

Constitutional Hill, March 2015

Hosted in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, Wits School of Governance and the Oliver and Adelaide Tambo Foundation

Hosted in collaboration with:



Sizwe Nxasana, NECT, Chairman; Mavuso Msimang, Wits School of Governance; and Dr David Harrison, DG Murray Trust.

## Introduction to the NECT Dialogue at Constitution Hill, March 2015

The fourth dialogue was opened by the Chairperson of the National Education Collaboration Trust, Sizwe Nxasana, who welcomed all the attendants, organisations and stakeholders.

The Deputy Minister of Basic Education, Enver Surty opened the discussions, noting that in moving forward and transforming, South Africa is embracing the principles of the Freedom Charter. He argued that the progress that has been made as a nation should not be underestimated, notwithstanding the enormous challenges still to be faced.

The dialogue group has been established to encourage openness to new possibilities. The voices of all stakeholders including the private sector, unions, government and higher education must be heard in order to build partnerships, relationships, collaboration, trust, and importantly for building confidence about the potential and the possibilities for the future of education in the country. If we stop listening we will stop changing.

Mavuso Msimang, CEO of the Oliver and Adelaide Tambo Foundation, explained that this dialogue was supported by partnership of the Wits School of Governance and of the Foundation with NECT. The Foundation aims at generating discussion and input into the National Development Plan (NDP). Oliver Tambo was an ardent believer in discussion, debate and dialogue, as witnessed by the fact that the country was ultimately liberated through negotiation, and this spirit and commitment was invoked in contributing to discussions of the NDP.

## Background to the NECT

The NECT Interim Report from December 2014, included in the document packs, provided an update of progress with the NECT programmes. The work of the NECT is focused on the following six themes:

- Professionalisation of teaching
- Promoting courageous and effective leadership at all levels of the education system
- Supporting the capacity of the state to deliver better quality education
- Contributing to the resourcing of schools
- Improving community and parent involvement in schooling
- Promoting learner welfare in schools.

The implementation of these themes is promoted through five NECT programmes. The small NECT office complement drives implementation of the programmes through service level agreements, and has mobilised nearly two thousand people in the five provinces and eight districts in which work is being done, impacting on just under two million learners. The work of the NECT is to identify, network and channel capacity within the country to implement the selected programmes. One hundred and forty-three organisations are involved, and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) relating to NECT programmes have been signed or are being negotiated with business, NGOs, some service providers, universities, labour unions, government departments, and others.

The first NECT programme, that of district and school improvement, consists of work pitched at four different levels. The first level is departmental, aiming to help

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DBE ministry and senior managers have met every quarter with district directors nationally, sharing best practice and innovations.

*(Deputy DBE Minister Enver Surty)*

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One hundred and forty teacher resource centres have been established across the country by DBE, as accessible points of access to sophisticated ICT and other resources, with trained managers to provide assistance. Sixty of these centres have complete connectivity. The centres are accessible to all teacher unions and educators in the area, with the aim of supporting professional teacher development.

*(Deputy DBE Minister Enver Surty)*

Through DBE partnerships with Shuttleworth Foundation and Sasol Nzalo, the grade 4, 5 and 6, and 10, 11 and 12 textbooks for maths and science have been digitised, as well as 94 titles for grade 7, 8 and 9.

A round table addressing maths, science and technology is in planning.

*(Deputy DBE Minister Enver Surty)*

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with simplifying the programming of the curriculum that every teacher across the landscape of the country must deliver, with the intention of improving the curriculum completion rate. This builds on work started by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and also already done in Gauteng.

The second level is the districts, where multi-stakeholder district steering committees have been established, taking responsibility for supporting the work of the district offices, and addressing issues interfering with education delivery. In the districts in which the NECT is active, these steering committees are generally working well and have secured the participation of senior and active people from the communities. In the long run, this strategy should help to rekindle public interest in education.

The third level of work is school support and monitoring done from the districts. The national department and the lead agencies of the NECT are planning together for a common programme that will cut across all levels of the system.

The fourth level is the so-called 'fresh start schools', of which there are 410, receiving close and comprehensive intervention, with specialist input across a range of areas including labour relations, skills and expertise, infrastructure, and so on. The school infrastructure work in the fresh start schools is being done in partnership with the Department of Rural Development and Land Affairs, the DBE, and other willing partners, with some of that work being done by TVET college interns supervised by experienced architects and building science experts.

Programme two relates to systemic interventions, and is in the early stages of supporting the DBE in addressing HR issues in the three largest provinces in order to manage the proportion of budget allocated to personnel.

