

Reclassifying Township Schools—South Africa’s Educational Tinkering Expedition!

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Abstract

This article critiques a proposed policy by the Gauteng Department of Education to reclassify province’s “Township” schools. In 2016, Gauteng MEC for Education Panyasa Lesufi announced that province’s schools will be reclassified to obliterate the “Township” School Tag commonly associated with the past regime. The reclassification is based on a three-pronged school performance category in a) Matric pass rates, b) Maths and Science passes and c) Bachelor passes. The new classification is arbitrarily divided into the following categories: 1) Poor schools with 0% to 40% performance; 2) Fair schools with 41% to 60% performance; 3) Good schools with 61% to 80% performance and; 4) Great schools with 81% to 100% performance. It is argued that the three tier classification criteria lack theoretical rigour and explication to justify policy’s credence and implementability. It further argues that “Township schools” exist in real geo-spaces, and changing name tag shall not obliterate their geographic presence. It concludes by cautioning that classifying schools based on performance might have unintended consequences, for instance, schools tagged as “poor” might naturally disappear as parents would not want to enrol their children in schools state deem dysfunctional. Failure by both “Poor” and “Fair” schools to enrol adequate learners puts more pressure on rest of schools to accommodate additional learners. When learners’ en-masse moves to urban schooling environments, it creates an operational conundrum and has potential to destabilize the educational provisioning processes and system in general. In a nutshell, the proposed reclassification of schools by the Gauteng Department of Education is flawed and unsustainable because it: a) waters down systemic challenges to simple act of rearranging of schools based on sectorial learner performance rather than holistic and research based form of rationality; b) fails to interrogate a suite of intertwined factors that underpin educational provisioning in its entirety; c) is sectorial in outlook and fails articulate modus operandi to institutionalize teacher efficacy and organizational effectiveness; d) obfuscates tenets for robust engagement on creative whole school improvement trajectories firmly anchored on solid research; e)

will not enhance learner performance and quality education; and f) is an inconclusive political tinkering expedition devoid of sustainable beneficiation.

Keywords

South Africa, Curriculum Tinkering, Township Schools, School Performance, Matric Passes, Teacher Efficacy, Learners, Policy Directives, Reclassification

1. Introduction

Schools don't turn bad and underperform overnight. It's a seismic process largely caused by a cocktail of operational challenges like a) lapses in school leadership and governance; b) poor infrastructural capabilities; c) teacher qualifications, experience and classroom efficacy; d) contradictory policy directives and curriculum praxis; e) learner quality, performance and monitoring; f) school culture and educational ethos and so on. Ineffectual coordination and management of remedial interventions lead to dysfunctional schools and poor learner performance and achievement across grades.

When President Jacob Zuma declared education “apex” of government, the expectation was to change South Africa's educational provisioning culture and *modus operandi* for effective delivery of educational activities. The theoretical underpinnings and praxis for school organization, management, teaching and learning were expected to drastically change. Essentially, that change was to be evidenced across grades in school performance both in international and national assessment tests. Regrettably, the presidential declaration and “order” turned to a mere soundbite devoid of robust activism—the culture of teaching and learning did not fundamentally change. Incidences of teachers failing to “be in class, on time, teaching” as per the presidential order are well documented (Bloch, 2006; Monyooe et al., 2014; Monyooe, 2005; Pretorius, 2012 & 2014; SACMEQ, 2011). A lacklustre approach to educational challenges has led to an exponential increase in the number of dysfunctional schools across the nine provinces of South Africa.

While the national government sets parameters and guidelines on policy implementation, provincial structures, nonetheless, respond differently to educational challenges under their locus of control and operational obligations. When in 2016, Gauteng MEC for Education Panyasa Lesufi announced that the province's schools were to be reclassified into four schooling categories to obliterate negative narratives and historical baggage associated with “*Township*” Schools, and it was his prerogative! The “*Township school*” tag has a negative orientation because of historical circumstances. During the apartheid regime, “*Townships*” were very unstable because of political struggles and unrest of the time. In fact, when the 1976 youth upheavals erupted, “*Township*” Schools were hubs of student movement to liberate educational provisioning in South Africa. Constant police raids rendered most schools dysfunctional and learners explored enrolling

in urban schools. The onslaught for quality education continues beyond the country's first democratic elections in 1994.

