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Rebuilding systems

– national stories of social and emotional learning reform

2022

The LEGO Foundation



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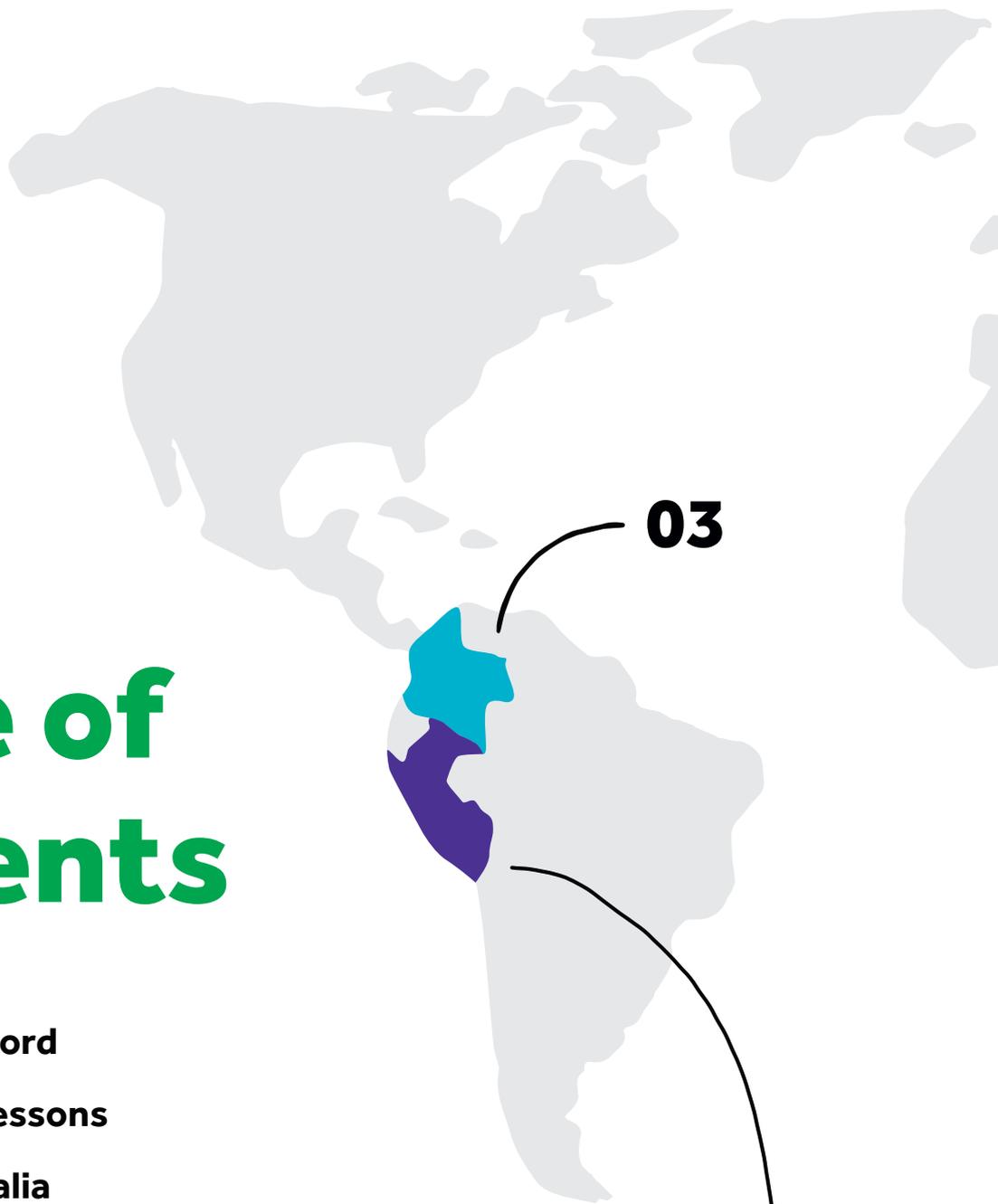
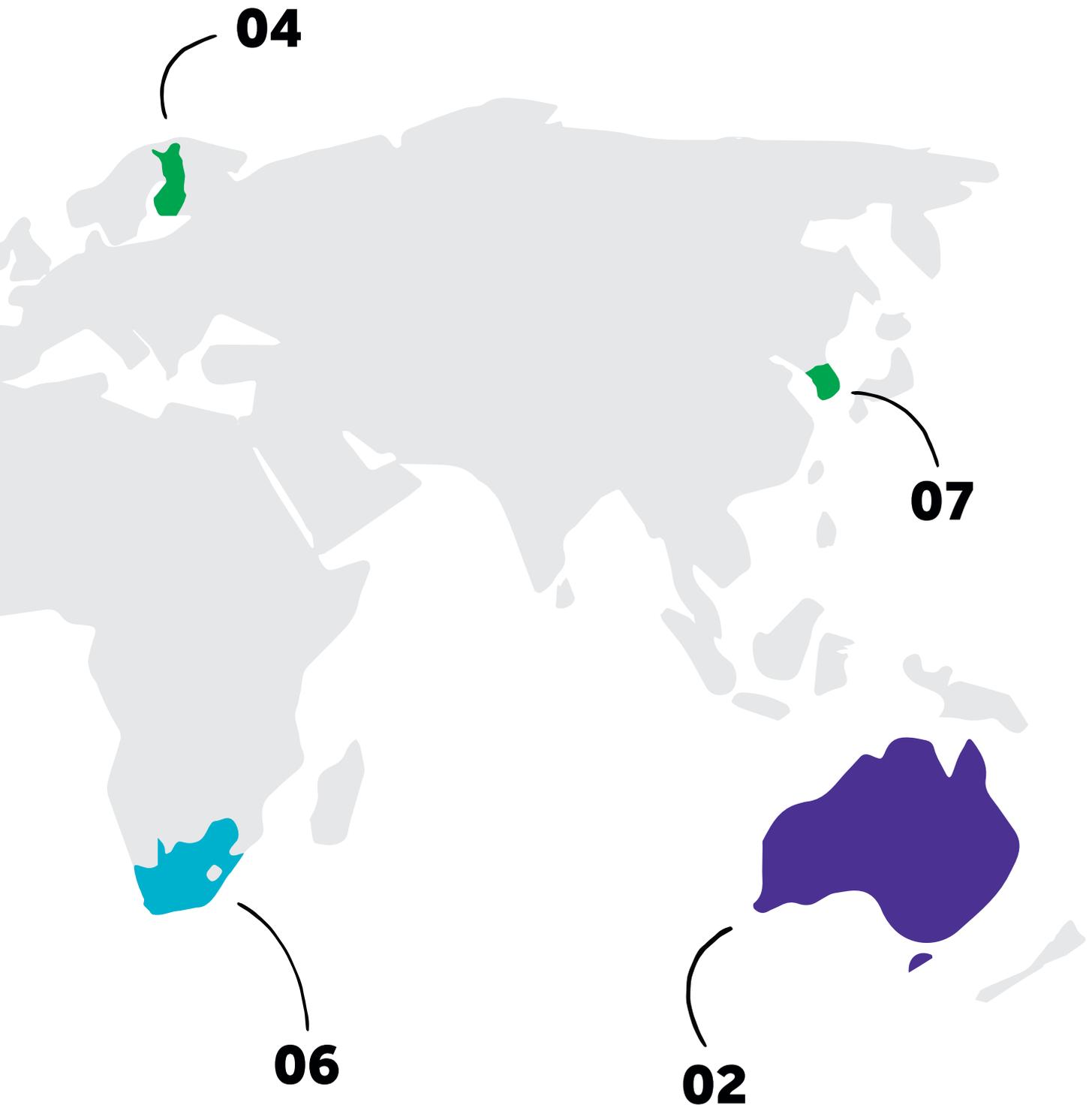


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Foreword



Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen
CEO of the LEGO Foundation

This generation of children is growing up in an uncertain time marked by complexity, the climate crisis and rising inequality. The global pandemic has brought new challenges and has tested the resilience of our children in ways we couldn't have imagined. It has brought a new urgency to prioritise social and emotional learning to support children to thrive as they adapt to their constantly changing circumstances. More than ever, as countries aim to build back better, governments, educators and parents recognise the urgent need to prioritise social and emotional learning.

From our conversations with children, families, communities, our partners, educators and education leaders across the globe, we know there is a wealth of practices which foster social and emotional skills. We are inspired to see this happening and know that this innovation and hard work are essential for rethinking education and improving teaching and learning. But isolated programs and pedagogies remain isolated if not shared.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that in order to help children and communities to thrive, we need to reimagine learning and reform education systems, but system reform is complicated. Policymakers and those leading change in their communities are looking for inspiration and insight from those who have been involved in similar reform efforts. Thankfully, there are some inspirational examples of pioneering countries which have reformed their

education systems to better equip learners with social and emotional learning skills. By reflecting on what has worked and what hasn't, these pioneering efforts can inform and inspire policymakers elsewhere to take action towards more holistic education systems.

For *"Rebuilding systems – national stories of social and emotional learning reform"* we interviewed policymakers from six pioneering education systems – Australia, Colombia, Finland, Peru, South Africa and South Korea – on how they have attempted to reform their public education systems to enhance students' social and emotional learning skills. These interviews bring together policymakers with first-hand experience of working in government on reform efforts, offering their reflections, insights and learnings.

We hope that this report can be used by policymakers and educators in the following ways:

- a. **As an advocacy tool** in making the case for reform and showing that it can be done (albeit with challenges) and that there are resources available to assist.
- b. **as a resource**, providing both insight and inspiration for those who are considering or leading education reforms within their education systems.
- c. **to stimulate debate**, further research, and encourage others to also share their lessons.

We at the LEGO Foundation are keen to bring our insight, experience and voice to the table – shining the spotlight on the importance of better understanding and promoting social and emotional learning both within and outside the classroom. We believe that social and emotional learning is fundamental for education and wellbeing, it helps children develop and maintain positive relationships, and become creative, engaged, lifelong learners. We also believe that learning through play is one of the key vehicles to help children, and adults, build social and emotional learning skills and cope with challenges and uncertainties. And as reflected in the interviews, learning through play is often seen by policymakers to be a critical component in delivering successful social and emotional learning reform.

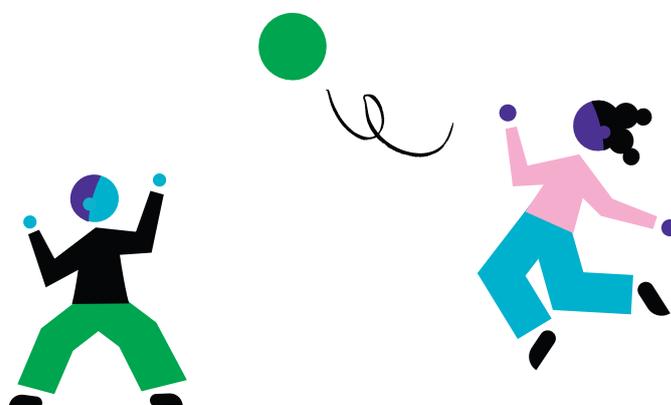
This report is recognition of the remarkable work that has already been done in the social and emotional learning space across the world. We hope it will inspire others to create and share their own social and emotional learning reform stories.

I would like to thank the pioneering policymakers featured in this report, and their colleagues, for paving the way in their reform efforts focused on social and emotional learning, and for sharing their insightful lessons with us.

May 2022

SECTION 1

Key lessons



1. Social and emotional skills are critical for social transformation and structural change

The rationale to introduce social and emotional skills in national education systems varies. For some countries experiencing high levels of violence, conflict and discrimination, the motivation is to achieve peace and to build a stronger democracy and equality through developing citizenship competencies in the population and thereby to reduce violent behaviour. In other countries, social and emotional skills have been driven by a concern for students' wellbeing.

In Colombia and Peru, for example, promoting social and emotional skills in schools is perceived to be instrumental in reducing the high levels of violence in their societies. In Colombia, the thinking was that

to achieve peace, it would be important not only to address the conflicts directly, but also to develop citizenship competencies in the population. Social and emotional skills were seen as vital to build a new generation of people with less violent behaviour. In South Africa, many people's self-concepts and self-images had been diminished as a result of decades of systematic discrimination and exploitation. Their "Life Orientation" subject seeks to enhance a positive self-concept and self-image by teaching social and emotional skills and thereby supporting nation-building and the integration of children into a newly democratic country following the fall of apartheid. In Australia, social and emotional skills are perceived to be important to help children adapt to a constantly changing world, while in both South Korea and Finland, the increased emphasis on social and emotional learning were aimed at improving students' wellbeing through more relevant and joyful learning processes.

2. The COVID-19 pandemic has made social and emotional skills increasingly important

The pandemic has interrupted many children's education and has affected their wellbeing. As students have stayed at home for extended periods, they have missed seeing their schoolmates, the community, and teachers in person. The COVID-19 pandemic has made clear the importance of social and emotional skills and competencies relating to managing self-care and daily life. As a result, these skills are now receiving more attention in education systems. In Peru, for example, social and emotional learning has been the backbone of the TV, digital and radio remote learning programme launched by the Ministry of Education. In Finland, many teachers chose to prioritise children's wellbeing during the pandemic, and devised strategies and tools to help children maintain their wellbeing, such as holding individual sessions with each student to ask how they were doing.

3. Learning through play helps children acquire social and emotional skills

Play provides great learning opportunities for children and young people to develop social and emotional capabilities and to learn subject knowledge. Learning through play takes different forms at different education levels; for example, it can take the shape of project-based learning and role play as children grow older. From K-12 to university, play can be used in many ways to practice social and emotional skills and to create opportunities for developing social relations, behaviours, creativity and imagination. Learning through play cuts across disciplines and can also be used to learn core subjects like mathematics, languages and science.

In South Africa and South Korea, play based activities are extra-curricular, while in Colombia, play and role-play is actively used to help children see different perspectives. In Australia and Finland, play is used intentionally to help children learn both core contents of the curriculum and social and emotional skills.

4. All relevant stakeholders need to be on board for the reform changes to be thorough and sustainable

Reforms have a greater chance to become successful and sustainable if they are inclusive and representational - if they create opportunities for dialogue, involvement and co-construction by all relevant stakeholders. Reforms implemented in a top-down manner without a broad involvement of teachers, parents, students, researchers and representatives from the wider society may gain less traction, as can be seen in the examples from Peru and South Korea. Participatory and collaborative education reforms where there have been involvement and consultations with all relevant stakeholders have gained broader consensus, a sense of ownership and better traction, as seen in South Africa, Colombia and Finland.

5. Teacher engagement in the design and delivery of a reform is a critical factor in successful reforms, and professional development can help ensure that the reform is sustained

A curriculum change is not sufficient in itself to sustain educational change. Teachers are key stakeholders in any education reform, and the implementation and success of the reform depends largely on them. It is important to involve teachers early on, to listen to their experience and expertise and to provide adequate support throughout the process. Successful reforms, resulting in sustained changes in teaching and learning practices are more likely to occur in systems where teachers are a part of and support the reform.

Professional development, in-service training, mentoring, and educational materials can all help teachers and help sustain the reform. Support can also be provided by collaboration with external organisations such as NGOs, as was the case in Colombia.

6. Wide and repeated communication of the reform's rationale and content may enhance its uptake and sustainability

A good communication strategy is stressed by all interviewees as key in delivering the reform and in getting “everybody on board”. Meeting stakeholders, listening through open dialogue and consultations, inviting feedback to draft reform documents, and thereby ensuring an iterative process is important. Publishing materials is not enough, they need to be accessible for different stakeholders and communicated in efficient ways, for example through visual images. All stakeholders need to be aware of what implications the curriculum change has for them.

In Finland, for example, all feedback received during consultations was published on a web page and made publicly accessible. Summaries of the material were created for easy access. When people understand the purpose of the reform and participate in the formation of it, there is room for more ownership and acceptance.

7. The role of the assessment system can both enable and hinder the implementation of reform

Learning and assessment should go hand in hand, which means that the assessment system should be aligned with the curriculum. For profound changes to happen in the education system, the assessment system has to be aligned to the education standards. Experience shows that teachers and parents value what is assessed, especially when examination results are the determining factor for access to further education. This means that in systems where social and emotional skills are not being assessed, these competencies receive less attention in class, as teachers generally will focus on teaching the children what they need to pass their exams. A lack of alignment between the assessment system and the curriculum can thus

have repercussions on the teaching of social and emotional skills.

There is still a need to find good ways of assessing social and emotional skills in classrooms and to apply innovative assessment methods. How to adequately assess the student's social and emotional learning is a challenge, especially when this is embedded in the design and implementation of project-based learning.

In Australia, they included descriptions of the competencies in the curriculum to try to compensate for this. In Colombia, they have assessed social and emotional competencies for two decades now, as they recognised the need to assess what they wanted to be valued and taught in the schools.



8. Reform is a long journey, not an event

Creating real change takes time and effort, requiring engagement and negotiation. Reform is not a single event of change in legislation or documentation; there are many milestones that the education system may have to journey through. The process is seldom smooth or linear, and there will be struggles of ideas and contestation. Co-construction and consultation processes take time, as do building consensus and creating ownership among stakeholders. Several policymakers state that the consultation processes took longer than anticipated at the outset, but that it was important to take the time to “get everybody on board”. The education system needs to be prepared for the reform in terms of resources, structures, incentives, and political intention.



9. Compromises and smaller steps may be necessary to implement a reform and move the system in the desired direction

If an education system is not ready for substantial change, the pace of implementation may need to slow down, or concessions may need to be made. In Australia, for example, the first National Curriculum Board was set up in 2008, while implementation was not completed until 2015. In Peru, a prior attempt to reform the curriculum called for the elimination of subject-based instruction. That made some aspects of the curriculum challenging to implement, particularly because teachers were normally hired based on subject specialism and the system could not adjust in a timely manner. Similarly, in Finland, the proposal was to move away from subject-based structure towards holistic learning. However, the government was not prepared for such a shift. Instead, the reform introduced multi-disciplinary modules to ease the system into the change and lay foundations for future revisions.

