Twenty Years of Education Transformation in Gauteng 1994 to 2014

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Martin Prew and Felix Maringe

The book

This book aims to record the successes of the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) over the past 20 years and also to report and analyse its failures and challenges. It is designed to provide the GDE, at both policy and implementation levels, with analysis of, and pointers for, how challenges could be tackled and perhaps solved in the future. Furthermore, the book sheds light for the general reader onto aspects of how a provincial department operates and why – and with which consequences – certain decisions have been made in education over the past 20 turbulent years, both nationally and provincially.

The book contains 15 chapters or – to be more accurate – essays, which cover many aspects of the mandate, resourcing and implementation processes of the department. Each essay is written by one or more specialists in the subject area. While most of the authors are based at the University of the Witwatersrand, specific writers were identified from outside the university to write particular chapters.

Twenty Years of Education Transformation in Gauteng 1994 to 2014: An Independent Review was internally peer-reviewed in a two-stage process. The first review process was undertaken by the editors. The revised versions of the chapters were then internally reviewed by respective specialists at the Gauteng Department of Education necessitating further revisions which were completed before final acceptance by the editors and by the publisher.

The contents of the chapters have been edited for access and readability but represent the views and analysis of their authors. There has been no attempt to fit these chapters into a particular ideological or educational paradigm. Inevitably, among the authors differing views are held, even over something as basic as how successful the GDE has been in fulfilling its educational mandate over the past 20 years. This, we believe, is as it should be, and hopefully makes the overall book more stimulating and authentic.
The province

As an introduction to this book, this section reviews the size and shape of the education system in Gauteng.

The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) was created in the aftermath of the democratic elections of 1994 when the country was divided into nine provinces. As education is a Section 4 function, responsibility for education lies both at national and provincial level. The national department, as defined in the legislation, has the responsibility of setting national legislation and norms and standards and of making sure that these are implemented at provincial level. It also has the overall responsibility for the performance of the education system. The provincial department owns the public schools under its jurisdiction. It sets policies for them and subsidises institutions within the province, within national legislation, and employs the educators who staff the public schools and the various district and provincial offices. It also has the responsibility of monitoring and supporting its institutions and staff.

On its creation in the aftermath of the 1994 elections, the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) had the responsibility of servicing the education requirements of the province, which was producing some 70% of the national wealth. By 2011, Gauteng was also the most populous province in the country with a population of 12.3 million, meaning that about a quarter of the national population was crowded into the smallest province. This means that whatever the GDE does in education has both a local and national impact.

The Gauteng population is the best educated in the country, with 52% of the population having reached Grade 12 – at least 10 percentage points above any other province – while all of Gauteng’s 15 education districts record literacy rates of over 85%, with some being well over 90%. The average household income is also much higher than in other provinces, being R156 000 in 2011, which was three times that of the neighbouring Limpopo Province. As would be expected, Gauteng – along with Western Cape – has a higher percentage of its population having access to running water and electricity than other provinces. However, the wealth is far from being distributed equally geographically. Even in adjacent areas there are huge variations in wealth and access to resources, as can be seen when moving two kilometres from Alexandra Township to Sandton.

In 1996, Gauteng contained under a fifth of the national population and had 1.3 million learners in education institutions. By 2013, there were 2.1 million learners in the province. This is related to increased concentration of the population in the province with the relative decline of mining and farming in other provinces, as well as migration of learners into the province, particularly from Limpopo and Eastern Cape provinces where the education systems are struggling and performance is much lower. The result is

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1 The data for this section has been drawn from a number of unpublished provincial and national education department reports, as well as published EMIS data and 2011 census data reports and data from the CREATE Project.
that 4% of learners each year in Gauteng schools are new to the province. This puts huge pressure on education planners as it is hard to predict this flow of learners year on year.

