

CAPACITATING THE STATE THROUGH THE PROMOTION OF SOUND ETHICS AND PROFESSIONALISM WITHIN THE TEACHING PROFESSION

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ABSTRACT

This paper acknowledges that, despite increasing expenditure in education in South Africa, there are indications that outputs and outcomes in education are not responding fast enough to increase spending in education within the country. Although parents and learners are also major stakeholders within education, the paper argues that any attempt to improve outputs and outcomes needs the support and commitment of teachers. This, therefore, calls for a need to promote sound ethics and professionalism within the teaching profession.

This paper argues that although professionalism and ethical conduct by teachers have major impacts within the teaching and learning environment there has not yet been any common approach by government and teachers in South Africa. This creates a need for change of attitude from all concerned if the desired results are to be achieved. While some progress has been made to close the gap between the government and teachers on issues of professionalism there are still more to be done. Finally certain recommendations are proposed that involve various stakeholders so that an environment conducive for teachers' professionalism and ethical conduct is created.

INTRODUCTION

The Minister of Education (Pandor, 2008) presented her Budget Vote which amounted to R123 billion on 15 May 2008. She reiterated government's commitment for a better life for all and stressed that the road to a better life begins with education.

This endeavour to improve the quality of education, however, depends on the availability and services of qualified, competent and committed teachers to improve the quality of life of its citizens by speeding up service delivery. In the words of African National Congress 8 January 2008 statement it is expected of teachers to be in school, in class, on time, teaching, and not abuse learners nor neglect their duty.

The Minister also alluded to the most shocking revelations for her Department, i.e. the occurrence of racism within some institutions of higher learning. She, however, said that this call applies equally to schools and colleges where there are incidents of violence, thuggery, substance abuse and bullying. Occurrences such as these, call for dedicated attention by all stakeholders to the values elaborated in our Constitution. Those values mandate a visibly altered learner, student and academic. As indicated by the former President (Mbeki, 2008) during the state of nation address, improvement of performance in the public service depends on the quality of leadership provided by the executive, senior management and commitment of public employees to their duties.

According to the National Treasury (2007) in January 2005 there were 13, 9 million learners and students enrolled in 34 162 education institutions served by 437 330 educators and lecturers in the different education streams in South Africa. Approximately 87,7 per cent of learners were in 26 592 public ordinary schools served by 382 133 educators. Further in money terms, South Africa spent R95 billion on education and skills development in 2006/07 financial year. At 69,8 per cent, primary and secondary schools make up the largest share of total education spending, this however, excludes funds raised through fees charged by different educational institutions. Of concern, according to the National Treasury (2007), is that statistics on education do not reflect that the changes in education outputs always match the growth in amounts spent on education. Outputs and outcomes are not responding fast enough to increases in spending. While the matric results remain around 66 per cent and the overall number of passes continued to increase, the mathematics pass rates decline at both standard grade and higher grade level. Enrolments and the passes in mathematics and science on the higher grade levels remain low. The number of learners who qualify for university entrance has also been declining which is also a concern on the quality of the matric passes.

RATIONALE FOR ETHICS AND PROFESSIONALISM

Freeman (1998) is of the view that professional ethics become relevant to teachers when the interest of legitimate stakeholders – students, families, colleagues, or the larger society collide in their classroom. Raga and Taylor (2005) are of the view that the question of ethics is one that is linked with the history of mankind. According to Hanekom (1984) ethics deals with the character, and conduct and morals of human beings, that is, it deals with good or bad, right or wrong. It evaluates conduct against some absolute criteria and puts negative or positive values to it.

According to Chandler and Plano (1988) ethics are rules or standards governing the moral conduct of employees in an institution. Ethics deals with values relating to human conduct, with respect to rightness or wrongness of particular actions and to the goodness

or badness of the motives and ends of such actions. (Raga and Taylor: 2005). Guy (1990) views ethics as different from law because it involves no formal sanctions it is different from etiquette because it goes beyond mere social convention. It differs from aesthetics because it is aimed at conduct and character rather than objects. It differs from prudence because it goes beyond self-interest of others. Ethics is both a process of inquiry. As a code of conduct and as code of conduct it is like an inner eye that enables people to see the rightness or wrongness of their actions (Ngulube: 2000).