10. Changes can be made within the existing legal framework

Some policymakers recognise that important changes can be made within the existing legal framework, without the need of a full education reform. In Colombia, they took into account the system that was already in place and worked to incorporate the changes within that framework. They also found that by working through already established programmes, they increased the influence and reach of the reform. In South Africa, the move away from apartheid created

new frameworks in which the reforms could take place. The curriculum represented the ideals of freedom, democracy, equality and justice enshrined in the new Constitution. The new Constitution was the framework that allowed the country to reach “sufficient consensus” in curriculum matters. Some countries, like Peru and South Korea, found that they needed to act when there was a political window for change, while in Finland and Australia, there is a system to consider the need for education reform every ten years.

11. Education reforms that incorporate concerns and feedback from both the left and the right and therefore speaks to a broad base of people have a greater chance of being sustained over time

In Colombia, they made a concerted effort to ensure that the education reform would be “depoliticised” both to ensure full support from all parties for the reform and also to ensure the reform’s sustainability. They communicated that the social and emotional competencies and standards do not have an ideological bias and made sure to incorporate the main concerns from both the left and the right side of politics. The standards included respect for the law (a concern of the right), and the “citizen competencies” which emphasised the importance of children knowing their rights and being able to exercise them (which satisfied the left and the unions). As a result, the education reform appealed across the political spectrum, in addition to the teachers. This was a powerful strategy to ensure broad support for education reform for peacebuilding.

This proved to be crucial, especially in the context of a generally polarised political environment. Eliminating the political and ideological bias made the changes possible and made them easier to implement. The reform is still in place in Colombia 11 years after the first governmental change. In other countries, such as Peru and South Korea, the reforms were more closely linked to the governing party and gained less traction upon change of government.

SECTION 2

Australia



Robert Randall

Former CEO of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)

About the contributor

Robert Randall was involved with the development of the Australian Curriculum when it was first conceptualised by the Australian government as General Manager of the Interim National Curriculum Board in 2008. Soon after, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was set up with a wider scope - bringing curriculum, the national assessment programme and a reporting function together. Robert Randall became General Manager Curriculum and Deputy CEO between 2009 and 2012 and then served as CEO of the organisation from 2012 to 2019.

Robert currently provides education consultancy services to organisations such as the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), the University of Newcastle Quality Teaching Academy, and the Palladium Group's INOVASI program Indonesia.

Motivation and enabling environment

1. Why were social and emotional skills important in your country?

The preamble of the 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* argues that the major changes in the world were placing new demands on Australian education. Young Australians were living in a more global world with technological change and complex environmental, social and economic pressures, along with increasing national and international mobility. These issues went beyond national borders; hence, Australia needed to be more outward-facing. The school system needed to pay more attention to developing the necessary capabilities (called general capabilities in Australia) rather than leaving them to chance. As a result, social and emotional skills were added to the national curriculum as part of the Personal and Social Capability.

2. What are your country's pressing problems, and how can social and emotional skills help to solve them?

In Australia, provision of education is the responsibility of the states and territories, albeit often with a common macro perspective. Local concerns, ranging from literacy and numeracy through to building young people's capacity to live safe and healthy lives exist across states and

“Our approach in developing the national curriculum was to draw out and build on common themes and challenges, while also setting high expectations.”

territories, although the context will often vary. Our approach in developing the national curriculum was to draw out and build on common themes and challenges, while also setting high expectations. For example, there was often discussion about how schools could contribute to the capacity of young people and communities to respond to and recover from crises e.g., bushfires or floods, or to deal with increased presence of drugs and alcohol. Rather than simply add specific topics to the curriculum, we decided to focus on a set of general capabilities, including personal and social capability where national expectations were set and schools could choose the context that was most relevant to their students and their community.

In this way, we set national expectations for the development of young people’s social and emotional skills, through the personal and social capability, which would allow schools to identify current skill levels and build on them. The goal was to level the playing field through explicit attention to these important skills.

The *Shape of the Australian Curriculum* guided the development of the Australian National Curriculum.

Previously, each of the eight states and territories had its own curriculum under Australia’s federated system.

Equally, there was recognition that more could be done to build young Australians’ intercultural understanding. As a country in the Asian region with strong Anglo-European roots and an increasingly diverse population, it was important to give greater attention to the intercultural understanding of our young people – so we added it as one of the seven general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum.

3. What was the status of social and emotional skills development in your education system before the development of the national curriculum?

Previously, each of the eight states and territories had its own curriculum under Australia’s federated system. There were a range of different practices in different states. For instance, Victoria included creativity in their curriculum framework, Queensland was piloting ‘new basics’ with the idea of moving away from subject disciplines, whereas New South Wales was strongly committed to disciplines. The pivotal point, in this case, was the decision to develop a national curriculum. There was some debate regarding the role of disciplines, but there was a strong view that the curriculum needed to value and retain a focus on disciplines, as well as develop a set of general capabilities.

4. What led to the decision to develop a national curriculum? What evidence, political incentives and interests converged to cause the government to take action?

The Melbourne Declaration reinforced the role of education in maintaining and improving the country’s economic prosperity and social cohesion. Australian Education Ministers saw value in high levels of collaboration and engagement between governments, education sectors and stakeholders in the education of young Australians.

Increased national attention on the role of education in a changing world, with increasing internal and international mobility, prompted the Australian government to reconsider how schooling might be more efficiently harnessed as part of a national policy. One of the value propositions of having a national curriculum was that our country was not

big enough to warrant or sustain eight different high-quality curricula. It was argued that a national strategy, setting the same expectations for all young Australians, would allow the Australian governments to better share resources and focus on collectively improving learning for all children, wherever they lived in Australia and whatever school they attended. We believed in the notion that “a rising tide lifts all ships”.

The *Shape of the Australian Curriculum*, first approved in 2009 by the council of Commonwealth and state and territory education ministers, guided the development of the Australian Curriculum.

5. Who were the most important people or actors influencing the national curriculum?

Julia Gillard, as the national Education Minister at the time, was very influential. She provided leadership and worked with the council of education ministers from each state and territory debating what we wanted for young Australians. The Board of ACARA was another important group. Barry McGaw served as a Chair, Tony McKay as Deputy Chair, and Peter Hill as CEO, and there were representatives from each state and territory. The group was very dynamic and had many well-respected deep thinkers and education leaders. Both Barry McGaw and Tony McKay, for example, brought an international perspective to the board of ACARA.

Civil society had an influencing role, rather than being the driver of the transformation. During the development of the national curriculum, we met with broader community groups, from parents and employers, to community, industrial and professional groups.

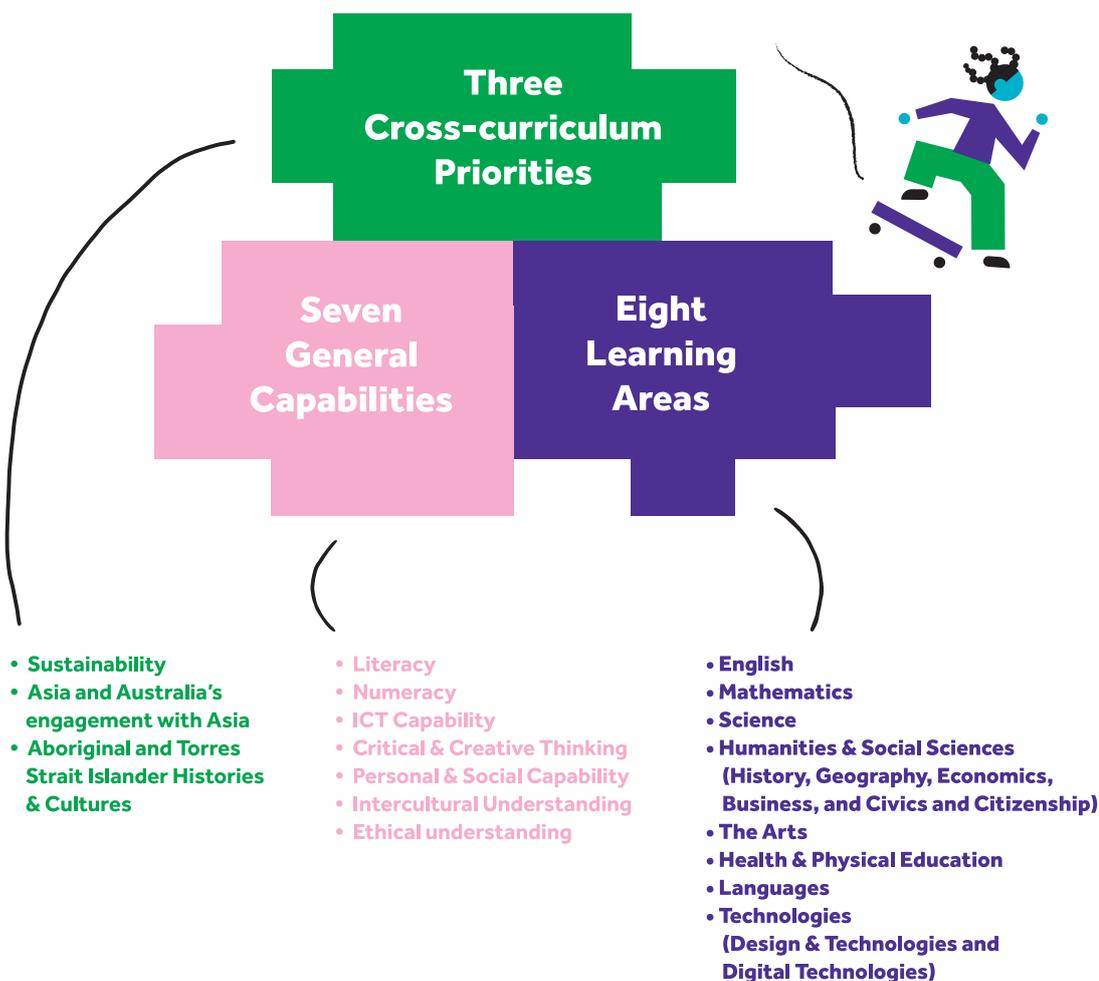


The reform

6. What was the main content of the national curriculum related to social and emotional learning?

The Australian Curriculum has three dimensions - subject disciplines, general capabilities and three cross-curricula priorities. As well as maintaining a focus on disciplines and introducing general capabilities, the development of the curriculum also provided an opportunity to pay great attention to three priority areas - to improve young Australians' knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of the first people of our country, a broader focus on sustainability, and greater attention on Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia.

The seven general capabilities include cognitive capabilities of literacy, numeracy, ICT capability, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, intercultural understanding, and ethical understanding. While the Australian Curriculum sets expectations for young people's learning, it is not a pedagogical document. Education systems and schools can choose to organise learning for young people in a variety of ways – reflecting their needs and interests. For example, to develop skills of inquiry will draw together Critical and Creative Thinking (general capability) and Science (discipline). The state systems can also have different takes on the curriculum. For example, Victoria sees the capabilities as more independent than other states. Such discussion and collaboration among the states can enrich curriculum implementation.



7. To what extent did play factor in the national curriculum and contribute to the outcomes?

For some, play sounds like random unintentional activity. However, for Australia, play takes a key role in the early childhood curriculum. Play provides a great learning opportunity for young people to develop social and emotional capabilities. Playing and interacting with others is a rich source of learning. Through intentional design, with some moderation and intervention, play can provide a range of rich and engaging learning opportunities and active forms of teaching, that contrast with traditional education. Additionally, play-based learning cuts across disciplines, so it can be integrated into Mathematics, Languages, Science, etc.

“...for Australia, play takes a key role in the early childhood curriculum. Play provides a great learning opportunity for young people to develop social and emotional capabilities.”

Play is a context for learning that:



Allows for the expression of personality and uniqueness



Enhances dispositions such as curiosity and creativity



Enables children to make connections between prior experiences and new learning



Assists children to develop relationships and concepts



Stimulates a sense of wellbeing

(Source: Department of Education and Training. (2019). *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, p. 10)

8. What was your role in relation to the national curriculum?

I was General Manager of the interim National Curriculum Board when the development of the Australian curriculum was first conceptualised. Then, when the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was established, I was appointed General Manager (Curriculum) and Deputy CEO from 2009 to 2012, then CEO from 2012 to 2019.

Reform process / implementation

9. Could you describe the overall process in designing and implementing the national curriculum?

A key first step was the decision to develop a national curriculum, reinforced through a Parliamentary Act establishing ACARA and a Board comprised of representatives from the states and territories. With the actual development of the curriculum, there were two main steps to the process. The first step was a shaping process – formalised through the drafting and publication of shape papers. For example, *The Shape of the National Curriculum: A Proposal for Discussion* which provided the overall blueprint for our work.

The second step involved the drafting of curriculum documents, including decisions about what was to be included in the national curriculum. The whole process was led by ACARA and we reached out, involved and engaged with different stakeholders. For example, during this process, we held seminars and workshops in each of the states and territories to help us agree on the content of the curriculum together. And we also sought out experts in each discipline to help us draft the shape papers for each learning area.

10. Which stakeholders were engaged and why?

Key stakeholder groups of parents, teachers, universities, and broader community and industry groups were engaged from all states and territories through socialisation. Additionally, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) was engaged in validation exercises when we drafted

the national curriculum. Now ACARA is working with them on learning progressions and describing levels of proficiency.

11. How was it communicated to key stakeholders?

A key strategy throughout the process was to give feedback to those who contributed to the curriculum. Through a “close-the-loop” strategy we communicated what we had done and why and what the next steps were.

The more challenging issue was engaging with the broader community. During the early stages, ACARA led the communication process through engagements, meetings and workshops. There was also media coverage and interviews. Once the process was underway, there was discussion about whether ACARA should continue to communicate across the nation or whether communication should be managed by states and territories (through the education authorities). The latter option was chosen, allowing the local authorities to take what had been agreed upon and channel it down through their own communication processes.

12. Did you get any pushback, and how was this managed?

There was pushback of varying degrees though the process, although this was set against an overall commitment to the idea of a national curriculum. There were also changes in scope along the way. The initial shape paper proposed just four learning areas: English, Mathematics, Science and History with agreement that these would all be implemented. However, the scope of the national curriculum grew to eight learning areas, with increased contest about the details of some subjects and overall a reduced commitment to implement all of it.

There were also pushbacks on specificity, particularly around minor matters of content, decision-making and authority, as well as in the rate of change and implementation. Over time, as decision-makers changed, there were challenges in maintaining commitment and continuity.

Nonetheless, Australia does have a national curriculum and discussion and debate about what is important for young people to learn.

When people are not used to new ways of doing things (such as play-based learning), it is very important to have a change management strategy. We have to explain the concept, how they can get there, create opportunities for them to try things out. We employed this early on and worked with states and territories to support the change.

Outcomes of the reforms

13. What was the ambition or expected results?

The 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* presents two goals:

1. Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence
2. All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens

The Declaration is updated every ten years with the most recent iteration being the 2019 *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*, which places more emphasis on social and emotional skills, reflecting the increasing complexity of our world and our ongoing balancing between disciplines and broader capabilities. Social and emotional skills are more important than they were before.

14. What were the achieved results? Were there any that were unexpected?

Measuring success of such a change is challenging. While Australia has national assessment programmes in literacy and numeracy and civics and citizenship, science literacy and ICT literacy, when it comes to deeper learning and general capabilities there are no standardised measures to compare results now and ten years ago. Anecdotally, we know that more schools and more teachers are doing new things to enrich students' learning, such as reaching and engaging with local communities. There are more projects and engagement of children in democratic and participatory projects in schools. Organisations are also reaching into schools and helping to enrich and deliver the curriculum.

One of the things where we can improve is in recognising the learning of general capabilities and encouraging young people to understand how their skills have improved. Strategies to assist with this are underway. ACER is developing processes to assess and report on learning of general capabilities. Sydney University is working to report levels of students' capabilities in addition to letter grades. The "Looking to the future" report on Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and training has shown how the capabilities defined by the universities, vocational education, and industries are aligned with the national curriculum. For example, it maps the social and personal capability to higher education skills such as adaptability, self-reliance, self-organisation, independence and autonomy; and to employment skills such as emotional intelligence and self-awareness.

“Teachers value what is measured. We still need to improve how we assess general capabilities. However, a key feature of what Australia set out to do, was to try to describe the capabilities rather than just label them.”

15. What enabled or hindered the development of the national curriculum?

Before 2008, there had been two previous attempts to have greater national consistency in curriculum. One of the reasons that those attempts did not work, was because they were only trying to draw out commonalities among the states and territories rather than raise value by setting something higher. This time, a federal Act of Parliament was passed to establish ACARA. The Act set out what would be done and how it would be done, including

that ACARA's Board membership would include a representative for each state and territory. ACARA, under the leadership of Board Chair Barry McGaw and CEO Peter Hill, became accountable to the federal government for delivering the national curriculum – or, as the Act states, “to set the framework for the government’s ‘education revolution’ in school education”. As a result of this, we now have a national curriculum.

The role of the assessment system can both enable and hinder the implementation of reform. We assess literacy and numeracy because they are fundamentally important for learning at and beyond school. However, many would say that we have to measure all that we value. If academic success is defined and measured narrowly, as in the university entrance exam based ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank), schools are not going to be incentivised to teach more deeply and broadly.

Education system coherence

16. How do you support teachers in adapting their teaching practices as envisaged in this national curriculum?

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited (AITSL) had a role in this, through developing teaching and school leadership standards. These included four levels of progression (Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, and Lead) which describe increasing standards of teaching. While the standards are not mandatory, some states and territories have used them to drive improvements in pedagogical practices through professional development.

