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accum faccus eatemquod que pratatio.*

Introduction to the NECT dialogue in Limpopo

Deputy Education Minister Enver Surty opened the Limpopo Dialogue of August 2014, welcoming everybody to the third NECT Dialogue, and the first taking place outside of Johannesburg.

This Dialogue was hosted by the MEC for Education in Limpopo, the Honourable Thembesile Nwedamutswu. The assembled stakeholders included business people, traditional leaders, district committee members, educationalists, university academics, school governing body (SGB) associations, student associations, labour unions, youth organisations and academic analysts.

The Deputy Minister explained that the purpose of the dialogues is to motivate general collective responsibility towards education in alignment with the National Development Plan (NDP) and by acknowledging regional and provincial challenges.

The Limpopo MEC for Education added that education is one of the pillars for successful social cohesion, knowing no colour or creed. Classrooms are the building blocks for an educated nation, and schools are integral to the communities in which they are located. In turn, communities play a critical role in the advancement of schools' programmes and projects. Home environments and parents are key school community members, and raising children is a collective effort.

The NECT dialogue is intended to be transformational, and not just about providing 'extra hands'.

Background to the NECT

Godwin Khosa, CEO of the National Education Collaboration Trust, described the establishment and history of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) in his introduction to the Limpopo Dialogue.

The NECT has been instrumental in outlining the common cause that education represents to the national collective, taking up the challenge from the NDP, and focusing on community involvement in their own development.

A leadership dialogue preceding the establishment of the NECT took place in 2012 and led to the development of an Education Collaboration Framework through which business, labour and civil society can support the NDP. This framework was the result of intense participation of key stakeholders, who were convened by a reference group that also coordinated their efforts. The first NECT dialogue took place in November 2013.

Members oversee the activities of the NECT, and the Education Dialogue South Africa sub-structure oversees regular dialogues, chaired jointly by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the universities, in the persons of Deputy Education Minister Enver Surty and Prof. Ihron Rensburg, Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Johannesburg.

Recently President Zuma met with a number of South African company CEOs to discuss the NECT, and to offer the challenge to find ways in which to support the NECT's work. At the meeting, the Minister of Basic Education emphasised the need to raise the stakes in education through dialogue aimed at capitalising on the success of the National Education Crisis Committee of the early nineties.

The Minister drew the CEOs' attention to widely differing community attitudes to schooling, with on the one hand a community refusing permission for public

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The hope was expressed that the NECT dialogues should not remain at the level of 'symbolic policy' never intended for implementation, but should be confirmed by teachers, learners, parents and schools in general and implemented accordingly.

*(Matome Raphasha, SADTU Limpopo
Provincial Secretary)*

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The platform created by the NECT for discussions between education stakeholders allows for a start to be made on resolving education challenges. The challenges must be confronted before the problems can be conquered. But a major stumbling block in solving education challenges is the lack of ability to appreciate each other as role players in the education sector, which essentially undermines our own roles in the sector. Instead we should be working together, hence the appreciation for the collaboration platform.

(Matome Raphasha, SADTU)

Collaboration between companies and the DBE requires all role players to be aware of what is happening for there to be proper collaborative planning so as to avoid duplication.

(John Dombo, Limpopo Province)

In the past five years, the importance of support to schools from the education district offices has been recognised, which has implications for resourcing.

(Enver Surty, DBE)

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meetings to be held in the school on Sundays because it would interfere with children who were studying, and on the other a community closing the local school as a protest against problems experienced with the municipality.

Schools are among the weakest institutions in society, and attitudes towards protecting them vary. Education is a societal matter, and the challenge is for all of us to create the space to talk about how to avoid problems that work against learning in the schools.

The key messages from the NDP include an overarching concern and commitment to improve the quality of education and how different stakeholders can contribute by:

- Building a professional and committed public service core from teachers to researchers and from the classroom to the universities, improving the role of districts, increasing parental involvement, improving basic infrastructure and facilities, dealing with the challenges of capacity and patronage;
- Considering the role of unions and expressing to them the different ways we want to engage with and support the improvement of education nationally;
- Calling for active citizenship, and understanding that five years will be needed to lay the foundations for effective implementation.