Pojman (1995) defines ethics as standards of conduct of a particular group of people in society. In elaborating this point, Pojman (1995) states that ethics explains how actions should be done and provide justifications for actions by providing the rationale involved. Thus “ethics seek to establish principles of right and behaviour that may serve as guide for individuals and groups”. According to Guy (1990) ethics is about honesty, accountability, pursuit of excellence, loyalty, integrity and responsible citizenship (Ngulube, 2000:162).

Starratt (1991) developed three fundamental ethical themes referring to conduct – they are: ethic of critique, ethic of justice and ethic of caring. These themes were developed to describe the day to day duties of an ethical educational administrator. He argued that in an age of school reform, administrators have the task or duty of establishing a school environment in which the educative function can occur ethically (Rucinski and Bauch: 2006).

The ethic of justice serves as a foundation for legal principles and ideals, and functions in schools as it does in societies through courts upholding what is considered legal or illegal in a community, including such elements as due process and students and teacher’s rights. The ethic of justice emanates from two schools of thought – the foundational principle and the contemporary principle. The foundational principle considers the rights of the individual as central and taking precedence over the right of the community, while the contemporary principle views the community as central and has to teach individuals to discharge their duties within the context of communities. By using, what is postulated as higher universal principles to guide ethical action, school leaders encompass both understandings of justice as they make decisions with the awareness that school community choices must be balanced with individual choices that are being made in the school every day. (Rucinski and Bauch: 2006).

According to Starratt (1991) ethic of critique is aimed at awakening employees to the inequities found in schools and in society. It raises questions about laws, the processes used to determine them, and whether they are just. The ethic of critique questions bureaucratic power structures of schools, how individuals are treated, and the inequities that arise from the continued use of a more technical approach to teaching and learning. The theme of critique compels administrators to confront the moral issues of the day, complex questions dealing with social class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and other areas of difference. Administrators must face questions such as how they can justify the way in which schools disproportionately benefit some groups in society and fail others (Rucinski and Bauch: 2006).

Beck (1994) sees ethic of care as the communal relationship between people that the welfare of each is inextricably related to the welfare of others such that caring for others

is, in fact, caring for oneself. According to Rucinski and Bauch (2006) the ethic of care is related to the ethic of justice in that relationships arise out of a sense of absolute positive regard for another, not as a contractual obligation. They further argue that educational leaders need to be committed to an ethic of care grounded in the belief that the integrity of human relationships should be held sacred and that the school as an organisation should hold the good of human beings within it as sacred. Often school purposes such as the efficiency and productivity associated with an increase in standardised test scores and the lowering of per-pupil costs supersede caring by viewing persons as *means to other ends* instead of the ethical Kantian notion of viewing them as *ends in themselves*.

Starratt (1991) argues that the ethic of care is altruistic. It requires the leader to accept each person as having value, dignity, and worth, qualities that are inherent in the nature of what it means to be a human being, and as such to consider that relationship as sacred (Rucinski and Bauch: 2006). Ngulube (2000) is further of the view that a code of ethics protects the image of the profession as well as that of the individual members.

Since ethics according to Heynes (1986) has to do with the actions of a human being it will require adjustment in the actions and attitudes of the public manager in relation to his/her colleagues and the public as well as in relation to himself. Within education ethics would require adjustment in the actions and attitudes of principals as managers in relation to their colleagues and the learners in relation to the principal (Rucinski and Bauch: 2006).

According to Sockett (1993) teaching does make moral demands on the teacher, specifically evident in teachers' relationships with a number of stakeholders. Sockett (1993) sees the ethical component of a teacher's work as most evident in teachers' responsibility to ensure the safety of their students, inclusive of both physical and emotional safety. The central thesis about ethical claims of teaching concern the causal relationship between the moral claims of teachers and the influences on their students. For Sockett (1993), the concept of professional virtue underpins the development of communities, the demands for accountability, the knowledge base for teaching, and finally, teachers' ideals about the value of education. The view is, rather than putting the onus on individual teachers to use an ethical basis to inform their practice, ethics can form the basis of collective values and behaviour (Rucinski and Bauch: 2006).

Abott (1983) argues that the five basic properties of professional ethics include universal distribution, enforceable visibility and allowance for individuality, collegial obligations and alignment with recognised status. Abott (1983) also adds that both intra- and extra-professional status need to be taken into account when forging professional ethics. These properties present the basis for a collective agreement about teachers' ethical obligations (Rucinski and Bauch: 2006).

Vongalis-Macrow (2008) is of the view that, rather than promoting ethical teaching as a personal obligation and preference, ethical deliberations, taking into account the types of properties suggested by Abbott (1983) should become part of the negotiations in defining the profession.

