4. MONITORING, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Reflections on South African Schooling

INTRODUCTION

In its most obvious sense, monitoring is about seeing that what has been ordained, ordered or agreed – depending on whether the warrant to act is given by theocratic, autocratic or democratic authority – is actually done. As a democracy, the warrant in South Africa is through agreement by citizens, voting once in 5 years, and participating in a variety of representative and expert consultative organs and media debates. In the domain of public schooling authority is vested by the Constitution and Parliament in the President, the Minister of Basic Education and his/her administrative arm, the Department of Basic Education (DBE). But, as a concurrent function, significant authority for schooling rests with the nine provincial Premiers, Members of Executive Councils, and Provincial Education Departments.

This chapter explores the role of monitoring in aligning policy and practice, through the successive layers of the South African school system, down to the level of the classroom. We start with an outline of the legal framework for monitoring in the school system, and follow this discussion with an examination of monitoring practices in schools, and how these relate upward to the district and down to teachers and classrooms. In assessing the effects of monitoring activities, we make a distinction between managerialism and professional practices.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTITUTION AND SCHOOLING

The Constitution starts by describing its Founding Provisions in Section 4, which lays out lines of accountability for all government functions (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). South Africa is defined as a sovereign state founded in a set of values, which include: ‘Universal adult suffrage, a national common voter’s roll, regular elections and a multi-party system of democratic government, to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness’ (section 1(d)). Chapter 2 sets out the Bill of Rights, described as ‘…a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa’ (7(1)), and Section 29 declares that everyone has the right to a basic education. Accountability is again mentioned in Section 41, which deals with the principles of co-operative government and intergovernmental relations, and which holds all

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spheres of government and organs of state to providing ‘…effective, transparent, accountable and coherent government …’ (41(1)(c)).

Schedule 4 lists education at all levels, excluding tertiary education, as a functional area of concurrent national and provincial legislative competence. This is tempered by two clauses. First, Section 100 provides for takeover of any provincial department that cannot or does not fulfil its executive obligations. This clause is currently in force in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. In both cases the invocation of Section 100 and imposition of administration by national government was precipitated by a loss of budgetary control on the part of the province. Over-expenditure in both provinces was caused by the employment of personnel well in excess of the 80/20 split between salaries and other costs recommended by national norms for post provisioning (Department of Education, 1998, 2002). According to a report conducted by Deloitte, commissioned by the DBE and the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the employment of ‘excess teachers’ in a number of provinces is in response to pressure from organised interest groups, and from the unions in particular (Deloitte/DBE/UNICEF, 2013). In the Eastern Cape Province, for example, there were 9144 teachers (14% of the total) ‘in excess’ at the start of 2014 (Ngonzo, 2013; National Education Evaluation and Development Unit [NEEDU], 2014). Chisholm (2013) came to the same conclusion concerning the collapse of the budget in Limpopo in 2011/2012. In both cases, overloading of the personnel budget, in turn, resulted in the collapse of other services, including textbook procurement, transport for rural children, and school feeding. The situation was exacerbated by corruption in the pricing and awarding of tenders, and other irregularities. Poor data management and administrative incompetence obscured much of this activity until the money ran out and national government was obliged to step in.

The second constitutional clause designed to regulate relations between the national and provincial spheres of government is Section 146, which applies in the case of conflict between national and provincial legislation falling within a functional area listed in Schedule 4. Section 146 stipulates that national legislation may prevail over the provinces if one of two conditions is met: in a matter that cannot be regulated effectively at provincial level; or where, in order to be dealt with effectively, uniformity across the nation is required. It can be argued that the collapse of the Eastern Cape and Limpopo departments reflect conditions which fit both clauses of Section 146. Accurate and timeous monitoring systems provide the best insurance against the extremes of having to invoke Sections 146 or 100. In essence, the problems experienced by the two provincial departments are administrative, precipitated by the absence of robust business processes.

MONITORING AND THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY ACT

The National Education Policy Act (1996) has much to say about the role of the Minister in setting and monitoring policy. First, Section 2 specifies that one of the four aims of the Act is to provide for the monitoring and evaluation of