The Education Collaboration Framework has processed these mandates and visions into five broad themes: teacher professionalisation; stimulating courageous leadership; ethical behaviour from the classroom to the highest office; and supporting the state in improving education capacity and improving school resourcing, parental involvement and learner welfare.

The NECT is driving five programmes, starting with support for districts' capacity to improve the quality of education in their schools. This intervention involves working with the national DBE in the specific areas where systemic impact can be improved, and in so doing encourage collaboration, and try out and then institutionalise innovation. Social and private-sector investment as well as dialogue are all essential for implementing this programme.

Only the DBE has the mandate to deliver public education, and consequently the responsibility for maintaining and improving the system. The NECT collaboration between government, the private sector and civil society is premised upon the DBE taking the lead. The work is supported by the sector education and training authorities (SETAs), bringing direct investment up to a projected R350m. This is the first time the private sector has committed so much to an education development programme, with Business Leaders South Africa (BLSA) committing its members to contributing 4% of their market worth.

The second biggest input is from civil society and labour (including community leaders, traditional leaders, religious leaders, teacher unions, SGB associations, business and youth) – representatives of which have been organised into steering committees to oversee the NECT's work in the districts to mobilise social support. The plan is to improve the districts' main function of monitoring and giving support to their schools.

Currently the NECT is actively working in eight districts in five provinces, covering 4 362 schools in all. About 350 of these schools are to receive 'fresh start' comprehensive attention.

NECT 'Fresh Start' schools project

Eugene Daniels explained that the key realisation in the Limpopo province is that there must be movement beyond dependence mode – with the majority of South Africans expecting the government to do everything for them, while, in contrast, the elite, the middle class and the rich are more independent. What is needed however is interdependence. Working together has been an important aspect of our recent history, and it could be argued that the current situation is as much of a crisis as the liberation struggle. With the NECT's approach rooted in interdependence, and led by healthy steering committees, the NECT Limpopo districts are moving towards interdependence, guided by a recent meeting of government departments, civil society and unions.

A meaningful difference is being brought to the 'fresh start' schools using the 'mall approach' to replace the 'spaza shop' approach. Spaza shops stand on their own, and most principals are observed to be 'spaza shops', not talking to the next principal. With the fresh start approach, the district directors are grouping schools into 'mass schools' and sharing teachers across them.

The plan is that if there are a number of small schools in a particular village and no maths teacher, we timetable one gifted maths teacher among the three or four schools. That is the 'mall approach' where we start working together and if there is a shortage of text books in one school and an excess in another, we shift those text books around and we work as a community rather than as individuals.

The fresh start approach differs from general school improvement, which aims simply at doing more and doing things better. 'Fresh start' aims to do things differently, engaging a number of change steps:

- Diagnosing
- Developing a vision
- Developing a detailed plan for each school
- Supporting the schools via the districts.

Currently change agents have been appointed, many being circuit managers, and these are being trained to help the fresh start schools and champion the change. Baseline surveys have been conducted to measure impact. Offices have been established, principals and teachers have been trained, and there is a focus on text book retrieval. Winter schools have been run, and a three-year intervention plan has been developed.

Discussions in the districts focus on the reasons for teaching and learning. Reasons were put forward for interrogation:

- To create free citizens
- To provide access to higher education
- To prepare learners for the workplace.

But providing access to higher education does not necessarily lead to employment, as shown by the many graduates in South Africa who have chosen study areas unwisely and now find themselves unemployed. In contrast, the majority of Swiss grade 9 learners sign up for apprenticeships rather than university, and Switzerland finds itself with a 3% unemployment rate. Following this lead, the NECT is helping education districts to link to local companies.

Creating effective schools

John Samuel, the chair of the task team for creating effective schools, reported that the team had started by commissioning a research review of major campaigns and strategies developed by the Department of Education since 1994, with the aim particularly of understanding what worked, what did not work, and why.



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An appeal was made that systemic change should be introduced gradually and without complexity, and should aim at improving learning rather than constituting teaching towards testing.

(Matome Raphasha, SADTU)

School learners must be properly prepared for future tertiary studies, of which career guidance is a critical aspect.

(John Dombo, Limpopo Province)

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Reading levels in Tanzania and Zimbabwe are also far higher than in South Africa.