When considering the potential for disunity, the differences in teachers' conditions, preferences, and ethical interpretations that may occur, and the context of education

across the globe, this calls for a unified response from the common ground, which can be viewed as a strategy for universalising professional understanding of ethics in teaching (Vongalis-Macrow 2008). There is also relation between ethics and professionalism in general. According to Cooper (2001) professionalism imbues its practitioners with a public service ideal and code of ethics – that is, internalised standards. According to this way of thinking, professionalism becomes the basis for a version of virtue or character ethic. Professionalism can also offer a basis for the external version of ethics (Mafunisa: 2001).

Le Bris (1996) argues that to be professional is to be ethical, thus, the association between professionalism and ethics is strong within public administration. Ethics is general and unifying, whereas professionalism gives pride of place to the specific vocation of each profession. For the manager in contact with the public, it is the quest for the greatest level of customer satisfaction (Mafunisa: 2001). Sinclair (1993) states that professionalism refers to being competent, efficient, masterly and qualified. According to Ott, Hyde and Safritz (1991), professionalism means a commitment to an ethic of product and service quality, and a need to be innovative (Mafunisa: 2001). The education profession serves complex goods. Anitha (2007) states that are concerned with the development of the student and the future of the society and accordingly shows the primary indicators of professionalism as three “r”s – responsibility, respect and risk taking.

STATE OF TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

According to Hoyle and John (1995) the dominant conception of teacher professionalism in the early periods until 1970 was the so-called *traits model*. The model emphasised the important intellectual role that teaching plays in society. It also identified various traits that are necessary for a profession. They are, however, of the view that although this conception of teacher professionalism has been theoretically challenged, it remained useful in that there is still a general agreement on some of its criteria (Wits: 2005).

The theoretical challenges to the *traits model* led to further debates such as whether teachers must be regarded as professionals or workers (Carrim, 2003; Shalem, 1990; Ozga and Lawn, 1988; Govender, 2004). Some debates centred on whether teachers are workers or professionals that are occupying middle class. The debate on whether teachers are workers or professionals has informed the debate or dichotomy on unionism and professionalism. This view according to Shale (1990) and Govender (2004) holds that unionism and professionalism are necessarily opposed to each other (Wits: 2005).

According to the Wits Education Policy Unit (2005) various authors (Govender, 2004; Heystek and Lehoko, 2001) argue that in the context of South Africa, the dichotomy between teacher unionism and teacher professionalism is being slowly eroded both among unions and professional bodies and the public. Increasingly there is a talk about *professionalism unionism* which considers the notions of professionalism and trade unionism as not only compatible, but as different sides of the same coin. Govender (2004) attributes the erosion of the dichotomy to the nature of teachers’ work which at times require professional activities and at times require labour relations issues. Unlike other

professions, teachers are in most cases employees of the state rather than independent service providers. This has an implications on the extent to which teachers can take autonomous decisions on professional matters. Thus, teachers occupy contradictory positions in society as opposed to other professionals.

Some authors (Englund, 1996; Hoyle and John, 1995; Hargreaves, and Goodson, 1996) make a distinction between teacher professionalism and teacher professionalisation. Teacher professionalism is regarded as outward looking and refers to societal views of teaching as a profession, whilst teacher professionalisation is regarded as inward looking and refers to the issues of teachers as reflective practitioners (Wits: 2005).

The teacher professionalism is seen as an instrument to empower a teacher or as an instrument to control teachers' work according to Sachs (2001). She suggests two discourses of teacher professionalism – democratic professionalism and managerial professionalism. Managerial professionalism emanates from outside the teaching profession and it is often imposed by employers to control teachers' work. It often means more bureaucratic control of teachers' work and it is driven by bureaucratic needs rather than the needs of teachers. Its link with attempts to limit teacher autonomy is seen as an attempt to deprofessionalise teaching. This form of professionalism often sees teachers as service providers or merely state employees rather than professionals with autonomy to determine the nature of their work (Wits: 2005).

According to Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996; Ozga, 1995 the managerial conception of professionalism has also been used to make teachers accept particular impositions by governments (like increasing teachers' workload under the pretext that teachers' professional responsibilities are being increased) (Wits: 2005).