17. What role does the assessment system play in curriculum development?

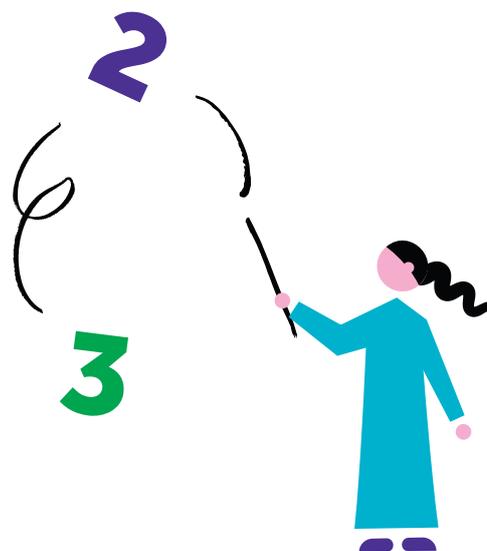
Teachers value what is measured. We still need to improve how we assess general capabilities. However, a key feature of what Australia set out to do, was to try to describe the capabilities rather than just label them. The described sequences provide a language for educators to recognise current levels of attainment and to think about what they can do to move their students to the next level. That is part of

a quality teaching process. Many schools are moving towards including young people in the assessment process, by having them take the responsibility to know where they are and demonstrate what they have learned.

18. What are the challenges in assessing social and emotional learning?

Learning capabilities or habit change require a longer timeframe. It is not something you can measure at the end of each term as it may require a couple of years to change. In addition, students can understand what self-regulation means but it does not mean they will exhibit self-regulation. We need to change the way in which evidence is collected.

Work on assessing capabilities is taking place, though not at a systemic level. We are now getting to the point where, through individual and group efforts, we have initiatives where the measurement of capabilities is being more valued. There is more endorsement from the public. Professor Peter Shergold encouraged portfolio assessments to describe and recognise what capabilities a young person has learned. Prof Sandra Milligan from Melbourne University is researching how to broaden skills measurement. Organisations such as ACARA, ACER and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) are researching ways to give formative feedback on the capabilities.



Lessons

19. What were the key learnings from this experience?

It takes time to bring about change.

The strategy of developing blueprint documents first (through the ‘shape’ papers) and then going on a curriculum development process made absolute sense. We actively engaged with the general public and gained broader endorsement for the change. The process of sending the drafts out and receiving feedback helped build engagement and commitment to the transformation. However, this is very dependent on the context. This approach worked quite well in Australia but it might not work in other places.

20. What were the compromises you had to make for the development of a national curriculum to happen, if any?

In our national curriculum, we have the disciplines, the general capabilities, and the cross-curriculum priorities. We acknowledged that the general capabilities might be learned out of context, but they are best learned through the disciplines. In hindsight, I think that we should have communicated this better. Some practitioners understood that they could simply keep teaching disciplines and make no changes to how they teach. This was not what we wanted. However, now there is a movement shifting to more integration of the skills into subjects, with work to lighten the content load to provide opportunities for deeper learning of the disciplines and the general capabilities.

21. What could have been done differently?

I would try to improve and develop progress indicators and stimulate work on assessment in this space earlier. There had not been a formal assessment on social and emotional learning, and I would advocate for that. The assessment and recognition of learning needs to catch up with the overall purpose of the change.

Looking ahead

22. What advice do you have for education policymakers who want to create their own version of what you attempted in your country, or who have similar ambitions?

Be very clear about *what* problem you are trying to address, *why* you want to make the change or what is the justification for the change, how this will improve education and make young people better off, *who* will implement this (engage with the media and do stakeholder analysis). The *why* needs to be clear otherwise you cannot engage people. The Melbourne Declaration provided us with *why*, and we articulated and thought through the *what*. For *who*, the media plays an important part in communication, and *how* is about mapping out an implementation plan, with indicators and a reasonable timeframe.

23. How does this change influence how children are coping with the challenges of COVID-19?

I think there is quite a legitimate concern about not just children but parental well-being as a result of the impact of COVID-19, although this does vary according to circumstances.

There has been a focus on ‘learning loss’ due to COVID-19. I believe children continue to learn beyond the classroom and I expect that they have learned other things during lockdown beyond academic skills. For example, how to organise their days, how to get on with their brother or sister better, sitting down and talking with their parents more often, etc. It would be great if we could better recognise the learning of such social and emotional skills.



“Be very clear about *what* problem you are trying to address, *why* you want to make the change or what is the justification for the change, *how* this will improve education and make young people better off, *who* will implement this”



SECTION 3

Colombia



Cecilia María Vélez White

Former Minister of Education of Bogotá,
former Minister of Education of Colombia

About the contributor

Cecilia María was the Secretary of Education in Bogotá from 1998 to 2002, where she piloted the “Citizenship competencies” education evaluation before implementing standards and evaluation nationally as the Minister of Education of Colombia from 2002 to 2010.

Motivation and enabling environment

1. Why were social and emotional skills important in your country?

Our country has a long history of conflicts and violence with narco-trafficking and with guerrilla and paramilitary groups. These conflicts have usually been very violent. Our thinking was that for us to achieve peace, it would be important not only to address these conflicts directly, but also to develop citizenship competencies in the population to reduce people’s violent behaviours. This was why social and emotional skills were vital. The introduction of social and emotional skills in the curriculum thus became an important means for us to work towards building a new generation of people with less violent behaviour.

2. What are your country’s pressing problems, and how can social and emotional skills help to solve them?

High levels of violence remain the country’s pressing problem. As we are working with children, it takes time for change to happen at a scale that is noticeable in the wider society. The country is making progress, nonetheless. Even though the Colombian Government signed a peace agreement in 2015 with the guerrilla group FARC-EP (Fuerzas Armadas

Between 2004 and 2006, the Ministry of Education issued basic competency standards (*estándares básicos de competencia*). Social and emotional skills were included in the standards as “Citizenship Competencies”. These competencies were aligned with the country’s ongoing peace building efforts.

Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo, eng: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia— People’s Army), we need to continue building strong social and emotional skills in our children and youth to maintain and develop a more peaceful society.

3. What was the status of social and emotional skills development in your education system before the initiative?

Prior to this initiative, there was no focus on social and emotional competencies in the school curriculum. Traditionally, our system did not focus on the development of these competencies, but rather on content repetition. For example, in a civics class, students would memorise facts rather than developing competencies for living in a community.

4. What led to the decision to reform? What evidence, political incentives and interests converged to cause the government to take action?

The decision to include social and emotional skills in the school curriculum was supported by political will, the constitution, and education law.

The following was the legal framework at the time: The constitution of 1991 and the General Education Law 115 (*Ley General de Educación*) of 1994 opened

the ground for delegating authority to departments and municipalities, which included the education sector. Local administrations (*certified territorial entities*) were given the authority to manage education services. The 1994 statute also granted schools the autonomy to define their curriculum, study plan, and assessment – one of the most distinctive characteristics of school education in Colombia. Schools are responsible for defining their specific curriculum through an institutional project (*Proyecto Educativo Institucional, PEI*) within the normative framework established by the ministry. Curriculum guidelines (*lineamientos curriculares*), introduced in 1998, supported schools in designing and developing their curriculum.

When I arrived in Bogotá in 1998, I realised we could add the competencies and standards as a complement to what the law had set in the curriculum guidelines. We did not enact a legal reform in the conventional sense - we had that framework and worked within the framework. The constitution of 1991 was inspired by a peace-building process¹ and the rationale for introducing the citizenship competencies was also peacebuilding, so they were very well aligned with the legal framework that was in place.

5. Who were the most important people or actors influencing the reform?

The former Mayor of Bogotá, Antanas Mockus, was one of the important actors. He had implemented important changes in Bogotá which served as a precedent for the education reform that we pushed through. At the time there was a lot of violence in Bogotá, so he introduced a programme of citizenship competencies at the beginning of his term. For example, in one of the Mayor’s citizenship initiatives, they had found that the public could be encouraged towards kinder and more considerate behaviours through a fun, play-based approach. The use of zebra lines for pedestrians was promoted by a campaign involving mimes. These same mimes were then used to encourage people’s appropriate behaviour in public spaces, by applauding or discouraging them in their own characteristically playful way. Our administration also believed that we may be able to

¹ In 1989, the guerrilla group M-19 became a legal party after reaching a peace agreement with the government. As a political party, they participated in the 1991 constitutional assembly.

change people's behaviours through pedagogical interventions. This is the background for why we have been focusing on developing citizenship competencies in the education sector.

In addition to the ministry's team, universities and NGOs played a vital role in the development and implementation of the reform. The ICFES (*Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación*), Colombia's evaluation institution and the leading evaluation institution in Latin America, was reformed and strengthened, and also played an important role.

The reform

6. What was the main focus of your reform related to social and emotional skills?

We introduced the teaching and practice of social and emotional skills by incorporating "citizenship competencies" into our education standards.

Citizenship competencies include:

- What students need to know for the exercise of citizenship (knowledge);
- The capacity to carry out various mental processes (cognitive). In the case of citizenship, the capacity of understanding the position of others, being able to take different perspectives and think critically;
- The capacity to recognise one's feelings and emotions, as well as to develop empathy (emotional);
- The capacity to establish constructive dialogues, including active listening to others' ideas, showing respect for them, and expressing one's own ideas in assertive ways (communication); and
- The capacity to articulate all other competencies in a given action (integrative). For example, being able to manage conflict constructively.

Building citizenship competencies in children helps build their self-confidence, gives them reassurance and develops their capacity to respect others. These are the basic foundations for other competencies,

and they are central to the development of students as rounded people; skilled communicators and collaborators. It may even be more important to develop social and emotional skills than literacy and numeracy skills.

“We know that children can easily learn new skills through play. In fact, all competencies, not only social and emotional competencies, can be developed through play.”

7. To what extent did play factor in the initiative and contribute to the outcome?

Play is very important in helping children see different perspectives, such as respecting norms. Seeing how play could influence people's behaviour inspired us to use it in the educational system. Some of the initiatives use play and games very actively to develop competencies. We know that children can easily learn new skills through play. In fact, all competencies, not only social and emotional competencies, can be developed through play.

8. What was your role in relation to the initiative?

I led the pilot initiative in Bogotá by introducing assessments of these competencies. Thereafter, I became the Minister of Education, and I implemented the reform nationwide.



Reform process / implementation

9. Could you describe the overall process in designing and implementing the reform?

In Bogotá, we had a chance to pilot the citizenship competency evaluation. To build this evaluation we defined standards. We were well aware that what is being assessed is also what is taught. Knowing this and considering that schools have autonomy in defining their own curriculum through the institutional project, we decided to define and introduce the citizenship competency standards through the assessment system.

However, we realised it was clearer and fairer to define and publicise the standards, discuss them with the system, and then assess them. So, when I started working at the Ministry of National Education we shifted to that process. That was an improvement we made when we implemented the national programme. In Bogotá, we had three years to implement and learn while we had 8 years to implement the reform nationwide.

“By working through already established programmes, we increased the influence and reach of the reform.”

Nevertheless, I believe the assessment system is the key. The standards are important, but they are not sufficient. After the development of both the standards and the test of citizenship competencies, we introduced assessments at all levels, including university level where the assessments of social and emotional skills have been more continuous than at the basic education level.

In Colombia, the ministry offers direct support to schools through programmes. We advise and support schools through methodologies that have been

developed by several institutions (NGOs, universities, etc.). Additionally, we aligned programmes that have been introduced by the law, with our education standards of citizenship competencies. The sexual education programme, for example, was easily aligned with the competencies. By working through already established programmes, we increased the influence and reach of the reform.

10. Which stakeholders were engaged and why?

NGOs and universities played a crucial role. The universities had conducted extensive research on how to handle issues of violence. Professor Enrique Chauz of the University of the Andes (*Universidad de los Andes*), who for several years had been devoted to researching cycles of violence and how to prevent them, was the coordinator of the team of researchers and ministry staff that formulated the citizenship competency standards.

The NGOs, on the other hand, were experts in new pedagogical approaches. They knew how to transform the way the schools were run, making them become more democratic, and they had seen positive changes in children's behaviour. The NGOs played an important role in accompanying the schools in implementing the citizenship standards. Escuela Nueva is one such example. The “Aulas en Paz” (Peaceful classrooms) programme, designed by Professor Enrique Chauz, was created to assist us in the most violent areas of our country.

NGOs and city-level private initiatives, which could be scaled up, received financing from the ministry. We also had a good relationship with the private sector, and we tried to mobilise resources from them for schools.

Additionally, we worked with school principals and parents. We found that it is very important to involve parents, as students can behave differently at school and at home. We reached out to parents through the Parents' Associations and also through teachers.

11. How was the reform communicated to key stakeholders?

We had to convince the whole education system. Our communication strategy centred on speaking up frequently. The Internet was just beginning to grow

in importance at the time, and we worked with many stakeholders through a portal. In addition to local and national forums, we held four forums annually. All sectors were invited to discuss the standards and the citizenship competencies through these forums. We also distributed booklets. There were 300,000 teachers and we could not fully control what was happening in all classrooms – hence, we had to talk to the teachers, listen to them, and convince them.

Towards the end of my term, I had to develop the national education plan for the next decade (2006–2016). It was a very collaborative process and working on this document provided additional opportunity to discuss these concepts.

12. Did you get any pushback, and how was this managed?

In Bogotá, we completed an evaluation very quickly (within ten months), despite knowing it was not perfect, as we had three years as the administration. The teacher's union (*Sindicato de Maestros*) was vehemently opposed to the evaluation and encouraged teachers to avoid it. However, many of the teachers wanted the evaluation, so they sent their students and we managed to assess 80% of students in the city. Additionally, some teachers reacted to the word "competence", as in Spanish the word "competencia" has two meanings; it means both "competence" and "competition", and this association with competition made some teachers sceptical to the reform. We had many forum discussions with them to explain what we meant. Now, we have a common understanding of what is meant by "citizenship competencies".

With the concept of citizen competences, the teacher's union did not go against what we did, nor did the people from the opposite side of the political spectrum. We communicated that the competencies and the standards do not have an ideological bias, and also that the standards incorporate the main concerns from both the left and the right politically. The standards included respect for the law (a concern of the right), and the "citizen competencies" emphasised the importance of children knowing their rights and being able to exercise them (which satisfied the left and the unions). As a result, this appealed to the left, the right and also to teachers. This proved to be a powerful strategy as it is important to make sure everyone is on board for the purpose of peacebuilding.

Is there anything else you would like to add, for example any comments on culture change necessary for reforms, or how change happened at different stakeholder levels?

We put a lot of effort into getting people on board. We wanted to get everybody on board, through the forums and through listening to their concerns and incorporating their inputs. There were many reflections about how to change pedagogical methods. The very high prevalence of violence in our society was the main problem that we wanted to address and, to be able to do that, we worked with teachers, parents, NGOs and universities conducting research on the process and content. I think to be able to achieve cultural change and a change in violent behaviour, we need everybody to work together for that change to happen.

"We communicated that the competencies and the standards do not have an ideological bias, and also that the standards incorporate the main concerns from both the left and the right politically."



Outcomes of the reforms

13. What was the ambition or expected results?

The ambition was to have students live in peace when they grew up, to reduce violence in our country. We acknowledge that to solve conflicts, direct negotiations and dialogue between the government and guerrilla groups is necessary. However, in general, and for the overall population, we have to learn to respect others and to build a society that is less polarised. We believe that education can help with that.

14. What were the achieved results? Were there any that were unexpected?

The assessments observed changes in students' behaviours. For example, in Escuela Nueva (New School), the assessment found that students who have participated in the programme do better in social and emotional skills and citizenship competencies than those who have not participated.

At a systemic level, it is difficult to measure the effect of the citizenship competencies programme, as there are other elements that may also influence children's



behaviour. For example, families can influence how and whether students develop these competencies. However, having schools focus on the competencies itself is a major achievement. Additionally, the reform may have helped students become more aware of the violent situations in the country.

15. What enabled or hindered the reform?

The reform is still in place now, eleven years after I stepped down as a Minister of Education. I think this is because the education reform and the citizenship competencies are not perceived to be political nor ideological. What we did was introduce small adjustments within the existing legal framework to ongoing programmes and structures, and this was

“What is yet to do, and remains a challenge, is to develop good tools for an adequate assessment of social and emotional skills such as citizenship competencies...”



what enabled the reform. For example, we directed schools to develop citizenship competencies in the areas they were teaching, whether it was civics or religion.

“For change to happen in the education system, the assessment system has to be aligned to the education standards.”

Additionally, we made sure that the sexual education programme was aligned with the competencies. We developed booklets together with UNFPA and discussed the content with all stakeholders. We did not make that compulsory, yet all schools, even the religious schools, accepted the booklets. The Minister who succeeded me, Gina Parody, in response to a court ruling, tried to make the booklets compulsory but it was met with resistance.

What is yet to do, and remains a challenge, is to develop good tools for an adequate assessment of social and emotional skills such as citizenship competencies and to incentivise schools for improvement in this area to better align the system.

Education system coherence

16. How did you support teachers in adapting their teaching practices as envisaged in this reform?

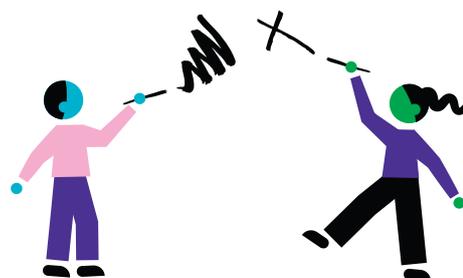
We provided different types of in-service training. There were courses for teachers, and these continued even after I left the Ministry. There were also programmes where teachers with experience in working with citizenship competencies were mobilised to assist teachers in other institutions.

Citizenship competencies have now been included in the entrance examination for teachers' qualifications.

17. What role does the assessment system play in this reform?

The assessment system enables teachers to better identify what the problems are and how they can address them accordingly. The teaching and practice of citizenship competencies may contribute to changing students' behaviours. It is only through assessment that the teachers can fully understand whether students have these competencies or not. Teachers generally want their students to excel and will work to help them do well in all assessments, and will therefore focus on teaching what the students will be assessed in.

For change to happen in the education system, the assessment system has to be aligned to the education standards.



18. What are the challenges in assessing social and emotional learning?

Assessing social and emotional skills is not a straightforward exercise. At first, we experienced some problems with the assessments, particularly in basic education and the feasibility of implementing complicated assessments. They are more structured now as we continue to improve, but they are still a challenge.