Perhaps even more impressive has been the growth in budget allocated to education in the province, which grew from R4.5 billion in 1995 to R29.2 billion in the 2013/2014 year. This means that the allocation per learner soared from R3,378 to R12,418. This is well above the rate of inflation, which represents real increases in funding. For learners in public schools this meant that while in 1995 an average of R2,898 was being spent on each learner, by 2013 this was R11,304. However, in the same period there was no explosion in school building. Only 242 new public and special schools were built in this period, averaging just over 12 schools a year. Increasing the number of learners by some 750,000 but only building a few hundred schools obviously means that the existing schools enrol more learners than they did 20 years ago. As a result, while the national average is 475 learners per school, in Gauteng it is 790; Gauteng schools have an average of 28 educators per school, while the national average is 16.3. This makes sense in a province in which the population is mainly concentrated in cities and large townships. However, while the number of learners has risen by over 60%, the number of state-employed educators has risen by only just over 20%. The gap has been filled by larger classes, and also by the burgeoning employment of privately employed educators, with 5,950 privately employed educators (in independent institutions and employed by state schools’ governing bodies) in Gauteng schools. However, these educators are not equally spread across all types of schools.

Gauteng, like South Africa generally, entered the election in 1994 with a highly differentiated system based on race. So, while the past 20 years has been about growth in the provincial system, it has also been about creating greater equity and redress, such that all learners in the province have similar schooling experiences irrespective of who their parents are and where they were born. While the GDE is a long way from achieving this, important strides have been made in the state schools to cater for all learners in a relatively equal way. To drive pro-poor funding of schools, a national quintile system was introduced, driven by the National Norms and Standards for School Funding. According to these norms and standards, as amended in 2007, all schools in the country are allocated a quintile status based on a range of community and school capacity indicators. The poorest 20% of schools, which are mainly rural and farm schools, are allocated quintile 1 status and get the highest per capita grants. The next poorest 20% of schools nationally are allocated quintile 2 status and get slightly lower per capita grants – and so on until quintile 5, which contains most of the ex-Model C schools that used to cater for the white community and remain better resourced with generally wealthier parents. Quintile 5 schools get the lowest per capita income.

At the same time as the quintile ranking was made a nationally set system, quintile 1 schools were also declared ‘no fee schools’. No-fee status has been extended to quintile 2 and 3 schools progressively at national level. This means that the state provides cost-of-learning subsidies to these schools so that they do not need (and, in fact, are not
allowed) to charge school fees. Gauteng pays the full subsidy to these schools, which in 2013 was R1 010 for quintile 1 schools. However, Gauteng has extended the same level of subsidy to all quintile 2 and 3 schools, presumably on the assumption that the quintile allocation system is somewhat blunt, so the communities that all of these schools serve are not fundamentally different from each other, and that the schools have traditionally not performed very differently from each other.

Further, Gauteng has allowed quintile 4 and 5 schools voluntarily to become no-fee schools if they feel that they could benefit by a secured income instead of having to collect fees from reluctant parents. This goes beyond national policy, as the GDE often does. The result is that although only 50% of Gauteng learners are in quintile 1–3 schools, 62% of the learners in the province are, in fact, now in no-fee schools.

The wide range in the distribution of wealth in the province is starkly illustrated by the fact that only 7% of Johannesburg Central learners are in quintile 1 and 2 schools while 50 kilometres away, in Gauteng North, 69% of learners attend such schools. This is also the only district in the province with less than 90% of its schools having access to running water, electricity, sewage disposal and flushing toilets. The fact that all the other districts have over 90% of such services and that in some districts all schools have these facilities indicates how far Gauteng has come in meeting the basic needs of schools.

Alongside this pro-poor allocation of funding, the system increased access to the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). There is no doubt that these measures have improved the school experience for many poor learners. Moreover, the way in which the GDE has interpreted and extended the pro-poor provisions has assisted in reducing the artificial differentiation between levels of poverty, to a large extent allowing most Gauteng learners to experience schooling in a similar way, and making the schooling experience considerably better than it was 20 years ago. However, the GDE acknowledges that the education experience that a learner gets in a former white school – which is in quintile 5 and charges fees of over R20 000 per year – is very different from the learning experience of a learner in a no-fee school in a township or rural area. Closing that experiential gap without driving the remaining middle-class learners out of the public system remains one of the greatest challenges facing the GDE.

