

The textbook saga and corruption in education

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Abstract

In mid-2012 a textbook war erupted in South Africa focused on provision in Limpopo province. Considerable international literature has highlighted the importance and complexity of textbook provision, quality and use in developing countries. This article focuses on the system of textbook provision that came into being in South Africa in the post-apartheid era and provides a closer examination of the Limpopo textbook crisis of 2012. It uses insights from the development literature combined with newer approaches to the state and corruption to provide a deeper understanding of the specific saga in Limpopo. The article argues that the system that came into being after 1994 was a market-based, decentralised amalgam or bricolage of previously-existing systems. Corruption, endemic in the apartheid era, quickly became embedded in new processes. New directions were undertaken in 2009/2010, but provoked misgivings and resistance. The context of the textbook saga was both political and economic. A fiscal crisis in Limpopo resulted in initial non-procurement and delivery. Over-priced contracts, inaccurate school data and poor communication systems worsened the situation. A new system was brought into being in Limpopo in the process, but serious systemic challenges remain. The article draws on evidence from secondary documentation, government reports and key informant interviews.

Key words: textbooks, corruption in education, decentralisation, South African education

Introduction

Non-delivery of textbooks to schools in Limpopo, a province placed under national administration in December 2011, provoked a storm of anger and outrage between May and July 2012 about the fact that 18 years after 1994 South Africa still had not got something as basic as delivery of textbooks to schools right. Litigation by Sec-

tion²⁷, an NGO, for delivery of textbooks precipitated a textbook crisis of unprecedented proportions when Judge Jody Kollapen ordered that textbooks be in schools by 15 June and a report prepared for the Department and Section 27 found that as of 27 June all textbooks were not yet in schools. By the end of the year, allegations and counter-allegations were still continuing.

Between June and July, there were a number of revelations linking what became known as ‘the textbook debacle’ with corruption. Into the open were brought a report by a dismissed administrator full of details about fraud, corruption, mismanagement and maladministration in the province, an early whistle-blower left in the doldrums, and a shadowy textbook distributor with close links to the ruling party whose cancelled contract it was fighting through the courts. Compounding the picture were simultaneous shocking images of usable textbooks and recently produced workbooks, the flagship of the national department, being shredded, dumped into rivers or left fluttering in the wind outside warehouses. Both national and provincial departments were placed under severe pressure, with calls for the resignation of the national Minister of Basic Education.

The issue became a metaphor for how government conducts its business. All levels of government, including the ruling party, responded. The national Minister apologised for what had happened, and together with Section²⁷ appointed the Metcalfe Commission into the delivery of books, and pulled out all the stops to ensure delivery where it had not taken place. The Presidency appointed a commission into the dumping and shredding of books, and the provincial government also appointed a commission. The media and Section²⁷ kept up a relentless pressure, providing commentary and new information on non-delivery on an almost daily basis. At the end of July, the ruling party at its *lekgotla* instructed the national and provincial departments to work closely with Treasury to ensure that 2013 saw no repeat of what happened in 2012, to pay special attention to logistics and to set up a hotline for principals to report undelivered textbooks. An interim report was handed to the Presidency on the dumping and shredding of textbooks, but not made public.

The dominant discourse, shaped by journalists as much as by prominent spokespeople within the national elite, represented the textbook saga as one of chaos, corruption, incompetence and indifference in which dark forces of evil were at work. A high premium was not placed on accuracy in this discourse. Investigative reporting did not extend to all aspects of the mystery. Deeper questions were not asked about the strange phenomenon, for example, of textbooks regularly found dumped in rivers or being shredded, and to whose advantage this might be and why this was occurring at this particular point in time with such regularity. Although it is not the subject of this article, the media approach to the textbook saga is worth much closer analysis of the underlying discourses at work. It did, as Steven Friedman pointed out, over-simplify the issues (*New Age*, 2 August 2012). For this reason, the underlying dynamics are worth closer examination.

