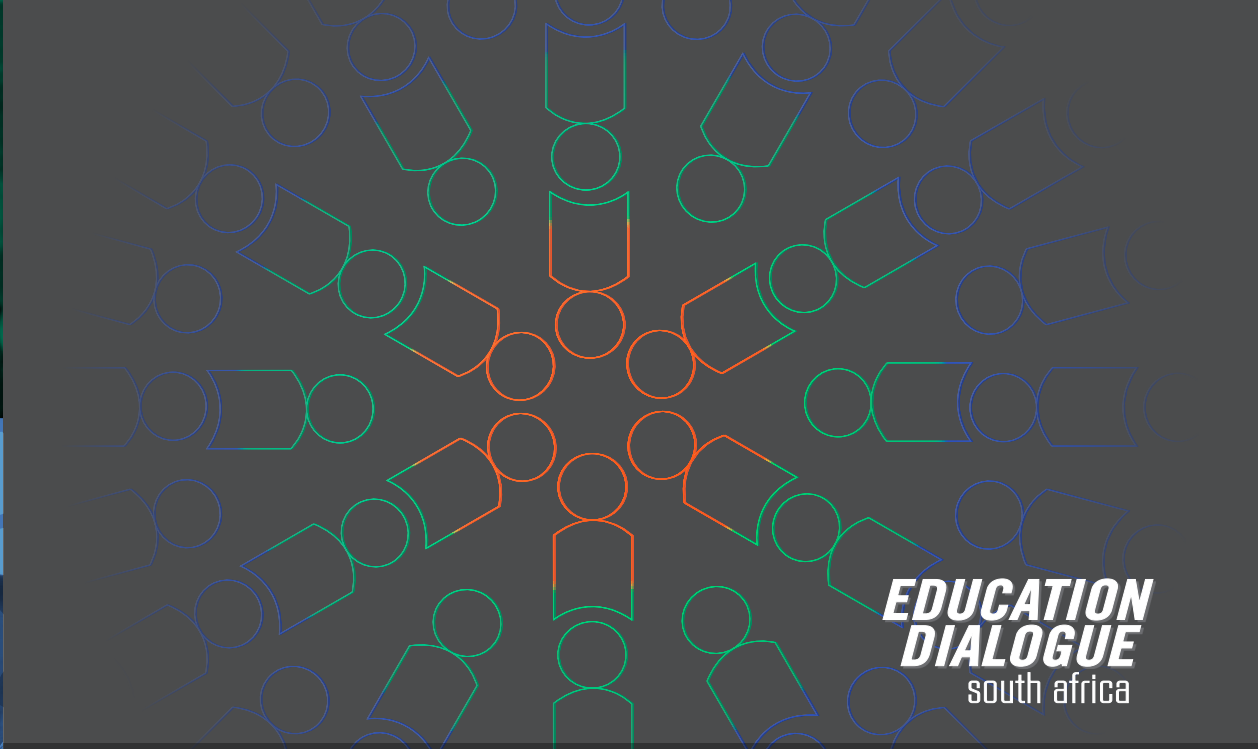




MAKING SCHOOLS & TEACHERS EFFECTIVE



**EDUCATION
DIALOGUE**
south africa

A DRIVE TO NATIONAL ACTIONS TO IMPROVE LEARNING

EDUCATION DIALOGUESA

Making schools and teachers effective:
Action Steps agreed at the inaugural
meeting in *November 2013*



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INTRODUCTION

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Education Dialogue SA is one of the five programmes of the NECT, and is intended to facilitate engagement between society's social partners and government to ensure a common vision for education. The dialogues are pitched as open conversations where people are encouraged to share ideas and perspectives, where stakeholders can debate issues and generate alternative solutions and approaches, and where government, as it drives the process of educational development and transformation, is afforded the opportunity to listen to the voices of the people.

The intention of the dialogues is to create an avenue for open, honest engagement among key stakeholders such as the teacher unions, student organisations, civil society organisations, business, and government. The dialogues are apolitical and inclusive, and give all organisations the opportunity to explore joint societal actions (Education Collaboration Framework, 2013: 13).