The first round of assessment results was not published because the results were not clear. We could not link the results of students to teachers for accountability purposes. We also thought that it would be important to feed this information back to the schools for them to discuss, learn and improve. We saw the need for improvement plans to ensure continual development. Establishing this cycle—developing the standards, evaluating, making improvement plans—is very important for ensuring continuous improvement.

Lessons

19. What were the key learnings from this experience?

Education reform is not as difficult as I originally thought. The main learnings for us have been the importance of depoliticising the reform, of depoliticising the “Citizenship Competencies” standards, making sure that it is not associated with the left or right side of politics. This has been very important, especially in the context of a generally polarised political environment. Eliminating the political and ideological bias made the changes possible and made them easier to implement.

Another lesson is the importance of getting everybody on board, and that can only be done through communication. *“You need to communicate, communicate, communicate. When you are tired of repeating, that is when people begin to understand what you are talking about”.*

20. What were the compromises you had to make for the reform to happen, if any?

The Congress wanted to direct teachers on what to teach in terms of content and how to teach it – they wanted to introduce a civics and a peace lecture. We wanted schools to develop the citizenship competencies within the school areas they already had. We had to push back on many occasions to prevent things from getting complex for schools. I had the President’s backing and this helped a lot in those discussions with Congress.

21. What could have been done differently?

We could have identified, and put in place, appropriate incentives for schools to improve. This would have helped facilitate the changes and improvements at the school level. Ideally, such incentives would have been aligned with the assessment system. The assessment system also needs to be consolidated. As we were focused on integrating citizenship into the assessment system and on its smooth implementation, we did not get the time to put corresponding incentives in place. Furthermore, I would emphasise that school management must lead by example in showing

“Establishing this cycle—developing the standards, evaluating, making improvement plans—is very important for ensuring continuous improvement.”

respect for others and resolving problems peacefully and democratically.

Even though our assessment system is not perfect, I would want to try to introduce incentives for the schools to take this properly onboard. Apart from this, I don’t think we had any major difficulties.

Looking ahead

22. What advice do you have for education policymakers who want to create their own version of what you attempted in your country, or who have similar ambitions?

Consensus and communication are important.

This means that you need to get everybody on board by communicating through dialogue – maybe several times and over many meetings. Listen to the different stakeholders and incorporate their inputs into the reform. To reach consensus may take time, but you won’t succeed if you don’t take the time necessary to reach consensus and get everybody on board.

Take into account what you have in place and integrate it into your reform. Introducing minor changes to existing programmes may be the best way to change - at least it was for us.

“We could have identified, and put in place, appropriate incentives for schools to improve.”

23. How does this reform influence how children are coping with the challenges of COVID-19?

I think the COVID pandemic has taught children many things, such as taking care of others. With the Citizenship competencies, children are better equipped to handle these types of situations; they have learned the importance of following rules and respecting others. I believe that these competencies would help them to cope with COVID.



SECTION 4

Finland



Irmeli Halinen

Former Head of the National Curriculum Development, Finnish National Agency for Education

About the contributor

Ms. Irmeli Halinen was the Head of National Curriculum Development and worked at the Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE) from 2004 to 2016. Prior to that, she had been working in the education sector for several years as a teacher, a school principal, and as the Head of Instruction and Education Development at the Helsinki City Education Department. She has also been working with organisations such as UNESCO and OECD and published books and articles on childhood, education and learning. After her retirement in 2016, she has been lecturing internationally.

Motivation and enabling environment

1. Why were social and emotional skills important in your country?

While Finland scored high in international assessments such as PISA and we were confident that our students were learning rather well, we were worried about their wellbeing, happiness, and social and emotional development. In Finland, we are continuously researching our students' wellbeing through the Finnish Student Health Survey and we found that our students' level of wellbeing was not satisfactory. Despite our efforts, there were still incidents of bullying, and some students reported that they were lonely and that they lacked motivation for learning. We wanted to find a balance between, on the one side, a high level of wellbeing and a joy of learning, and good learning results on the other side. We wanted to find new ways of promoting social and emotional development and the joy of learning, to create opportunities for positive interaction, and for children to learn to be a good human being, to understand oneself and to treat others with respect.

2. What are your country's pressing problems, and how can social and emotional skills help to solve them?

We face similar global issues that other countries are facing. We were particularly concerned by our findings of the relatively low level of wellbeing and motivation in schools, and we wanted to improve that. This is especially important now as the children are facing additional social and emotional challenges during and after the pandemic.

3. What was the status of social and emotional skills development in your education system before the initiative?

One of the objectives of Finnish education is "to support pupils' growth into humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them with knowledge and skills needed in life (Basic Education Act, p. 1)". While social and emotional skills were already included in the core curriculum, they were not adequately described and sufficiently focused. It did, however, provide a good starting point.

Finland's National Core Curriculum serves as a framework for the core content of Finnish education. Within this framework, municipalities and individual schools have the autonomy to formulate local curricula. This gives the teachers freedom to form and co-create their teaching methods in creative and innovative ways.

4. What led to the decision to reform? What evidence, political incentives and interests converged to cause the government to take action?

The government's Basic Education Decree is renewed approximately every ten years, in recognition of the rapidly changing world. The renewed decree of 2012 provided more emphasis on sustainable development, including the human element and the need to create a school environment that better supports social and emotional development. Based on the Decree, the National Agency for Education was tasked to draw up a new national core curriculum. The National Agency for Education is a state agency and has the authority to decide the content and shape of the curriculum. We drew lessons from the previous education reform of 2004, listened carefully to teachers and other education professionals, and drew learnings from research and evaluations of various development projects. Together with the University of Turku, we also developed a new tool called the Future of Learning 2030 Barometer which was launched in 2009. The intention was to support the reform of the core curricula and to look beyond contemporary interests. The aim of the Barometer is to acknowledge the future possibilities of learning and take the opportunities and challenges that may affect the development of schools, teachers and learning into consideration.

5. Who were the most important people or actors influencing the reform?

It was the task of the National Agency of Education to design and facilitate the reform and we invited and listened to a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties. We made sure to open the whole process to include as many participants as possible. We wanted to work with teachers, with school principals and with teacher educators. We also worked with education researchers and researchers of connected areas, in addition to working with stakeholder organisations and with relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Parents and their organisations were also important partners of the reform process. To capture the students' voices, we organised meetings with their representatives and distributed a survey to which we

received 60,000 responses. This was to ensure that we would take a variety of experiences and opinions into account and to understand how changes in the education system could meet global challenges and the rapid changes in society and in the job market.

The reform

6. What was the main focus of your reform related to social and emotional skills?

The main focus of the reform was the full integration of social and emotional skills in teaching and learning processes. We viewed these skills as an integral part of learning and not as a separate facet. This was introduced with the new reform.

Social and emotional skills are now integral to the main goals of teaching and learning and it is also an important part of how we describe school culture. Social and emotional skills are transversal in that they are connected to the nature of each subject.

Social and emotional skills are important in the seven transversal competencies that, for the first time, were described in the core curriculum. They are also included in the content and methods of school subjects as well as in the description of the school culture. The seven transversal competencies are: i) Thinking and learning to learn; ii) Cultural competence, interaction and expression; iii) Taking care of oneself, managing daily life; iv) Multiliteracy; v) Digital (ICT) competence; vi) Working life competence, entrepreneurship; and vii) Participation, involvement, and building a sustainable future.

A new structure of multi-disciplinary learning modules was also created with the purpose of learning across subjects, for example project-based learning. In these modules, teachers of different disciplines come together to work with students to create opportunities for interaction and collaboration and for students to learn across disciplines and to apply the knowledge and skills in real-life situations. Multi-disciplinary modules promote the achievement of the goals set for education and, in particular, the development of transversal competences. Schools must ensure that they include at least one multi-disciplinary learning module every school year.

The guiding principles for the development of the school culture were also described in the core curriculum more precisely than before. The principles are:

1. A learning community at the heart of the school culture
2. Well-being and safety in daily life
3. Interaction and versatile working approach
4. Cultural diversity and language awareness
5. Participation and democratic action
6. Equity and equality
7. Environmental responsibility and sustainable future orientation

“We trust our teachers and believe that they have enough expertise and capacity to work according to these guidelines. The whole Finnish education system is based on trust in our teachers: they are well-educated, autonomous, and empowered to create their own ways of teaching.”

Teachers are reminded of these perspectives through the reform. We trust our teachers and believe that they have enough expertise and capacity to work according to these guidelines. The whole Finnish education system is based on trust in our teachers: they are well-educated, autonomous, and empowered to create their own ways of teaching.

7. To what extent did play factor in the initiative and contribute to the outcomes?

Finnish early childhood development, pre-primary- and lower primary education levels were play based even before this reform. But the role of play was further emphasised in the higher levels of primary and secondary school. From K-12 to university, play can be used in many ways to promote social and emotional skills and create opportunities for developing social relations, behaviours, creativity and imagination. Now that digital tools offer more ways to engage in play, it can easily be incorporated into the learning process.

“Often, the most insightful feedback came from students.”

8. What was your role in relation to the initiative?

As the Head of the National Curriculum Development at the Finnish National Agency for Education, I coordinated the reform process and planned the design of the core curricula and the text production together with my colleagues. I retired in 2016, just as the curriculum reform implementation was initiated in the schools and have trained teachers and published education-related books and articles since then.

Reform process / implementation

9. Could you describe the overall process in designing and implementing the reform?

The Finnish National Agency for Education coordinated the reform and initiated the work with a consultation process with all relevant stakeholders in 2012. The process was holistic, integrative, and based on mutual trust, open interaction and collaboration.

We formed working groups to produce texts for the core curricula and an advisory group to support the process. We gathered feedback in various ways, adjusted the draft texts of the core curricula based on that, and created new drafts for feedback again. We continued this iterative process until we had final drafts for pre-primary-, primary- and secondary levels. After that, municipalities and schools drew up their own local curricula and implemented them in schools.

10. Which stakeholders were engaged and why?

The consultation process was open to everyone. As mentioned earlier, we worked with teachers, school principals, municipal authorities, teacher educators, researchers, ministries and relevant organisations. We engaged in conversations to hear their opinions on how the world and our society are changing and what needs to be addressed by the education system. Parents and students were also involved. This is a common way of working for us, but this time the process reached wider and was even more inclusive and iterative.

The working groups wrote proposed texts to the curriculum within their own areas of expertise. These texts were published on a website created specifically for the reform process. The website was publicly accessible so anyone who was interested could participate and give feedback. In addition, all municipalities were informed by email, and they were encouraged to include schools, teachers, and parents, and students in the process and to provide us with feedback. The process was repeated multiple times, which was time-consuming. However, it was worth it as we got a lot of feedback. Often, the most insightful feedback came from students.

We also travelled across the country and organised around 8 – 10 workshops for teachers and principals to discuss the curriculum reform. We asked them to reflect what should be changed and what should be kept, as well as their vision of a dream school. We found many commonalities in the different discussions, which were used in the drawing up of the curriculum.

Before we started the reform, we held workshops around the country and asked three questions:

- What would you like to change?
- What would you like to maintain?
- What does your dream school look like?

We found that most teachers wanted to move away from the traditional role of “the teacher who knows everything” towards giving students more space for dialogue and to express their own ideas and thoughts. Teachers wanted to work with colleagues and explore topics together with the students. Hence, the teachers were ready for this change. Students conveyed similar thoughts: they wanted to work and learn together and they also wanted to be part of planning their own work.

11. How was the reform communicated to key stakeholders?

In the very beginning of the reform process, we published a curriculum road map on the website. It contained the goals, main principles and timetable of the process, and it guided municipalities and schools in their local processes.

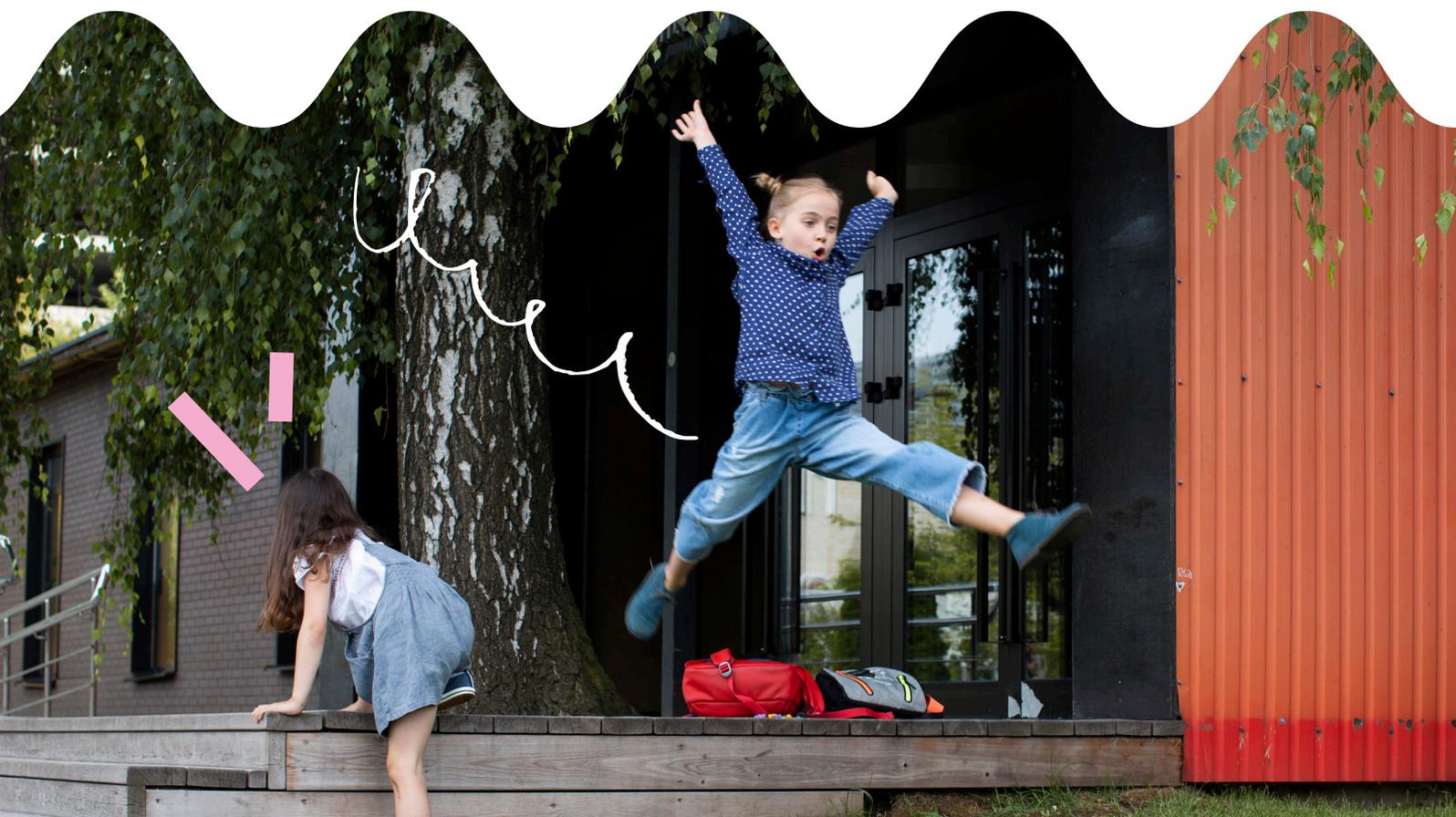
In addition to all the meetings and consultations, the draft core curricula and summaries of all feedback that we received during the consultations were published on our web page and publicly accessible.

To ensure easy access to the material, we also created summaries for those who did not want to read the full texts. My colleagues and I were invited by ministries, universities, teacher education faculties, textbook publishers, parents’ organisations, and municipal education authorities to give presentations concerning the reform. We also organised curriculum workshops for municipalities and schools.

12. Did you get any pushback, and how was this managed?

There were no major pushbacks. Some teachers questioned whether this reform process came too soon, as the last reform only finished in 2006, and this new reform process started in 2012. However, most teachers supported the reform as they could see that we were trying to provide a better learning environment for the children. There were critical discussions and controversies regarding the details of how this change could best come about, and

“Learning should be fun, meaningful, interesting and enjoyable.”



some issues provoked more discussion than others. Some of the provoking topics were the language programme, the culture of the Sámi indigenous group, religions, and global issues of sustainability. There was no serious pushback against the reform itself, both because the consultation process had been broad and inclusive, and the reform process was established by law.

Outcomes of the reforms

13. What was the ambition or expected results?

We wanted to improve students' wellbeing and motivation for learning, so that they can enjoy their day at school and enjoy learning. We hoped the reform would create more opportunities for teachers to work together with each other and with the students to promote their all-round development, help them recognise their emotions and enable them to express their feelings in a constructive way. For this purpose, we also wanted to create a better learning environment and working culture in the schools. Learning should be fun, meaningful, interesting and enjoyable.

“...teachers are empowered to work together collaboratively, to ask good questions, and to learn from each other.”

14. What were the achieved results? Were there any that were unexpected?

There have been many studies of the reform. Overall, it has proved to be a good reform and we have achieved a lot of what we set out to achieve. We observed rich discussions among teachers concerning the school culture and transversal competencies, and we saw some great school-level examples of how teachers implement the multi-disciplinary modules. Teachers now also have a better understanding of the rationale behind the reform.

What I am especially happy about is that we were able to promote constructive interaction between students and create a space for students to discuss and explore the connection between their own lives and local and global issues. The reform facilitated more time for that as the schools have the power to increase the number of lessons dedicated to this type of learning. Additionally, we emphasised that the starting point of discussion should come from the students themselves, as that improves their motivation and creates space for the issues that are important and relevant to them.

15. What enabled or hindered the reform?

One of the key enablers of the reform was the way our system was set up. With no census-based assessments in basic education, teachers are not threatened to compete with each other, and they do not fear that they will be blamed for poor results. Instead, teachers are empowered to work together collaboratively, to ask good questions, and to learn from each other.

Nonetheless, the reform was not an easy process. It demanded much work and rethinking, and lack of human and financial resources, especially for the communication work and for in-service training for school principals and teachers, remained a challenge throughout the process.