Morrow (1989) and Darling-Hammond (2001) show that democratic professionalism emanates from within the teaching profession. Its logic is to improve the nature of teachers' work and to entrench teacher autonomy. It also works with a conception of teachers that assumes that teachers are highly skilled and knowledgeable and therefore they are able exercise professional judgement. These two concepts of teacher professionalism suggest a contradiction between teacher autonomy and accountability as defined by the employers and there seems to be a generalised view by bureaucracies that autonomy and accountability are necessarily mutually exclusive as defined by employers (Wits: 2005).

Darling-Hammond (2001 in Wits 2005) provides two notions of accountability that seem to link with Sachs' (2001) two conceptions of professionalism – that is professional accountability and bureaucratic accountability. Accordingly professional accountability is based on the following principles:

- knowledge is the basis for permission and for decisions that are with respect to the unique needs of clients;
- the practitioners pledge his first concern to the welfare of the client; and
- the profession assumes collective responsibility for the definition, transmittal, and enforcement of professional standards of practice and ethics

This concept of accountability emphasises that knowledge should be the basis for making autonomous decisions that are in the interest of those served by the profession.

It also places responsibility on the members of the profession to ensure that professional standards are set and adhered to. Professional accountability is driven by rather the profession than external forces.

According to Darling-Hammond (2001 in Wits 2005) bureaucratic accountability is not necessarily geared towards the needs of the teacher, learners and their parents, but more towards the needs of the appointed officials. This form of accountability seems to reduce accountability to mere following of standard procedures and the implementation of policies. Here accountability is equated with monitoring and compliance to rules rather than as a means to ensure that the needs of those served by the profession are fulfilled. Bureaucratic accountability does not see the basis of making professional decisions as knowledge and the interest of those served by the profession; it sees the basis for decisions as compliance to bureaucratic standards. This undermines the notion of professionalism as the freedom for making autonomous decisions which might be severely curtailed by the bureaucratic accountability regimes. According to Sachcs (2001a and 2001b) bureaucratic accountability seems to be on the increase with the discourse of managerialism becoming more dominant in education globally (Wits: 2005).

Teacher autonomy in Wits Education Policy Unit paper (2005) is used in the sense of Bailey's view (cited in Morrow 1989:5) arguing that

An autonomous teacher is not anomic, not ungoverned. To claim to be autonomous is to claim to be governed in a special kind of way. An autonomous teacher does not ignore the wishes and interests of others – parents, pupils, government and employers – but such a teacher does reserve the right to consider such wishes and interests in the light of appropriate criteria. The wants and wishes cannot be simply taken as given starting points.

Thus being professional means balancing two important notions, namely accountability and autonomy.

Gutman (1987 in Wits 2005) provides two useful concepts to understand this balance – the notions of ossification of office and insolence of office. Ossification of office arises when the work of teachers is controlled to the extent that their autonomy in making pedagogical decisions is undermined and their creativity is stifled. Insolence of office arises when a profession has too much power and not accountable to the public it serves. Here professionals become a law unto themselves and this could result in professionals not taking responsibility for their actions. In fact some theorists caution that at times professions can be used to shield professionals from being accountable to the public they serve.

The Wits Education Policy Unit (2005) makes the following conclusions about the state of teachers' professionalism in post apartheid South Africa:

The post-apartheid education policies in South Africa have contradictory effects on the nature of teachers' work. First, the policy framework seems to encourage teacher professionalism on paper, but its implementation tends to contradict teacher professionalism. Second, the policy overload and the intensification of teachers' work have contributed to the loss of space for teachers to develop themselves.

The proliferation of policies in the post-apartheid era has not only resulted in confusion among teachers, but has resulted in policy overload. The implication of this is not only a loss of confidence among teachers, but also a feeling of being overworked. The major policies introduced are the *Norms and Standards for Educators* (NSE), the *Integrated Quality Management Systems* (IQMS) and *Revised National Curriculum Statement* (RNCS).

The NSE was gazetted as a policy in February 2000. The policy envisages teachers who are curriculum developers. In addition, the policy conceptualises teachers as researchers and knowledge creators. Critics of the policy argue that the policy is suited to contexts with independent and highly professionalised teachers. Thus, the philosophy upon which the policy is predicated is pro-teacher professionalism, but it needs more time for teachers in South Africa to develop the expected qualities. For Jansen (2001) the NSE as a policy represent *policy image* of teachers that conflict with their personal identities. Carrim (2003) agrees that the South African teachers do not see themselves as *owning* the transformation of education in South Africa but as subjects of it. Morrow (2005) argues that besides thousands of teachers not having the required expertise to implement some policies, there is a problem of some teachers who have not yet made the necessary *paradigm shift* that goes with the post-apartheid policies.