Twenty two years of democracy, notable progress and learner performance progression have been noted. The overall performance still lags behind top performing nations. The proposed reclassification is based on three school performance categories in a) Matric pass rates, b) Maths and Science passes and c) Bachelor passes. Using cumulative performance percentages, schools are "arbitrarily" reclassified into four distinct categories:

- a) Poor schools with 0% to 40% performance
- b) Fair schools with 41% to 60% performance
- c) Good schools with 61% to 80% performance and
- d) Great schools with 81% to 100% performance.

The selected school performance criteria, is arbitrary, lacks theoretical rigour and explication to justify policy's credence and appropriateness of the methodology deployed. The three selected categories are a fraction of a cocktail of factors and indicators that determine school efficacy and overall system's effectiveness. It is not clear why, for instance, a) Matric pass rates b) Maths and Science passes and c) Bachelor passes were prioritized over other key performance indicators such as a) teacher profiles b) learner profiles c) infrastructural capabilities d) qualifications e) curriculum f) leadership and governance structures. In a nutshell, a reclassification policy lacks robust justification to back-up the decision. It suffices, to argue that inference seems to be a preferred *modus operandi* rather than robust research based modalities.

The choice of Matric and Bachelors passes add to theoretical conceptualization conundrum and praxis in many ways, for instance, the quality of matric and Bachelors' entry passes remains highly contestable because of low performance criteria used that are not comparable with international performance regime and best community of practice. I have argued, elsewhere that "South Africa has institutionalized a very low pass mark requirement for Grade 12 learners, for instance, a learner must achieve "40 percent in home language, 40 percent in two other subjects and 30 percent in other three subjects". South Africa's learning ecologies remain unequal and hugely differentiated—public and rural based school are predominated under resourced when compared to independent schools. Reclassification model fails to appreciate historical imbalances and other salient drivers that constrain uneven resourcing and provisioning of educational services and activities. If not carefully managed, it might create an avalanche of unintended schooling challenges.

2. Reclassification Model—An Inconclusive Mirage

Globally, business of education has changed, recursive models experimented to match ever changing societal and global need for personnel steeped in requisite skills set to penetrate knowledge economies. Research also shows that successful schools are hugely autonomous, have well defined educational goals and efficacious *modus operandi* to attain set goals and objectives. Examples of successful

and autonomous schooling and educational changes were evidenced by the American charter schools and England academies. American charter schools and academies in England are anchored on accountability to justify existence and beneficiation.

The Economist (2016: p. 44-45), under an article–"School Reform–After Freedom, What?" states "Accountability requires clear standards, transparent ways of measuring whether schools are meeting those standards, and ability to reward schools that succeed and sanction those that fail". Another lesson learnt from American and British educational transformation is leadership. According to Nick Bloom of Stanford University, as quoted by *The Economist* (2016: p. 45), schools that model their daily activities and practices on operational values of successful companies perform better because "clear targets, performance tracking as prioritized and implemented with precision".

South Africa's education has been found wanting in accountability, performance and achievement scorecards. South Africa's poor performance in both international and national assessment studies continues through the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS); the Southern Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) and Annual National Assessment respectively.

Similar views are expressed by Pretorius (2014: p. 52) namely that "Using the combined TIMSS and/or PISA assessments, Newsweek estimates of 2011 ranked the South African schooling system fourth–last in the world (97th out of 100 countries) and lower than African countries such as Mozambique, Tanzania and Ghana (De Klerk-Luttig, 2012)".

Pretorius (2014: p. 52) further states that:

The ANA report (DBE 2011 (b) shows that Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners scored average of 35% and 28% respectively in literacy/language tests, and 28% and 30% in numeracy/mathematics. Overall, 58% of Grade 3 learners and 70% of Grade 6 learners are not achieving expected levels in literacy. Only one out of three Grade 3 learners can read at the expected level.

Reading and writing skills deficit at foundation phase of any education system hampers learners' progression across grades and might lead learners to prematurely leave the system at a huge national cost. Poor learner progression contributes to dysfunctional learning environments. Literature is replete with cases of dysfunctional schools in South Africa (Reynolds & Teddlie, 2001; Green & O'Sullivan, 2009; Brown, 2010; Pretorius, 2012; Krotz, 2011; Bloch, 2006; Bloch, 2009; Brown, 2010).

