools Act states that the country needs a 'new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners, and, in so doing, lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities.' Fourteen years on, people's talents have not been developed. The business sector is complaining; it can't find people with the qualities it needs, because the education system is failing.

I will be happy to hear people from other countries talk about teachers' autonomy, accountability, principles and ideals. When we go to hospital, we know what the ideals of doctors are. When we go to a lawyer, we know what the ideals of the legal profession are. The same should be true of the teaching profession. We want government policy that is developmental, and not as overbearing as it is at present.

Why can our children not read and write after 20 years of transformation in education?

Kuben Naidoo

Head, Secretariat, National Planning Commission, South African Presidency

I WOULD like to read a letter received by my Minister. It says:

Dear Minister

I'm the principal of a primary school in the south of Johannesburg. My school is a well-performing school by the standards of those around us. We have a team of mostly dedicated teachers who work hard to deliver quality education to our children. Importantly, we care for these children.

I get to school at around 6.30 in the morning and leave after 5.00 on most days. I'm at school most Saturdays and Sundays involved in some type of school activity. During the school holidays a few of us would paint the roofs, fix the doors and any other repairs that the

school requires. In short, we give almost all of our time to the school and its learners. We feel that, because of this dedication and commitment by hardworking teachers and efforts of some of our parents, our school produces very good results.

Despite the seemingly harmonious environment, my life as school principal is constantly stressed, and I constantly feel that what we have at our school is not sustainable and possibly already slipping. I have two principal sources of frustration, ... that frustrate my efforts and that of our school to further raise standards of performance. On the one hand, I have a school district that is generally incompetent, and their only role seems to be to frustrate any initiative of innovation that we may have.

Their sole purpose seems to be to impose templates for dozens of reports that they want but don't have the ability to use. They offer almost nothing in the form of advice, guidance or support from a curriculum perspective. They're generally incompetent in dealing with basic HR issues that they are supposed to be doing as a matter of routine.

My second source of frustration is SADTU. SADTU has completely lost the plot. They too frustrate every attempt to innovate, to lengthen contact time, to deal with poor performance or even to make the right appointments. SADTU influences appointments through their cosy relationship with people in the bureaucracy. They block any attempt to address absenteeism, petty theft or other forms of misconduct by a minority of teachers. They constantly call meetings during the school day, and incidents of intimidation are almost a weekly occurrence.

I fear for the future of my children, because I am stuck between a rock and a hard place, and my school is slipping. The incompetence of the Provincial Education Department on the one hand frustrates the good teachers, and the intransigence and violence of the unions prevents me from dealing with the poor performers.

I fear for the future of my school, and I fear for the future of our country.

Yours sincerely

A school principal from somewhere in the south of Johannesburg.

'I fear for the future of my school, and I fear for the future of our country'

I know we are meant to talk about solutions in this session, and not diagnosis, but I think this letter hits at the heart of our policy confusion. We are confused about how much power to give parents. Over the past 16 years we have vacillated between giving parents significant powers, and restricting them again for fear that racial factors would begin to play a role in appointments. We have vacillated about how to deal with teacher performance. Should we introduce incentives? How should we deal with rewards and support? We've been neither fish nor fowl in either of these areas.

There's been a reluctance to have an asymmetry of decentralisation, giving better performing schools more freedom and less onerous reporting requirements, and exercising greater control over others. In some ways the education debate has been polarised between a right wing that is overly optimistic about the use of market-based mechanisms to achieve equity and performance in poor schools, and a left wing which believes that any attempt to achieve equity or performance will work against equity and access. The debate has been very fragmented. There is consensus about many aspects of the education system, but a lack of consensus about some of the key problems. I will deal with two or three.

We have widespread consensus that teacher performance is the single most important factor in determining the quality of education, but very little consensus about what to do about it. In this respect, I'm disappointed that there are so few trade union representatives present. I know they were invited, so it's not the fault of the organisers.

We lack a consensus on what to do about teacher development. Should we use incentives or not? Should we use support mechanisms or not? Should we have in-service training or not? Should we

improve training at universities? How should we balance in-service programmes and catch-up programmes for new teachers? Should we assess teachers or not?