During the consultation process, nearly 90% of the stakeholders who gave us feedback supported the direction the reform was taking. However, some influential researchers were critical during the reform process which sparked public debates in the media. The content of the critique was mainly against the multi-disciplinary learning modules and the formative assessment. These topics were often connected with the issues of self-assessment and self-regulation. Some of the critique focused on children's capacity to take responsibility for own learning and their ability to evaluate themselves, as some researchers claimed that children were given this kind of responsibility too early. We believed that children could take responsibility for their own learning, and they had demonstrated this in real-life situations already.

This critique and the debates in the media did cause some confusion among teachers, making

them question the reform and whether they should implement it or not. This discussion was relatively heated a couple of years ago, but now it has calmed down. Most of the discussions were, however, about how best to implement the reform, and not necessarily against the content of the reform.

Education system coherence

16. How do you support teachers in adapting their teaching practices as envisaged in this reform?

According to law, the main responsibility for supporting teachers and providing training for teachers falls under the municipalities. In addition, the National Agency for Education provides workshops for municipal authorities, school principals, teachers and other school staff. It also produces supporting materials and allocates financial resources for universities and private organisations to provide training for these groups. All training is provided free of charge.

17. What role does the assessment system play in this reform?

We do not have national census-based assessments and the schools are not compared to each other. This is to foster school cooperation rather than competition. Instead, at a national level, we have a subject- and sample-based² evaluation of students for us to get an overview of how the country is doing academically. These tests are now becoming more PISA-like and include areas such as problem-solving and creativity.

The role of formative assessment of learning outcomes is emphasised in the reform. Assessments are done by the teachers who construct their own tests based on what the children have been learning. These assessments are used as a learning process for the students as well. They learn to set goals, assess how they are doing and give feedback to others. Students are not compared to each other. In the multi-disciplinary learning modules, teachers and students cooperate to give feedback.

There are no national guidelines for the assessment of social and emotional learning. General guidelines are included in the assessment criteria of each school subject. Teachers are implementing these criteria in their own assessment.

18. What are the challenges in assessing social and emotional learning?

There are no specific national guidelines for the assessment of social and emotional learning. There are, however, teacher education programmes that focus on social and emotional development, as well as supporting materials published on this topic.

Lessons

19. What were the key learnings from this experience?

It was fun and inspiring to go through the reform process together. The reform was a very involved process and we received feedback from more than 100 organisations.

I think one of the main learnings is that such a reform is possible only when you make it inclusive, when everyone is given the opportunity to voice their opinions and to give feedback to the draft suggestions. When people understand the purpose of the reform and participate in the formation of it, there is room for more ownership and acceptance. Clear guidelines and leadership are needed as well to keep the reform consistent.

20. What were the compromises you had to make for the reform to happen, if any?

Before this reform process, there had been an attempt to shift the system's focus from a subject-based to a more holistic one. This would have

² A representative sample of children from sampled schools are selected to take the test rather than having tests at each school

been a significant change to the National Education Decree and to the Basic Education law, and there was no general acceptance for that at the time. Instead, by introducing the seven transversal competences and the multi-disciplinary modules as part of this new curriculum reform, we were taking small steps towards holistic learning.

21. What could have been done differently?

The National Agency for Education did not have enough financial and human resources for the reform process. One of the processes we could have done better was communication. Even though we published everything, looking back, we might have needed an additional communications expert who could have communicated the reform in more efficient ways through visual images of the reform, for example, to make the information more easily accessible. We had a communication strategy, but we did not have enough resources to implement it the way we would have liked. I also wish we had conducted more workshops at every municipality. Once, after I retired, I was invited to talk about the reform in a teacher training session. One teacher said that this was what she would have needed to hear two years ago, when the reform was being implemented. Even though we did produce materials on video, and everything was published on our website, not all teachers were able to find it and use it.

Looking ahead

22. What advice do you have for education policymakers who want to create their own version of what you attempted in your country, or who have similar ambitions?

Firstly, it is important to try to understand what teachers think and what the needs of the schools and students are. Then, during the process, you need to create structures that make it possible for everyone to participate. Respect people you are working with

and appreciate good questions. Do not be afraid of debates and controversial opinions. Create space for discussions and support people in finding consensus. After that, communicate and communicate it well. Try to find ways to describe the reform that are understandable for everyone, especially for the practitioners and parents. The message must be clear, simple and visually well-done.



23. How does this reform influence how children are coping with the challenges of COVID-19?

The pandemic has been a very difficult period for many children and young people, especially with regard to their social and emotional development. As students stayed at home and could not meet each other, there was no live interaction between them. They have missed seeing their schoolmates, the community, and the teachers in person. Many children do not have enough support at home. However, teachers in Finland adapted very quickly. They reorganised their teaching to match the circumstances and tried to reach every student. In addition to digital teaching, many teachers held individual sessions with each student to ask how they were doing and feeling. The reform had encouraged the teachers to better listen to their students and support them by giving individual guidance and feedback. The COVID-19 period has also strengthened the importance of transversal competences, especially those relating to self-care and managing daily life, thinking and learning to learn, digital competence, and multiliteracy.

SECTION 5

Peru



Angela Bravo

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About the contributor

Angela Bravo is currently a Management and Advocacy Specialist for the Horizons Program at the UNESCO Office in Lima. She is also a teacher trainer at Innova Teaching School. Between 2015 and 2017, Angela was a member of the curriculum reform team at Peru's Ministry of Education as coordinator of the curricular area of Education for Work and Employability. In 2019, she was appointed National Director of Secondary Education, in charge of curriculum implementation. In 2020, she was appointed National Director of Elementary Schools, responsible for all aspects of basic education.

Motivation and enabling environment

1. Why were social and emotional skills important in your country?

As a country, we have had a long-standing crisis in education, which became obvious when we ranked last in the PISA assessment of 2012, ranking 65th out of 65 countries. This put pressure on the Ministry of Education to reflect on how students were being taught and what they were learning in school.

The pressure allowed us to talk about deepening competency-based learning and how it might benefit teachers and schools. Competency-based learning encompasses both cognitive and social and emotional skills. By introducing such an approach, we can facilitate a more complete and holistic development of the students.

2. What are your country's pressing problems, and how can social and emotional skills help to solve them?

Although it is not widely known outside of the country, Peru has problems of violence (particularly against women), racism, and classism. As a Ministry of Education, we were interested in tackling these issues by developing the 'whole person' through education. The competency-based curriculum was designed to develop three pillars: competencies, social and emotional learning, and citizenship skills. These three pillars are defined as part of an ideal profile for the students included in the curriculum along with seven cross-curricular approaches.

Political and Institutional Context

Peru underwent a period of curricular reforms between 2011 and 2016 including the establishment of learning standards. These were motivated by the low learning outcomes attained in national and international tests and were influenced by political and institutional changes. A timeline of significant decisions is provided below.



2011

The Education Plan (*Plan Bicentenario*) is published, confirming the need for establishing learning standards. This step was taken in response to challenges observed in curricular matters, with the National Curriculum Design (DCN, in Spanish), experiencing difficulties with the curriculum decentralisation process, and in response to low learning outcomes in national tests.

The development of standards in Peru was recommended in order to provide a common reference frame for improved articulation between curriculum and evaluation.

The Government of Ollanta Humala begins.

Administration of Minister of Education Patricia Salas begins.

2012

Minedu begins the development of a new guiding curricular instrument, which was called Curriculum Framework (in place of the DCN), with the goal of indicating more clearly the end-of-school learning objectives, and also started a pedagogical strategy based on the implementation of competence based learning standards called "Rutas de aprendizaje" (Learning Routes).

Administration of Minister of Education Jaime Saavedra begins.

2013

A public discussion of the Curriculum Framework begins.

PISA results shock the country.

2014

It is decided that the Curriculum Framework will not be made official and the DCN is maintained.

Ministerial Resolution RM-199 is published incorporating learning routes to the DCN.

2015

New versions of the learning routes are published in accordance with the areas of the DCN.

The development of a new curriculum design begins.

2016

The new curriculum, focus of this publication, is approved.

The Government of Pedro Pablo Kuczynski begins.

Source: SINEACE (2016).

3. What was the status of social and emotional skills development in your education system before the initiative?

Before the period of curricular reforms began with Patricia Salas in 2012, the curriculum was mainly knowledge-based and content-focused, even though the previous reforms in the 2000s were aligned to a capability-based curriculum closer to a competency-based approach. Teachers had been mentoring students and teaching social and emotional skills in a course called “Tutoring and Orientation” since the 1990s. However, that course is only taught by one teacher per class and is only given two hours per class every week.

This new curriculum directs teachers to work with each student individually. Every teacher should be actively involved in their students’ development of social and emotional and citizenship skills, and they should take on the role of a tutor. Teachers should no longer just teach basic subject knowledge, but should also focus on other competencies. As a result, the new curriculum aims to change the instructional methods of teachers, so that maths teachers, for example, in addition to teaching maths and subject knowledge, are able to facilitate the development of their students’ social and emotional skills and their sense of responsibility as citizens in society.

4. What led to the decision to reform? What evidence, political incentives and interests converged to cause the government to take action?

The National Education Law mandates that the curriculum is reviewed every five years. Previously, this was mostly a technical process led by a Curriculum Committee. Discussions were held with a small number of stakeholders, including the National Council of Education, university academics, and curriculum specialists both from the Ministry of Education and from external institutions.

In 2011, there was a change in government. Ollanta Humala’s reformist government prioritised issues of social stability, social mobility and structural inequality. They appointed a new Minister of Education, Patricia Salas O’Brien, a reformer who was worried about the low educational quality

and the inequality in education as evidenced by national assessments results. She worked to resolve curricular discrepancies and confusion caused by three instruments that governed curriculum matters concurrently but not coherently: the curricular guideline (National Curriculum Design), the progress maps (*mapas de aprendizaje*) mandating learning at the end of each level, and the grade-level learning paths (*rutas de aprendizaje*). She started an advocacy campaign to change the curriculum into a competency-based curriculum and mobilised the National Council of Education. Her advocacy for a competency-based curriculum received enthusiastic support from national and international stakeholder groups. She produced the draft of a new curriculum document.

When the 2012 PISA assessment results were published in December 2013, the urgency of a change in direction became obvious, and the government declared a national educational emergency. In this context, Jaime Saavedra Chanduvi became the Minister of Education. He maintained public debate on the curriculum and completed the revision of the curriculum by 2016.

Since then, curricular matters have piqued the interest of not just technical staff but also the general public due to the rise of contrasting political agendas in the country.

“When the 2012 PISA assessment results were published in December 2013, the urgency of a change in direction became obvious, and the government declared a national educational emergency.”

“There was an overall surge of interest in competency-based learning and in changing the curriculum inspired by experiences from other countries.”

5. Who were the most important people or actors influencing the reform?

Patricia Salas O'Brien, the former Minister of Education, and her successor, Jaime Saavedra Chanduvi, were key figures in the reform. Academics were also vocal supporters of the reform at the time, and articles supporting competency-based learning were published by universities with education faculties. There was an overall surge of interest in competency-based learning and in changing the curriculum inspired by experiences from other countries. The Finnish education system was used quite frequently to make the case about the advantages of the competency-based approach. In practice, however, most people working on the design and implementation plan for curriculum reform were the technical staff from the Ministry of Education, like Lilia Calmet, who was the coordinator of the curricular area of Citizenship.

The reform

6. What was the main focus of the reform related to social and emotional skills?

Patricia Salas, the former Minister of Education, introduced the notion of developing “competencies” of students in a new guiding curriculum instrument called the Curriculum Framework. Although that version of the curriculum was never made official, it served as the foundation for our work.

Jaime Saavedra, who was the Minister of Education at the time, maintained reform efforts but devised a new curriculum design that could be implemented, ironing out some of the challenges of the earlier version. This curriculum focused on competency-based learning (30 competencies of which two relate to social and emotional skills) and included the holistic development of students, which means that all competencies are equal in terms of priority and that knowledge, skills and behaviours are developed simultaneously.

The two social and emotional skills competencies are:

- **Competency 1:** Creating an identity, which includes skills like self-regulation.
- **Competency 16:** Live democratically and contribute in the pursuit of the common good, which includes skills such as interacting with others, creating and upholding agreements, and handling conflict constructively.



The reform programme was not limited to curriculum change. Another main element of his educational reform programme was the enhancement of teacher capacity and teacher recognition. The reform established a National Directorate of Teacher Wellbeing, which designed a strategy for improving teachers' salary base.

To align the education system to the reform, student and teacher assessments were also changed. There were no formative assessments prior to the reform – students were graded based on a scale of 0 to 20. Formative assessments using rubrics are now required. The letter grade now represents the level of competence based on the curriculum. Teachers, both new and experienced, are evaluated on a competency-based curriculum.

7. To what extent did play factor in the initiative and contribute to the outcome?

The curriculum does not directly specify the pedagogical approach on how things should be taught. However, the use of project-based learning, role-play and exploration are common activities expected of teachers. When I was in charge of basic education, we trained teachers to use play-based learning and project-based learning in subjects such as Education for Work and Employability, Tutoring and Orientation, Social Personal Development and Citizenship. We made an attempt to show teachers how play may lead to actual learning outcomes. Some teachers, on the other hand, did not see play as a tool.

8. What was your role in relation to the initiative?

The Ministry of Education is organised by Directorates at each education level. In each Directorate there is a team in charge of the curriculum area for each subject. These micro-teams worked closely together and across education levels under a coordinator in charge of designing the new curriculum and its implementation plan. In 2014, the team worked on the earlier version of the curriculum that was not approved. In 2015, I was one of the new people brought in to oversee the coordination of Education for Work and Employability as part of the curriculum reform introducing entrepreneurship, innovation, creativity and social and emotional skills.

Reform process / implementation

9. Could you describe the overall process in designing and implementing the reform?

The reform process began after the Minister of Education, Patricia Salas O'Brien, first lobbied for it. Her version of the curriculum was written with the goal of bringing about systemic change through a comprehensive reform, for example, calling for the elimination of subject-based instruction. That made some aspects of the curriculum challenging to implement; teachers were normally hired based on subjects and the system could not adjust in a timely manner. Teachers would have to be recruited in a different way if we moved away from that system. We were not able to implement a new system for the recruitment of teachers in time to accommodate the changes. In secondary education there are still subject-specific teachers for each subject and subject-based timetables and materials.

“Social and emotional skills are now well understood in the system and most teachers are fully aware of their importance and their benefit to students.”

As soon as the PISA results were released, and we were ranked last, the curriculum reform discussions were fast-tracked. There had been media coverage on how Peru had “the worst education system in the world”. The new Minister of Education (Jaime Saavedra) reacted by devising a strategy, which he did admirably. Jaime Saavedra took advantage of this situation, advocated for the reform, and it gained traction. The National Council of Education, a five-year-appointed roundtable of education experts, urged that we examine curriculum implementation more closely.

The new version of the curriculum approved and publicised in 2016 was less radical than the curriculum proposed previously. It allowed the system to adjust to changes without collapsing. We tried to strike a balance between the need for new pedagogical approaches that support competency-based learning, and the desire for a curriculum that existing teachers and the system could implement.

There were also insufficient resources to implement the plans and train teachers. In addition, there was a change in government shortly after the reform was passed. Between 2016 and 2018, we had three ministers of education, and also faced teachers strikes. In 2018, Peru regained some political stability. The new Minister of Education announced that the curriculum would be implemented in all schools.

“Teachers, who are the ones teaching in the classrooms, were noticeably absent from the debates about curriculum change. This created an issue during implementation that had to be dealt with later on.”

When I was the National Director of Secondary Education (in 2019), we developed textbooks and materials to help teachers understand how the curriculum could be implemented. We experimented with a variety of methods, including videos and manuals detailing pedagogical strategies. As we did not have many resources, we focused on providing materials and technical assistance based on what teachers were doing. We tried to instil in teachers that the reform is beneficial for students and can be implemented in classrooms. Throughout 2019, we motivated teachers to want to be a part of the reform.

In 2019, we also worked on revising the implementation plans and advocated for additional financial resources. We received some budget for teacher training, which we used to create courses on how to implement project-based learning and social and emotional learning. This came to a halt when the pandemic arrived. However, during the pandemic, we also introduced competency-based learning and social and emotional learning materials into the remote learning programme and emphasised to teachers that the social and emotional aspect of students is one of the top priorities.

Social and emotional skills are now well understood in the system and most teachers are fully aware of their importance and their benefit to students.

10. Which stakeholders were engaged and why?

The reform was externally imposed on the system through a top-down approach to the process. The Minister of Education, the directors, and the teams within the Ministry all played key roles in the reform. We believed that the curriculum reform would drive further reforms in pedagogy, textbooks, teacher training, and mentoring. We based our decision on the assumption that if the curriculum changed, other components in the system would also change.

We did not have in-depth discussions with the local and regional governments nor the teachers about the implementation of the new curriculum. We were in a rush to publish the curriculum as we thought the system needed this instrument first before changing the pedagogy, teacher recruitment, teacher training, or evaluation - all of which we wanted to affect before the new government took office.

Teachers, who are the ones teaching in the classrooms, were noticeably absent from the debates about curriculum change. This created an issue during implementation that had to be dealt with later on.

11. How was the reform communicated to key stakeholders?

We spoke with parents of both private and public-school students and with teachers. We

had consultations with parents, regional leaders, teachers, students, and teacher trainees. We held various roundtable discussions to present the curriculum and implementation areas. Curriculum versions were made available online for stakeholders to review and comment on. It was a participatory exercise, but it was not widely disseminated and therefore not well publicised among all stakeholders. We were also trying to convince stakeholders and bring them on board once the reform was implemented, rather than having included them already at the design stage. Parents and teachers were not included at the early stages of the reform process.

12. Did you get any pushback, and how was this managed?

There were several kinds of pushback from key stakeholders such as private school parents and teachers.

The first pushback came from private school parents. As the curriculum applies to the whole system, it needs to be implemented by both public

and private schools. By law, private schools are allowed to make changes to the curriculum and introduce their own system, such as the International Baccalaureate degree, as long as their school system is aligned to the base curriculum. Some parents stated that their children's schools were already applying a competency-based curriculum. Others, particularly influential and resourceful parents, who had themselves been taught in a content-based curriculum, saw no need for change in the curriculum. We dealt with this pushback by developing a communication strategy to support competence-based learning, based on the PISA findings, and navigated the problem technically, with assistance from UNESCO and UNICEF staff advocating for competence-based learning.