(Joseph Raulinga, Regional Court President)

While literacy is a critical consideration, the language in which literacy is expressed defines the environment. Language can tell us about things that are unfamiliar to the environment, and thus open new vistas.

(John Dombo, Limpopo Province)

Teachers need to earn respect by behaving professionally. Those who are recruited into teaching positions must have basic managerial skills. Solutions lie with the principals and teachers, particularly in regard to changing attitudes and organisational culture, which are long term targets. But putting committees in place helps.

(Nkosinathi Zondo)

At a recent conference in Japan an OECD survey was released reporting that average teaching time in most European countries was 35 hours per week as compared to 53 hours weekly in Japan.

(Enver Surty, DBE)

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He cautioned that an important point to be borne in mind is that in dealing with the complexities of education, South Africa is not unique. Common expectations are that education will solve all our problems, but there is in fact an almost global crisis, with education systems around the world largely having failed to keep pace with profound social and political changes of the past 20 to 30 years. A second conclusion is that change of an entire system is a long-term process, and very often generational.

A third conclusion of note is that communities are essential to the success of schooling, and understanding the nature of this relationship provides a focus for the task team. Schools consist of physical properties – such as the school building, textbooks chairs and desks, the playground, the teachers – and a range of less tangible aspects, such as the school–community relationship, which together seem to lead to success.

Unlike any other aspect of government, schools have the involvement of the entire community, without which they would remain simply a government responsibility. But schools are much larger than that and play a central role in society and are not simply a government responsibility. This is because education is not only a private good. It is not only something I personally benefit from, but also something that the country at large benefits from, which is the reason why governments invest so heavily in education. When you do that, not only do you develop responsible citizens but you develop an informed citizenry that ultimately benefits society.

Part of the challenge, while addressing the physical aspects of schooling, is to determine and use the strengths and resources of individuals and communities that can sustain programmes of improvement and reform. Ultimately we must recognise education as a public good.

Reading, literacy and numeracy

In his introduction the Deputy Minister mentioned that the promotion of literacy and numeracy as the foundation for the learning and teaching environment is vital to the NECT’s collaborative work. Accordingly, in the recent meeting between the President and the company CEOs, the Education Minister threw down the challenge of improving national reading levels, revealing that in Russia, 60% of the population are advanced readers while in South Africa only 5% are.

In this vein, during the course of discussions among the task team for creating effective schools, a simple idea emerged with the power to harness available capacity and goodwill and bring about a shift within the schools. The idea relates to the powerful gift of reading, and its role as the foundation of education. Thought is being given to matching human capacity resources to the need to help schools with reading, by training undergraduates to go into schools and read to children, thereby setting children on the road to becoming readers.

Professionalisation of teaching

Prof. John Volmink explained that the question of the professionalisation of teaching started with a discussion of conceptual issues at the Curtis Nkondo Professional Development Institute, and included considerations of what is meant by a profession, and whether teaching is a profession or an occupation. The distinction between professionalisation and professionalism was considered, and how a South African teacher-professionalisation programme could be built. Despite the lack of a common understanding of what is meant by teacher professionalism, there is widespread belief that the poor state of schooling is largely due to a lack of such professionalism. The current reality is that there is a very negative public image of teaching, teachers and teacher unions in South Africa.

Part of the work of the task team is to address that issue, and a national campaign is planned to challenge perceptions, and raise the profile of teachers, given that there are wonderful teachers currently working in the sector. The DBE is interested in driving a campaign aimed at making teaching a preferred occupation. The negative public image will be challenged honestly, and criticisms of teachers having little commitment to their profession, spending insufficient time on the task, and not caring about the welfare of their learners or even about their own image will be taken to focus group discussions with teachers in each province for their response to these accusations.

Having a crucial social function raises an occupation to the status of a profession, requiring commitment, passion, knowledge and skills. Professionalism entails practising according to publicly acknowledged professional standards, responding to a calling to offer a service to the public, while also protecting the public by guaranteeing certain minimum standards of competence. The idea is that personal judgement becomes the required professional judgement.

This discussion is an important contribution to nation building, dealing as it does with the concept of a just society. Our future will be determined by the extent to which we attend to the professional preparation and retention of those entrusted with the education of our children. Teachers should be at the centre of reform, even if the model developed is focused on improving schools.