Programme four has to do with supporting local projects taking place in NECT districts in parallel with NECT interventions. The first steps here have been to review maths and science improvement projects that have been implemented over the past years, with a view to developing guidelines for maximising the benefit of such projects.



*Dr Thabo Mabogoane, Presidency.*

The monitoring and evaluation programme is run by an independent monitoring and evaluation committee that has met three times since the middle of 2014. They report directly to the trustees, and provide guidance on the monitoring and evaluation process and on design and implementation of the programme. The draft monitoring and evaluation framework that will guide these activities of the NECT is close to completion, and baseline studies will be run when the schools come back from the March holidays.

## Programme for the March 2015 Dialogue

Godwin Khosa explained that the distributed document packs included a summary of the protocols and rules of engagement originally adopted for NECT dialogues, and a draft memorandum addressed to the Minister of Basic Education containing a summary of discussions, observations and recommendations emerging from engagements that took place in 2013 and 2014, for general consideration and potential endorsement.

## Shared roles in improving education

Graeme Bloch acknowledged that the responsibilities of government are vast, but *'government does not have to do it all'*, and can rely on support from the NECT and the constitution. Government is complex, with national and provincial levels, local and SGBs. There are signs that government is moving in the right direction as evidenced in the allocation of budgetary priorities. Issues such as values, and quality learning and teaching have been raised for attention, and there has been progress. In 1976 few people went beyond primary school. Now although maths, science and literacy results are poor, compared to what they were in 1976 at least people are getting through primary school and that shows progress.

Teachers work under difficult circumstances and carry the blame for everything that goes wrong in education. Yet they are struggling with several issues: large classes, their content knowledge, training and remuneration levels. He expressed regret that the unions have not played a helpful role to assist teachers in dealing with these issues in a non-fragmented way. Instead it his view that unions only speak about themselves and not about the learners and their needs. The challenges of initial teacher education and the professional development of teachers remain problems, but a much bigger problem is the language of engagement.

Parents are also part of the school community and can assist in defining what the role of school in the community should be. Currently parents are engaged through reading programmes but there is a need to go beyond this in order to engage communities.

There is no quick-fix for education but it is important for government and teachers to engage parents and communities in order to address the complexities of education.

## Adoption of the memorandum to the Minister

Dialogue participants considered a draft memorandum addressed to the Minister and Cabinet. The memorandum summarises previous dialogue discussions and decisions, and recommended actions.

Professionalism and professionalisation of teachers is the starting point of the dialogues. The post-1994 architecture for managing teachers and teaching provides for the involvement of a range of organisations, including higher education institutions under DHET, the provinces under the DBE, school governing bodies who are involved in selection and recommendation of teachers for

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Although access to education has improved substantially since 1994, access is still an issue, particularly for groups such as migrant learners, and learners with disabilities, who continue to need help.

*Nikki Stein (Section 27)*

The DBE as a major player is involved with several projects, but these have yet to be taken into operational reality, which can only be with the support of the various stakeholders. A particular challenge is whether the SACE is adequately governing the affairs of the profession. It was questioned whether the recommendation that the role of SACE should be reviewed, for the reasons given, has been dialogued.

*John Volmink*

A caution was issued against benchmarking SACE with other professional bodies unless there is equal footing in regard to source of funding, and resourcing. A review would need to be based on an understanding of the current and intended roles of the Council and possible discrepancies between these.

*Sesi Nxesi (ETDP SETA)*

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*Renny Somnath, SADTU.*



*Deputy Minister Surty.*

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An agreed educational theory is a critical component lacking in addressing the problem with quality teaching and learning. Teachers need development, and programmes can be put in place given agreement on the nature of educational theory, and debate on what development is needed. Then schools can be set up as learning institutions for teachers and thereafter move to learners.

*Rennie Somnath (SADTU)*

Schools often do not do things for themselves when they are not able to, or when their school governing bodies lack capacity. The approaching school body election period presents an ideal opportunity for starting to work with governing bodies to develop capacity for doing things themselves.

*Nikki Stein (Section 27)*

Comparison with Ghana is instructive. Literacy and numeracy performances of Ghanaian schools are better than those of South Africa, although the SA schools are better resourced. In parallel with this is increased parental involvement in schooling at a community level in Ghana. For example, some communities make schooling bylaws requiring fining of parents whose children are caught out of school during school hours.