It is against this backdrop, that the Gauteng's proposed school reclassification policy should be contextualized to understand inherent subtleties. Paucity of details and implementability conceals deeper policy fissures. It in fact, underscores the officialdom's failure to incorporate notion of flexibility in their cocktail of actions. Dan Millman, a self-help coach, offers an illuminating definition of "fle-

xibility'. He states that "Flexibility requires an alert and expansive awareness. Mastering this law, we turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones". How does South Africa measure up on the "flexibility" scorecard in educational provisioning? What are levels of "alertness" and "expansive state of awareness"? Does it master the "flexibility law?"

Responses to these questions are nuanced depending on which position one responds. Generally, officialdom responses are often laced in political rhetoric devoid of activism. Where remedial interventions are deployed, success impact is often not adequately amplified to affirm public confidence in educational interventions and dispel notions that equate such steps as unworthy educational tinkering expeditions devoid of substance and meaningful national beneficiation. In a nutshell, there is no evidence (notwithstanding policy announcement) that Gauteng department of education had cumulative track records of schools' performance to justify policy's credence. The extent to which to reclassify "Township" schools smacks of political expediency rather than sound interrogation of educational data and strategic decision making that would change and transform such schools into hubs of excellence. Reliance on terminal outcomes (examinations) has serious limitations. It undercuts the value proposition of Millman's notion of "flexibility'. Twenty three years on, South Africa's educational system has litany of "X-rayed snapshots" about the system's "sickly" components. Reclassification of schools does not address deficits nor demonstrate "alertness" and "expansive state of awareness" about the entire value chain of an educational system.

The Economist (2016: p. 44), through an article "School Reform—After Freedom, What?" agitates for robust review of educational provisioning policies and practices. It contests that modern nations can leverage more from schooling systems by "Liberating schools to run their own affairs... The priority now is to spread success". The proposed reclassification of "Township" schools, may not be viewed as an attempt to liberate schools and learning ecologies in general. Paucity of research based details and modus operandi—render the process a mere educational tinkering expedition with potential unintended consequences.

Liberating educational spaces and modus of provisioning involves inter alia, shrewd planning, visionary and courageous leadership and efficacious systems to roll out transformation processes. It also requires presence of leaders with high sense of professionalism and accountability ethos to coordinate transformation and change processes. At the heart of educational change and transformation (provisioning), is the drive to enhance quality and relevance of education and broaden skills set for human capital to penetrate knowledge economies (Chisholm & Vally, 1996). It is also to wrestle away stranglehold on educational provisioning by creating robust accountability across all spheres of educational leadership, governance and management.

Literature of educational change and transformation is nuanced and quizzical due to diverse schools of thought and rationalism, for instance, in an article "Rethinking the building blocks" published by Mail & Guardian, Prew (2012)

advocates for education custodians and role-players to “reimagine schooling so that it does not serve the elite, but also ensures that all children leave school literate and numerate”. While the proposed policy to reclassify “Township” schools may seem to be a “major” relook at “Township” schooling landscape, it is however, a carefully crafted political expediency stance to appease disillusioned citizenry about poor performing “Township” schools. Artificial changes do not bring worthy results—a holistic approach to educational provisioning has better chances to usher better results and get the nation engaged in diverse educational narratives.

Evidence gleaned from international educational systems confirms that their success formula is anchored on sound planning, clarity on stakeholder roles and responsibilities and concomitant interventional strategies to operationalize envisaged educational changes. Another strategy that has contributed towards the Finnish Educational system is what [Sahlberg \(2011: p. 37\)](#) terms shrewd alignment of educational policies and classroom interface. He reminds us that “Educational policies that are based on the ideal of educational opportunities and that have brought teachers to the core of educational opportunities have positively impacted the quality of learning outcomes”.

Similar views have been articulated by [Tomasevski \(2003: p. 18\)](#) writes that:

For education to be adaptable, schools must adjust to the children’s needs in accordance with the principle of the best interests of every child. This change ended the practice of forcing children to adapt to whatever school was offered to them. Human rights being indivisible, the requirement of adaptability means that human rights must be protected within educational system and also improved.