The teaching profession suffers from a greater degree of state interference and control than most other professions, leading to low bargaining power and low remuneration. Unlike lawyers, doctors and engineers, the teaching profession is particularly vulnerable to managerial methods, which without the balance of other influences have the potential to de-professionalise the profession. The essence of a profession is that a professional body controls the conduct of its members. Managerial professionalism gains its legitimacy through the promulgation of policies and the allocation of funds associated with those policies. Although this is necessary, it must be balanced by core democratic professionalism (as argued by Chris Day), whose legitimacy comes from collaborative and co-operative action between teachers and other education stakeholders. The relationship between managerial professionalism and core democratic professionalism must be strategic, with strategic cooperation, strategic alliances and if necessary strategic compromises.

The relationship between teacher professionalism and strong unions has been the study of a literature review, and needs interrogation. The finding is that the strength of the unions is not held to contribute to good performance when the highest-performing countries have strong unions, although teaching unions are blamed when performance is inferior. Teachers in other countries complain that they are caught in the cross-fire between the managerial professionalism of the state and the democratic professionalism of unions.

Managerial and democratic professionalism differ in many ways, with one being system driven and the other driven by the profession, one consisting of external regulation and the other professional regulation. This implies that the South African Council for Educators (SACE) should play a bigger role as the educators' professional body, as do the health and engineering professional councils.

Continuous professional development

Prof. Volmink explained that the reform agenda proposed by Linda Darling-Hammond for preparing teachers for a changing world provides a complementary view, posing the political against the professional, the competitive and market-driven against the collegial and professional. The agenda is based on professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement.

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Professional standards for teachers based on the Commonwealth framework for teaching standards are being developed.

(Enver Surty, DBE)

Even policies that are developed through democratic collaborative processes, such as the national safety at school framework, also need departmental funds, as much as policies developed through managerial professionalism do.

(MC Sebothoma)

A distinction was made between 'management' and 'leadership', positing 'management' as '*forc[ing] people to do things even if they don't want to do those things*', and asserting that '*nobody wants to be managed*'. On the other hand, leadership is seen as '*influencing people or subordinates to do or achieve what you want to achieve*', and asserting that people prefer to be led rather than managed. In this framework, the need for leadership in schools is emphasised, and that there should be a shift from the concept of 'management' to 'leadership'.

It was suggested that the education system is over-regulated, resulting in teachers having no opportunity for innovation in teaching practices.

(Matome Raphasha, SADTU)

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A false dichotomy should not be understood between managerial and democratic professionalism, although these do come from different departure points, but an alliance should be built between these. Managerial professionalism pertains to inspection, accountability, documentation, whereas democratic professionalism has to do with learning communities. There is evidence that government is moving away from a simple compliance approach to the creation of space for the professional learning community. In the spirit of building alliances a reciprocal movement from the unions' side in the other direction as well would be useful, translating the strategic intent of government to operational reality. It is true that resources are required for this, but resources have just as well been made available for the professional development institutes.

(John Volmink)

Forty fully functional teacher development centres with connectivity have been established country-wide with more currently in development.

(Enver Surty, DBE)

A positive development is for teachers to work in clusters, learning from each other and collaborating at circuit level. In this regard, cooperation between circuit managers and the different unions promotes the notion of working collaboratively for a common goal, which is already being encouraged by the unions.

In 2013 about 80 000 teachers were trained by the unions.

(Godfrey Nkondo)

Progress made by the unions in instituting teacher development initiatives in collaboration with the DBE was commended.

(Matome Raphasha, SADTU)

All stakeholders and contributors to teacher development programmes should take the various contributions into account so as to avoid duplication, which is time wasting.

(Audience member)

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A definition of continuous professional development put forward by Chris Day argues that

Professional development is a process by which alone and with others teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching, and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues throughout each phase of their teaching lives.

The proposed model has three pillars: knowledge, collective autonomy, and accountability. Knowledge is more than merely content knowledge, but includes knowing why and how. Autonomy cannot be granted without accountability, and accountability needs to be properly understood and embraced by all teachers. These three pillars arise through pre-service training as well as through continuous in-service development. Some aspects of each are institution-based, and some come through self-development.