The curriculum's gender-inclusive approach elicited a second outcry from the conservative segment of society. The curriculum stated that gender roles are created by social interactions and not biology. The conservative segment of society, mostly religious parents and communities, started a movement against the whole curriculum, which was backed up by the opposition party. They campaigned for



curriculum revisions claiming the curriculum would create confusion in children about their sexuality and sexual identity, and claimed that these ideas would affect families. We were not expecting such a strong pushback against one small part of a much larger document, to the extent that the entire document was tainted. We tried to communicate technically what the curriculum intended but it did not help. The government was very weak at the time and the curriculum became the centre of a political confrontation between the conservative and progressive sides of politics. This affected the implementation of the reform, and the funding tied to the curriculum was reduced. Congress summoned the Minister of Education to explain why the curriculum had changed and they revised the textbooks and materials to look for any “troubling” content. After some time, the political confrontation faded.

“We dealt with this pushback by developing a communication strategy to support competence-based learning, based on the PISA findings, and navigated the problem technically, with assistance from UNESCO and UNICEF staff advocating for competence-based learning.”

The third pushback came from the teachers. The curriculum reform was the starting point of numerous reforms, including the introduction of teacher performance assessments. In 2012, we passed a new legislation about teacher career progression based on meritocracy. Teachers who failed the assessment would be suspended, retrained, and re-evaluated. Teachers who did not

pass the re-assessment would be dismissed. When the curriculum was published, the performance assessment team was working on developing the rubrics to evaluate teachers. The teachers’ unions started a movement against this type of assessment, pointing out the risk of losing their jobs. They were mainly dissatisfied with the curriculum change because they did not receive training and instruments to implement it, and they were not consulted during the implementation phase. Almost 40,000 public school teachers went on strike for almost five months, and we lost almost a whole school year. We had to introduce remedial education for the students. It ended with the resignation of the Minister of Education. In the end, the teachers’ performance assessments were postponed.

To foster a culture change we need a constant dialogue. The change of mentality is still a work in progress. It has been challenging to change the culture, especially when the teachers were not properly included in the design of the reform and the early implementation phase.

Outcomes of the reforms

13. What was the ambition or expected results?

The goal of the curriculum change was to improve educational quality. As a result, we anticipate improved educational quality and learning results, both nationally and in PISA assessments. The ambition was also to prepare the next generation of students to become better citizens by teaching social and emotional skills. The first part of the curriculum describes the profile of the kind of people we want our kids to become in the future. We believed that by changing the way schools teach and look, we could form better citizens and transform society.

14. What were the achieved results? Were there any that were unexpected?

Since we implemented the reform, the learning outcomes of our students have consistently improved. We also took a strong stance on teacher quality and qualifications and we tied these to salary improvements. We restored teachers’ professional autonomy and professional recognition, as well as the notion that teaching is one of the most important professions in the country. Teachers were empowered as a result of this structural change.

15. What enabled or hindered the reform?

A shared understanding of why the Peruvian education system needed a reform was what made a difference. Prior to this, there was consensus that education was failing, but no one was doing anything about it. There was no intention to act, no resources, and no capabilities to do so. The devastating PISA results instigated a change of mindset, and with that a sense of responsibility that the Ministry of Education had to do something about it. Jaime Saavedra strongly advocated for an increase in education financing. One of the important takeaways from the 2014 reform was that with resources, capabilities, and political intention, we can reform our education system.

Implementation has been hampered by political volatility, with the frequent turnover of presidents. The Ministry of Education has had to learn to adjust to this and to continue with the implementation plans as opportunities present themselves and resources become available.

Additionally, as the system is highly centralised, the reform could only happen if resources and frameworks were made available. Local communities and schools do not have the resources to implement changes on their own. We are actively advocating to change the system's governance. Local authorities should support schools in their reform efforts.

Education system coherence

16. How do you support teachers in adapting their teaching practices as envisaged in this reform?

The Ministry did not have a large budget to implement the curriculum when it was approved. There was some very basic training given to teachers, but this did not reach all teachers and was therefore insufficient to change teaching practices. The implementation was progressive, starting with urban elementary schools. From 2016 to 2017, the implementation was rolled out to public schools and other education levels.

Later, we used online training programmes to help teachers improve their practices. We also designed a mentoring programme for teachers. Instead of

organising mass trainings with teachers and experts, we hired mentors and sent them to schools as part of a national programme created in 2012 called *Acompañamiento pedagógico*. These mentors were sent to help improve and change pedagogical practices. Three years into the programme, an evaluation revealed positive results in terms of learning outcomes and students' attendance. It was, however, a very expensive programme that grew in terms of scale at a slower rate than other cheaper alternatives such as online trainings and talks with experts.

Textbook printing is an activity led by the Ministry of Education. At the Ministry, we produced new textbooks and resources to integrate competency-based learning in teaching practices. We began at the elementary level, where the curriculum was first implemented.

Previously, lesson plans were provided with stamped scripts of how the teaching should be done and what teachers should say. It was imposing and disrespectful for teachers and this brought about a movement against the reform. We hired an evaluator to investigate the matter and concluded that we should abandon this, as it only created more resistance to the reform. Instead, the materials we created are tools that teachers can choose to use in classrooms. For example, we have a poem that can be used in a language class. This poem can be used to teach social and emotional skills as it integrates ideas such as bullying. Similarly, we created teaching materials that can be used in many subjects and where social and emotional skills can be integrated into teaching. In History, rather than memorisation, we focused on discussions of citizenship, empathy, and how what happened in the past affects current events. Before the pandemic, we tried to create a platform where teachers can share how they implement the materials and learn from each other. All these efforts were put in place to empower teachers and let them be drivers of the reform.

17. What role does the assessment system play in this reform?

As discussed before, the 2012 PISA results shocked our country. When we changed the curriculum, we needed to ensure system alignment between the curriculum and the assessment system. We have a national assessment for all students in

“There is a need to equip teachers with tools so that they can assess students at the classroom level and prepare them for the national examinations.”

the second year of elementary and at the end of secondary education. The assessment changed to be competency-based. Additionally, in 2016, we started a programme to evaluate citizenship (the subject), which is sample-based. We participated in PISA assessment of citizenship and financial literacy in 2015.

The teacher assessment needed to change to focus on competence-based learning, deeper learning, and high-demand cognitive skills for both new and existing teachers. In mid-2017, we faced teacher resistance and widespread strikes. One of the reasons for the strikes was that we were assessing the teachers on the new curriculum despite the fact that they had not been trained in it. The assessment is now mandatory for all new teachers and for those that apply for a raise and a promotion.

We waited until 2019 to change classroom assessment from summative to formative assessments. We knew this was a contested issue as we had faced some resistance, especially from those who believed that students are motivated by grades and ranking. However, the pandemic started soon after the law was approved, and the resistance subsided.

In 2019, we started discussing the assessment of social and emotional skills. We used the pandemic as a driver to move the assessment forward, as it was not initially included in the budget. We conducted a phone-based assessment in 2020.

18. What are the challenges in assessing social and emotional skills?

The assessment of social and emotional skills is challenging, and we have put a lot of thought into this. There is a need to equip teachers with tools so that they can assess students at the classroom level and prepare them for the national examinations. We created observation sheets for teachers to check if students are developing the skills prioritised to help teachers provide feedback to students. Additionally, we had dialogue with teachers on aspects around social and emotional development. We introduced the use of diaries so that teachers could write down their teaching techniques and develop maps of emotions of their students – albeit this was often difficult in large classrooms.

We encouraged teachers to use conflicts as opportunities for learning, which was challenging because teachers often do not know how to use those encounters as learning opportunities in formal education.

At the system level, there are fewer challenges as assessments are conducted externally. We had discussions with universities on how to measure social and emotional skills and we commissioned a study. We participated in a regional assessment of social and emotional skills called Regional Table for Technical Cooperation on Transversal and Socioemotional Competences (MESACTS, in Spanish).

Lessons

19. What were the key learnings from this experience?

Reforms, especially those involving changed practices, mentality, and culture, cannot be implemented using a hierarchical top-down approach. The reform needs to be discussed with all stakeholders. We must respect the autonomy and experience of teachers and re-establish dialogue with stakeholders who might have been left out of the discussions. Ensuring involvement and ownership by all stakeholders enables us to implement a reform better, as it is not the Ministry imposing the reform on the stakeholders and the system.

We started to include all stakeholders in 2019 when I was National Director of Secondary Education. After a period of political turmoil where we could not implement it, we knew that we needed to involve the teachers. We needed to get them to understand the motivation of the reform and we needed them to buy into the reform. This process helped to change the tone of our conversations with teachers.

Competency-based learning is proven to lead to better results in teaching and learning. To accomplish this, everyone involved in the system must believe in it. We need to collaborate and discuss. Hence, all actors must be included, but especially those implementing the reform. It may require more time and effort to reach an agreement in negotiations but the alternative is having to introduce the reform from above and outside. It could be the best document in the world, but if the implementors are not buying into it, there will be setbacks.

20. What were the compromises you had to make for the reform to happen, if any?

We faced a debate about whether to keep the tutoring and mentoring subject that existed in previous versions of the curriculum. By retaining it, we risked giving teachers the impression that they do not need to teach social and emotional learning skills and competencies since there was already a class for it. Our stance now is that each teacher has to be a tutor. We advocated to keep it because even though we have social and emotional skills introduced in other subjects, these subjects are very important parts of school culture. The teachers also wanted to keep the subject in the timetable.

We developed teaching materials to help teachers navigate social and emotional skills learning across the curriculum. Furthermore, we emphasised that the two hours of tutoring do not replace the cross-curriculum approach. Both can exist at the same time.

21. What could have been done differently?

Consultation on curriculum reform is mandated by law. However, the legislation does not require that the process be participatory. There had been consultations, but curricular decisions had already

“Teachers should have been included from the beginning to be part of the movement for change. The fact that teachers had not been consulted about the reform might have been one of the reasons for the 4.5 month teacher strike in mid-2017.”

been made. Teachers should have been included from the beginning to be part of the movement for change. The fact that teachers had not been consulted about the reform might have been one of the reasons for the 4.5 month teacher strike in mid-2017.

Schools were not very open to change during the early days of the reform. There were teachers who wished to return to knowledge-based learning and preparing for university entrance because they believed that education was better in the past. While I also recognise it might have taken too long to get everyone on board, we should strive for a balance of having sufficient time for engaging key stakeholders but also carrying out the reform when the political window is open.

We also need better communication strategies, to communicate and discuss the reform with a wide range of stakeholders, from teachers to communities and parents. Everyone should be aware of what implications a curriculum change has for them.

Looking ahead

22. What advice do you have for education policymakers who want to create their own version of what you attempted in your country, or who have similar ambitions?

Reform can only happen successfully when all stakeholders are in support of it.

“The reform also created a national awareness of social and emotional development and wellbeing, reflected in several local strategies focussed on providing support to the students and their families during the pandemic.”

23. How does this reform influence how children are coping with the challenges of COVID-19?

A key aspect of Peru’s remote learning policy was including social and emotional learning in the National Curriculum. Social and emotional learning has been the backbone of the TV, digital and radio learning activities proposed by the Ministry of Education. The reform also created a national awareness of social and emotional development and wellbeing, reflected in several local strategies focussed on providing support to the students and their families during the pandemic.

In addition, the reform allowed the Ministry of Education to start a national evaluation of social and emotional learning in 2020 that is helping those advocating for change to get more resources for teacher training and to ensure technical support for the schools from psychologists and mental health professionals.

Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on the social and emotional development and wellbeing of students and their teachers and reversing this situation will need strong political will and well-designed education policies. These challenges are growing as the school system that has not fully reopened after 18 months of the pandemic.



SECTION 6

South Africa



Dr Komane Mphahlele

Deputy Director General (DDG) of Curriculum Management & Delivery, Limpopo Province Department of Education.

About the contributor

Dr. Mphahlele was a Chief Education Specialist within the National Centre for Curriculum Research and Development in the National Department of Education (DoE) during the National Curriculum reform journey (between 1998 and 2004). Prior to that, he was involved in the curriculum change process since the early 90s. Before the historic 1994 democratic elections, he was part of a team that trimmed gender and racial discriminatory overtones from the Apartheid syllabi. In 1995, Dr. Mphahlele was appointed as the National Curriculum Coordinator of Curriculum Development in a Task Team of four people that was appointed by the former DoE to develop the SYSTEM (Students and Youth into Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Programme. The programme was established to increase a pool of historically disadvantaged matriculants in mathematics and science as well as a cohort of new teachers with a SYSTEM diploma with competencies to increase the number of historically disadvantaged learners with good passes in mathematics, technology and sciences.

Motivation and enabling environment

1. Why were social and emotional skills important in your country?

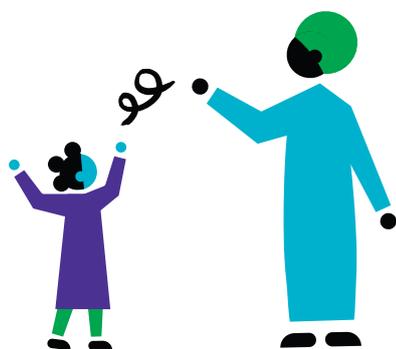
South Africa transitioned to democracy in 1994, resulting in the development of a new society based on the principles of freedom, equality, human rights, and justice. These principles, which were subsequently enshrined in our Constitution, needed to be expressed in the school curriculum. Many individuals were emotionally pained after decades of racial and gender discrimination; so it was evident to us that the notion of emotional intelligence, the self, and interpersonal relationships were crucial to make the new South Africa a free, democratic and inclusive society.

We could see that these ideas were prevalent in the African philosophy of "*Botho*" as expressed in Tswana-Sotho languages and "*Ubuntu*" as described in Nguni languages. It is also described as African humanism and is based on the idea that "I am because you are. You are because I am" or "If you feel pain, I also feel the pain and must be concerned about you". These values were absent from the pre-1994 curriculum. To address social, cultural and emotional skills, we decided to group them together in a new subject called Life Orientation, which focuses on the relationship between me and myself, me and society, me and my health, me and my career.

2. What are your country's pressing problems, and how can social and emotional skills help to solve them?

Poverty, unemployment, and inequality are the three primary challenges we face. Schools play a key role in teaching what it is to be an exemplary citizen, to be equal, and to have human rights. However, one subject (Life Orientation) alone cannot address these issues. It is the whole curriculum packaged into different subjects and other societal interventions and practices that will address these challenges.

COVID-19 has exacerbated these challenges, if it has not become our fourth problem. Africans live a communal life with strong kinship relations and communal networks. These socio-cultural ties are people's buffers in situations of unemployment, poverty, inequality and low income. COVID-19 has disrupted social and communal life, causing immeasurable pain with social distancing and isolation. People are more in need of psychosocial help than ever before. We need a network from the state to society to attend to people's social, cultural, and emotional needs.



Social and emotional skills were included in the South African curriculum as part of the national curriculum reform introduced when South Africa became a democracy. The reform was called "Curriculum 2005", reflecting the year in which the curriculum was expected to reach full implementation.

3. What was the status of social and emotional skills development in your education system before the initiative?

In schools, the focus was on reasoning, which was supported by a theory described as "scientific rationalism". There was no subject focusing on social and emotional skills such as Life Orientation. Career guidance was arguably the closest subject to Life Orientation, although at the time, it paid less attention on the social and emotional state of learners. At the very least, it focused on promoting and exposing learners to careers they could follow once they had completed their studies. In order to guide learners' future careers, IQ (Intelligence Quotient) testing was used to decide and guide which occupations learners could pursue.

Furthermore, we had Christian National Education (CNE) as a "philosophy" that guided the Government's education system prior to 1994. The majority of the subjects were influenced by a religious worldview based on Calvinism and Christianity, with hierarchical beliefs of a supreme creator at the top, followed by the supreme white race, and other races at the bottom of the proverbial ladder. In 1994, we all embraced freedom and a new inclusive worldview.

4. What led to the decision to reform? What evidence, political incentives and interests converged to cause the government to take action?

It was a confluence of circumstances that evolved over time. There was a struggle against colonialism that grew more organised in the 50s in reaction to a succession of acts that established the framework of the Apartheid State, most notably the Bantu Education Act (1953) which established a separate and distinctly unequal education system for the black population.

In 1955, the Freedom Charter advocated for equality and democratic values that needed to find expression in society. This was a struggle that occurred outside of the formal education system. Almost a decade later, unprecedented upheavals such as the youth uprising that took place in 1976 increased the pressure for the government to realise the visions enunciated in the Freedom Charter.

In the mid-80s, concerned parents took over the responsibility of channelling the energies of resistance in an attempt to avert the events of 1976. One of the decisions taken was to launch the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC) to bring civic organisations, student organisations, school governing boards, political organisations, and teacher organisations together under one umbrella in pursuit of the struggle for freedom and equality in education. The NECC was a component of a mass democratic movement whose focus was to champion democratic ideals in education.

In order to galvanise society around common education ideals, the NECC championed what was coined “people’s education” and gave voice and content to what “people’s education” should look like in a post-Apartheid system. In the 1990s, these concepts began to be expressed in government documents.

“...we brought people who had historically been excluded to work together with those who had historically been advantaged, ensuring that differing world views, and views on how the new curriculum should be organised, were included.”

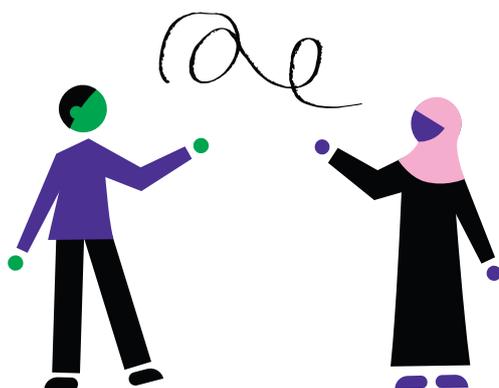


5. Who were the most important people or actors influencing the reform?

Mass mobilisation was the driving force behind change. However, the most important document that influenced our curriculum was the new Constitution, which was adopted in 1996 (two years after the interim Constitution). Once the new constitution was adopted, the National Education Policy Act of 1996 was approved, granting the Minister of Education the authority to develop new curricula and establish teams to develop subjects aligned to the new curriculum. The new curriculum was introduced in 1998.

