



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

REPORT ON PHASE TWO OF THE EDUCATION RESEARCH INDABA

**NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA:
SUPPORTING LITERACY AND NUMERACY IMPROVEMENTS**

**DBE Conference Centre
Sol Plaatje House. Pretoria
16-17 April 2013**

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1. BACKGROUND

The Department of Basic Education through the Research Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate hosted a two day workshop on the 16th and 17th April 2013 on Phase two of the Education Research Indaba (ERI). The purpose of the ERI was to deepen the dialogue between national and provincial education departments, and the research community in order to promote research utilisation as well as advance evidence-based planning and practice. The ERI provided an opportunity to engage on research that is not necessarily published but indicates emerging ideas, new methodologies and approaches on the causal impact of policy implementation. It reflects an ongoing discussion and creation of a sound research community based on rigorous approaches promoting diversity in discourse, theoretical frameworks, analytical tools and methodology.

2. PURPOSE

The theme and focus of the ERI Phase two was *National education assessments in South Africa: supporting literacy and numeracy improvements*. The Annual National Assessments (ANAs) introduced by the Department in 2011 in order to measure literacy and numeracy across the country at a nationally standardised level formed the key point of reference. The ANAs were developed as a response to the Delivery Agreement for Outcome 1: Improved quality of basic education, in which the Minister of Basic Education is the principal signatory. Four key outputs summarise the Delivery Agreement namely, improve the quality of teaching and learning; undertake regular assessment to track progress; improve early childhood development (ECD) and; ensure a credible, outcomes-focused planning and accountability system. The ANAs, which will be in their third year this year, respond to the second output by benchmarking learner performance. This is essential in order to ensure that the system responds effectively to ensure that learners master basic competencies throughout foundation phase and intermediate phase schooling. The feedback to the system provided through the ANAs is invaluable to teachers, learners, district managers, Provincial Education Departments, the Department of Basic Education, parents, School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and society at large.

3. PARTICIPANTS

The ERI was well attended by officials from the DBE, provinces, NGOs, research and academic institutions. A total of 58 people attended the ERI with representation from the following organisations and institutions: Basic Education, Limpopo Department of Education, Mpumalanga Department of Education, Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), University of Johannesburg, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), University of the Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch University, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and JET Education Services.

Presentations were made by the following individuals representing a range of institutions:

- Dr Anil Kanjee, Tshwane University of Technology;
- Dr Stephen Taylor, DBE;
- Dr Cas Prinsloo, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC);
- Ms Hellen Mkhwanazi, Mpumalanga Department of Education;
- Prof Elize Koch, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University;
- Ms Roeline Herholdt, JET Education Services;
- Dr Thabo Mabogoane, DPME;
- Ms Jennifer Kinnear, DBE;
- Prof Shireen Motala, University of Johannesburg;
- Dr George Frempong, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC);
- Prof Brahm Fleisch, University of the Witwatersrand;
- Ms Nokhanyiso Mantshongo;
- Mr Meshack Qetelo Moloji, DBE;
- Mr Martin Gustafsson, University of Stellenbosch/DBE;

4. PROGRAMME

The ERI programme is at Annexure A. The ERI was opened by the Director-General of Basic Education: Mr PB Soobrayan.

The Director-General, Mr PB Soobrayan, welcomed participants and provided his perspective on the importance of the conversation with the research community and reflected on the quality of education provisioning and key interventions. He indicated that the primary objective of the indaba was to improve the interface between research production and research utilization. This served as an opportunity for stakeholders to engage on what knowledge production has been undertaken, what research questions have been generated at a systemic level and how we find ways to implement the knowledge.

Mr Soobrayan emphasized that research is utilitarian in nature and it is increasingly important to become analysts and researchers, informed about the methodology of research and knowledge building. South African government officials need to be equipped to access and source research actively as part of their functions. The knowledge of the empirical content of policy, implementation of policy and the ability to gauge the conditions mitigating implementation and common understanding is required from all officials. The ERI should extend beyond the indaba to become an ongoing discussion with the research community around academic work and important research which will frame the debate in the future. The ERI is therefore developmental and includes reflectiveness of function in a developmental manner, it is a fluid and open platform which will sector.

5. SUMMARY OF KEY DISCUSSIONS

- In the early stages of educational reform, access to education, crafted through policy reforms and development of new education strategies formed the crux of the sectors focus. While physical access is not a major education problem in South Africa, meaningful learning, including the acquisition of numeracy and literacy skills, remains an elusive goal for many, particularly the marginalised and the poor, notwithstanding the numerous education policies enacted since 1994. The reasons for exclusions were provided together with a review of policy and strategies advocated in the South African context for restructuring the education system. The policy proliferation from 1994-1999 focused on the frameworks to address historical inequalities relating to gender, disability and social barriers (race, language and bullying) and creating broad-based vision for a new education system. A far more explicit, proactive and equity-driven approach that prioritises the neediest and the most marginalised, in particular in terms of access to meaningful learning should be considered in terms of a way forward (Dr Shireen Motala).