The inaugural meeting, which was convened as an opportunity to frame the agenda and the future approach to public conversations, was a follow up to the leadership dialogue which was convened in December 2012 on the state and future of public education. This leadership dialogue assisted in generating a range of possible topics for discussion, and resulted in the formulation by the NECT of 6 themes for action.

The inaugural dialogue, held on 15 November 2013, focused on the first theme and was titled "Effective Schools and Teachers: What actions to take?" Discussion and debate was framed by two presentations, "Making schools effective, what actions should we as a nation take?" by Professor Brahm Fleisch of the Wits School of Education, and "The Professionalisation of Teaching" by Professor John Volmink, chairman of the SADTU Curtis Nkondo Professional Development Institute's Task Team on the Professionalisation of Teaching.

6 themes for ACTION

1. Professionalisation of teaching
2. Supporting the capacity of the state to deliver
3. Courageous and effective leadership
4. Resourcing of schools
5. Community and parent involvement
6. Promoting community and parent involvement

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to present the essential highlights of the inaugural meeting, placing emphasis on the ideas, issues, and recommendations which arose during the conversation. The document seeks to simultaneously communicate the structure and content of the dialogue, as well as abstract the areas for possible action in realising an education system with effective schools and teachers.



IDEAS

ISSUES

**RECOMMEN-
DATIONS**

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EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

MAKING SCHOOLS EFFECTIVE – IN SEARCH OF THE MAGIC OF EDUCATION

Prior to 1994 the basic elements of education provision were not in place. Participation and attendance rates in schools were very low; inequity in provision was at its highest, and legislated. In 2014 the participation rates are high, and equity promotion policies and programmes have been adopted; however, there is still limited learning taking place in many schools across the country. Systems across the world appear to have focused a lot more on technical means of improving the effectiveness of schools. This involves the following principles:

The centrality of instruction

Efforts should focus on building a strong instructional core for sustainable school improvement by providing, amongst others, standardised lesson plans; tasks and scripts for teachers; standardised and adequate learning resources; support for children which they may not receive at home; and in-class coaching and support for teachers.

Literacy and mathematics as bedrocks of learning

International and national tests have shown that children in primary school are generally not learning to read. Low reading

and numeracy levels have discernable effects on the academic performance and achievement of learners. As a result, literacy and mathematics have become the focus of educational improvement, particularly in early childhood education.

Using external measures as central to improvement

Using external measurements enables schools to understand and benchmark their levels of performance against other schools, and use the measurements to track their performance: education systems also use the performance data to segment schools and learners for special attention.

Teacher capacity, training, and institutional coaching as central to instruction

There should be a focus on improving professional development in pre- and in-service teacher training: there has been a realisation that typical teacher workshops and seminars on their own are not effective, since teachers are often unable to convert the theoretical content of workshops into changed behaviours and enhanced classroom practice when they return to their schools.

MAKING SCHOOLS EFFECTIVE – IN SEARCH OF THE MAGIC OF EDUCATION

Teacher accountability as a key to performance

Consideration is given to the extent of curriculum coverage, the level of engagement of the teacher with the curriculum, and the sense of professional responsibility assumed by the teacher for meeting a wide range of curriculum expectations as elements of teacher accountability.

The dialogue and the task team set up to further discuss this theme observed the need to bring elements of culture change into the improvement strategy. This approach requires a shift from focusing on the signs of things not being right (such as poor learner performance) to the root causes. The nation seeks to look for the ‘magic of education’ which should drive learners, teachers, parents, and the community as a whole to be committed to and value excellence in education.

Ideas on school effectiveness raised during the dialogue include:

- o The need to understand
 - 1) how children learn in the classroom;
 - 2) how teachers learn; and
 - 3) what non-conventional interventions could re-ignite the “magic of education”.