We engaged in a participatory process. It was a careful process that involved the creation of various committees such as subject committees and learning area committees with representatives from provinces and other stakeholder bodies and formations. Additionally, we brought people who had historically been excluded to work together with those who had historically been advantaged, ensuring that differing world views, and views on how the new curriculum should be organised, were included. As previously stated, Calvinism was a dominant doctrine that promoted certain misconceptions in fields such as science and was also utilised to suit the interests of the dominant white race.

We were able to implement a curriculum that represented the ideals of a new, free and democratic society; thanks to the new Constitution that espoused the ideals of freedom, democracy, equality and justice. It was the founding document from which we were all working, and the framework that allowed us to reach “sufficient consensus” in curriculum matters.



The reform

6. What was the main focus of your reform related to social and emotional skills?

Many people’s self-concepts and self-images had been diminished as a result of decades of systematic discrimination and exploitation. The Life Orientation subject seeks to enhance positive self-concept and self-image through a topic area called “Relationship building” as understood below:

- **Relationship with Yourself:** This thrust seeks to develop a positive person, who must also be healthy. As a result, health promotion became a priority or learning outcome. In Africa, unlike the West that focuses on the mind (thinking), we place emphasis on the heart (feeling). Therefore, health promotion is not just for physical health, but also the health of the heart.
- **Relationship with Others (neighbours, fellow citizens, community, and society):** According to the *Botho/Ubuntu* philosophy, “I am a part of them, and they are a part of me”, social development also became a learning outcome of the subject.
- **Relationship with Work:** This focus is about students knowing their own talent and potential, so that they can pursue the right career for themselves, with the help of teachers and parents. Hence the inclusion of the learning outcome called “orientation to the world of work” for the senior phase (grades 7-9).
- **Constitutional Rights and Responsibilities:** The initial emphasis of policy work was on rights, as provided for in the Bill of Rights included in Chapter 2 of South Africa’s Constitution of 1996. Later, in 2008, the Department of Basic Education launched the Bill of Responsibilities, which include responsibilities that cover the youth’s rights to equality, human dignity, life, family/parental care, education, work, property, citizenship, freedom of expression, a safe environment, religion, belief and opinion. Both rights and responsibilities are important and need to be respected and practised in order to produce a balanced individual and society.

7. To what extent did play factor in the initiative and contribute to the outcomes?

Physical development is an integral part of the holistic approach adopted by the Life Orientation subject statement. Play is an important contributor to physical development. Activities associated with play include sport, games and recreation. In the past, play used to be viewed more as an extra-curricular activity than part of a school subject. Achievement of the Physical Development and Movement Learning Outcome is demonstrated when learners are able to perform in physical activities, participate in play, apply basic first aid techniques and evaluate game plans.

8. What was your role in relation to the initiative?

In 1995, I was appointed as a National Curriculum Coordinator of the SYSTEM (Students and Youth into Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Programme. When I was working with SYSTEM, the National Centre for Curriculum Research and Development (NCCRD) was created, and I was the first official to be appointed to it based on my curriculum background. The curriculum interventions I worked on included trimming Apartheid curricula before 1994, SYSTEM curriculum with effect from 1995, Curriculum 2005 (named after the year of expected full implementation) with effect from

1996. I was appointed into the NCCRD in 1998 when Prof Bengu was the Minister of Education. In 1999, the new Minister, Professor Asmal, was appointed and began his tenure by reviewing Curriculum 2005 (C2005) because of societal dissatisfaction with its rollout. I was the only official in the C2005 Review Committee that was appointed by Prof Asmal. This appointment ensured my continuous involvement in curriculum change in South Africa. We found that C2005 was overly complex and recommended that it should be streamlined to focus on two design features: learning outcomes and assessment standards.

“Physical development is an integral part of the holistic approach adopted by the Life Orientation subject statement. Play is an important contributor to physical development.”



Reform process and implementation

9. Could you describe the overall process in designing and implementing the reform?

At a national level, the broad education policy and framework were provided. At a provincial level, the focus was more on curriculum implementation. As we introduced the Life Orientation subject, we encountered some implementation challenges. Teachers had not been trained beforehand on how to teach it because it was a new subject. Furthermore, because it was a fundamental³ subject, we needed to make sure there was enough capacity to deliver it. We negotiated with provinces, as they are responsible for appointing teachers, to ensure its successful delivery. The provinces then negotiated with the labour unions and other stakeholders to ensure successful implementation of the curriculum in general and the Life Orientation subject in particular. We identified how many teachers were needed and analysed budget constraints. We redeployed and retrained teachers to ensure these new subjects were supported during implementation.

“Stakeholders who could not be represented in the Committee were also given the opportunity to participate. In this way, the whole society was given an opportunity to engage in the curriculum change process.”

10. Which stakeholders were engaged and why?

South Africa has a history of representative and participatory democracy. We ensured that all key role-players and stakeholders participated in the curriculum change process through formal structures and also as individuals.

To ensure an active and participatory way of developing the curriculum, the Minister of Education formed a Minister Project Committee with a management role, and Reference Group of stakeholders with an oversight role. The latter consisted of representatives from labour unions, school governing bodies, higher education institutions, provinces and professional associations operating in many technical fields. There was representativity in terms of stakeholders and role-players but also in terms of individual intellectual capital, with experts from various fields. The bureaucrats were also involved because they would be expected to institutionalise the adopted change process and products once the development process was over. Curriculum drafts were also made available to the public for comments. Stakeholders who could not be represented in the Committee were also given the opportunity to participate. In this way, the whole society was given an opportunity to engage in the curriculum change process.

11. How was the reform communicated to key stakeholders?

The legal frameworks provide ways in which Government communicates with society and shares information and records. The Ministry was in charge of communicating the decisions related to the reform process. For example, the Minister would call a press conference before the beginning of a change process, make a call to society, participate in public meetings and announce results of the change process through press conferences and media.

12. Did you get any pushback, and how was this managed?

Pushbacks are an integral part of any change. Change cannot happen on its own. It is neither smooth nor uncontested. We must expect, accept, and embrace

³ Fundamental means “mandatory”. All learners are expected to learn fundamental subjects.

'pushbacks'. When the committee for curriculum change was founded, we wanted to bring people of diverse backgrounds together. 'Pushbacks' can be managed with regular meetings, workshops and consultative forums to regularise and institutionalise change, and by having a flexible framework that accommodates different views and opinions. A reform is not an event. It is a journey with milestones whose implementation is negotiated on an ongoing basis.

We dealt with 'pushbacks' via negotiations of meanings and recording 'sufficient consensus' once it was reached. We paused, reflected and made sure everyone was on board. We used a consensus approach, rather than divide and rule (voting) approach. If people were not ready, we did not impose implementation. We allowed ideas to evolve and reach a level of maturity before they were adopted.

Outcomes of the reforms

13. What was the ambition or expected results?

The expected results of the reform were curricula that would produce a better, well-rounded citizen with competencies to live in a democratic society and face a future that is growing more uncertain and chaotic. These expectations are captured in the outcomes of the Life Orientation subject itself. They cover the development of an individual who is well-rounded, balanced, has a positive self-concept, positive self-image, and is able to relate with others, and the world. These expectations are connected to the national developmental outcomes described in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which focus on the emotional and cultural aspect, dealing with talents, relationships with others, and rights to equality, freedom, liberty, exploiting career opportunities and denouncing discrimination. It is intended that learners of the Life Orientation subject should be in harmony with nature, live well with others, know themselves, integrate their knowledge into vocations, and support local livelihoods.

14. What were the achieved results? Were there any that were unexpected?

We have the experience of what it means to implement a new curriculum. Students have gone through the same curriculum in their twelve years of

“A reform is not an event. It is a journey with milestones whose implementation is negotiated on an ongoing basis.”

schooling. We think that is an achievement in itself as you are able to know how your system works with regard to the new curriculum, where you need to fix it, and where you need to improve it.

We are also able to understand how students perform. We have, currently, a single measure that is used to measure the performance of the education system – and that is grade 12 external examination. However, recently, the Minister has released a new draft General Education Certificate (GEC) policy document for piloting. This new qualification would allow learners to achieve the first qualification at the end of grade nine and use it to determine the career options the learner wants to pursue afterwards. The learner can choose from academic, technical-vocational and technical-occupational pathways. This will be a great opportunity to reduce the burden that has been placed on the academic pathway since 1994, enabling us to strengthen the education system and ensure it prepares learners with diverse talents and gifts for the future.

“We paused, reflected and made sure everyone was on board. We used a consensus approach, rather than divide and rule (voting) approach.”

15. What enabled or hindered the reform?

As mentioned previously, the reform was made possible by maintaining representation and achieving 'sufficient consensus' throughout the process. When people were not ready, we allowed time for ideas to be understood and developed before implementing them.

Education system coherence

16. How do you support teachers in adapting their teaching practices as envisaged in this reform?

The implementation of the first iteration of Curriculum 2005 was hastily executed and left little time to retrain the teachers. With the curriculum being streamlined and strengthened, more efforts are put into maximising use of in-service training to enhance educators' competence to deliver the curriculum. In addition, professional support is provided to schools by curriculum advisors and senior management teams. Bursaries are also given to those who want to either train as educators or improve competencies or qualifications of serving educators.

17. What role does the assessment system play in this reform?

Assessment is an integral part of the official curricula. According to the National Curriculum Statements, assessments must adhere to the constitutional principles of fairness, equity, transparency, and justice. They play an important role in the curriculum since they indicate whether or not the learners are performing at expected levels.

18. What are the challenges in assessing social and emotional skills?

The curriculum statements define different types of assessment to track learner performance. The chief method propagated in official curriculum policy documents is continuous assessment. This form of assessment regularly assesses learner's progress towards a defined standard. It uses a variety of strategies that cater for, amongst others, physical, psychological and emotional needs of learners. Such strategies are able to monitor learning progress in Life Orientation. Unlike other subjects with well-established "conceptual spines", Life Orientation is largely assessed through the formative (school-based) methods during the course of the year. The other subjects with long-established discipline knowledge are largely assessed through summative assessments at the end of the academic year.

Is there anything else you would like to add, for example any comments on culture change necessary for reforms, or how change was influenced at different stakeholder levels?

Change management is an essential component of the curriculum change process. The South African setting required an inclusive approach to bring together diverse populations which were previously separate from each other, to formally collaborate and cooperate on the design and piloting of new curricula. Collaborative processes were established such as regular meetings, workshops, and field-testing exercises. The outcomes of the resultant curriculum proposals played an important role in facilitating change and creating what has been described as "new traditions". Consequently, society as a whole collectively embraced the process and developed a sense of ownership of the curriculum policy statements.



Lessons

19. What were the key learnings from this experience?

We learnt to be pathfinders and ground-breakers. Implementing an outcomes-based curriculum for the first time in the history of South Africa at a time when the State was amalgamating different race and ethnic-based departments into a single non-racial, non-sexist and democratic institution, was a big achievement.

The key learnings from the experience of introducing a new, inclusive curriculum into the previously segregated education system in 1998 can be summarised as follows:

- Thinking through the most appropriate design is important and provides a platform on which successful implementation will depend.
- Ensuring a representative and participatory approach in designing and piloting of a new curriculum design promotes ownership.
- Building optimal capacities and capabilities prior to implementing system curriculum change interventions increases the chance of success.
- Continuously and persistently implementing the change process over a period of time makes the impact sustainable.
- Leadership that has been legitimised and rooted in knowledge and communities of practice is key to successful change process.

20. What were the compromises you had to make for the reform to happen, if any?

Compromises are part of any negotiation. In principle, it is important to understand what type of citizen must emerge from the educational system. We wanted a well-balanced, well-rounded, and confident citizen.

Deciding which contents to include, on the other hand, can spark a heated debate such as in the Life Orientation subject, where the inclusion of sexuality topics was contested. Typically, these issues were

settled utilising the “sufficient consensus” approach I alluded to earlier. At times, we delayed certain decisions until there was sufficient consensus to take the process forward. This was the case with, for example, the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the first iteration of Curriculum 2005. We realised that the system was not ready in the first administration of post 1994 dispensation and did not proceed with the implementation. With time, and after the first curriculum review, we managed to include it as a principle by reframing it and adapting it to suit local worldviews of different communities.

21. What could have been done differently?

Learning happens in practice and is affected by a range of factors, some are within the control of the Department of Education and some are outside its control. The key question, therefore, is not what could have been done differently but how will we use lessons learnt to inform future curriculum change processes. As we say in Sesotho: “bohlahe bo tšwa lebadings” (its direct translation is: wisdom comes from scars). Simply put, it means we needed these scars in order to be wiser.

Looking ahead

22. What advice do you have for education policymakers in other countries who might want to design and implement a similar education reform?

First, curriculum reform is a journey. It requires engagement and must be negotiated. There will be struggles of ideas and contestations. It is neither smooth nor linear. With this understanding, half of the work is completed.

Second, the curriculum design needs to be embraced by all from the start. It is better to spend more time at the design level to get the constitutive design and underpinnings right and support from key role-players and stakeholders. After that, regulatory frameworks and policies should be approved to enable efficient and effective implementation of the curriculum change process. The curriculum reform process must be inclusive. Everyone needs to be able

“...it is a long journey, with no short cuts or quick fixes. It is, therefore, important to maintain institutional memory as new people come into the system.”

to participate freely and actively in the negotiation process. Inclusivity can delay the work, as you want everyone to be on board, but this is an important process that cannot be bypassed.

Third, it is a long journey, with no short cuts or quick fixes. It is, therefore, important to maintain institutional memory as new people come into the system. At the country-level, we need people who were there from the start who can take people along and understand the subtexts, contexts and pretexts of the official curriculum over a long period of time (measured in decades).

23. How has this reform influenced how children are coping with the challenges of COVID-19?

COVID-19 brought a different spin to the situation, and Life Orientation is the subject that has helped us to teach learners about the pandemic. This subject was also used to educate learners and teachers about HIV-AIDS.

To cope with the pandemic, we partnered with many institutions and organisations, including commercial and community-based radio stations. This is because radio is the most powerful vehicle with the potential to reach the poorest of the poor during the lockdown. More importantly, radio reaches everyone because it is also broadcast in local languages. For those with access to technology, we have provided free and zero-rated educational programmes online and effectively used WhatsApp group platforms to reach teachers, learners and parents. The pandemic has been catalytic in transitioning the use of traditional face-to-face methods into the exploitation of the virtual environment to deliver and assess the implementation of official curricula.



SECTION 7

South Korea



Professor Ju-Ho Lee

Chairperson of the Education Commission Asia

About the contributor

Professor Ju-Ho Lee began his career as a professor at the KDI School of Public Policy and Management, before being appointed to the National Assembly (legislation) from 2004 to 2007. After that, he became a Senior Advisor to the President for Education, Science, and Culture in the administration of Lee Myung-bak (2008). He then became a Vice Minister in 2009, and the Minister of Education between 2010 and 2013. He is now a Commissioner for the Education Commission as well as the Chairperson of Education Commission Asia, where he is a pioneer of "High Touch High Tech", which employs artificial intelligence to assist personalised learning.

Motivation and enabling environment

1. Why were social and emotional skills important in your country?

There is a lot of pressure on students in Korea's school system to improve their exam results to get into prestigious universities. This is at the expense of other important areas of personal development such as social and emotional learning and sports. The pressure is similar to that of a pressure cooker. There is a saying that perfectly expresses this: "If you sleep four hours, you can pass; but if you sleep five, you can fail." This pressure extends across the whole system and country. As a result, we wanted to address the strong imbalance between academic performance and non-cognitive learning caused by the college admission process.

2. What are your country's pressing problems, and how can social and emotional skills help to solve them?

The Korean education system has constantly been praised by foreigners because we consistently rank at the top in academic performance in international tests. However, our students often deal with very serious issues like depression and growing levels of bullying in schools. We have a crisis which became evident in December 2011 when we lost one of our pupils to suicide due to being bullied.

“In accordance with the OECD survey results in 2006, Korean students’ academic achievement was one of the highest among the OECD member nations but the competence to interact in heterogeneous groups, which means the ability to relate well to others and cooperate with, came in the bottom group”.

Source: Oh Seok-hwan et al. (2013). ‘Opening a New Era of Character Education’, in Lee, Ju-Ho (ed.) *Positive Changes*, Seoul: Korean Economic Daily & Business Publications Inc., p. 248

The college admissions process is also the most stressful aspect of the education system. It still is, even after the changes I introduced to the process. Regardless of our reforms, teachers, students and parents are primarily interested in test results.

Korean students’ ability to trust and cooperate with others is lower than that of other advanced nations’ students. The rates of obesity, depression experience, and Internet addiction are on the rise. There are students who suffer from physical and mental violence by attackers without feeling guilty with other peers watching and doing nothing. This led to several casualties when students could not cope with the assaults and bullying any more.⁴ We believe that strengthening character education would help counteract, and alleviate, some of these difficulties.

3. What was the status of social and emotional skills development in your education system before the initiative?

South Korea had been influenced by Confucian culture which traditionally respects teaching and learning. Learning was particularly important for the governing elites’ life and Confucian instruction

included how you live and contribute to society and family. As we evolved into a modern society this long tradition was radically weakened.

One of the key features of modern Korean society is meritocracy. Unlike other countries, we radically erased social classes since independence in 1945. Syng-man Rhee, the founding father of the South Korean government, implemented radical reforms on land and education based on the notion that democracy can only be achieved when people have equitable access to economic resources.

