Getting into Schools and staying there: Inclusion and Exclusion in South African Schools

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Introduction

- Three years to go before 2015 target for meeting EFA goals, education quality remains a key challenge to development.

- Main question is why 10 years after Dakar, 20 years after Jomtein, and 20 years after first democratic elections in South Africa, quality education is still out of the reach of so many SA learners.

- Presentation will consider why meaningful access to learning continues to be an elusive goal.

The Policy Context

- Between 1994 and 2011 proliferation of policies, 7 white papers, 3 green papers, 26 bills, 37 acts (including amendments), 11 sets of regulations, 59 government notices, and 29 calls for comments.

- Bhengu (1994 – 1999) focussed on frameworks to address historical inequalities, and creating a broad-based vision for a new education system, including access and introduction of user fees.

- Asmal (1999-2004), broadened scope of activities to include equality and social justice, and inclusion, including ECD and special needs.

The Policy Context 1994-2011

- Pandor (2004-2008) departure from previous efforts, emphasis on quality rather than access.

- Commitment to back to basics approach eg Foundations for learning campaign, focus on prescriptive guidelines.

- Since 2009, fourth Phase and significant changes at the policy and governance level, with the establishment of the DBE and DHET.

- Six major trends can be identified :

Trends since 2008

- Back to basics continues unabated.
- Strong focus on regular testing and assessment re ANAs.
- Outcomes based education reviewed in 2009, including the revised national curriculum statement and CAPs comes into effect in 2011, focus now includes processes and inputs.
- Greater credence to the notion of teachers as agents of change, including the national teacher development summit(2009) and Integrated Strategic Planning Framework, with training for CAPs as a priority.

Trends since 2008

- Separation of basic and higher education at national level has allowed for a more intense focus on skills development.

- Manifest in the publication of the National Skills Development Strategy (3) 2011- 2016, Green paper for post school education and training and dedicated focus on SETAs as a way to improve coherence across university and college systems.

- Amendments to NNSSF allows for expansion of the number of fee free schools and widening of school feeding schemes, important pro poor development.

- Poorest and most marginalised continue access poor quality education, reflected in national, regional and international benchmarking results.

What is the new knowledge from empirical research?

- Beyond physical access
- Gender parity basics gender bias
- Problems of progression, repetition and dropout persist
- Age in appropriate enrolments
- Absence of meaningful access to schools
- School choice, parental voice and quality
- Language of learning
- Limited gains in terms of pro poor approaches in relation to quality

Improving quality of education in South Africa: strategies and plans

- Flurry of roadmaps and strategies have included the DBSA process 2010, the NPC report 2011, DBE Action Plan 2014.
- Back to basics reflects UK examples, but also strips curricula down so that it is teacher- proof, may result in modest and temporary gains, but unlikely to bring about a deep seated transformation in learning.
- A utilitarian approach which ignores social and cultural capital concerns.
- Poor learners need are varied and challenging curricula and forms of pedagogy that suit their particular contexts and circumstances have to be considered.

Improving quality of education in South Africa: strategies and plans

- Policy not the problem: lack of effective supervision and monitoring of teachers and schools is.

- Demise of inspectorate, signing of performance agreements focussing on quality of teaching and learning, assessment , accountability and improving ECD.

- Inline with global managerialist discourse, problems of education quality are reduced to a management shortcomings; solutions are management centric, training of additional principals, dedicated leadership institutes etc.

Improving quality of education in South Africa: strategies and plans

- Resolution of education problems found in effecting changes to the governance of the system.
- Reshaping of ministries, redefining powers and relationships between national and provincial authorities and creating new bodies.
- Has persuasive policy appeal as structural change often gives the appearance of movement, reform and innovation, prevalent on the run up to elections.
- Assumption that structural change has direct impact on classrooms is contestable : revitalised governance maybe a necessary but not sufficient condition to address the situation.

Improving quality of education in South Africa: strategies and plans

- Education failings are neither technocratic or managerial associated with a 'loss of innocence' as once idealist policies are revoked .

- Decline of popular participation, civil society demobilised, parental participation has been into a discourse of governors and governance, activists become technocratic bureaucrats, teacher unions and govt at an impasse, and some provincial departments dysfunctional.

- Popular participation depends on seeking consent and extending legitimacy as on policies and planning.

Concluding Comments

- Focus on values and an insistence that equality and social justice in education must drive education reform.

- Move away from 'blame' and establish pro active strategies to overcome failure, mutual trust and binding behaviour is required.

- Solutions and approaches must have widespread legitimacy and cannot be left to bureaucrats.

- What is measured or done is not always meaningful, and what is meaningful is not easy to assess and achieve.

- No shortage of policy proposals to improve quality, important to build on processes that exist.

Concluding Comments

- School quality is highly valued, even amongst the poorest of the poor.

- Must be used as an entry point for interventions, and making the agenda towards EFA more inclusive, feasible and achievable .

- Narrow gap between policy and implementation, improve teaching and learning in the classroom, and support for development of teachers.

- Need an explicit, proactive and equity driven approaches which prioritise the needest and the most marginalised and work towards contextually specific and indigenous understanding to education reform.