[The Economist \(2016: p. 53\)](#) in an article “Must try harder” states “Top performers also focus their time and effort on what goes on in the classroom, rather than the structure of the school system. For while test scores and pupils’ economic background are linked across the OECD, so too are specific things that best schools and teachers do”. It further accredits success to teacher quality and professionalism, for instance “The top performers treat teachers as professionals and teachers act that way as well. They tend to direct classroom instruction rather than be led by pupils. Their advancement is determined by results, not by teachers’ union. There are high expectations of nearly every student and high standards, too”.

Regrettably, South Africa’s performance and achievement criteria for learners to progress to next grades do not conform to internationally accepted performance and achievement regimes—even a 20% pass in Mathematics in grades 7 to 9 allows learners to progress to grade 10 if they passed other subjects with scores of 30% to 40%. In some instance, learners that fail grade 11 more than once are progressed to grade 12 (matric) under a dubious policy that confounds international performance regimes and best community of practices, namely the “Failed but Progressed” policy condonation. The “Failed but Progressed” policy is in-

tended to manage learner age distribution across grades by ensuring that learners within the same age range learn together and not made to repeat classes.

The consequences of adopting the “Failed but Progressed” policy are varied, first, it undermines international performance and achievement benchmarks, second, it has short term dividends, in that, a fair number of learners may ultimately pass grade 12. Yet the long term implication is that they would have completed schooling with epistemological deficits—curriculum gaps across grades require ample time and commitment to redress. South African teachers sadly, do not display that behaviour. Individual attention in a classroom context gets diluted by high number of learners teachers teach which makes one-on-one interface difficult. And lastly, the “Failed but Progressed” policy both undermines national commitment to institutionalize quality education and performance regimes that are globally credible to enhance the country’s competitiveness in fast growing knowledge economy. It is against this backdrop, that the proposed “Reclassification of Township Schools” policy remains an inconclusive mirage—it shall never bring quality and stability to the educational landscape. It has potential create a snowball of challenges, especially on infrastructural capabilities, school efficacy and effectiveness.

3. “Phantom” School Leadership

When President Zuma declared education the “Apex” priority of government and implored that “All teachers and learners should be in school, in class, on time, learning and teaching for at least seven hours each day”, we expected schooling to drastically change. School principals, teachers were implored to be more professional and learners were to display utmost commitment to learning and education in general. Regrettably, teachers’ professionalism and commitment to the craft was found wanting (Bloch, 2006; Monyooe et al., 2014; Pretorius, 2012; Pretorius, 2014; SACMEQ, 2011) still showed less commitment to the profession. Incidences of absenteeism still dominate learning environments and continue to undermine quality education and effective schooling. “Phantom” leadership immobilizes systems and “dyslexic” culture of accountability that contributes to organizational dysfunctionality.

Successful organizations or entities are anchored on visionary and transformational leadership—a leadership that fully understands organizational intricacies and systemic synergies for optimal deliverables. Efficacious leadership anchors strategic and operational endeavours of organizations or entities. This is demonstrated by robust and consistent performance and optimal achievement of set targets and goals. An all-encompassing approach to organizational challenges contributes to efficient management and high performance returns. When leaders and role-players share vision and ethos of the organization, quality of deliverables and turn-around time are consistently improved and sustained.

Successful organizations are managed by what Treslan (2010: p. 59) “Transformational leadership—embracing participatory decision making, reflection, and self-awareness”. How does “transformational leadership” manifest in the

classroom? Or learning context? Treslan (2010: p. 59), offers an illuminating disposition, namely, that:

Teachers express this value when they clarify concepts covered in a lesson, respond to class questions, and strive for agreement far beyond textbook teaching and mere lecture to reveal evidence of pedagogical and curricular constructivism which themselves are accepted indicators of effective teaching.

By creating a culture of consensus within organizational activities, empowers role-players. It significantly engenders a sense of ownership and critical awareness to enhance organizational cohesion and easy management of learning environments for example. According to Treslan (2010: p. 60) “moral action” forms an integral part of the teaching profession. It “reflects doing the right thing rather than doing things right”. The “moral action” narrative presupposes awareness of contextual factors and *modus operandi* to redress the situation.