There is no consensus on these issues, either in broader society or at the policy level. We know that principals play a vital role, but don't agree about what to do to attract and retain good principals. Should we have specific training for principals? Should principals be screened and tested? Should they be remunerated better? Should there be performance incentives, and if so, what should the criteria be? These are all areas where there's a huge amount of evidence but very little consensus on what to do.

The decision to introduce standardised assessments is a positive one. I am aware that standardised assessments could drive negative outcomes, so let me explain my view. When children in wealthier schools achieve scores of 50 or 60 per cent, parents know they are performing poorly, and can put pressure on them to improve. When children in township or rural schools achieve scores of 60 to 70 per cent, the parents say, well done, you can go out to play. When they write school-leaving exams and get 30 to 40 per cent, it's too late to do anything about it.

So, in my view, assessment is not about holding teachers accountable, or holding schools accountable, but about giving parents the information they need to manage their children's education, which schools they send them to, and so on. And I think it's a hugely positive step that the department has decided to assess students and give parents the results. The next logical step would be to ask whether, after adjusting those results according to the incomes of parents, we could use them as a basis for performance measures.

Everyone largely agrees on what needs to be done; the problem is that we're just not doing it

Jeff McCarthy

Programme director, CDE

I WOULD like to move on to the issue of strategy, because it seems to me that everyone largely agrees on what needs to be done; the problem is that we're just not doing it.

Bobby Soobrayan correctly pointed out that the issue really is about the 'how', that we need to make rapid progress in this respect, and expressed his concern about continual attempts to reinvent policy. I agree; essentially, people have reached the same diagnoses, and we know what we should be doing. He and others also emphasised that consistency is the key.

In his most recent budget speech, the Minister of Finance said that, given the increase in the education budget, a special responsibility rested on the departments of education to achieve value for money. The Premier of KwaZulu-Natal has made the same point repeatedly. Are we getting value for our money? We're spending more and more, but the outputs aren't changing. This is also the case in several other countries we have heard about.

Paulo Renato Souza spoke about working with every conceivable social ally to achieve his objectives. One of the advisors to his president at that time was Manuel Castells, the originator of the analysis of urban social movements. Thirty years ago, I discussed Castells with the current Minister of Finance, who was banned at that time and could not meet with more than one person. I had a copy of Castells, and we used to talk about social movements and how they worked. The Minister liked to talk about working with changing balances of forces, and hasn't changed his language much since then.

My concern is that, in a worst-case scenario, we could be heading for what some people describe as an 'explosion'. How, then, with the aid of social movements, could education be reformed more rapidly, and an explosion averted?

Social movements are largely meant to involve civil society, but in the case of Brazil it included people in government and other social sectors as well. It then occurred to me that we - as participants from various social sectors, including government, the education sector, and others - may have different conceptions of the balance of forces around us, and the urgency of the problem.

As several speakers have noted, schooling reform is not high enough on the national agenda; as a collective endeavour, we have to make this a bigger and more urgent national priority. This is what social movements are about. And they don't occur without a sense of urgency. Brazil had a social movement around education because they realised they were in crisis; they said, we are bottom of the class. They are no longer at the bottom of the class, but in many ways we are.

So my suggestion is that we should work with every willing party to restructure the balance of forces so that we do get value for money, not only out of the public system but also adjuncts to it. Our speakers have presented us with all sorts of possibilities from various countries. This is an inclusive idea of educational and social movements taking along everyone who wants value for money and improved quality for what is clearly a crisis and a major national priority.

When South Africans are presented with evidence of a deepening crisis, we tend to turn inwards. Events like today's workshop give us a broader perspective, and a bit of light. We will all interpret this crisis slightly differently from each other, and we don't have to agree entirely. But I believe our hope lies in saying, we have these examples of other countries that have achieved better results with far more limited resources, and we should form a social movement aimed at emulating their example.

DISCUSSION

Several participants argued that enough was known to enable South Africa to diagnose the problems surrounding its schooling system, and that it should now proceed to implementing a rational reform programme.

- Given South Africa's history of different education systems under apartheid, the issue of one size doesn't fit all was vital. Different sectors had to be dealt with in different ways, and the best performing sectors should not be subjected to the same strictures as others.