KEY POINTS

- o The ethos of a school is important, and this implies that the support of the community around the school is vital to build and maintain a good ethos.
- o Although South Africans have tried to implement projects aimed at building self-pride and a sense of personal responsibility amongst citizens, some of these projects have not had the desired effect. Such projects include Values in Education, Emerging Voices, LeadSA, the Quality Teaching and Learning Campaign, and the Moral Regeneration Campaign.

Key actions were identified on which efforts should be focused.

We should:

- o Draw lessons from the successes and failures of previous projects, and also breathe new life into those that are still running;
- o Consider developing an army of graduates who can go into schools and support learners by assisting them with reading, giving them extra lessons or helping them with homework: there is a significant number of graduates who remain idle;
- o Review the school organisational model, which has remained largely the same since 1900: a review could yield suggestions for improvement;

- o Encourage schools and communities to start doing things for themselves – each community should agree on its contribution to improving the quality of education in its schools;
- o Include leadership structures beyond those of the school, such as traditional and community leaders, in education change initiatives.

It was agreed that the following stakeholders need to be engaged to commit to improving school effectiveness going forward:

- o Religious groups should be approached to participate in conversations around how to rebuild an appropriate school ethos.
- o Communities should be engaged through interviews and discussions on local radio stations to encourage them to get involved in education.
- o The President should be approached and encouraged to adopt the status of ‘Education President’.

ENGAGING

¹A task team held a discussion on Making Schools Effective on Wednesday, 5 March. The group comprised Dr John Samuel (Chairperson), Ms Janice Seland (CIE), Mr Maitanzima Mweeli (DBE), Mr Matakanya Matakanya (NASGB), Mr Henry Hendricks (NAPTOSA), Ms Derryn Craib (NECT), and Mr Godwin Khosa (NECT).

IDEAS ON SCHOOL the need to understand EFFECTIVENESS

KEY POINTS developing an army of graduates IDENTIFIED

ENGAGING participate in conversations STAKEHOLDERS

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PROFESSIONALISATION OF TEACHING

The dialogue recognised that there is an overall negative image of teachers and teacher unions. Teachers themselves express concern about their working conditions. Teachers are criticised for lack of commitment and lack of concern for the welfare of learners. Presenters at the dialogue sought to highlight the importance of professionalism in teaching, and explained the meaning of professionalism so as to frame an agenda for the professionalisation of teaching. The following concepts were discussed:



Definition of professionalism

The first point to be made here is that 'managerialism', as reflected in efforts to make teachers more accountable, is not professionalism. Many critical aspects of professionalism were mentioned. The most critical is the self-regulating nature of a profession, and the right principles and responsibilities allocated to members. The responsibilities are framed by the crucial social function undertaken by the profession, and by the understanding that teaching as a profession is an aspect of nation-building contributing to a just society. While professionalisation is concerned with teaching as work, professionalism is concerned with the manner in which teaching as a profession defines and regulates its own practice.

Understanding teaching as a profession

The key to understanding teaching as a profession is distinguishing the difference between teaching as a craft culture and as a professional culture. A craft culture focuses on specialised and practical knowledge, while a professional culture is concerned with professional knowledge, practice, and engagement. Professional knowledge includes sound subject knowledge, and also knowledge of how to teach and how to select, order, and pace content. Professional practice refers to: the capacity to manage classrooms effectively across diverse contexts; the ability to assess learners in

various ways, and to use the results to improve teaching; and the ability to display a positive work ethic in terms of the values that are evident in one's behaviour. Professional engagement refers to the ability to engage with colleagues and reflect critically on one's own practice. The more teaching as a profession is able to define its own field of practice as having an abstract base of ideas, specified skills, and ethical code, the more it will be able to manage the influence of external forces and take charge of its professional experience.

Issues related to professionalising teaching

Some of the issues related to the professionalisation of teaching are: managerialism; the role of unions; the approach to teacher development; the conditions of service; and the adequacy of standards in the field.