Collective autonomy in part has to do with shared systemic practices which must be evidence based, specific to the profession and endorsed by professional learning communities. Workshops are currently addressing the development and establishment of centres for continuous professional development for professional learning communities to share their practice.

Deep change is very important, but is not something that can be created in a workshop, and must be properly resourced. Deep change cannot come about through a once-off, top-down intervention.

The importance of education leadership from school principals must be understood. The recently published gazette on standards for principals is applauded, and must be tested for local validity and legitimacy.

For success, the approach to professional learning needs to be respectful, building an interactive community of practice that offers new strategies instead of focusing exclusively on deficiencies.

The Deputy Education Minister asserted that continuous professional development towards competent, confident educators is central to any programme of radical transformation. Providing access to technology is also an important enabler. He reported that SACE has launched a continuous professional development programme and 20 000 principals and deputy principals have enrolled in a leadership and management course. In 2016 55 000 heads of department will participate in more than 150 professional development courses.

Another more recent issue is the role that unions play in the professional development of teachers, and thus ensuring the provision of quality education. In 2013 about 80 000 teachers were trained by the unions.

He added that learner poverty is very much a concern, and in this regard care must be taken to ensure that the allocation of resources to impoverished areas addresses issues of equity with regard to resources and professional development available to teachers in those areas. Retaining educators in scarce skills areas in rural environments needs attention.

Initial professional education for teachers

Talk about professionalism should start with initial teacher education, suggested Prof. Volmink. One of the main blockages to improving the quality of teaching may be the nature of initial teacher education. Universities tend to over-emphasise

academic knowledge, and thus the teacher education curriculum is academically driven. The task team is engaging with the Deans' Forum on this point.

The lack of an induction programme following graduation with a teaching qualification is also a substantial problem.

Values in education

In relating findings of a recent OECD survey, the Deputy Education Minister reported that problem solving seems to be a foundational challenge to literacy and numeracy. And while most developed countries were found to have progressed well in terms of literacy and numeracy, there is nevertheless a deficit in values and attitudes. ICT was identified as another important issue. ICT encourages self-directed learning and could bring about a huge paradigm shift in the facilitation of learning, putting the role of teachers to question.

A number of points relating to values were raised from the floor.

The role of teachers

An important question was raised by Graeme Bloch in regard to the role of teachers in the collaborative endeavour:

Having spoken about stakeholders and role players, SGBs, students, churches, traditional leaders, teachers, the department and government, all these are understandably important, but the importance is in building the alliance. Teachers are the heart of education, so it is important to look to what the teachers have to say. What we do to teachers is terrible, if we think of class size, of school infrastructure such as toilets and safety, of not providing teachers with text books. There is little support available from the districts, and yet the public want to blame the teachers. The public also blames the unions, and the teachers are not explaining adequately why the unions are important.

The key question is how to make teachers the front line of the new liberation struggle rather than all these problems? How do they rise to the occasion?

Other areas of concern

Early childhood development (ECD)

The Deputy Education Minister recognised the importance of early childhood development, but noted that there are still challenges in improving the qualifications of ECD educators and practitioners.

Inclusive education

A number of participants in the dialogue expressed concern for inclusive education.

Extra-mural programmes

A programme of extramural activities has an important contribution to make.

School governing bodies

Contributions were made by representatives of both the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS) and the National Association of School Governing Bodies (NASGBs). The Deputy Minister in summing up the discussions mentioned that school leadership and management, particularly principals, play an important role in its functionality and ethos, and that SGBs, schools, districts and provinces need specialist skills in financial knowledge, human resources, administrative responsibility, and the utilisation of resources. In 2015 schools across

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Principals are often well positioned to drive training at school level, understanding the critical skills needed, and being in daily contact with the teachers.

(Audience member)

However, principals must also assume primary responsibility for implementing the curriculum, including requirements in regard to content and the national curriculum assessment policy statements.

(Enver Surty, DBE)

Life Orientation teachers are required to provide learners with career guidance. Grade 12 is far too late to provide such guidance which must inform Grade 10 subject choice at least. Perhaps all teachers should become specialists in the career fields available to their subject specialisation, so that they are able to advise their learners accordingly.

