

# **CONTRIBUTING TOWARDS THE NECESSARY TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM**

## **Introduction:**

While we all recognise that the transformation of the South African education system will only happen within the context of the plans, strategies and education budgets managed by the Department of Education, the process of such transformation needs to be supported, triggered and encouraged by all stakeholders and all citizens within our country. That there needs to be more effective and efficient use of funds and a clear roadmap for transformation of structures and institutions, is clear but it is also evident that such transformation needs to be strongly supported and precipitated by the actions and words of the citizens of this country. We propose that the following specific areas form the starting point of such transformation. We ask all stakeholders to get involved and to commit to the processes of active engagement, creation of support structures and initiation and implementation of new ideas and plans around the central strategies of the Department of Education as they seek to address the crises within our systems and educational practices.

## **Proposed areas of thrust:**

1. The Dinaledi schools need to be supported. The focus of these schools need to be clarified with effective benchmarks and markers of progress clearly outlined and established.
2. The creation of new incoming streams of teachers into the system and the development of strategies and plans to facilitate such inflow of professional people into the system.
3. The creation of new focus schools, the restoration of historic schools and the strengthening of existing intervention schools to ensure the existence of hubs of excellence with spokes reaching out into surrounding communities.
4. The creation of a third tier of schooling within the legislative framework of South Africa is a vital element of the transformation of our education system. This will facilitate the development of efficient hubs and will stimulate social entrepreneurship within the national education framework.
5. Specific strategies within each of the four phases of educational development within this country need to be outlined and cohesive and coherent strategies need to be developed in the following areas:
  - links between publishers and curriculum specialists
  - focus on mother-tongue writing and resource development for African languages
  - appropriate lesson enrichment material within the phases
  - developing strategies to create access
  - strategies relating to the use of appropriate technology need to be developed for each phase.

6. Within the national curriculum framework, it is clear that learning areas need to be the subject of clear focus.

Focus on:

- innovative and tested methodologies to be uncovered, explored and piloted
- language development
- numeracy development
- technology which includes computer technology

In order to achieve this, we need to create an appropriate data base of information and networks that will provide access to all the support strategies that are being developed in this country but most of which are fairly micro in their capacity. These need to be taken to scale and rolled out across larger areas and ultimately integrated into the South African system.

7. The area of educational leadership training and development within the country is vital and must be made effective.

Creating systems of mentorship and supervision of educational leaders needs to be implemented.

Training needs to be focussed on personal development in addition to the acquisition of particular skills.

A cadre of life orientation teachers needs to be developed and the training and development of this group should include health professionals, such as occupational therapists and social workers, to tackle the challenges and seize the opportunities offered within the life orientation curriculum framework.

To enable these processes to run in parallel, large networks of volunteers need to be mobilized from the business world, from the world of health professionals and from the realm of psychology professionals. Teams need to be established to provide the necessary basis for training for process groups within schools and for supervision where necessary.

Particular interventions at a therapeutic level can also be structured and set up in such a way to enable teachers and leaders within schools to claim access to such support.

8. The Department of Education has recently identified and committed itself to creating a level of school inspector intervention within schools and this will need maximum support from all stakeholders. Audits of performance will reveal inadequacies and challenges within the teaching echelons of education that will require active interventions. Some of these will not be popular within the framework of teacher unions and, possibly, even school communities.

These 8 areas are identified as key thrusts that the Department of Education must prioritise. We need to identify leading academics from educational institutions and business leaders who will select suitable and appropriate areas for financial support and volunteer time support. We will be able to create clear benchmarks of progress and measure success over time as part of the greater goal of complete transformation of our dysfunctional educational system. The stimulation of awareness of the rights and responsibilities of stakeholders within education and the

creation of accountable systems within the structures can only be achieved through an active engagement of the citizens of South Africa in the process. It is therefore envisaged that all of the actions outlined above will form part of the emerging social movement that will empower the voices of all stakeholders in our economy and within our country to be vocal and supportive in ways appropriate to their strengths. A vital component of this social movement is the activation of the parents of children at school so that the accountability of each school in this country is directly linked and monitored by appropriate parental expectations, regardless of the educational level of parents themselves.

## **Proposed Action Plan**

It is proposed that for each of the above 8 areas of activity, leadership teams are established tying in directly with Department of Education key personnel and that these teams should establish very clear objectives, strategies and measures of progress for each of the areas. The teams should be comprised of business leaders, educational specialists and practitioners, Department key personnel, ordinary citizens who volunteer for such roles and, wherever possible, educational foundation personnel. The tasks of each team would be to collect information and review research and practical project ideas that are being tested and implemented. These reviewed ideas should be structured in such a way that they can be integrated, shared and scaled up as quickly as possible. A further task of each team would be to stimulate social entrepreneurship and to encourage a volunteer spirit in the particular area of focus. A third task of each team would be to focus particularly on the creation of appropriate interventions, support structures, resource development and technological support for each of the areas identified.