The resonance of Treslan’s (2010) narrative sheds some light on the theoretical underpinnings of the envisaged “reclassification “ of schools policy in many ways, for instance, first, it skirts over causal reasons and factors that contributed to current dysfunctionality of schooling in South Africa, second, it takes a short cut approach to complex schooling challenges that require robust elucidation and finally, it’s found wanting on the “moral action” scorecard and commitment to quality education.

The current state of schooling dysfunctionality, requires more than just an articulation of a policy intension. It must be based on robust research evidence that covers all facets of educational provisioning to ascertain credibility and plausibility of *modus operandi*. Plans and or policy directives on their own may not be effective. They must be anchored and driven by courageous leadership that understands the schooling value chain in its entirety. The current policy articulations do not provide much hope, they sadly, espouse political rhetoric and expediency to delude public perceptions.

Efficacious leadership remains South Africa’s educational Achilles heel. Narratives on intervention strategies and implementability remain elusive. Prevalence of dysfunctional schools is a result of poor leadership in schools and education in general. A view cleverly elucidated by Bolin (1989: p. 88), who writes “Schools will never change as long as teachers clock in and out without thought of what it is they are trying to accomplish. Teachers who aspire for excellence in teaching and expect excellence from students are concerned about their craft”. Bolin’s articulation “speaks truth to power” and challenges nations found wanting in leadership across national organizations and entities to rethink their approaches and *modus operandi* to change leadership profiles.

In his address to Parliament on May 24 1994, former state President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela remarked “Seize the time to define ourselves, what we want of our shared destiny”. It was a provocative challenge to citizenry to rethink, chart, mould and affirm the new democracy and concomitant national and in-

ternational mandates. Similarly, proposed “Reclassification of Township Schools” policy could yield some credence, only when it reviews, redefines its national purpose. Part of reflection, should relate to capacitation of schools and learning environments—by entrusting schools to human capital highly steeped in the knowledge of education and through state-of-the art school infrastructure. Courageous and visionary leadership understands change trajectories and capacity and foresight to introduce changes that would enhance school performance and desired learner performance. Such leadership can turn underperforming schools into credible learning sites that are responsive to needs of learners.

4. Investing In Dysfunctional Schools—An Affirmation Narrative

According to Sir Daniel Moyniham, Harris Federation’s Chief Executive as quoted by *The Economist* (2016: p. 45) reminds us that “Taking on failing school is expensive... Turning it around will require a great deal of time and attention”. “Department of Education’s” (2001: p. 6) Sir Moyniham’s narrative seems to find space in the articulation of the Education White Paper 6, which advocates for the institutionalization of Social Justice Culture in educational provisioning by attaining the following fundamental objectives:

- Transforming all aspects of the education system;
- Developing an integrated system of education;
- Infusing “special needs and support services” throughout the system;
- Pursuing the holistic development of centres of learning to ensure a barrier-free physical environment and supportive inclusive psycho-social learning environment, developing a flexible curriculum to ensure access to all learners;
- Developing a community-based system which includes a preventative and developmental approach to support; and
- Developing funding strategies that ensure redress for historically disadvantaged communities and institutions, and ultimately access to education for all learners.

According to Fullan (1993: p. 84) “learning organizations are part of a greater complexity that requires a holistic view to survive and develop”. A perspective also shared by Land and Jarman (1992: p. 30), who state “The reality of evolutionary success demonstrates that “fitness” is not simply about “adapting to environment’, but rather the continuing improvement in the capacity to grow and build ever more connection in more varied environments” (Slonimsky & Shalem, 2006; Stoll, 2009).

While a policy on reclassification of “Township Schools” may implicitly invoke public perceptions about change with Gauteng’s “Township Schools’, it however, does not fundamentally address tenets of Social Justice because it fails to encapsulate the six objectives articulated by the Education White Paper 6 above. The policy directive lacks details on the stakeholder perspectives and most significantly-modus operandi and cost implications on the National Treasury. It is not evident that there is public consensus on the proposed policy di-

rective. In fact, Gauteng MEC for Education Panyasa Lesufi inadvertently amplifies the polemics by declaring “Now we’re going to have the top schools categorised so that you can go to our website and identify whether you want to enrol your child at the school or not. This is a major intervention and we have placed lots of resources to attend to this”. The above narrative by Gauteng MEC for Education both undermines current feeder school policy and practices and complicates educational provisioning in general. The feeder school policy dictates that learners completing foundation phase schooling must be accommodated into schools adjacent to feeder schools and residence. The proposed policy change gives parents choices to enrol their children “only” at top ranked schools—creating an avalanche of learner exodus from currently underperforming “Township” schools.