(Strike Manganyi)

Universities need to prepare teachers coming from rural settings for dealing with learners in this environment, if the rural schools are to retain their teaching resources.

(Godfrey Nkondo)

An appeal was made for teacher development to put greater emphasis on practice, and to prepare teaching students for realistically resourced classrooms in order for new graduate teachers to be able to deal with their teaching context with confidence.

(Matome Raphasha, SADTU)

Provision of induction is a basic necessity for implementing a long-term plan and for reviewing success.

(John Dombo)

People undertake appraisals for rewards instead of to promote quality. In addition, unions may promote their own members over competence, where their own members are less competent. While unions have played an important role in establishing South African democracy, competence and quality must be the criteria for promotion.

(Joseph Raulinga)

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the country will be electing new SGBs. The suggestion was made that in order to develop social cohesion, the associations should move beyond representing parents according to racial categories. The conversation should be mediated in order to reach the targeted social cohesion.

Closing remarks

Godwin Khosa listed some of the actionable discussions that had taken place, including the following:

- Religious leaders similarly should discuss whether there is a common space that can be accommodated by diverse religions;
- At national level, the NECT is working with key stakeholders under the leadership of the DBE, the ELRC, SACE and teacher unions to prepare an advocacy programme towards World Teachers' Day, promoting a positive narrative about our teachers, belonging as they do to the DBE, the unions, the associations, the state that pays them and the communities whose children they teach;
- The call to develop an ECD model;
- Providing psychological services in every school;
- Improving the training of SGBs;
- Researching teacher indebtedness;
- Establishing a teacher development summit;
- Improving extramural activities in schools and districts;
- Mobilising additional capacity in the form of unemployed youth in programmes such as homework and study groups;
- Having personal discussions on our values and how we want to bring up our children.

The Deputy Education Minister summarised the discussion points as:

- Ensuring a paradigm shift away from doing things managerially to a more democratised process in which administrative responsibilities are embedded;
- The importance of reading, and how to promote reading in schools and communities;
- Educators must be able to use technology as an enabler in the teaching and learning environment to assist in integrating IT into the curriculum as well as bridging the digital divide by providing access and opportunity to learners, particularly in rural areas;
- Teacher development centres can provide points of access for developing the capacity to utilise ICT and providing professional teacher development.

The Limpopo Education MEC Thembisile Nwedamutsu closed the dialogue session.

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Education is the process of saving someone from ignorance. Anybody engaging in education should do so within the discipline of doing the right things at the right time for the right reasons and with the right attitude, with due consideration by conscience as to right and wrong. We must be sure that the education we are handing out is the same education that we would wish for our own children.

Teaching is a calling, and education is a struggle for knowledge, whether the struggler is a teacher or a learner – learner and teacher are nail and finger – they are together. The teacher's responsibility is to answer the calling, and the teacher is also a resource for the learning, along with other contextual resources.

(Rev. Maudji Pataki)

Low levels of ethics and ethos in the education sector appear to be the basis of the numerous challenges experienced in education, including low morals and morale of educators, poor education management, poor learner discipline, lack of parental support. Undue emphasis on curriculum without corresponding consideration for values and attitudes would appear to have led to this situation.

(Matome Raphasha, SADTU)

Departmental business plans in Limpopo display a gap in terms of ECD numbers of learners still not included in the system, and with regard to ECD teachers' qualification levels. NECT assistance in terms of a best practice model of ECD was requested.

(Kgabo Masehela)

Another significant need in schools is an educational psychologist.

(Christo Thurston)

Schools lack the professional capacity to deal with special needs such as autism, which affect their approach to learning to read.

(Keneilwe Ndala)

Extramural programmes, although valuable, are currently hampered by after school teaching programmes that are necessary as a result of teachers' content knowledge gaps. Better management of teacher development programmes will lead to the situation where extramural programmes can once again replace the catch-up programmes.

(Mamadela Madela)

Extramural programmes play a vital role in children's development. Extramural programmes that cover more than sport, and entail support from university students can benefit both the learners and the students.

(Christo Thurston)

Provision of extracurricular activities contributes significantly to learners' attitudes to and enthusiasm for classroom activities.

(Nkosinathi Zondo)

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