- Participation in assessments including the Trends in Mathematics and Science (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality surveys (SAQMEQ) is beneficial for the education system as it affords the opportunity for policy lessons through comparison with other education systems, monitoring system performance over time, obtaining important information about learners, the teacher force, school resources and organisational features, and conducting analysis of the determinants of educational outcomes. TIMSS is administered every 4 years and the best expected level of improvement is 40 percentage points within each cycle. South Africa however improved by 60 percentage points, which can be interpreted as 1.5 years improvement within the 2002 and 2011 cycle. This indicates that efforts to improve learner performance, particularly in poorer schools which were the most improved are taking root in the system and beginning to produce positive results.
- In addition to the noted learner attainment improvement benchmarks on an international basis, TIMSS affords us the opportunity to establish linkages between learner performance, their social economic status as well as educational resources. It was noted that the higher the level of resources (social and educational), the better the learner performance. As such DBE interventions such as the National School Nutrition Program (NSNP), scholar transport, no-fee schooling and the distribution of workbooks are necessary to equalize the opportunities for learners across different quintiles to learn effectively.
- We have seen an increasing emphasis on assessment due to concerns around declining quality but there is now an emphasis on achievement scores in 'core' subjects. Testing indicates areas in need of intervention but not what is required. Therefore assessment and testing does not necessarily equal quality (Dr Anil Kanjee).
- South Africa has largely achieved the universal access to education and as such the issue of quality being the heart of learning and teaching and a great need for the effective use of data should be the areas of focus moving forward. The use of data should not be limited to the production of statistics or background information. Data may be used innovatively and effectively in the improvement of teacher capacity through formative assessments, this includes the use of ANA results and the

diagnostic reports produced on ANA results. The identified areas where learners did not perform well could be used not only as an area for intervention but as an area where further teacher training or support should be focused. The ANAs then could be a formative learning opportunity as well as a benchmarking exercise.

- An interest in large scale assessments of learner performance has increased across developed and developing countries. The importance of assessment results to inform decision making is acknowledged but the main purpose is accountability. Assessments also include the possibility for curriculum review and monitoring. Advantages of assessments include providing schools with valuable information about the consequences of their past practices and programme effectiveness, Disadvantages of assessments are that teachers teach according to the tests and are held responsible for results with inequitable resources.
- It was proposed that the policy direction in terms of assessments should be to develop a culture of formative assessment through what we term ANA Professional Development Programmes (Dr George Frempong, HSRC). A culture of formative assessment involves beliefs and practices where findings from the analysis of data are consistently used to inform schooling improvement decisions. The ANA processes should be an opportunity for teachers to develop an understanding of how assessment data can be used to improve teaching and learning. Professional development programme integrated in the ANA processes could help develop a culture of formative assessment practices and would potentially help sustain interest in ANA.
- Options that are more and less feasible in the South African context in terms of national assessments such as ANA formed part of the workshop's discussion. One point of emphasis was that context matters: different contexts require different solutions. A fairly comprehensive range of topics including governance of national assessments, sampling approaches, test design, scoring methods, migration to census-like universal assessments, improving accountability through information, accountability based on sanctions and rewards linked to the assessments, linkages between assessing and supporting were key areas of focus. The myths discussed included the following: that governance should always be broad-based (and the converse myth that a centralised techniques approach will always succeed), that standardisation always means everyone writes the same test, that the 'just information' approach to accountability always succeeds, that one always

needs strong support before one can begin assessing, that rewards are always associated with cheating. The discussion provided an opportunity to reflect and assess common understandings of assessments.

- According to findings from PIRLS and ANA, the majority of primary school children in South Africa simply cannot read fluently, and comprehend what they are reading, in any official language. The reason is not due to absence of policy but rather the failure of policy to get at the ‘instructional core’: to change ingrained patterns of instructional practice. Despite two decades of policy, there remain two distinct common instructional practices. The first is a common instructional practice defined by the routine use of choral reading aloud and photocopied worksheets. The second instructional practice is where teachers teach with graded or level reading schemes (sometimes known as basal readers). Children whose primary experience of literacy is limited to incomplete phonics teaching, choral reading aloud and very limited writing are predictably unable to achieve on standardised tests. The Gauteng Primary Language and Mathematics Program (GPLMS) was emphasised as a case study; the key objective of the program is to transform routine instructional practices, specifically to change what teachers and learners do every day in classroom tasks and activities associated with reading and writing in the First Language and First Additional Language in Grade 1 to Grade 7 classrooms. It assumes that institutionalising a new set of instructional practices, practices built on knowledge of effective reading and writing teaching, will raise average literacy scores and narrow the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged schools focused on measuring literacy and raising expectations, strengthening the teaching of literacy and maths, improving programmes of learner support and improving the management of teaching and learning

6. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This is a summary of the recommendations derived from the presentations and discussions that took place.