South Africa's desire to sweep away the past had resulted in the introduction of policies and systems that were beyond the capacity of most teachers. As a result, it had now gone back to trying to get the basics right. More scripted programmes were needed for the bottom end of the system.

The workshop had failed to consider the rapid growth of low-fee private schools in many developing countries, including South Africa. Many of those schools were performing extremely well, far better than public schools in the same areas. They were often opposed for ideological reasons. However, given proper support and regulation, they could play a valuable role in extending quality education to the poor. This was occurring in numerous developing countries, including Pakistan and Colombia.

- Reform initiatives would not succeed unless they were matched by appropriate bureaucratic capacity. For example, introducing some of the decentralised systems that had been discussed at the workshop would require educational bureaucracies to be structured differently than at present. This would require not only a series of training programmes, but a change in paradigm. 'We need to think seriously about what it would take to create a bureaucratic context for implementation-oriented delivery.'

Problems in respect of frameworks of authority and accountability were not specific to the education sector, and were being experienced across government as a whole. This included a lack of clarity about the roles of ministers and directors-general, ministries and departments, and the national and provincial spheres. These problems were inhibiting the implementation of initiatives that could work really well.

- Since the ANC Education Roadmap Conference prior to the last election, a lot of work had been done to clarify national strategies for education for the next 10 to 15 years. A successful social movement

Other countries have achieved better results with far fewer resources, and we should form a social movement aimed at emulating their example

would have to be based on this strategy. Many strands of such a social movement already existed in a range of educational projects. Rather than those strands being seen as competing with each other, they should be woven into a single national strategy.

The country was ripe for unlocking social entrepreneurial innovation in education in the form of charter schools. Rather than simply creating opportunities for opportunistic entrepreneurs, this should be a focused initiative forming part of a national strategy.

- A participant expressed concern about the relevance of some of the international examples to South African reality. Working with schools and districts over 15 years had taught him that the South African system was unusually resistant to change, and reforms introduced relatively easily in other countries seemed to struggle in the South African environment.

Working in government, he had learnt that many schools failed to benefit from school improvement processes. Following research in northern Uganda, he had come to believe this might be because South Africa also had a post-conflict schooling system. The implications were that one could not simply continue to put pressure on schools and expect them to change. Instead, one had to examine the implications of trauma on teachers, students, and the schools themselves. Research had shown that post-traumatic syndrome affected the next generation most severely. If this was correct, current learners were bearing the brunt of events of 20, 30 years ago. 'If we don't take this into account, we can continue battering away at trying to improve our schools, and it's not going to happen,' he added.

- The public discourse around schooling needed to become more mature in two respects. The first related to success and improvement. South Africans were obsessed with matric results, but standardised tests were far better indicators of whether the system was improving. Therefore, South Africa should follow the example of other countries and pay far greater attention to its performance in international tests. Most analysts believed the schooling system was stagnating. However, the last reliable standardised indicator of quality in schools was for 2007. Therefore, one should not simply assume that the system had not improved.

The public debate should also move beyond the obsession with what was wrong with educational institutions. This was obviously very important, but there was almost no discourse around what the government was actually doing. Much had been done, but this was not publicly discussed. For example, other than delivery problems, little attention had been paid to the introduction of workbooks. 'However, if we start looking more closely at their impact on learning, we will be moving forward.'

South African society was extremely diverse. Its various communities sent their children to many different kinds of schools, and they had different educational needs which required different solutions. The education authorities could not be expected to provide an inclusive solution. Various people and institutions were working on various aspects of the problem, but their efforts were not being co-ordinated. This should be done, taking into account past and present practice, issues of equity, and limited resources.

'Among others, the state and the private sector should collaborate. I believe the will is there and the resources are there; we should just get round to working on it.'

South Africans could not run away from the realities surrounding their society and the schooling system. They needed to deal with it, and find solutions. This should be done in a more coherent way.

- Political parties were polarised. For this reason, a social movement was necessary to achieve progress in respect of education. Given its overwhelming majority support, even the government could not be held accountable for its use of taxpayers' money. 'I'm glad the D-G is here; our cry out there is that unless we do something about education, South Africa is not going anywhere.'