The school reclassification model is silent on many crucial aspects of schooling, namely a) school efficiency and efficacy b) teacher professionalism and efficacy c) school leadership, governance and management and levels of accountability. South Africa has poor culture of learning and teaching (COLT), which invariably, contributes to dysfunctional schools and poor learner performance and achievement. According to [The Economist \(2012\)](#):

Teachers in black state schools work an average of 3.5 hours a day, compared with 6.5 hours in the former white state schools known as “Model C”. A fifth of teachers are absent on Fridays, rising to a third at the end of the month. The education Minister herself admits that 80% of schools are still dysfunctional.

Both [Darling-Hammond and Wentworth \(2010: p. 35\)](#) underscore the importance of accountability by arguing that accountable leadership ensures that schools are staffed with professionally qualified personnel and streamline bureaucratic regimes that stifle quality education and provisioning thereof. School or educational accountability is dialectically linked with quality and qualification profile of personnel entrusted to lead and manage learning environments. A view further espoused by [Sahlberg \(2011: p. 125\)](#), in his articulation of the Finnish Education System. He writes that Finland’s success is anchored on “*Well-prepared teachers, pedagogically designed schools, good school principals*”. Regrettably, South Africa has been found wanting in these categories ([Bloch, 2009](#); [Monyooe et al., 2014](#); [Monyooe, 2005](#); [SACMEQ, 2011](#); [Pretorius, 2014](#)).

The shoddiness of policy directives and implementation to change educational landscape and turn schools into efficacious entities, is eloquently expressed by [Darling-Hammond and Sykes \(2003: p. 1\)](#), namely that “The concern with teacher quality has been driven by a growing recognition, fuelled by accountability research evidence, of how critical teachers are to student learning. To acquire and retain highly-quality teachers in our Nation’s classrooms will require substantial policy change at many levels”. The envisaged Gauteng school reclassification policy lacks fundamental details on key nuggets of the system—teacher

and learner profiles, infrastructural capabilities and current policies implementability. Deficits in policy and clarity on methodological base only add to the confusion. The officialdom's narratives about the envisaged changes remain an inconclusive mirage!

South Africa's learning environments remain unequal and hugely differentiated (Bloch, 2006; Business Week, 2010; Monyooe, 2005; Pretorius, 2012 Waghid, 2004). The reclassification policy skirts around real issues that continue to muzzle quality education. The Global Competitiveness Report 2014/15 recognizes the power of adequate resourcing public schools, for instance, "Better assigning available resources to produce activities is crucial and requires well-functioning ... institutions, available talent and a high capacity to innovate hold the key for success of the economy". South Africa has failed to roll out the Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure across provinces—learners continue to be taught in dilapidated structures and that emboldens their levels of dysfunctionality. Evidence from research confirms that "Township" schools lost their shine because majority are dysfunctional and learners opted to enrol at urban-based schools (Department of Education, 2001; SACMEQ, 2011; Pretorius, 2014).

The classification of schools as outlined by the Gauteng MEC has unintended consequences—exodus of learners from less performing schools and potential overcrowding fiasco. Currently, parents struggle to have their children placed in schools because of limited infrastructure and other basic amenities for quality schooling. Arbitrary use of learners' performance scores at Grade 12 (matric) has serious limitations and may not be used as sole driver to re-engineer schools and education in general. All intertwined facets of educational provisioning must be robustly interrogated and implemented with shrewd oversight.

Governments invest substantially in developing performance indicator regimes that provide crucial data on systems' efficacy and performance in real time. Does the Gauteng department of education have such a robust capacity and system? How does the education system manage learner and teacher performance? Currently, only learners get tested and there is no official tool to account for teacher efficacy in the classroom. How do we make teachers accountable for their teaching endeavours? If schools were sufficiently resourced and professionally managed, there won't be need to reclassify them. South Africa's education system is found wanting in these key areas of educational provisioning.

