

COMMISSIONED PAPER:

NECC NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GOVERNANCE

ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PTAs/PTSAs AND THE STATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this commissioned paper is to outline the range of options for a democratic governance structure in education, with particular reference to the relationship between PTSAs/PTAs and the democratic state.

2. Context

In considering the range of options for an alternative system governance in education, three critical issues will co-determine the nature and functions of such a system in a democratic South Africa:

i. the legacy of governance: the historical apartheid governance structure and the ways in which its legacies will shape and undermine innovative and democratic initiatives of the future.

ii. the struggle for governance: the anti-apartheid governance structures created in the struggle for democracy, and the various lessons these experiences and struggles hold for reconstruction.

iii. the vision of governance: the democratic vision for governance articulated by education movements such as the NECC, and the steps required to fulfil that vision in the education of the future.

These three critical issues will influence the nature of the envisaged relationship between the state and PTAs/PTSAs.

2. On the Legacy of Governance

It is accepted that the official system of governance in schools is repressive, authoritarian and anti-democratic. The culture of authoritarianism has expressed itself through the different instruments of state governance, including the inspectorate, School Management Councils and, not infrequently, through the school principalship. A democratic structure of governance will not change this culture radically, for the reality of permanent appointments, the shortage of qualified administrators, and the ingrained expectations of the schools' clients e.g., teachers, students and parents, will prohibit

democratic change. This does not mean that democratic governance initiatives should not be launched--quite the contrary; but it does mean that such initiatives should be contextualised in the essentially conservative and reactionary legacy of apartheid governance.

3. On the Struggle for Governance

The apartheid state has never recognised PTSAs as legitimate structures in schools. However, in the course of the struggle for PTSAs as legitimate school-based representative bodies, three outcomes have resulted. First, there are democratic PTSAs which are linked to broader struggles for democracy and which have the trust and confidence of the community. Second, there are conservative PTSAs which define their agenda in very immediate terms (e.g., fundraising) and are not linked to broader education struggles. And third, there are nonexistent PTSAs and in such areas the state either has complete control through its officially sanctioned bodies (e.g., Management Councils) or there is not local initiative to implement such a structure. It must be emphasised, though, that through struggles of the NECC and other mass organs, exemplary, effective and democratic PTSAs have been established, and these are experiences which should inform future initiatives.

4. On the Vision of Governance

It should be recalled that the struggle for democratic control of schools has been a principal objective of the education/ political struggle. The vision of a community being actively involved in and responsible for school governance has energised much of the education struggle over the past 15 years. That vision will be blunted and attempts at subversion will invariably follow in the future, even where a new state ostensibly represents the demands of its constituency. Whatever the limitations and the legacy, this vision should continue to form an ongoing struggle for making democratic governance a reality, long after a democratic government is installed.

5. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PTSAs AND THE STATE

This paper outlines three concrete models of the relationship between the state and PTSAs, with the possible consequences associated with each model. The three models are not sacred nor do they necessarily occur as clearly delineated in practice. But the idealised models presented below do work with different assumptions and suggest different consequences for democratic governance in education. Moreover, the models assist our understanding of the range of possibilities for educational governance.

5.1 MODEL A: The PTSA as an Organ of the State

In this model the PTSA is completely governed by and responsible to the state. The PTSA members are appointed by the state and they report, as a body, to the state. The state would define the scope of work and agenda of the PTSA, provide the requisite training for its effective workings, and outline clear lines of accountability to the PTSA as a body as well as the individual sectors within it e.g., the state draws up a code of conduct for students which is implemented through the PTSAs. In this model, the PTSA makes representations to the state when problems arise and the state will decide how and whether to act on these representations. The regular workings of the PTSA will be confined largely to fundraising activities, community outreach and enforcement of codes of conduct. The PTSA will not be involved in "political" activities, but will make orderly representations to the state on issues political. The state, assumed to be democratic, will pay for all the activities associated with the PTSA including a nominal fee for individual members for their contributions to this governance structure.

5.2 MODEL B: The PTSA as an Organ of Civil Society

In this model the PTSA is completely independent of the state and accountable only to the local, regional and national networks of PTSAs which are constituted outside of the state even though they are located within a state structure i.e., the school. PTSA members are democratically elected by all parents, students and teachers who are associated with that particular school. The local PTSA defines the agenda for action but the local PTSA, in conjunction with regional and national PTSAs, will also jointly draw up codes of conduct and a framework for national action which will govern the activities of the local PTSA. The functions of the PTSA will incorporate political, educational and social activities. The PTSA, for example, would be actively involved in fundraising activities for the school but it also reserves the right to decide on political action at the school level and through associated networks at regional and national level. In order to minimise state interference, the PTSA is financially independent of the state and members contribute to the PTSA on a voluntary basis.

5.3 MODEL C: The PTSA as a Semi-Autonomous Community Organ

In this model the PTSA has links to the state but is primarily accountable to the community it serves. The state finances the activities of the PTSA including a national training program for PTSA structures on issues ranging from "how to run a meeting" to more complex concerns such as "democratic administration". While the state as funder could require certain

responsibilities from the PTSA, those requirements are specific and limited. For example, the state could require that PTSAs provide a monthly budget of expenditures to the regional state education department or that PTSAs provide annual reports on activities. While the state has certain technical requirements for PTSAs to fulfil, the local PTSA, through its national and regional networks, will reserve the right to protest state decisions. For example, if the state is not delivering textbooks to the regions effectively or the demand for salary increases for teachers is not met, the PTSAs on local/regional/national levels can collectively and individually register their protest in various ways. Codes of conduct for the sectors will be compiled and legitimated through PTSA structures. PTSAs would be the school-level structures making representations to the state on issues such as unfair dismissals and teacher appointments. A PTSA member will serve, at the different levels, on state education department committees as a PTSA representative. There are areas in which PTSA--state education department will have joint duties, such as textbook selection for a particular region and teacher appointments in a particular school.

6. The Models in Review

The critical question to resolve then is the degree of distance between the state and PTSAs in a democratic society. Each model has certain advantages: Model A assures uniformity in the system and holds the state primarily responsible for governance; Model B recognises that states elected on a democratic platform can rarely meet the demands of its constituency, and therefore allows for maximum independence; Model C ensures that the state is held responsible for its part of the governance deal but that the relationship is strictly a technical one that does not interfere with the possible political action which PTSAs may need to embark on from time to time. But each model also has potential disadvantages: Model A is a recipe for authoritarianism while Model B may generate more conflict rather than consensus vis-a-vis the state. And Model C requires very careful negotiations between PTSAs and the state to define which responsibilities belongs to whom, and this may itself generate uncertainty, inconsistency and conflict.

But there is another flaw which each of the models may need to attend to. In certain regions different models may promote democratic governance, in others it may inhibit such a goal. A strong PTSA in a conservative school region or area may in fact become an effective blocking mechanism for democratic initiatives from the centre. What this means is that any model proposal must also concern itself with consequences and not only with outward structure or form i.e., the degree to which a model works in practice depends on the specification of a number of conditions in the social context of model implementation.

7. Conclusion

Models are imaginative representations of an ideal situation. They cannot substitute for political mobilisation. This paper begins to outline possible models of PTSA-state relations in full recognition of the fact that the models are subject to the scrutiny of struggle and the dilemmas of existing efforts to democratise school governance at the local level. At this point the finer points of model construction ends and the necessity of political review begins.