Acting out of frustration, the private sector was tempted to remove promising black learners from township schools and send them to private schools. However, if private sector resources were

Reforms introduced relatively easily in other countries seem to struggle in the SA environment

channelled to public schools, it would help the majority of learners instead of just a few. Moreover, black learners in private schools were ridiculed in the townships.

Progress could be made if people pooled their resources in a social movement that drove the transformation of education in South Africa. 'Right now we have a government that does things when it suits them, and doesn't do things when it doesn't – so we need to find a way of making them accountable.'

CLOSING REMARKS

Bobby Soobrayan

Director-General, Department of Basic Education

ON BEHALF of the Ministry and the Department of Basic Education, I want to say that this workshop has been very useful. Our engagements with CDE are always very constructive. The last thing you want is to talk to people who tell you what you want to hear. It's important for us to talk to people who have a critical but constructive stance. So we have always benefited from these engagements, and look forward to many more. I found this one particularly useful. When we heard the conceptualisation a while ago we were excited, but I think CDE has really delivered on this occasion.

The idea of a social movement is important. Understanding the balance of social forces in South Africa is vital, and conditions are right to say that there are a number of interests who have a role to play in what happens in the schools. Let's amplify the way in which those interests are expressed in the system.

Some government officials are indeed hostile to independent or low-fee private schools. However, I and many other officials don't hold that position. We believe diversity is vital, and that independent schools, especially those that serve the poor, introduce an element of diversity that will help to benchmark schools. So it's a very important development which we support very strongly. We have engaged with CDE around its work in this regard, which again has been very helpful. There are issues in this area, but our job is to engage with those issues while keeping the outcomes in mind.

We've always focused on policies instead of our institutional capacity to deliver. We not only have to strengthen the bureaucracy, but also ask ourselves, what is the purpose of this delivery chain, how is it supposed to work, and what are its shortcomings? These are among the issues we are focusing on in our latest action plan.

Ann Bernstein

Executive director, CDE

THE FIRST insight I come away with is that reform is achievable, and that real change can be achieved relatively quickly (within five to six years). This is very encouraging. To do this will require resolve, leadership, and commitment. The story of Brazil is partly one of policy leadership, but also leadership about choosing priorities. One of South Africa's current dilemmas is that it has many good people, and lots of good ideas, but that these are not sufficiently focused.

Independent schools, especially those that serve the poor, introduce an element of diversity that will help to benchmark schools

The second insight I take away is that – given the size and complexity of South Africa’s education system – management capacity is vital. This is an enormous challenge which requires not only traditional management but also political management.

We’ve all taken away the point about continuity – in leadership, policy, targets, and approaches. This is also vital. Another issue which CDE has stressed in the past but which has been underscored once again is the ability to communicate. The department has had some wins, but nobody knows about them. It needs a much more effective approach to communication – to the broader public, parents, teachers, schools, their own officials, and so on.

The fourth insight is that strategy matters. It’s not about having some grand plan at the beginning, but having a notion of what can we do first that will unleash a whole lot of other productive forces. It’s not about a complete plan, but about finding a good place to start, so that you can get many other people to make further advances. I think this is worthy of more reflection.

The fifth insight for me is that differentiation is essential. This emerged from a number of presentations. You have to look at how you incentivise teachers and principals, and people in the bureaucracy as well. This cannot be done in a uniform way, and you have to think hard about how to do that. But it has to be done.

The other area of differentiation is how we should direct our energies, because we can’t do it all. This will require some tough choices. If you say, I want to start with the bottom three quintiles in our schooling system, because those are the people whose schooling is the worst, you’re not going to have the capacity to focus on the top two. So choices must be made, and differentiation will be essential.

I was struck by Tom Boasberg’s remark that ‘you have to know who hires and who dismisses in the system.’ Decentralising this function has worked well in Denver. We can’t continue to have people in our system who are only present three days a week but who continue in employment and receive the same pay as everyone else. We also have to think harder about who allocates the money – where the money is going, who is making those decisions, and whether we can differentiate between those schools that can make more decisions and those that can’t.

We’ve all said that teachers play a pivotal role, and I don’t think anyone has moved away from that position, but what has emerged from this workshop and our previous workshops in Washington, DC on international experiences of schooling reform (see www.cde.org.za) is the theme of: What have our teachers been taught, and is this what we need in our schools? And, who teaches? Denver is starting an academy of its own. The Boston school district essentially fired the Harvard school of education, and is training its own teachers. These are vital issues.