Syng-man Rhee believed that an education based on liberty and fairness was essential in the formation of a new nation. As a result, he ensured that everyone would have equal access to economic resources and that every child received a quality basic education. Despite the Korean War, enrolment grew quickly, and we were able to accomplish universal basic education in just one generation. By 1980, we had a 100% enrolment rate in elementary (6 years) and junior level schools (3 years). Unlike other countries, the ‘public education system’ in South Korea also includes private schools. That is, all teacher salaries, public and private, are paid by the government. The South Korean education system abolished all elite schools through an equalisation policy, which is a unique feature of the South Korean education system to achieve quality education for all. The elite schools were originally set up to meet students’ diverse needs, but they did not have to follow South Korea’s national curriculum and were increasingly criticised for providing the more privileged families a leg-up into the country’s top universities. This created disparities in society, given that in South Korea a college degree is a major factor in determining one’s future from employment to marriage prospects.

Since then, there is a strong and widespread conviction in the transformative power of education – education is the vehicle for leading better lives, accessing better job opportunities, and pay compensation. We have witnessed how investing in education has transformed South Korea into a rapidly growing economy.

For parents, the education of their children is a top priority. Parents understand the importance of social

⁴ Positive Changes: The Education, Science & Technology Policies of Korea (2013), edited by Ju-Ho Lee

and emotional learning and sports – however, it is far more crucial for their children to achieve higher test scores because this will allow them to progress to higher levels of education and achieve better life outcomes (through access to top universities and the ability to command greater salaries). People believe that graduates of Seoul National University lead far better lives, even though this is not always the case. Nonetheless, this story is deeply rooted in parents' minds.

The notion of character education has been part of the school discourse since 1995.⁵ However, in the midst of a cultural phenomenon that prioritises academic performance over all else, character education in schools and in society has been radically weakened. The fact that educational achievement is mostly measured by test scores limits the education system's capacity to foster creativity and build character in students.

“South Korean education was viewed as exemplary in the eyes of other world leaders with considerable resources and dedicated teachers. We, on the other hand, thought it lacked balance, particularly in terms of character education and creativity education.”



4. What led to the decision to reform? What evidence, political incentives and interests converged to cause the government to take action?

South Korean education was viewed as exemplary in the eyes of other world leaders with considerable resources and dedicated teachers. We, on the other hand, thought it lacked balance, particularly in terms of character education and creativity education.

There was pent-up demand for change from parents and students who were not happy with the pressure that the test-based education system placed on students. In addition, we also received input from the creative industry that South Korean education needed to provide a greater emphasis on soft skills, creativity, and social and emotional skills. Many top companies, such as Samsung, were complaining that Korean workers were not creative or collaborative.

Those two types of feedback, received from parents, students, and the industrial sector, were factors in my decision to make a change.

“We implemented a series of reforms to transition away from a test-based education system to one focused on “Educational Diversification”.”

5. Who were the most important people or actors influencing the reform?

Major policy reforms such as the one we introduced in 2008 to the Admissions Officer System (discussed below), required collaboration between the Presidential office, the Ministry of Education,

and the National Assembly. Education leaders and the teachers' union are equally crucial, and for the Admissions Officer System reform, university presidents were also heavily involved. We have a confederation of university presidents who are a powerful ally in making changes and ensuring that policies are followed.

The reform

6. What was the main focus of the reform related to social and emotional skills?

We implemented a series of reforms to transition away from a test-based education system to one focused on “Educational Diversification”.

We modified the Admissions Officer System in 2008 to reduce the pressure on students and so that the focus was not solely on academic achievement.

We knew from prior experience that teachers focus on what is assessed rather than what is in the curriculum, therefore this reform came first.

In 2009, we also changed the national curriculum to emphasise creativity and character education in every subject through project-based classes. We were worried about bullying and suicide rates among students and we saw character-building education as a fundamental solution to those issues. We were also successful in introducing more extracurricular activities, such as sports, and in allocating more instructional time to those.

We gave guidelines to teachers on how to conduct qualitative student performance assessments in classrooms. Additionally, we brought in brain scientists to conduct a seminar and to talk to parents to explain the importance of mental and physical wellness, including their children's sleep and engagement in sports.

We also established special vocational high schools as a viable alternative to universities, and a pathway into decent jobs - Meister High Schools. Meister High Schools had two goals: to alleviate the burden of the admissions system and to respond to economic

⁵ The concept was made public via a written report “The Agenda of Education Reform of the Establishment of a New Educational System” in 1995.

needs. Previously, vocational schools were thought to be inferior to universities. However, as vocational schools became more attractive, the pressure to attend prestigious universities diminished – this has been one of the primary achievements of the reform programme.

7. To what extent did play factor in the initiative and contribute to the outcomes?

The extracurricular activities such as sports and orchestra include elements of play. They are an effective means of developing mental capacity.

Even though I did not explicitly emphasise it, the change in direction of education made more space for play-based learning. In addition, play-based learning attracted attention from some teachers' and experts' groups.

8. What was your role in relation to the initiative?

First, as a Senior Advisor in 2008, I assisted in the development of the curriculum. Then, while serving as a Vice Minister and a Minister from 2009 to 2013, I oversaw the implementation of the reforms.

Discussed policy changes (2008-2013)

2008 Reform to the Admissions Officer System:

The government provided grants to 40-50 participating universities to hire admissions officers so that they could have dedicated personnel to assess students' applications using additional criteria, other than just test scores (such as school activities, essays, and recommendations, etc).

2009 Curriculum reform:

The 2009 curriculum emphasises creativity and character education in every subject. The reform introduced **Creative Experiential Learning (CEL)**, where students obtain creative hands-on activities and learning experiences inside and outside of school (e.g. at partner companies, museums, etc). These activities develop and grow the talents of students. The reform also increased the instructional time of **Extracurricular Activities**, which includes CEL, and activities such as sports, sports clubs, and students' orchestra programmes. Schools in rural areas were granted funds to purchase orchestral instruments, and Music Colleges were invited to provide lessons in these schools.

2010 Meister High Schools:

Meister—meaning master of trade— High Schools were promoted and supported, and incentives for getting students employed straight after high school graduation were improved. Partner companies were invited to co-develop the curriculum for these schools and also provide teacher training as part of public-private partnerships. The educational curriculum at these schools often incorporates cutting-edge technology as a result of these partnerships with business. To encourage businesses to collaborate with schools, all costs incurred by companies were reimbursed by the Ministry of Finance as a tax exemption policy.

2012 Counter-bullying Committee:

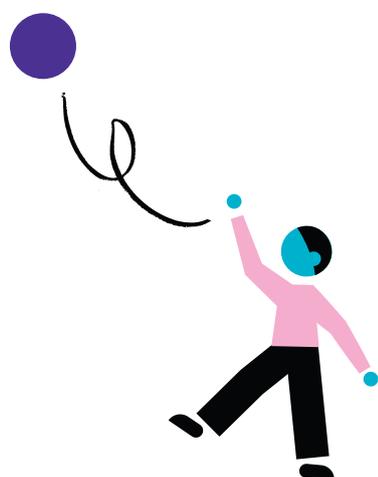
"Comprehensive Measures against School Violence" were announced to counter bullying in schools.

Reform process / implementation

9. Could you describe the overall process in designing and implementing the reform?

I can share my experience as a change-maker. As a scholar, I presented a reform package to the government. This was accepted by the political party, and, as a result, I was appointed to the legislature. I served as a proportionate representative of the National Assembly for four years. Proportionate representative positions are reserved in proportion to expertise. When the new president was running for office, he recruited me to design his campaign pledge, which included the Admissions Officer System as one of the policies. Once he was elected, we gained the legitimacy to approve the reform package. I was appointed as the Senior Advisor to the President on Education, Science and Culture. While in the president's office, I designed the entire package of reforms. Then, as a Vice Minister and as the Minister of Education, I was responsible for carrying out these plans. This consistency in policymaking made the change possible, and I was at the centre of the whole process.

“...the change in direction of education made more space for play-based learning.”



10. Which stakeholders were engaged and why?

Stakeholders who would be involved in the reform's implementation were engaged. In some cases, stakeholders were engaged largely in a top-down manner. For curriculum change, for example, these included teachers and the Local Education Offices in charge of teacher training. We engaged other stakeholders differently and with the right incentives.

11. How was the reform communicated to key stakeholders?

Many of the changes were announced by the Ministry. Reforms went more smoothly when there were incentives involved, such as the assistance offered to universities for hiring admissions officers and tax exemptions to businesses for the Meister High Schools.

12. Did you get any pushback, and how was this managed?

The reform to the college admission process received pushback from some parents, particularly parents who went to great lengths to guarantee that their children were admitted to prestigious colleges. Despite the financial burden, many parents would frequently hire private tutors to prepare their children for college admission examinations. When the admissions system changed to include new admissions criteria that involved qualitative judgments from admissions officers to evaluate students, it signalled a shift away from rote learning and quantitative evaluation. However, since private tutoring, which is most commonly sought to prepare students for tests, emphasises testing skills such as rote memorising, some parents felt they could no longer fully prepare their children for these tests. In particular, those who spend more on private tuition, such as highly educated parents or those with a high family income, had an incentive to maintain the status quo, because they had a market-based solution to provide an education for their children and to ensure entrance to top universities.

The Admissions Officer System remains divisive in the Korean educational system. Nonetheless, it is increasingly rooted in the system. The Admissions Officers System currently handles more than half of all university admissions, a continuous increase since

I left office in 2013, when it handled just 14 percent of all admissions.

Is there anything else you would like to add, for example any comments on culture change necessary for reforms, or how change was influenced at different stakeholder levels?

Realising change is not simple. I changed a lot of policies; however, the changes should, in my opinion, take the form of new learning models that can leverage the opportunities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. New technologies and pedagogies are changing our understanding of how learning takes place. Innovation in teaching, for example, requires all stakeholders at all levels (national, municipal, district and school) to be on board.

The top-down approach to implementing the reform was not able to create culture change among the stakeholders. When I returned to academia, teachers informed me that, as the Minister of Education, I was demanding too much of them when they were already overburdened. At the time of the reform, I was not aware of the situation, nor did I have the tools to alleviate their burden.

Outcomes of the reforms

13. What was the ambition or expected results?

The goal of the Education Diversification Reform, in addition to reducing the pressure of the test-based education system, was to make the entire system adaptable to the many needs and expectations of children, parents, businesses and society. As our country becomes more diverse and democratic, so must our education system. We attempted to accomplish this by placing a greater emphasis on social and emotional learning and creativity in addition to test scores, and by emphasising alternative vocational high schools such as the Meister High Schools to cater to the diverse competencies of students.

“The goal of the Education Diversification Reform, in addition to reducing the pressure of the test-based education system, was to make the entire system adaptable to the many needs and expectations of children, parents, businesses and society. As our country becomes more diverse and democratic, so must our education system.”

14. What were the achieved results? Were there any that were unexpected?

I believe the Admissions Officer System reform has brought about many positive changes in students' daily lives. Students can pursue their interests more freely and can enjoy activities such as sports because these activities contribute to building a more holistic student profile that is valued as part of the university admissions process. Schools are also offering more activities, such as student club activities and orchestras. We were able to boost the time dedicated to these activities, which make students proud and improve their social and emotional wellbeing.



The Meister High Schools are still regarded as one of the most successful policies from when I was the Minister, as they greatly eased the pressure on university admissions.

With these changes, I think we achieved a more diversified society. The most fundamental shift in education, however, is in learning and teaching practices. We still need an education system in which teachers serve as tutors to their students. This diversified reform package did not accomplish this. Nonetheless, this could serve as a solid framework for future adjustments.

15. What enabled or hindered the reform?

The Ministry's open attitude was key in enabling the reform. Many educational changes require being open to outside ideas. We cannot discover solutions by just relying on our own teachers, education

leaders, and experts. We were able to find novel solutions for vocational schools (Meister High Schools) because we were open to collaborating with industry experts and private partner companies. This was not easy as South Korea has a long history of mistrusting the private sector as it is associated with the private tutoring system. Private tutoring is seen unfavourably in South Korea as it is outside the equalised public education system. Despite this, the Meister High Schools were willing to collaborate with private firms and that turned out to be successful.

We also started collaborating with the Ministry of Finance. We did not have any tools to incentivise companies to work with schools and students. The Minister of Finance then granted tax exemptions to companies in specific industries that partnered with Meister High Schools to create educational experiences customised to the demands of the workforce, support specialised school curriculum design (e.g. mechanical engineering, automotive manufacturing, etc.) and train teachers in those specific fields.

In the latter, school autonomy was also very important. Schools have a lot of leeway when it comes to changing the curriculum. This provides them with the ability to adapt to changing times.

“The Ministry's open attitude was key in enabling the reform. Many educational changes require being open to outside ideas.”



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Political structures, on the other hand, were not in sync. As a lawmaker, I took action to empower Local Education Offices, believing that they should be more relevant. In doing so, the job of teacher training was then delegated to the Local Education Offices. Local education officers are elected through votes, whereas I was appointed by the president. They had political influence while I had administrative power. We struggled to bring them on board as we did not have a close working relationship with them. This shift created an environment in which we could not work collaboratively, and teacher support suffered as a result. However, I recognise that it was the first time in Korean history that the officers had had these powers, and they had been elected for the first time.

Education system coherence

16. How do you support teachers in adapting their teaching practices as envisaged in this reform?

Teachers are crucial because they are the ones who will carry out the policies. It is critical to speak with them and convince them to be on board. More significantly, we must create an enabling environment for them, such as improved teacher training programmes.

Perhaps, rather than being the responsibility of Local Education Officers, teacher training should be the



“Teachers are crucial because they are the ones who will carry out the policies. It is critical to speak with them and convince them to be on board.”

responsibility of changemakers. This includes NGOs, CSOs, industry and EdTech players, and passionate individuals in the education workforce, who may be less reluctant towards system changes than politically elected bureaucrats.

17. What role does the assessment system play in this reform?

As mentioned previously, changing the assessment system to reduce the pressure on the education system was the starting point for this reform.

Additionally, as part of the curriculum change, qualitative performance assessment was introduced for teachers to assess students in class. However, this element fell short in terms of implementation, owing in part to the fact that we did not give teachers the right tools (resources), access to support and incentives to motivate them to achieve this shift in teaching and learning practices.

18. What are the challenges in assessing social and emotional skills?

Assessment and learning should go hand in hand, especially for social and emotional learning. The biggest challenge is how to adequately assess the student’s social and emotional skills when this is embedded in the design and implementation of project-based learning.

We still a need to find good ways of assessing social and emotional skills in classrooms and apply innovative assessment methods.

Lessons

19. What were the key learnings from this experience?

First, the transformation of learning is not easy. You need a complete system redesign, not just a few tweaks that can be handled separately. The admission system, the vocational schools, an assessment system that evaluates other skills than mere academic work are all relevant, but they are not enough. A transformation could be a long journey, especially in a country where rote learning has been emphasised for a long time.

Second, there are limitations of a top-down approach. When teachers are not included in the formation of the reform and, subsequently, are not adequately supported, they are less likely to be the agents of change we expect them to be.

Third, crisis can be a trigger for change. For example, during the reform in 2011, we were influenced by a tragic episode involving a student’s suicide after being bullied by his classmates. I made the decision to use this momentum to strengthen character education. As a result of this, we formed a counter-bullying committee, chaired by the Prime Minister.

20. What were the compromises you had to make for the reform to happen, if any?

Politics and policy making are rife with compromises – I personally made a lot of compromises. However, when you have a clear mission and goal for improving education, there are always opportunities to make change. Fortunately, when I was the Minister of Education, the window of opportunity for change was open. When such windows are closed, however, no change is possible. In these periods, one can rely on international collaboration and networks of individuals to continue to seek improvements from outside so that opportunities can be taken when they arise.

21. What could have been done differently?

The top-down approach has its drawbacks. Every week, as the Minister of Education, I met with teachers; I would listen to them, we had

conversations, and I wanted them to be the ones to bring about the change we were looking for. However, I was giving the orders. Teachers told me that a lot was being asked of them to implement the reform. I missed their point in our conversations – I was sceptical since I thought it was their job and mission to perform as we asked. That is probably the reason that I was not popular among teachers.

When I returned to academia, I discovered that teachers were not implementing the reforms. For example, teachers used multiple-choice based exams and referred to them as qualitative assessments. They do not like ministers who give orders, which is very understandable. As a professor, if I am asked by the Minister, I might not want to change my assessments. Instead of giving orders, I should have created an environment that would have allowed them to work more efficiently. In retrospect, I was expecting too much of them without providing them the necessary tools.

The teacher training programme should have been one of the enablers of the reforms. However, many teacher trainings were organised by Local Education Offices with bureaucratic problems. Now that I work in High Touch High Tech, I have realised that fundamentally, teachers need to be supported in changing roles. They require time-saving tools, which High Touch High Tech is providing. This would enable them to concentrate on innovative methods of teaching and assessing.

At the time, education technology was not as advanced as it is now. Looking back, if I was able to utilise artificial intelligence (AI) to alleviate teachers' burden before asking them to integrate performance assessment and project-based learning, maybe they would have been able to do that. I agree that I may have been asking too much of them at the time.

Looking ahead

22. What advice do you have for education policymakers who want to create their own version of what you attempted in your country, or who have similar ambitions?

Go for the significant fundamental change. If not all schools can make fundamental changes at the same time, start with a few by focusing on the schools that are ready, and then scale up. This is not a time for incremental reform; rather, it is a time for fundamental transformation. Make it happen by providing an enabling environment for those schools. They will be able to demonstrate to the others how they made that fundamental change, and those modest numbers of schools can be expanded later.

23. How does this reform influence how children are coping with the challenges of COVID-19?

Social and emotional learning is becoming increasingly crucial after the pandemic, especially as human connection has been limited due to the virus. Social and emotional learning is one of the important tools for educators to increase human connection with their students and it should be prioritised by schools.





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About the LEGO Foundation

The LEGO Foundation shares its overall mission with the LEGO Group – to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow. This demonstrates our shared heritage and values, and is the guiding star for everything we do.

The LEGO Foundation aims to build a future in which learning through play empowers children to become creative, engaged, lifelong learners. We are dedicated to re-defining play and re-imagining learning to ensure children build the broad set of skills they need to navigate a complex and ever-changing world.





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