*(Banga Linguleza, GTAC)*

Reports of annual literacy and numeracy testing across phases inform interventions made by the DBE. The question is the extent to which these reports mobilise community participation, and trigger parental and caregiver initiatives and efforts to motivate, inspire and support the children in their educational aspirations. Home monitoring of learner achievements in the workbooks provided can easily be done, and does not need great expertise.

*(Speaker)*

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employment, the teacher unions, and a number of statutory organisations. In order to reach a common understanding of what teaching is and what role teaching should play in society, critical consideration was undertaken of the various roles and participants involved in the full value chain of teaching. In this context the focus on the South African Council of Educators (SACE) emerged.

The emphasis on SACE indicates the importance accorded to the role of a professional body. Opinion is that SACE should be playing a more active and possibly broader role as guardian of the teaching profession, relieving the DBE of the pressure of managing the full value chain. Councils for other professions play a significant role in attracting entrants to their careers, finding bursaries for students, providing professional development courses, ensuring the maintenance of professional standards and so forth. The memorandum suggests that the allocation of roles along the value chain should be critically assessed. Perhaps in the same vein, expectations of what a single national department should be doing across the value chain should be limited.

Regarding the role of unions in education, although this is viewed adversely and perceived to be the root cause of the malfunctioning of majority of schools, the dialogue group has not made a judgement on this assertion but raised a number of considerations that would improve understanding. The first of the considerations is an acknowledgement of the constitutional right of teachers to form unions. A literature review had shown that even the best performing countries in the world, such as Finland, Singapore, Canada and Australia, all have strong unions. So it is not the strength of the union that should be a problem but rather the nature of engagement with those unions, so that wise decisions are taken constructively together.

In calling for a better language of engagement between unions and government, between unions and civil society, and between unions, government and civil society, the importance of achieving constructive engagements amongst these players was acknowledged,

seeing that teachers have the responsibility to bring up our children. Children will imitate what they see on TV as to how people talk to each other and deal with different views. This is a big challenge and we are calling for joint action and responsibility towards building a common language and a better language of engagement, even when things are very difficult.

The other set of recommendations pertain to making schools effective. When considering the progress made as a country over the last few years it can be seen that despite concerns that most of the schools are still not optimally functional, significant progress has been made. Various government campaigns have been undertaken with the aim of making schools more effective – the Culture of Learning and Teaching Programme (COLTS), the Values, Education and Democracy programme, and the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC). But the response seems not to have matched the importance of these initiatives. The campaigns have not been adequately adopted either by schools and the system, or by society at large, and they have not been followed through. Programming must be improved to ensure that society takes these initiatives more seriously.

Although the opportunity for creating quality learning and teaching councils was not taken up through the QLTC, this cooperation remains relevant. Until people around schools and districts become interested in what is happening in schools, the public perception of schools as merely an extension of government will remain – a view that discourages effective participation of communities, and inhibits the creation of necessary conditions for reciprocal accountability between schools and the communities they are in. Schools will function properly only when they are part of their communities, rather than being like enclaves in a foreign territory.

Three specific suggestions are proposed:

- Promote reading in schools as a bridge between schools and community
- Challenge all schools and communities to start doing things for themselves
- Promote the notion of schools as public community resources and not just as state enclaves within communities.

The Chairperson summarised responses to the Memorandum that:

- There are no principle concerns with the document, and there is broad agreement that it does represent conversations that have led to this point
- The wording of the passage relating to SACE could be elaborated, recognising the opportunity to go forward more definitively and deliberately in order to build momentum.

No objections were voiced to proceeding with the memorandum once the amendments that have been suggested have been addressed.

## Presentation on low-fee independent schools in South Africa

In her presentation on private schools for the poor, Dr Jane Hofmeyer from the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) pointed out that the establishment of low-fee independent schools is a rapidly growing world-wide phenomenon. Independent schools constitute approximately 6.3% of the total number of South African schools. While many independent schools are only affordable to the elite, low-fee schools are generally defined as those charging fees below R12 000 p.a. Of the registered independent schools, approximately 90% are not-for-profit, and of these, low and mid-fee schools are eligible for a state subsidy, which amounts to about 60% of independent schools. Independent schools that are not-for-profit and charge fees below R6 000 p.a. qualify for a subsidy of 60% of the provincial average per public school learner spend, while a 40% subsidy is provided to those

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In calling upon communities to wake up, get up and take action, assumptions are being made that parents know that learning materials or assessments have arrived, and that parents, or equally SGB members, with little education themselves, know how to respond to these documents and events. What first steps should be taken to intercede in the situation and change the circumstances? Perhaps this should be the focus of conversation in a dialogue. The call to action is necessary, but guidance on the first steps in taking action is required.