It doesn’t mean we need to do exactly the same thing, but we have to engage much more on how our teachers should be trained for our kinds of schools.

A new social compact

South Africa needs a new kind of social compact in respect of schooling – a compact that focuses on results, makes hard choices, and builds on process. A number of people have made the point that it’s not just key officials and the department that have to be committed to a new plan; it’s a much wider set of social groupings which can support the Department of Basic Education and political leaders in the difficult moments. What must be done? What should we talk about for the next month, because we shouldn’t all talk about everything? How do we shape the public debate and discourse in a constructive way? How do we make this happen? This is also about how we bring in the parents, how you bring in learners to assess the quality of their education – an interesting new dynamic in the Western Cape. And how you bring in the rest of the cabinet, never mind the ruling alliance.

To get to that kind of a social compact, we need to change the balance of forces. We also need to change the current conversation. The endless focus on what is wrong with South African education is

SA needs a new kind of social compact in respect of schooling – one that focuses on results, makes hard choices, and builds on process

not really taking us very far – it’s time to move on to the top three priorities for action. Let’s fight with each other about what those should be, but let’s resolve this after a reasonable period. And that will form the heart of the kind of compact our society needs to make so that we can make the tough choices and then pull together to improve the quality of schooling for more and more people.

The unions should form part of this compact. In the case of three country experiences, our international experts spoke about problems surrounding the unions, but one gained a sense of leaders being able to move despite this. This issue is obviously complex, but we cannot afford to be held back indefinitely in this way.

We have to move forward decisively. This requires political leadership in the Presidency and the cabinet. But the key is that leaders aren’t alone; there are social forces who could be mobilised to pull their weight. It might not be sufficient, or as powerful as one wants, but one could at least strengthen the forces and voices behind the political leaders who are prepared to do what is right for the country. Mike Spicer argued that business should be saying more, or pushing harder on the key issues in education, and I think many experts and civil society organisations could do so as well. But this will require effective leadership and the definition of a common purpose, which is part of what a social compact should try to accomplish.

Attention was drawn to the importance of context. You can’t offer people vocational training, and expect them to take it up, unless there are jobs at the end of the process. Ato Essuman pointed out that Ghana had failed to do this at a particular time in its economic development. So economic policy and context matters a great deal. And we will not create enough jobs – particularly for inexperienced school-leavers – unless we achieve far higher rates of job-intensive economic growth.

These things connect to each other, and I suspect urbanisation is a key factor as well. Brazil has done very well, moving 30 million people into the lower middle class over the past 10 to 15 years, partly because it is 80 per cent urbanised. South Africa needs to think harder about the benefits of urbanisation for the people involved, and the country as a whole. Significantly, the National Growth Path does not mention urbanisation at all. Another vital contextual factor is political cohesion, and a sense of where the nation is going, and it’s hard for education to do that on its own.

The bottom line of all this is that we face a really big challenge in trying to improve the schooling system. There are centres of excellence in our current schooling system, and we should talk about them more as well as ensure they are preserved and expanded. I think we all need to be better at communicating, and certainly the department needs to commit more astute and professional resources to that area.

There is a growing private sector schooling system for poorer people in South Africa, which is a key dynamic. Where are the parents, I used to ask; why aren’t they shouting in the streets about the poor quality of their children’s schooling? Well, many of them are quietly placing their children in low-fee private schools where they pay for the schooling, and the schools are accountable directly to them for their performance in return. Then we have experiments, mainly funded by the private sector, taking place all over the country, and some of them are very valuable and should be replicated.

However, this again needs to be part of an overall thrust – a strategic game plan – that the country does not have at present. So we have to look for synergy, we have to look for partnerships, in a serious way. We have to look at combining the public sector and market forces without ideological blinkers on either side. And we need a strategy for change, which we don’t seem to have.

To conclude, we need teachers in class, on time, and teaching, but words and intentions are not enough. We need urgent action in this area now, we need some resolve, and we need much better outcomes.

We need teachers in class, on time, and teaching, but words and intentions are not enough. We need much better outcomes

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