While South Africa’s education system in 1994 was typified by unequal provision based on race, with schools catering for white learners being very different in appearance and resources from those catering for the majority black population, most learners in school were in the state system. Only 5% of Gauteng’s learners in 1994 were in independent schools. Many of these schools, such as Sacred Heart College, catered consciously for learners who wanted to be schooled in a multiracial environment, as apartheid crumbled in the 1980s. The middle class at this time, which was predominantly white, found that state schools adequately met their educational requirements, with well-qualified teachers and relatively small classes. At the same time, the apartheid state authorities encouraged such a belief as the schooling system was one of the main routes through which children

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were inducted into the rationale for the segregated and differentiated state provision of services, life choices and chances based on race.

However, since 1994 this has changed and there has been a substantial flight of middle-class children out of the state system. In 1995, there were very few non-subsidised independent schools. Now, such schools cater for over 10% of Gauteng’s learners, with 230 000 learners attending these schools in 2013. This indicates a largely middle-class reaction to the perceived and real problems that transformation has brought to schools in Gauteng. While racial integration of schools and larger classes persuaded many white parents to seek alternative education forms, many other parents from all race groups have been persuaded to do the same, as the press is littered with stories of incompetent and abusive teachers and a national belief that public school teachers would prefer to strike than teach. Such stories are reflective of the difficult journey that educators have had to walk over the past 20 years. They have been faced with a barrage of changes – having had four different curricula, each one requiring different paperwork and assessment norms – while dealing with what are perceived as unruly and ill-disciplined children with little sanction available since the banning of corporal punishment in 1996 and minimal parental support.

The reality of the legacy of apartheid is that many of the province’s teachers, who were inappropriately trained as teachers, struggle to master the content of their subject as well as to manage classes, maintain discipline and teach. In the same period, though, on average, the conditions of service for teachers have improved in the province. While their salaries cost the state R3.6 billion in 1996, by 2013 this had soared to R22 billion as a result of recruitment of more teachers, substantial pay increases, the creation of pay parity between teachers with the same qualifications and upgrading teacher qualifications to a minimum level.

A recent report found that South African teachers’ salaries and conditions were comparable with, or better than, those of other middle-income countries such as Malaysia. Employees’ pay took up 81% of the provincial education budget in 1996, which increased to 86% in 1999, but has declined to 75%. This means that there is a substantial and increasing budget available for investment in school improvement. In fact, in the same period, the capital budget available has risen from a mere R200 million annually to R1.9 billion in 2013/14.

During the period under review, Gauteng achieved almost universal access for appropriately aged children to schools, including the recent addition of Grade R (Reception) classes in most primary schools. At the same time, the overall quality of teaching has undoubtedly improved, as indicated by the province’s matric results, which achieved a pass rate of 86.9% in 2013. Many of the measures introduced by the GDE over the past decade, with a focus on improving the quality of education offered in the classroom, have clearly had an impact.

Nic Spaull’s chapter indicates that if matric is calculated both on exam results and the retention of the Grade 2 cohort from 11 years earlier, then Gauteng has consistently been
the highest-performing province in the country. The translation of a higher percentage of learners who did Grade 2 in 2002 into numbers who sat for matric in 2012 in Gauteng also indicates that the Gauteng education system is among the most efficient in the country.

Over 60% of learners complete the schooling cycle without repeating a year or dropping out. An education system in which few learners drop out or repeat and which has a high pass rate in exit exams is more efficient than one in which many learners drop out or repeat, which uses teacher time and energy and eats up resources.