*(Enver Surty, DBE Minister)*

Privatisation has also taken place in Europe, but not to any great extent in regard to schooling where privatisation is subject to very strong government regulation. Education is seen as a great socialiser, and primary education is what cements a nation.

*(Ambassador Roeland van de Geer, EU)*

The specialised footprints of some of the low fee independent schools bear investigation, for example settings in the inner city or informal settlements where there is no state provision; or for over-age matric completion.

*(Ihron Rensburg)*

The question is whether the state should relax its regulatory authority over low fee independent schools, and whether with that relaxed authority and higher subsidy the low fee schools may become even lower fee schools in future. This needs to be investigated.

*(Ihron Rensburg)*

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**90% of learners achieve more than 50% in maths, science and languages by 2030. (NDP)**

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The suggestion is that introducing an operational management organisation has potential for significantly improving poorly performing schools, but the conversations need to be more nuanced to avoid the presumption that talk about management operation systems excludes the instructional model or values.

*(Speaker)*

The debate essentially distracts from the main focus, namely the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. The big problem has to do with the instructional core rather than management. The processes of teaching in our schools are not working, but it should be quite feasible to alter the instructional core within the public system without having to fundamentally reject the relative position of the public and private.

*(Ihron Rensburg UJ)*

The question of introducing operating partnerships similarly needs investigation in order to be revisited at a future dialogue to reach some agreement on whether to test the proposal.

*(Ihron Rensburg)*

Detail was requested on the managing operator, where they would come from and their professional backgrounds. Concern was also expressed at the need for their majority rights on the SGBs. Having won the rights for parental involvement on the SGB, this would amount to giving an outside entity the right of veto.

What role would the recruitment policy play if the existing staff have not been chosen by the managing operator, which would be bound by existing labour relations? What would the plan of the managing operator be with the staff of the school, given that the problem is the instructional core, the subject matter knowledge, the pedagogical content knowledge of the teachers?

Explanation of financial considerations is also necessary. Would the partnerships bring funding, and how would the funding be used? Would salaries of the managers be paid? And how would salaries for teachers compare with state schools?

*(Anthea Cereseto NAPTOSA)*

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schools charging fees between R6 000 and R12 000. However although low-fee schools provide choice and access for disadvantaged learners, they are not accessible to the poorest of the poor who cannot pay fees.

The independent school sector is fairly small at 6.3%, with no runaway growth, with 90% being not for profit. Low fee schools, with fees below R12 000 per year cannot at the moment cater for the poorest. The subsidies for independent not-for-profit schools constitute less than 1% of the provincial education budgets, but if replaced by state schools would cost the state an additional R1.8bn.

The regulatory system for independent schools is increasingly disabling and expensive. It was argued that raising the subsidy amount and reducing compliance costs would enable the lowering of fees and consequently the catering to the poorest learners.

Data in the sector is problematic.

In addition to the registered independent schools are unregistered, fly-by-night or pop-up schools, which need careful investigation.

Dr Hofmeyer provided statistics that demonstrate the rapid growth in the independent school sector. Reasons for this growth include unmet and differentiated demand of communities. The growth is being fanned by recent developments such as the emergence of new players and chains of for-profit and not-for-profit schools: e.g. Curro, Meridian, Spark, BASA schools, etc. as well as investment from big private sector investors such as Old Mutual, Pearson, Advtech, Curro and others.

The independent school sector is complementary to the public sector, saving the state money. The cost to the state of subsidised independent schools in each province is less than 1% of the provincial education budget, except in Gauteng with the greatest number of independent schools, where the cost to province is 1.45% of the provincial education budget. The KZN cost to province is 0.19% of the education budget which is less than the catering budget of the PED. Mpumalanga has the lowest percentage cost to budget at 0.09%. If all subsidised independent schools were to become public schools it would cost government R1.85bn in recurrent costs (excluding capital costs).

The demographics of these schools post-apartheid have shifted from a majority of white learners to majority black learners, and while the majority previously were in traditional high-fee schools, now majority numbers are in mid- to low-fee schools.

It was suggested that growth in low-fee independent schools is a response to unmet and differentiated demand, rather than that the quality of public schooling is bad, with the slogan 'more, better, different' covering different aspects of demand. The rate of state planning and establishment of schools cannot match the growth of demand in rapidly expanding urban areas, new informal settlements and rural areas. Over-age learners who have failed matric are not accepted at public schools but can complete their schooling at 'repeater' schools often found in the inner city buildings. These schools are certainly better when there is a lack of good public schools. The public system cannot provide the range of faith-based and alternative approaches for which there is demand, such as Montessori, Waldorf, Muslim or Jewish based education.