## **SPECIFIC ACTIONS**

### **1. DINALEDI SCHOOLS**

In order to support and focus the Dinaledi schools, we propose the following:

- a) An immediate audit should take place of each of the schools in terms of the achievement of the outcomes that have been set for the Dinaledi schools.
- b) The schools need to be categorized on the basis of this audit in a system of four categories, where category 'D' is the lowest category and category 'A' is the highest category.
  - **Category 'D'** - entrance level Dinaledi schools. These would characterise schools without a success pattern and with the beginnings of programmes implemented (typically previously disadvantaged township schools).
  - **Category 'C'** – schools that have the resource base and the beginnings of a success pattern that reflect progress and pass rates appropriate to category 'c' level.
  - **Category 'B'** – largely successful schools in terms of the outcomes established for Dinaledi schools with high levels of engagement and

performance in the levels of maths and science and in the results of students.

- **Category 'A'** – highest achieving schools, models and nodes for other schools to follow, optimal systems and optimal patterns of success.
- c) Once this categorization has taken place, schools need to be required to create clear targets and timelines in which to achieve these targets. Targets should be developed with a view to outlining a pathway for each school to work hard to move from a lower level to a higher level. Ultimately, each school should attain category 'A' status. See attached diagram for details on possible categorization criteria and incentivised modification plans. We propose that the Dinaledi schools be considered part of a national framework rather than a regional framework and that the accountability of these schools would then be centrally driven and the comparisons of performance would therefore be managed from a central Department of Education office. If this is not immediately attainable for all Dinaledi schools, then certainly the schools in categories C, B and A should immediately be drawn into this category. We propose that clear incentives be created and funded to provide motivation and structure for schools to graduate from one category to the next.
- d) We suggest that Teach South Africa should be engaged to provide at least two young graduates (teachers within the programme of Teach South Africa) be allocated to each Dinaledi school in the field specifically of Maths and Science. These posts should be considered additional posts in support of the specific targets of the Dinaledi schools. We propose that all teachers within the Dinaledi schools be committed to a programme of training and development with regard to the use of computer technology. The culmination of this programme should be the provision of a laptop computer for each teacher. We propose a leadership mentoring programme for Dinaledi schools and for middle management of the specific Dinaledi Maths and Science components. The mentors would come from business fields with business engaged in the process of identifying mentors in each region with a view to providing the appropriate support envisaged.

## **2. THE CREATION OF NEW STREAMS OF TEACHERS**

- a) The Teach South Africa initiative should be nurtured and developed as a matter of priority and taken to scale as quickly as possible. The target for the year 2010 should be at least 500 teachers and for the year 2011 a doubling of that to 1,000 teachers with attempts at doubling for the three successive years thereafter.
- b) We suggest that active recruitment of grade 12 students into the teaching profession be a consciously driven process by an identified team of recruitment specialists with a strong marketing focus and that funding for such an office should be established and specific targets for this recruitment should be set and measured within this programme. We believe that all universities and training colleges should be engaged in

order to prepare for rapid growth within the education faculties and departments and to prepare for such growth, and to look for creative strategies and mechanisms for teacher preparation.

- c) We propose that teachers who teach within the Teach South Africa system for 2 years and/or teachers who are willing to volunteer and teach in recognized successful institutions for a period of 2 years with training support provided by the Teach South Africa model, should be awarded PGCSE equivalent qualifications. They could well be called Teacher Internship qualifications.
- d) We believe that the UNISA distance learning model of Bachelor of Education needs to be reviewed and refined to be more appropriately structured to enable a national internship programme to be established in all schools that reflect patterns of academic success and positive histories of performance.
- e) We propose that international networking should be actively pursued and short-term teaching permission needs to be granted to volunteers from other parts of the world and teachers who wish to teach for short terms in this country. In this regard, targets should be established and the same team recruiting from grade 12 into the education faculties and into internship programmes, could be responsible for creating a conduit of teachers into the systems. Again, specific targets need to be set and support funding to enable the administration and the effective implementation of this programme would also need to be found.

### **3. CREATION OF NEW SCHOOLS AND**

#### **4. RESTORATION OF HISTORIC SCHOOLS (CREATION OF THE THIRD TIER)**

We propose that the Historic Schools Restoration Project should be given maximum support and sufficient autonomy to drive these schools into becoming effective hubs of success within the educational landscape.