In another indicator of system efficiency, when comparing the number of learner years it takes to produce a matric pass (this measures repetition, dropout and matric failure), Gauteng comes out as the most efficient provincial education system in South Africa, with an average across its districts of 29.4 years of learner effort per matric pass. In five of its districts (a third of its total districts), it takes fewer than 27 years, placing these districts among the top 10 most efficient districts in the country. By this measure, the most efficient district in South Africa is Tshwane South, where it takes 23 learner years of effort per learner pass. However, in a perfectly efficient system it would take 12 years of effort, so there is still a long way to go.

Equally important is that the GDE, driven by a belief that all children have the basic human right to equal access to quality education, has deliberately set out to narrow the gap between the performance of learners from poorer backgrounds who generally attend quintile 1–3 schools, which do not charge fees, and learners from wealthier backgrounds who attend quintile 4 and 5 schools. While there is still a gap in performance between quintile 1–4 schools and quintile 5 schools, which collectively have a matric pass rate of over 90%, the gap has closed considerably: very few quintile 1–3 schools in the province now score below 60%, and 21 quintile 1 secondary schools achieved a pass rate of over 80% in 2012, while a decade ago many were achieving below 50%, with some below 20%.

In fact, in 2012 Gauteng only had four secondary schools scoring a pass rate of below 40% in matric, compared to 50 in 2009. By 2013, this had been reduced to just two schools.

Perhaps as significant is that over 80% of learners who pass matric in the province achieve grades that allow them to proceed to higher education. It is this relative success that is the magnet attracting poorer learners from other provinces. Attending a peri-urban school in Gauteng is often a much more enriching experience than attending any school in some other provinces.

There is still work to be done, though, as the GDE moves to ever greater efficiency while ensuring that learners, irrespective of their backgrounds, have an equal chance of success in the education system. The province still experiences a situation in which learners are being ‘warehoused’ in Grade 10 and, to a lesser extent, in Grade 9 and Grade 7. This implies that schools are deciding who is able to pass matric and holding back the learners whom educators believe are unlikely to pass. Pedagogically this can be defended with the argument that if a learner is not ready for matric, it would be wrong to push that
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learner through to Grade 12 like a lamb to the slaughter. However, there is suspicion that much of this warehousing is a school-level response to political pressure to maximise the school’s matric pass rate, which is publicly available in league tables. The result in human terms is worrying. There is clear evidence, which is reflected in official GDE documents, that this practice is ‘culling’ learners – in other words, with almost 50% of Grade 10 learners being overage, there is a strong likelihood that many will drop out if they are warehoused. There is a strong relationship between being overage and dropping out of school (Hunt 2008; Motala et al. 2007).

Also of concern is that while the matric pass rate has risen, the percentage of learners sitting for Mathematics and Physical Science has declined rapidly in the province since the CAPS curriculum has come into effect over the past few years. Gauteng contained two of the 10 districts nationally that had the lowest percentage of learners sitting for Mathematics in matric, with under 30% of learners doing Mathematics in 2012. In 2013, one of these districts still had fewer than 30% sitting for Mathematics.

Further, no district in Gauteng had over half of its matriculants sitting for Mathematics in matric in 2012 or 2013. The result is that only 27.5% of Gauteng learners who sat for Matric in 2013 managed a pass in Mathematics and 22.8% in Physical Science. As these are the base subjects required for accessing most technical, professional and commercial degrees and jobs in most economic sectors such as mining, the medical profession, construction and financial services, this situation must be reversed.

It would be ironic if Gauteng’s education system, which is increasingly seen as the most effective and best-performing nationally, could not provide the basic skills and qualifications required by its industries and services and limited the life chances of its learners, compared to Limpopo and Free State where a higher proportion of learners sitting for matric pass Physical Science.

Another area in which improvement is needed is in the selection and professional preparation of school managers. While progress has been made with the work of the GDE’s Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance and the Sci-Bono Discovery Centre, as well as with provincial and district interventions, there are still serious gender imbalances seen in school management. While 75% of teachers in the province are female, 66% of school principals are male. So, the old adage that if you meet a man over the age of 40 in a primary school you can confidently address him as ‘principal’ still holds in many schools in Gauteng. Hopefully, the various upgrade programmes focused on female educators will impact on this imbalance over the next five years.