Independent schools have a good equity profile, with 73% of their learners in 2010 being black, with the greater proportions at the schools with lower fees. Gender profiles indicate that access to schooling is not biased against girls in South Africa, and 51% of learners in independent schools are girls, with 62.5% in low-fee high schools as compared to 55% in public high schools by grade 12.

Dr Hofmeyer confirmed that at the moment with the 60% subsidy and excessive compliance costs, independent schools in South Africa cannot serve the poorest of the poor, but reported that there are contrary examples all over the world. One in particular has led to growing numbers of children in the Punjab education foundation schools of Pakistan. Providers are given 100% subsidy with a performance contract having targets of annual growth and no option of charging fees. CDE will issue a report on this project shortly.

In terms of teaching salaries, research shows that across independent schools as a whole, particularly with low- and mid-fee schools, teacher salaries are lower than the public sector when benefits are taken into account. Whatever teacher salary is paid in the public sector the independent schools must add 35% to meet the value of the housing subsidy, medical aid and pension benefits, and that no private entity can provide except the highest fee schools.

An aspect of teaching salaries in the public sector that needs consideration is that there is a plateau in about mid-career, which research shows to be the time that qualified teachers leave the public system not to return.

The curriculum and the ethos for independent schools are at the core of what they do. While good principals are important, the critical element is their ensuring that teachers have the subject and pedagogic knowledge, often being trained in the situation of the school. But the values and ethos are not solved by management alone.

### **Presentation of the Public School Operating Partnership proposal**

Dr David Harrison, CEO of DG Murray Trust, outlined a model of schooling whereby selected public schools were placed 'under new management' as a strategy to improve educational outcomes for the poorest 40% of children in South Africa. *Public school operating partnerships (PSOPS)* aim to contribute to systems-wide improvement of the quality of *public* education by placing *selected public schools* under the

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Research still shows that although access to education has improved, and although the model of no-fee schools has been introduced, economic access is still quoted by a number of families as the reason for non-enrolment at school or dropping out of school, and a disproportionate number of girls are seen to be excluded from schools in that context.

Independent schools, even low-fee independent schools, may be seen to be widening the equality gap by providing the opportunity for learners who can afford to pay fees, and whose families are thus more likely to participate in and help to strengthen SGBs, to leave those schools. Where the memorandum of the morning challenged schools and communities to start doing things for themselves by mobilising additional resource inputs, both financial and in kind, taking learners with resources out of the public school system leaves the remaining learners in those public schools with less resources and less to empower them or develop their potential. The fact that the school belongs to the community is also removed, and the remaining learners and their parents are those who need the community support that has moved on.

*(Speaker)*

Various examples of alternative models of schooling were discussed including the work of the Two Oceans Foundation described by Dr Adam, which set up successful no-fee community schools for learners in Manenberg, Gugulethu and Mitchell's Plain on the Cape Flats.

The assertion is that the public system remains the main provider for the poor, and people's belief in the state's capacity to provide gives people hope. However this does not mean that only the state can and should provide quality education. In a democracy other forms of expression must be allowed, which may not be a disruption as long as they are not alienated from the purposes of government. The fact that the community is more involved in the life of the school does not mean that it is alienated from the purposes of government or that belief in government's capacity to deliver has been lost.

*(John Volmink)*

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*Nikki Steyn, Section 27.*

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The concept of public-private partnerships playing a part in what was traditionally the state’s role is increasingly common in many countries, and in SA in regard to prisons, hospitals, power production. In all these settings, the private sector has substantial resources to negotiate, to structure, to consider costing issues, while often the state does not have the necessary level of sophistication required to hold the private sector properly accountable or to negotiate affordable costs.

(Sizwe Nxasana)

The core of quality education should be brought back to current experience of schools for learners. Regardless of the merit of the different approaches discussed, the daily reality of learners includes a tragic level of violence. The recent rape of a schoolboy in Northern Cape seems to have been based on racial prejudice. And yet that child, and all others around the country who are suffering as a result of school violence, belongs to all of us.

The core of education is values. What values drive schools? What values drive school management and the quality of leadership, inspiring these schools to create democratic environments where learners’ voices are valued? What values drive teachers to make sure that they turn up, that they embrace the curriculum and teach in the best possible way? What values are we passing on to students and explicitly allowing learners to engage with, particularly in subjects like Life Orientation?