What happened in Limpopo that schools still did not have textbooks 18 years after democracy? What is the role of corruption in this and what does it tell us about the nature of the state? Corruption, according to Transparency International, is ‘the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It hurts everyone who depends on the integrity of people in a position of authority.’ The question of corruption in textbook selection, procurement and distribution is not a new one. The apartheid regime was notorious for corruption in textbook writing and selection procedures (Nishino 2011). New approaches to understanding the state have emerged in post-apartheid South Africa, and cast light on the issue from different angles. Late, wrong or non-delivery of textbooks to schools is also not confined to the Limpopo province. The Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) in 2007 showed that only 45% of South African students had sole use of a textbook, 44,3% were sharing and 10,7% had no textbook at all. Fewer had no textbook than in 2002, but countries such as Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique and Mauritius all had higher percentages of children each with their own textbook per subject per grade (Ross 2010: 8).

The importance of textbooks and their role in ensuring quality learning for all has long been recognised in the international context. In this regard, access to textbooks is seen as closely linked to the achievement of quality education. The role of textbooks first came into prominence in developing countries in the 1980s in the context of expanding educational systems, economic decline, structural adjustment and the search for cost-effective solutions to achieve quality education. Reflecting then on textbooks in the Third World, Altbach and Kelly (1988: 6) noted that ‘textbooks are not produced in a vacuum. They are related not only to the educational system, but also to the publishing industry, to the fiscal realities of the nation, and to the broader “book consciousness” of the society. The production of a textbook is a highly complex matter that depends on adequate coordination of a variety of organisations and interests’. Writing in the same book, Farrell & Heyneman reinforced this point. ‘It has become evident,’ they wrote, ‘that mounting a large-scale textbook provision programme in a developing nation is an extremely complicated and risk-prone venture, with implications well beyond the education sector itself’ (Farrell & Heyneman 1988: 26).

From the 1990s, as approaches to achievement and effectiveness grew in strength, the education development literature began to draw attention not only to the provision and quality of textbooks but crucially also their use by teachers in classrooms (Fuller & Clarke 1994). Later work has illustrated the diversity of systems across nations, but emphasised the continuing pertinence of the key challenges of provision, use and quality for developing countries identified almost two decades earlier (Braslavsky 2006; Farrell & Heyneman 1988). This article uses these perspectives to examine the system of textbook provision in South Africa and the key elements of the specific textbook crisis in Limpopo in 2012. It builds in questions relating to corruption that are largely absent from the development literature on the topic. For this reason it is necessary to briefly discuss approaches that are relevant to this article. They include anthropological, institutional and post-modern approaches.

Laurence Wright's (2012) edited collection on the Eastern Cape education crisis provides an *anthropological* variation of the neo-patrimonialism argument to explain why books do not get to schools in that province. In his introduction, Wright considers corruption in education in relation to the dysfunctionality of the provincial government as a whole. His approach draws on an anthropological literature to argue that transition from one form of society to another results in 'covert networks of group loyalties around sectional interests' being formed that become 'asset-stripping consortia, or professional lobbies, or formal labour unions' (Wright 2012: 13). These are 'the ethical residue from transitional life in small-scale pastoral societies' (ibid.: 12) 'In the Eastern Cape Education Department,' he says, 'pillaging of government resources ... is an instance of that "doubleness" characteristic of small-scale society, where it is deemed legitimate to enhance your share of the cake, provided you are not found out, and the "victim" is not one of your own Ethical damage to society at large is discounted because it is extraneous to your group and outweighed by the comfort of having enhanced the well-being of those who matter to you, yourself and your extended family' (ibid.: 14).

This anthropological approach is vulnerable to the criticism that it assumes unchanging social relationships over time and problematically racialises corruption. Corruption, including that under the apartheid regime, for example, could equally be linked to 'covert asset-stripping networks'. The state is not neutral, and has been prone to corruption in both developed and developing countries, by people coming from both small and large-scale societies. Nonetheless, Wright does bring to bear on the argument a social understanding of the nature of corruption in parts of the post-apartheid state and the relationship between corruption inside and outside it.