The IQMS was agreed upon in the *Education Labour Relations Council* in 2003 as Resolution 8 of 2003. The government considers this policy as a shift from the system of inspection to a system of self-evaluation and external evaluation. Gardiner (2003) argues that the IQMS endeavours to bring together three instruments which are morally and philosophically very different. He points out that the Developmental Appraisal System, which is one of its components, is based on the philosophy of support and development. It also views teachers as professionals who are able, with the input of their peers, to identify their developmental needs. The performance measurement system is based on managerialism which does not acknowledge the ability of teachers to devise their own development paths.

In 1997 the government introduced *Curriculum 2005* which was based on the philosophy of outcomes-based education. The introduction of Curriculum 2005 signalled a shift from the apartheid curriculum. The policy was subjected to criticism which included the fact that teachers were not sufficiently equipped to implement the policy. This resulted in the *Chisholm Committee* which reviewed Curriculum 2005 and made various recommendations including that there should be comprehensive teacher development if *Curriculum 2005* is to be implemented successfully. The recommendations of the *Chisholm Committee* were carried forward through the *Revised National Curriculum Statement* (2002).

The post-apartheid policy has been contradictory in that at times it conceptualises teachers as service workers rather than as professionals. This is manifested in the imposition of a monitoring system which tends to show that the state does not trust teachers to work independently. Several authors have pointed out that the post-apartheid state has secured for itself more surveillance and monitoring powers (Jansen, 2004; Sayed, 2004; Chisholm and Hoadley, 2005). One of the experts who were interviewed, argues that proliferation of accountability and monitoring instruments can be attributed to the fact that the state is

anxious as transformation and learner performance seem not to increase as rapidly as it was expected. Instead of providing teachers with support and more space the authorities resort to more control and monitoring (Wits: 2005).

A teacher organisation indicated that opportunities to engage the state on policy matters are increasingly being closed down. This is partly manifested in what Jansen (2001b in Wits 2005) calls centralisation of policy-making, where experts as opposed to those affected by the policies, increasingly play a major role in policy matters. The policies are also impacted upon by the political and socio-economic context that affect teachers' creativity and their pedagogical decisions their teaching is driven by outputs manifested in the number of learners who critically engage with what they have been taught and make a contribution to citizenship. The major implications are lower teachers' morale (Wits: 2005).

CONCLUSION

There are indications that outputs and outcomes in education are not responding fast enough to increase in spending in education within the country. Teachers are among the major stakeholders within education and any attempt to improve outputs and outcomes need the support and commitment of teachers.

Although professionalism and ethical conduct by teachers have major impacts within the teaching and learning environment there has yet not been any common approach by government and teachers in South Africa. This calls for change of attitude from all concerned if the desired results are to be achieved. While some progress has been made to close the gap between the government and teachers on issues of professionalism there is still more to be done.

RECOMMENDATION

Government

- Government should regard teachers as stakeholders and partners not only when it comes to policy implementation but also during the policy development stages.
- Government should consider ways and means to reduce teachers' workload and revisit the idea of principals being managers and teachers at the same time.
- The government should stop negative labelling of teaching such as dysfunctional schools, poor performing schools, under qualified teachers and public bashing of teachers.
- Insistence by the government on teacher accountability should be balanced with teachers' autonomy as professionals.
- Teachers should be given enough support to develop the skills that are necessary for the new policy framework.
- Professional conduct must be viewed positively as against negatively.
- Government should ensure that the proposed school pledge is generally accepted and supported.

- The government should provide necessary support to South African Council for Educators (SACE) to ensure that SACE is pro-active and more prominent in professionalising teaching than crises management.

Teachers

- Teachers should change their mindset and attitudes.
- Teachers should be held accountable for their professional decisions and conducts.
- Teachers should develop a more professional attitude that is characterised by accountability and knowledge.

Parents

- Should show interest by getting involved in the education of their children and also hold teachers professionally accountable for the education of their children.
- Should embrace and support the proposed school pledge.

The public

- Schools premises and learner support materials are public assets and their effective, efficient and economic utilisation should be a concern of every citizen.
- Stop engaging in teacher 'bashing' and generalisation whenever few teachers behave in an unacceptable manner.
- Should support teachers and government in addressing issues of drugs and violence in schools.

Learners

Should embrace and support the proposed school pledge that is intended to promote aspects of social cohesion to highlight values and encourage their internalisation with the support of teachers and parents.

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