- o State interference as an attempt to professionalise teachers is conducted in a managerial way, and hence has the opposite effect. In effect, managerialism actually de-professionalises teaching as a profession. Some agree that government is responsible for the lack of teacher professionalism because of its interference and its insistence on the use of scripted programmes, not only for those teachers and learners and who need them. This inhibits teachers from developing professional autonomy.

- o The role of unions in fostering professionalism could be positive if they played a corrective function regarding policy and practice, and if they rendered support to teachers in making them more effective. Unions are playing this role to an increasing extent. However, there is a perception that unions can also frustrate and obstruct efforts to hold teachers and principals accountable for poor performance and unprofessional practices.
- o There is a general dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of teacher preparation by universities. There is a sense that the body of knowledge addressed by the universities does not relate to classrooms, and some argue that university academics who are involved in teacher education do not have classroom experience.
- o Teachers claim to struggle for the resources they need to be effective in the classroom.
- o There are questions about standards for the profession, their maintenance, and monitoring.
- o The role of the South African Council of Educators is not felt in the education system. More needs to be done to ensure that the council plays its independent role.

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PROFESSIONALISATION OF TEACHING

CONTINUED

The following lessons should be heeded in advancing teaching as a profession

- o It takes time and requires the engagement of teachers to make deep changes in their practice, although the first steps should be taken without delay, by the teachers themselves, unions, and the society as a whole.
- o It is unrealistic to hold teachers accountable for the performance of the education system.
- o What makes the education system work is not the sum of uncoordinated initiatives, but the proper integration of a broad range of diverse policies and strategies.
- o Strong educational leadership by principals is crucial to addressing the challenges in schools.

Further to the dialogue, a smaller group of participants was tasked with the responsibility of developing action-oriented recommendations. The Task Team made the following observations about the professionalisation of teachers.

- An action oriented programme in South Africa is needed: all stakeholders need to play their part and not just blame poor quality on teachers.

- There is a need to understand
 - 1) the current practice of teachers in the classroom;
 - 2) what teachers are expected to do by the different stakeholders; and
 - 3) the practices teachers should be employing.

It is important that a conversation on these points takes place between teachers, government, unions, and parents.

- The centrality of teacher knowledge, which has a bearing on how teachers are prepared and what in-service professional development support they receive, must be recognised.
- There must be acceptance that teachers need not only specialised knowledge, but also a sense of the importance of their jobs: they will derive this sense of importance from the commitment of schools and their surrounding communities to education.

The discussion identified the key aspects of teacher development on which efforts could be concentrated:

[Selection] The South African system does not necessarily attract the most suitable candidates to enter the teaching profession, although evidence from the Funza Lushaka intervention shows an improvement in the quality of students studying teaching. Further efforts need to be made to change the public perception of teachers so that teaching as a career is aspired to, and not one that is easy to get into.

[Training] Pre-service training needs to be strengthened. The university programmes need to be coherent and have continuous serving lecturers with practical experience, as happens in other professions such as engineering, medicine, and law. It is important that there is a balance between academic knowledge/theory and practical craft knowledge.

[Practice] There is a need to understand how teachers learn once they are engaged in the practice of teaching, and what the best methods of continuous professional development are. It was noted that currently in-service training is not very effective, as pre-service training is inadequate.

It was agreed that the following organisations working with educators need to be engaged to commit to improving teacher professionalisation:

- SACE needs new energy and should do more to set standards. SACE needs to be advised to communicate a clearer understanding of the work that it does and how it can play a more effective role in teacher professionalisation.
- The Education Deans' Forum needs to be engaged to work towards improving pre-service training and tightening university selection criteria.

- The Department of Basic Education needs to be engaged around how to strengthen promotion of teachers into management positions, starting with heads of departments who should be selected based on their subject knowledge. This will strengthen the professional career paths of teachers.
- The role of unions in in-service training should be strengthened as is the case in other countries. The initiation of the Teacher Union Collaboration by the DBE and the teacher unions was noted as a positive move.