(Nick McKay, AVAAZ)

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Education institutions must have the capacity to implement policy and, where capacity is lacking, immediate measures need to be taken to address it. (NDP)

management of a non-profit school operating partner. The proposal is to test the model as part of the innovation mandate of NECT.

The proposal is for putting selected poorly performing public schools under new management, providing the school with additional technical ability by bringing an external operating system to bear to help improvement, while retaining accountability with the community and governing body. Seeing how this model could work, there is a need to test the model in the system.

PSOPs would be *one form* of management in publicly-funded schools, focused on underperforming schools or those in marginalised communities that require intensive institutional support to flourish. Unlike subsidies to independent schools, the benefits would be retained within the public school system and should be evident within two years.

The way PSOPs would work is that

- *Non-profit school operating partners* would be part of school governing bodies (SGBs) and these enhanced SGBs would be contracted to operate a public school.
- That operating partner would – with parents’ permission - have the *majority vote on the school governing body*, which would account to the provincial Department of Education.
- The operating partner would be contracted on the basis of *school performance outcomes*, and would be able to operate more flexibly (e.g. in terms of school budget, staffing, and school hours).
- An *operating network organisation* would act as the administrative and legal entity for the school operating partner, and would also provide management and instructional support to the school operator and staff to ensure excellent school performance

The operating network is an umbrella network that supports a number of underperforming schools, and has a systematic process for improvement, and is accountable to government.

While there are several benefits of PSOPs the main benefits are:

- *Harnessing strong managerial resources* that currently reside outside the public education system, and concentrating those resources in underperforming schools and in schools serving marginalised communities
- Helping to *bridge the quality divide* between the best schools and the rest
- Creating an institutional mechanism *at school-level* to achieve greater equity in education.

**There are partners and provinces interested in testing this innovation.**

A group of funders (including the DG Murray Trust, Zenex Foundation, Millenium Trust, FirstRand Empowerment Fund, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, the Omidyar Network and ARK) is interested in working with the national and provincial governments to develop public school operating partnerships that strengthen the quality of Government schools in South Africa. The Gauteng and Western Cape Departments of Education are interested in testing PSOPs as a potential innovation within public schools.

David Harrison responded to questions and comments on the Operating Partnership model by referring to implementation in the United Kingdom of a similar model intended to improve two hundred underperforming schools. What made the improvement was having in place a network operator focused on the instructional core around professional development and teacher support. That network could be a non-profit organisation, or an alliance of teachers who came together to service the network operator. Developing the



instructional core is at the heart of it, rather than management.

In that model, the parents decided that the operating partner should have majority rights in the SGB, and have been pleased with the improved performance. Parent buy-in has increased.

The majority of staff (85%) were retained, with the remainder opting to find other jobs, and virtually no firing. Interestingly, because these were underperforming schools 30 of the 31 principals were changed and it made a massive difference.

In the model currently, the costs are 3% higher than the equivalent in the public school. Breakeven point seems to be at about 50 schools. The model seemed to go wrong in the UK when it stopped being seen as a selective strategy aimed at underperforming schools, and came to be seen under the Conservative political administration as a way of expanding the autonomy of schools.

The model is recommended as part of a spectrum of interventions, rather than a panacea.

## Response to the presentations

In response to the presentations, Yousuf Gabrhu (Independent Educationist) argued that the focus should be on strengthening existing managers within the education system, rather than introducing new ones. His view was that the proposal undermines the Government mandate for education and that the State should be the sole provider of education for the poorest of the poor.

It was pointed out by Prof Braam Fleisch that equal attention should be paid to management and improving the instructional core, and in this regard, the role of the operating network was crucial.

After a wide-ranging discussion the group agreed that the matter was of national interest, and required further discussion with the Minister and Department of Basic Education, trade unions and other stakeholders.

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Reading must be re-thought as part of a more expansive understanding of culture as it evolves, as part of cultural traditions and practice.

It would be important to scale up initiatives such as literacy clubs, and to empower parents, caregivers and community to activate, mobilise and move forward the literacy campaign.

School libraries should be rethought as public libraries.

*(Ihron Rensburg, UJ)*

There may be flaws and gaps in the undergraduate teaching curricula. Teacher educators in the universities need to ensure that they are themselves up to date with the latest methods in the CAPS curriculum of how to teach phonics.

*(Jane Hofmeyer)*

A language issue similar to that of South Africa is relevant in the European Union, but although more and more English is spoken, there is no tendency to move to one language at primary school level at all.