We further propose that these schools should form part of a third tier of state-assisted schools in which the autonomy for critical key decision-making would be granted in order for those schools to break the cycles of under-performance and failure that have come to dog them. Such autonomy should be conditional on performance to set targets.

We propose that new schools that are created to address the specific challenges of the educational crisis particularly the provision of access to quality education to previously disadvantaged learners and presently economically disadvantaged learners included. These new schools should be included in the envisaged third tier. This tier would provide opportunity for social entrepreneurs to create further hubs and models of effective intervention and effective schooling in areas and for communities who do not have such access.

We propose that business, civil society agencies and Department of Education be encouraged to support these initiatives and to own them as state-assisted schools. We further propose that the success of these schools be attributed to the Department of Education's strategy rather than to the creation of further independent schools as alternatives to Department of Education responsibility. These schools, as with the Historic Schools, would be identified as state-assisted. State assisted schools would be funded per student as per the funding formula and the autonomy of each school would be granted at the same level as the autonomy of independent schools.

### **5. SPECIFIC STRATEGIES WITHIN PHASES OF EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

As a starting point for this strategy, we propose that the following working groups be established with clear mandates to explore and develop strategic plans. Such plans would be processed and accepted as part of an integrated strategic plan complementing government initiatives.

- a) The establishment of a mother-tongue language steering team who could form the basis of a team to explore relationships with publishers with writers' associations and with resource developers related to mother-tongue. This team would look in detail at the creation of interactive mother-tongue websites of appropriate materials for publishers and for networking with publishers in South Africa to create incentivised opportunities and projects that will result in large **increase** in the production of mother-tongue literature and resource material.

## **6. NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**

We propose to establish initially four working groups drawing from existing cluster groups and provincial planning groups to develop groups representing numeracy in mathematics, the sciences, technology including computer technology and languages. Each of these groups will meet with the clear purpose of identifying specific resources, approaches and frameworks existing that would be of value in all schools, including the Dinaledi schools in the start-up phase. These groups would operate for a period of two years and would meet once a quarter during this time. They would produce composite lists of all valuable support materials as well as define proposed ideas and reviews of existing content. These groups would also, in time, work with the phase groups and the publishers to ensure that a coherent and integrated plan would emerge. These groups would also be valuable as reviewers of new material and new ideas that surface within education.

## **7. LEADERSHIP TRAINING**

This is a key area of development and support required in our country. This process needs three prongs. The first is the training of principals and potential principals. The second is the retraining and redevelopment of existing teachers and the third is specific training and developments of middle managers within education. In the case of the leadership training at the higher end of school management, we propose a carefully planned mentoring network that will link successful business managers and leaders directly with school managers and leaders. We also propose that regional workshops be conducted focusing on personal development and understanding personal context rather than only skills development. Skills development focus would come through the mentoring process. Secondly, teacher training and redevelopment, should take place in the form of creating support groups and process groups within schools enabling key educators to play a facilitation role. Teachers can be taught and learn the necessary capabilities of reflection required for effective teaching and learning.

## **SPECIFIC ACTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED IMMEDIATELY**

The list below is an action list that is created in no particular order suggesting immediate actions that need to be considered as short-term priorities to contribute to the growing social movement relating to education issues.

1. A press release undersigned by key business leaders and key economists to identify with the need for major educational reform.
2. A similar press release undersigned by key academic figures and heads of tertiary institutions associating themselves with the need for major educational reform.
3. A meeting of journalists, columnists, editors to discuss and determine effective media strategy for mobilizing support for major collective efforts to educational reform in South Africa. All sectors of society need to be engaged : parents, communities, business and government.
4. A strategic meeting between ideas creators and relevant political role players to establish and formalize an educational advisory team. This team would be an advisory team to the unfolding and emerging new educational leadership in South Africa.
5. A meeting with relevant players from the Teach South Africa framework in order to encourage and grow this project at an appropriate scale.
6. Maximum attention to be focused on proposed legislative changes regarding the third tier and all efforts combined to ensure that this process is accelerated. This may require the creation of a small strategic team to take this forward.
7. The identification of teams of educational and professional leaders to drive each of the 8 identified thrusts of educational reform proposed in this document.
8. The co-ordination of a team or meeting of key people from the text book and resource development publishers in this country to encourage and develop appropriate 5 to 10 year plans for publishing.
9. The creation of a specific team of involved and engaged educators in the foundation phase to propose and develop specific educational reform strategies in this particular phase.

*[Written and compiled by John Gilmour in close consultation with Dr Mamphela Ramphele.]*