- The need for the issue of language and mother tongue learning to be discussed further in the next phase of the ERI and raising the issue of schools being societal institution and education being a societal matter.

- The need to move towards bilingual testing to address the contradictions regarding tensions in testing.
- The need to take note that just changing the language in schools makes no difference because there is a need to change the pedagogical aspects and implementation has to be on a broader basis that is strengthened by the Department of Basic Education support and academic institution.
- The factors and system elements that exist needs to be worked on and strengthened as well as improvement on the various dimensions to improve total quality and the management of quality.
- The requirement for an international or national quality framework for education
- There is a need to advance formative assessment which although is a provincial responsibility clearly needs work, effort and advocacy from the national as well as guidelines to deepen its usage in the system. A formative assessment unit could work with the examinations and ANA.

DAY 1: 16 April 2013

CHAIRPERSON:

MR SG PADAYACHEE: DEPUTY DIRECTOR – GENERAL: PLANNING, INFORMATION AND ASSESSMENTS

NO	ITEM	TIME	RESPONSIBLE	ORGANISATION
TEA AND REGISTRATION		08H30		
1.	WELCOME	08h55	Chairperson	Basic Education
2.	OPENING ADDRESS Reflections on quality of education provisioning and key interventions	09h00	Mr PB Soobrayan Director- General	Basic Education
3.	PANEL PRESENTATION: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ASSESSMENTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment and educational quality: reflections on policy and practice in post-apartheid South Africa South Africa’s participation in TIMSS, SACMEQ, PIRLS & ANA: implications for quality Highlights from TIMSS 2011 South Africa: perspectives on improving education in South Africa 	09h30	Dr Anil Kanjee Dr Stephen Taylor Dr Cas Prinsloo	Tshwane University of Technology Basic Education Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)
4.	Response to panel presentation	10h40	Dr Thabo Mabogoane	DPME
5.	Panel discussion	11h00	All	
TEA		11H30		
6.	PANEL PRESENTATION: TEACHERS AND ASSESSMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers’ use of formative assessment in the teaching of reading comprehension in Grade 3 Testing in bilingual education projects: lessons learnt from the ABLE project Can educators use the common assessments like the Annual National Assessment effectively to improve their teaching practices? 	12h00	Ms Hellen Mkhwanazi Prof Elize Koch Ms Roeline Herholdt	Mpumalanga Department of Education Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University JET Education Services
7.	Response to panel presentation	13h00	Dr Thabo Mabogoane	DPME
8.	Panel discussion	13h15	All	
9.	Closing remarks	13h45	Chairperson	Basic Education
LUNCH		14H00		

DAY 2: 17 April 2012

CHAIRPERSON

MR M MWELI: ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR – GENERAL: CURRICULUM POLICY, SUPPORT AND MONITORING

NO	ITEM	TIME	RESPONSIBLE	ORGANISATION
	TEA	08H00		
1.	WELCOME	08H25	Chairperson	Basic Education
2.	PANEL PRESENTATION: QUALITY AND ASSESSMENTS	08h30		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dimensions of quality focusing on literacy and numeracy • Getting in and staying there: exclusion and inclusion in South African schools • Improving teaching and learning through the South African ANA: Challenges, possibilities and solutions • Making better use of ANA results for learning: an urgent imperative 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms JD Kinnear Prof Shireen Motala Dr George Frempong Mr Deva Govender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic Education University of Johannesburg Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Limpopo Department of Education
3.	Response to panel presentation	10h00		Basic Education
4.	Panel discussion	10h15	All	
	TEA	10H45		
5.	PANEL PRESENTATION: IMPLICATIONS OF ASSESSMENTS	11h15		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System reform and primary literacy: implications for education leadership • From evidence to action: enhancing learner performance by using assessment data in South Africa • Whither national assessments: the nexus of policy intentions and implications • Best practice in the design of national assessments: A few myths and trade-offs 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prof Brahm Fleisch Ms Nokhanyiso Mantshongo Mr Meshack Qetelo Moloji Mr Martin Gustafsson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of the Witwatersrand Basic Education Basic Education Stellenbosch University
6.	Response to panel presentations	12h45	Prof Shireen Motala	University of Johannesburg
7.	Panel discussion	13h00	All	
8.	Way forward and closure	13h30	Chairperson	Basic Education
	LUNCH	13H45		