*Ambassador Roeland van de Geer, EU*

Getting back to basics, and getting to the foundations must recognise that the scaffolding of the brain for cognitive development and language development starts in the first year of life, and not at Grade R or Grade 1. Education debates must understand a longitudinal approach to children’s development that places as much emphasis on the first few years as it does on the rest.

*(David Harrison)*

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*UNDP – Roeland van de Geer, European Union Ambassador.*



Matakanye Matakanya, National Association of School Governing Bodies (NASBG).

## Involving communities in growing a nation of readers and writers

Shirley O'Carroll of Wordworks presented a paper entitled *Growing a nation of readers and writers: The importance of early language and literacy* in which she outlined approaches to support learners to read and write successfully.

It is well known that South African children are underperforming significantly in literacy. Many children still fail to reach the minimum expected level, and our results lag behind other African countries. The reasons for this are complex, but a central problem is that many young children from birth to five years do not have access to essential learning opportunities that support early language and literacy development. These children are starting school already behind and the achievement gap becomes entrenched from the earliest years. Furthermore, there is evidence that, without intervention, the deep inequalities that already exist as children enter school are amplified throughout their school careers, with severe consequences for the fabric of our society.

In South Africa there is growing awareness of the importance of investing in young children and co-ordinating state and civil society programmes more effectively. There is a new enabling draft policy framework in ECD, and a National Curriculum Framework for Birth to Four Years. In this context, it is vital to increase understanding of how language and early literacy can be supported before children begin formal schooling. Effective coordination between the DBE, the Department of Social Development and the Department of Health, which are all concerned with children, could help to promote literacy.

The term 'early literacy' refers to the skills, understanding and behaviours of young children that develop into conventional reading and writing. Because the development of language is integral to early literacy, the process of becoming literate starts at birth.

Early language and literacy development is rooted in everyday activities and interactions as well as exposure to environmental print and books. Talking with

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Related to the issue of reading and needing attention is the issue of language, language development and policy. Despite the fact that language policy addresses issues such as the stage at which English should be introduced in schools, and dealing with the vernacular as languages, there is evidence to show that many children are proficient in neither English nor their home language. The situation may be better for the more widely spoken languages such as isiZulu or perhaps isiXhosa where there is some exposure to written content available in the form of newspapers. However the only source of public exposure for the smaller languages is television soaps, with nothing available to read. Substantial investment into development of books in all the SA languages is required, particularly at the early stages such as ECD and Foundation Phase. Teachers must also be trained to be proficient in these languages for children before they are exposed to English in Grade 3.

(Sizwe Nxasana)

Part of the problem of reading is that it has no institutional home, but straddles arts and culture and basic education. India made progress with the 'Read India' national campaign with strong collaboration across several government departments. There was clear understanding of the continuum between community and school, and the continuum from conception through to post-matric in terms of a single strategy for reading development.

South Africa does not have that, so perhaps a critical role that the NECT could play would be to try to convene at least the Departments of Basic Education, of Arts and Culture and the Department of Cooperative Government. There is a wonderful opportunity with the community work programme for creating reading facilitators, which is the way that the Read India programme rolled out. NGOs should also be brought in, such as the Nal'ibali Initiative which has established multiple platforms of media and community.

(David Harrison)

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babies and young children, sharing stories and books, pointing out print, talking about letters and sounds, supporting drawing and early writing, and facilitating pretend play, all have a powerful bearing on whether or not a child learns to read and write successfully. And all these simple activities can be integrated into daily routines in homes and community settings.

Home-visitors, health and community workers, ECD practitioners, parents and caregivers have a crucial role to play. However, both in private homes and public programmes, these important role players are overstretched and under-resourced. They need knowledge about how young children learn, they need to be convinced to prioritise the kinds of experiences that promote early language and literacy, and they need resourcing and, perhaps most essentially, support. Cross-sectoral programmes in education, health, and social development, need to have a sharper focus on informing and empowering parents and caregivers to support early language and literacy development. There is also a need for public education campaigns, to raise awareness and share information.

Input from respondent, Mr M.H.Mweli (DBE) took the form of a presentation: *'Reading as a strategy to promote learner achievement and greater community participation'*. This presentation highlighted the importance of an advocacy strategy for early literacy development, with a focus on the following:

- a community awareness programme on early literacy development with the target group including parents, ECD practitioners, health and community workers.
- programmes that focus on mediating early language and literacy activities in home and school environments and empower parents and caregivers to support early literacy and language development.
- public education campaigns to raise awareness and share information on early literacy development.
- cross-sectoral programmes (across education, health and social development).