Public-union sector politics has added to toxic learning environment in South Africa (Letseka, Bantwini, & McKenzie, 2012). According to Letseka et al. (2012: p. 1197):

The largest union, the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) is affiliated to the Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU). The latter is a partner in the ruling tripartite alliance that includes the National African Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). Worldwide public-sector unions are known to prop up left wing political

organizations. SADTU is no exception.

Literature on public-sector union impact on schooling is replete (Bloch, 2009; Makola, 2005). South Africa's highly unionized and politically charged school environment adds to a toxic mixture of organizational and leadership challenges. Lack of teacher professionalism and public-union sector politics have contributed to dysfunctional schools and underperformance by learners across grades. The current officialdom's interventions to enhance school efficacy and effectiveness have not yielded desired outcomes. At worst, they remain elusive!

5. Rethink, Reinnovate and Implement—The “Seize the Time and Define Destiny” Strategy

Twenty three years ago, former state President Nelson Mandela challenged South Africans to “Seize the time to define ourselves, what we want of our shared destiny”. It was a national directive to reengineer foundations of the new democracy and concomitant structures that would deepen democracy and social cohesion. South Africa still grapples with fundamental aspects of educational provisioning. When applied to the educational sector, Mandela's clarion call implies total “reengineering” of educational provisioning by implementing interventions that change profiles and performance of dysfunctional schools. Perhaps, instead of reclassifying Gauteng “Township Schools”, we could “reengineer” the following sickly components South Africa's basic education:

- Creating robust and reliable school inventory of infrastructures and tighter renovation schedules and harsher sanctions for non-compliance by service providers;
- Create effective and efficacious circuit/district managerial teams to provide on-site support for schools;
- Create comprehensive learner profiles across grades to monitor progression better and circumvent incidences of “condonation” and “progressing” learners even when they fail performance regimes.
- Rethink robust and practical ways of leveraging from rich Annual National Assessment tests data to systematically intervene in real time at the “sickly” components of basic education;
- Create teacher profiles across grades in terms of qualifications, experience, subject preferences and classroom efficacy to enforce much needed levels of professionalism and accountability;
- Create robust internal school governance profiles at national and provincial levels to share best practices and enforce accountability;
- Create national/provincial leadership profiles of schools in terms of gender, race, experience and qualifications to ensure that professionally qualified personnel are entrusted to lead and manage schools;
- Create robust and competitive teacher recruitment, training and development strategies to recruit and retain only the best and talented personnel;
- Strengthen community and school partnerships to embolden ownership, culture of excellence and accountability;

- Transforming learning ecologies into centres for creativity, innovation and improvisation to challenge learners breach knowledge boundaries; and
- Infuse entrepreneurial curriculum into school education to create incubators for innovations.

Only an integrated approach towards these key educational deficits and challenges has potential to substantially enhance South Africa's educational provisioning and quality, credible learners' performance across grades and overall system's efficacy and management.

6. Conclusion

The proposed reclassification of Gauteng Provincial "Township Schools" based on a) Matric pass rates b) Maths and Science pass rates and c) Bachelor pass rates, makes the following flawed assumptions that:

- Educational provisioning in South Africa is equal and of high quality. The reality is that learning environments are unequal and hugely differentiated;
- Learning ecologies are adequately resourced. School environments remain hugely unequal in terms of resource allocation, distribution and utilization despite the adoption of the Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure;
- Schools are staffed with teachers steeped in the official curriculum and its teaching and assessment methodologies. South African schools have not acquitted themselves well on teacher professional and classroom efficacy;
- South Africa embraces globally accepted learner performance and achievement regimes. The country's overall performance benchmarks do not compare favourably with international performance regimes. "Condonation of learners with a 20% pass in Maths" to progress to grade 10 and adoption of the "Failed but Progressed" learner policy do not enhance quality of education system. On the contrary, it adds to a cohort of learners devoid of requisite skills to penetrate the fast growing knowledge economy; and
- Culture of excellence drives school organization and management. South African schools have not infused excellence as a non-negotiable practice across schools.

Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills, and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Secretary-General at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris, states *"Success will go to those individuals and countries which are swift to adapt, slow to complain and open to change"*. It might be prudent for South Africa's educational technocrats to heed Schleicher's wise articulation to enhance educational provisioning. Reclassification of schools invokes our sad apartheid historiography about segregated educational system.

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