Finally, Gauteng also has a backlog of classrooms, with a shortage of 2 850 in 2012; this is an average of 190 per district. This is not high compared to other provinces, but is one of the main causes of large class sizes.

While public focus has mainly been on ordinary schools and the system that caters for the majority of learners, this book also looks at the parts of the GDE system that cater for learners who are too young to enrol in school; are undertaking post-school vocational
courses or upgrading their literacy skills; or are not catered for adequately in ordinary schools due to their mental or physical disabilities. These sectors – Early Childhood Education (ECE), Further Education and Training (FET), Adult Education and Training (AET) and Special Schools – have not generally benefited to the same extent as the public ordinary system over the past 20 years, and were particularly neglected in the first post-independence decade. The Further Education and Training sector in the province has been ‘rationalised’ from 33 institutions into eight multi-campus FET colleges. These colleges are increasingly catering for the education needs of the province’s 19–23-year-olds, with nearly 100 000 enrolled and a tenfold increase in funding allocations over the period. This indicates that the colleges are mainly catering for learners who completed matric or dropped out in Grades 10 and 11, rather than being used as a vocational alternative, by those in Grade 9, to the academic schooling system. This may change as FET colleges were recently moved out of the GDE’s jurisdiction into that of the national Department of Higher Education and Training.

Similar changes have occurred in the provision of AET, with the 214 public centres in 1999 being reduced to 47, and the main users (64%) increasingly being young adults repeating their matric. However, as the chapter on AET indicates, the national Khare-Gudi adult literacy programme has also increased enrolment and success in this sector of provision.

There has been a similar change in government’s attitude and focus in relation to provision of ECE places and facilities. Traditionally, this has been an arena left largely to private provision. However, as research indicated the importance of pre-school learning experience on later results, and as the education system struggled to find ways of improving South Africa’s performance in international comparability studies, the state’s attention has moved to building capacity in all primary schools to be able to cater for Grade R as an extra year of schooling before Grade 1, housed in schools but staffed by early childhood development (ECD)/ECE practitioners. The intention is that every learner, irrespective of his or her home background, should experience a year of high-quality ECE prior to entering Grade 1. As a result, learner enrolment in Grade R in the province has risen by 300% since 1995, with 120 000 children now enrolled in public Grade R classes.

The provision of education opportunities for learners with learning difficulties has also become a focus of increasing attention over the past decade. While national policy encapsulated in White Paper 6 is moving the country towards mainstreaming such learners – where possible – in ordinary, inclusive, full-service schools, the province has increased dedicated institutionalised provision, with 11 new special schools being built and a process of early identification of learners who would benefit by being in such schools. This responds to educator concerns that catering for learners with serious barriers to learning in large classes where many learners have moderate poverty-related barriers to learning is extremely difficult without extensive specialised training and means
that learners with serious barriers to learning are further marginalised. The province has increased spending on such learners almost tenfold over the past 20 years, with special schools getting a per capita grant well above that of mainstream schools and a higher Post Provisioning Norm for staff as well.

The structure of the book

The book is divided into four broad, progressively connected sections.

Section 1

This section presents the policy and planning framework that guides all implementation. It mainly addresses the ‘Why?’ questions.

The section contains a single chapter, written by the eminent team of Shireen Motala, Seán Morrow and Yusuf Sayed. It explores the policy environment that has developed in education and the GDE since 1994. This chapter is intended as the foundation for the other chapters in the book.

Section 2

The second section explores the implementation frameworks and systems developed by the GDE, including the curriculum, management and governance arrangements, the financial and employment systems and provision of professional development. It mainly answers the ‘How?’ questions.