²The smaller group comprised Prof John Volmink (chairperson), Dr Nick Taylor (NEEDU), Ms Kirsten Kennedy (BLSA), Mr Themba Kojana (DBE), Ms Mpho Letlape (SASOL Inzalo foundation), Mr Mugwena Maluleke (SADTU), Ms Sheva Messias (SABJE), and Mr Godwin Khosa (NECT).

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AIM OF EDUCATION DIALOGUESA

OUR GOAL

The primary goal of **Education DialogueSA** is to provide sustained leadership to the nation on practical steps that need to be taken to achieve the behaviour changes necessary for improving the education of our children. The programme aspires to contribute to bringing about a coordinated shift in the mind-set of the people of South Africa.

This ideal will be achieved by:

- o drawing the dialogue participants into discussions characterised by mindful speaking and listening that will provoke insightful responses;
- o creating an avenue for joint understanding of what we individually fail to think through;
- o engaging South African society in a cycle of deep listening, reflection, and speaking;
- o compelling South Africans to adopt the future now, i.e. generating familiarity with what the future should look like;
- o creating a sustained hunger for change;
- o being continuously stimulating, open, and courageous, but focused on actions.





DIALOGUE MEMBERS

THE DIALOGUE GROUP IS MADE UP OF APPOINTED EXPERTS REPRESENTING ALL SECTORS OF THE EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

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Janet Love
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Janice Seland
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Kgotso Schoeman
Kagiso Trust

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Tracey Henry
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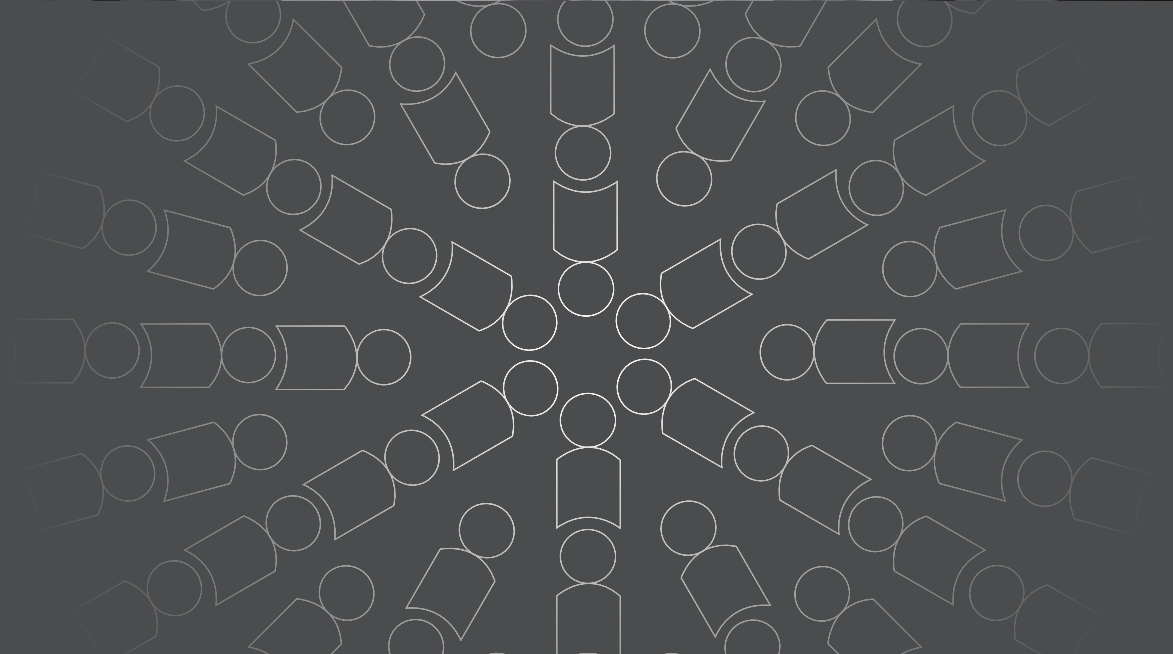
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Equal Education



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