Both political scientist Ivor Chipkin and sociologist Karl von Holdt wish to explain poor service delivery by the state through attention to its social organisation and practices. Using an *institutionalist approach*, Chipkin has argued that state failure is due to a combination of the introduction of the New Public Management and the incorporation of Bantustan officials into the new state (Chipkin 2011). The model of the New Public Management entailed applying business principles to the public service. In the process, the old-style, impersonal, hierarchical, rule-bound Weberian form of the state and 'traditional' model of administration 'has come under siege' (Chipkin and Lipietz 2012: 2). The task to restore integrity to the system then becomes the re-establishment of Weberian rules and procedures, hierarchies and authority.

Karl von Holdt's (2010) *sociological ethnographic* work in a hospital posits a different origin yet similar effects. Von Holdt argues that post-apartheid modernity, and the bureaucracy, are profoundly shaped by the racial form of modernity introduced by colonialism and apartheid. Bureaucratic practices in the post-apartheid state are consequently shaped by a series of tensions and contestations that undermine effective provision. These include the tension between the aspiration to establish a modern, effective bureaucracy and on the other subvert the dominance of groups privileged by

apartheid and promote a new black elite, as well as ambivalence towards skill, the importance of maintaining face in situations of failure, the importance of hierarchy, ambivalence towards authority and the prevalence of budgetary rituals. These do not take as their primary purpose the fashioning of effective state institutions. Instead, the state bureaucracy is marked by contestation over its purposes and meaning.

A third, *post-colonial anthropological* approach questions the valorisation of the Weberian state and distances itself from the image of the state as a rationalised administrative form entirely. Veena Das and Deborah Poole's book *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* wants to move away from the idea that recent political and economic reforms in developing countries have 'produced a weakening or shrinking of the forms of regulation and belonging that supposedly constitute the modern nation-state' (Das & Poole 2004: 3). They see 'state power (as) always unstable,' 'the state itself (as) not a fixed object', and indeed (able to) be 'a margin of the citizen-body it represents' (Asad 2004: 279, 281). To move away from dichotomous conceptualisations, it is necessary to explore those margins 'imagined as wild and uncontrolled and where the state is constantly refounding its modes of order and lawmaking' (ibid.: 8). Governmentality is understood here as 'being constituted through sporadic, intermittent contact, rather than through an effective panoptic system of surveillance' (Das 2004: 230). Margins are 'managed and controlled, but also flow outside this control' (Das and Poole 2004: 30).

Each of these different perspectives casts light on the textbook crisis in Limpopo. Covert asset-stripping networks, the absence of rules and routines, hierarchies and observed bureaucratic procedures, conflict over the meanings of skill, authority, hierarchy and budgetary rituals all cast different light on the state as an 'unstable', 'ineffective panoptic system of surveillance' and control where its 'margins' 'flow outside its control.' The work and role of NGOs such as Section27 and Equal Education can also be understood from this perspective: through their actions they reveal the incomplete project of the state, the marginality of its rules and procedures, the uncertainty of its law. The conflict itself exemplifies how law can run through the margins and disorder through the law-making authority.

The article begins with an examination of the contexts of the crisis and approaches to corruption in the state, and goes on to consider the role of policy changes in the procurement and distribution of textbooks in 2011 and 2012, the specific financial crisis in Limpopo and the importance of data for ordering textbooks. The sources used for this article include government, publishers' and academic reports on textbooks, as well as key informant interviews.

Context of the crisis

The crisis occurred within a specific and sometimes linked political, economic and educational context. Economically, a period of limited growth and increased spending

on education from 2001 to 2008 was brought to a halt in 2009 by the economic downturn spurred by the global economic crisis. As gains made in the 2001 to 2008 period were reduced and social conflict around delivery heightened, pressure mounted on the state to curb financial losses incurred by poor provincial administrations.

Politically, the crisis occurred in a province in which intra-party tensions in the run-up to the ANC conference to be held later in the year at Mangaung were running high. The emasculation of ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema by the ruling party, to limit his access to state resources in Limpopo by corrupt means, was in process. A party disciplinary committee had already taken steps to remove his ANC membership, and a team from Treasury was examining the finances of the province in the light of the Auditor-General's reports of 2010 and 2011. These had drawn attention to inadequate oversight and management of budgets with lack of a document trail to support transactions included in the financial statements. Limpopo had received a disclaimer: as such there were no internal controls over record-keeping and management. In such an environment, fraud and abuse of public resources can easily be perpetrated, resulting in 'irregular, unauthorised, fruitless and wasteful expenditure' and other forms of non-compliance with laws and regulations (Auditor-General 2010).