This section, containing six essays, is intended, along with Section 1, to create the basis of a deep understanding of the GDE and its systems and processes. The first chapter, written by Professor Felix Maringe, explores the curriculum changes that have dominated the education landscape for the past two decades. The chapters that follow explore the financial and governance systems and the human resource and resourcing provisions and processes that the GDE has put in place, and the section ends with a review of the teacher education and development systems that have been established by the GDE and the local universities. These chapters are written by Raj Mestry, Zakhele Mbokazi, Gugu Nyanda and Francine de Clercq with Yael Shalem, all experts in their respective fields. They include many important insights and conclusions and flag important lessons and signposts for the future.
Section 3

The third section talks to the implementation processes and arenas. It focuses on the different elements in the system, such as ECE and AET provision, as well as dedicated GDE institutions for professional development and system improvement. This section mainly answers the ‘Who?’ and ‘What?’ questions.

The section contains six essays, which look at several institutional structures and their performance in Gauteng since 1994.

The first chapter looks at the two main existing institutions that drive teacher and education management in the province: the Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance (MGSLG) and the Sci-Bono Discovery Centre. Both have had their original mandate extended greatly since their inception, particularly to include all aspects of teacher development. The eminent international expert on school management, Tony Bush, discusses the implications of these changes on the two institutions.

In the next three chapters, Lorayne Excell, Elizabeth Walton and Edward French with Barbara Dale-Jones, specialists in their respective fields, explore the education provision for pre-school children, children with special needs and adults. This is generally acknowledged as the area in which the education system has struggled to make meaningful progress nationally, as in Gauteng. The issues that the chapters explore are those of marginalisation in the early years after 1994, limited funding, and high hopes supported by expansive policies that have not delivered to the extent that was hoped for.

All three chapters end on a somewhat more positive note with acknowledgement that progress is being made in each field in Gauteng, with the allocation of more funding and prioritisation. This is particularly the case with the drive to get all children into Grade R before they enter Grade 1.

In the next chapter, Anthony Gewer and Makano Morojele explore the situation in the FET sector. The chapter explains how this sector has been badly impacted by being split from education for a number of years while under the Ministry of Labour. It has recently been handed from the Department of Basic Education to Department of Higher Education and Training. All of these political changes – as well as high expectations of the sector’s absorptive capacity; low lecturer morale and skills base; and a radical transformation process involving consolidation of sites – have left the sector scarred and unable to fulfil its mandate effectively.

Finally, Jane Hofmeyr looks at the growth of the independent school sector since 1994 and the challenges it faces from an insider perspective.
Section 4

This final section looks at interventions to improve schools as well as measuring and assessing the performance of learners and institutions. It mainly answers the ‘With what effect?’ question.

This section contains the last two essays in the book. The first, which is written by Veerle Dieltiens and Brian Mandipaza, looks at the process of school improvement with a focus on particular school and district development projects undertaken over the past two decades. The second chapter, authored by Nic Spaull, examines the performance of the Gauteng education system based on exam and test results as well as international comparability studies, and comes to some interesting conclusions about the relative efficiency and performance of the system.

The chapters provide a picture of a provincial education system that has made considerable progress in two decades, bringing together multiple differentiated schooling and education systems and forging a unitary system while trying to achieve fairness and equity across income and race groups in the education experience that children receive, while at the same time stabilising the system and improving its quality of output. This has been achieved with much of the legislation and policy being developed beyond its control by various national departments.

Not surprisingly, given the complexity of this task, there have been changes of direction, failed interventions and experiments, and varied priorities over this period. In the process, almost all of the managers who pioneered the creation of the new department moved on years ago and a new cadre of leaders has taken up their posts as the GDE became a settled bureaucracy.

At the same time, there has been relative stability of staff in many schools. These teachers – not surprisingly – often feel powerless and suffer from innovation overload. This book captures some of the tension between mainly well-intentioned head- and district-office bureaucrats who are trying to make the education system work as best they can, and the practitioners working in schools who just want to be able to get on with their jobs with minimal disturbance.

The picture with which the reader is left is that of a system that has matured but still has a long way to go to be considered high performing against international indicators of school and education institutional performance.

References