The focus must be wider than the training of teachers only, but must include training of caregivers to provide appropriate stimulation to develop literacy. In this regard the role of Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign which was launched in 2008 to assist almost 5 million adults over the age of 15 years to become literate and numerate in one of the official languages, was applauded. In provinces where investments have been made in the training of adults, there is a correlation seen in the reading performance of learners.

There was consensus that investment in young children's learning was critical for improving literacy outcomes at school level and general agreement that this was an area of focus that NECT would support. It was proposed that NECT could play a role through helping to drive the literacy agenda across sectors (Arts and Culture, Education, Social Development and Health), with a particular focus on literacy in communities and homes.



Prof. Ihron Rensburg, Co-chair, Education DialogueSA.



Suren Govender, DBE; Max Sisulu, Wits School of Governance; and Samuel Isaacs, Independent.

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It was noted that high levels of illiteracy in South Africa and lack of a reading culture meant that children did not have role models that read. The DBE reported on an intervention in the Eastern Cape to improve literacy levels of grandmothers looking after young children. It was anticipated that as they became more literate they would be in a better position to support their grandchildren's literacy. It was also proposed that rural print-poor contexts posed challenges for developing young children's literacy.

It was explained that where caregivers are illiterate or resources are scarce, young children's language and literacy development could still be supported through caregivers spending more time talking to children and telling stories. Participants raised the question of whether young children should use their mother tongue or English from an early age. Presenters stressed the importance of encouraging parents and caregivers to build strong language foundations in their home language which would support the transition into English at a later stage.

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## Summary conclusion

In conclusion, Godwin Khosa observed that a clearer framework has been crafted within which to progress. The framework comprises myths, questions and clarities; tensions and convergences.

Myths, questions and clarities:

- Successes achieved in or through government should be acknowledged, and not confused or underplayed, particularly with regard to access and investment, inputs
- The school system, in fact and by law, comprises public and independent schools
- We are not giving up on the government in our system, and we are not giving up on the public education system
- What are we going to do about the increasing pace of education of the middle class?
- Independent and dependable research must be done
- The learner is at the centre: What kind of learners and what kind of adults are we wanting to raise?
- Mostly it is about school choice, which has much to do with class, geography, ideologies, and how to support democracy going forward.

We should be aware of these **tensions** and continually work towards finding the balance, but in that process take care not to lose ourselves:

- Credibility and confidence in the public school system
- Public good versus delivery mechanisms – differentiation between the two and avoiding confusing the two
- Managerial versus instructional core as drivers of improvement
- Technocratic versus culture change initiatives.

Convergences:

- There is urgency, and something must be done about it
- There is a need for an exploratory approach
- Disruptors must be identified to allow for new paradigms to enter

Courage is required.

At a recent meeting between the NECT and the DBE, discussion ranged over whether the NECT is on the right track, how to increase the pace, and more fundamentally who the NECT is and what its role and function in society are, its authority and legitimacy. It was agreed that the NECT represents government, business, civil society, and labour, and that it should capitalise on its strength in unity. The primary responsibility of the NECT, positioned as it is outside core governance, is to facilitate the building of a compact.

Three steps should be taken from the discussions:

- Discussions around the model of schooling require more listening and more research, consideration and if necessary preparation to take it to a policy level
- The coordination of key players in terms of both reading and alternative schooling must be facilitated
- In respect of the issues discussed, there are contributions that each organisation can make without waiting for policy or the coordination of government structures

Requests will be made for volunteers to each of the committees to take the work forward.

Prof Ihron Rensburg closed the dialogue, expressing appreciation for everybody's attendance and engagement.

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David Harrison's proposals were supported, with the addition of the Departments of Social Development and Health, in terms of promoting the message to parents of younger children. The presentation and discussion in the breakaway group was concerned with broadening literacy outside the school and also into the years from birth to five. Existing networks of home visitors, house visitors, and people who access families and young children should be used to add to their messages around health or nutrition a message around talking to babies and children, and being a child's first teacher. It would be valuable to see what already exists as available systems and networks, and to consider how that can be used to start to create awareness and to think differently, and provide some resourcing through these networks around early literacy and language.

The moment is very opportune to make critical input in this area, since the ECD frameworks are currently in draft form. There is a focus on a beautiful curriculum as never before in this country. The issue is around mobilising support for families and communities in addition to what takes place in schools.

*(Shirley O'Carroll)*

A conference or round table of key government departments, NGOs and donor organisations would be useful for exploring the possibilities and opportunities for scaling up some of these initiatives.

*(Ihron Rensburg, UJ)*

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