Limpopo was also a province that had just been placed under national administration. Both the Eastern Cape and Limpopo, poor rural provinces that incorporate former bantustans, were placed under national administration in 2011, the Eastern Cape in June 2011 and Limpopo in December 2011, some six months after Treasury had begun its work. Tensions between national and provincial levels of government ran higher in the Eastern Cape than Limpopo, but in both the national department was limited in terms of what it could do. Section 100(1)(b) of the Constitution provides for national intervention in provincial administration when a province cannot or does not fulfil an executive obligation in terms of the Constitution or legislation. But the actual nature of such national intervention is constrained by the practical interpretation of the constitutional provisions for the relative spheres of national and provincial authority as well as by power relations between national and provincial spheres of government. In both the Eastern Cape and Limpopo, national intervention permitted teams of national officials from different departments such as the Treasury, Public Service and Administration, Justice and Basic Education to intervene to provide oversight and guidance.

But the Constitution directs the role of national government to be policy, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, whereas that of the provinces is actual implementation and budgetary accountability. This limits what the national department can do. Additional resources or personnel, apart from the appointed national administrator, are not allocated for the task, and existing officials remain in place. The *modus operandi* is thus for provincial officials to remain in place, executing the day-to-day tasks, with national officials, including a Ministerial team, who provide oversight and direction. The limits of this approach were recognised in the Metcalfe Report commis-

sioned to verify delivery of books to schools (Metcalf 2012)

Educationally, the immediate context of non-provision of textbooks in Limpopo and the ensuing saga was the implementation of a revised curriculum. Following a review of the implementation of the curriculum in 2009, the Minister had ensured its revision during 2010 and 2011 and planned for implementation from 2012 in Grades 1-3 and Grade 10. Curriculum revision required new textbooks, which were produced under pressure at great speed to meet the implementation deadline for those four grades.

Finally, the growth, influence and impact of the NGO Equal Education, which had a strong legal base within its organisational make-up and had prioritised school libraries and resources in its campaigns, was another important dimension of the social and educational landscape. With experience and strong networks in the Treatment Action Campaign, and drawing inspiration from its approach to leveraging change within the state, it spawned Section27, a legal pressure group to take up the question of timely provision of textbooks in Limpopo schools.

History and role of textbooks in post-apartheid South African education

A critical issue that informs the unfolding drama of 2012 is policy relating to the procurement and distribution of textbooks, curriculum and textbooks, and the implications of new policy for various social actors. South Africa has no textbook policy per se; what it has is a decentralised system made up of elements of past and present systems. The opportunity to develop such a policy was lost in the policy process that developed alternatives for education between 1990 and 1994. It was then negated by OBE's disavowal of textbooks, undermined by the nature of new systems that came into being and continues to be stymied by poor data management systems in provinces.

First, the policy process: not one of the central policy-alternative development processes in the early 1990s had much to say about textbook provision, although textbooks were central to anti-apartheid struggles. The National Party's Education Renewal Strategy (1991) and the NECC's National Education Policy Investigation (1992) were silent on how textbooks were to be provided. The detailed recommendations of the ANC's Yellow Book (1994) were not taken forward. The general tenor of thinking within democratic educational circles was to identify democratic control with decentralised systems. And these were what came into being after 1994.

With no model or plan, existing systems prevalent in apartheid's 18 education departments emerged to form a bricolage of systems of provision. All were bound by new financing norms and standards. New models for financing education allowed provinces to negotiate and shift their priorities in such a way that amounts budgeted for textbooks could easily not be spent, be shifted to other line items or be rolled over. Numerous journalists have tried and failed to discover what the state actually allocates and spends on textbooks and stationery, as allocations do not correspond to what

is ordered, spent or delivered.

Second, OBE: outcomes-based education intended to promote the use of multiple resources. Teachers teaching then recall how the message came down that they should abandon textbooks and construct their own resources. How this OBE vision of resources collided headlong with the reality of limited resources and failed to be implemented is well-documented (Spreeen and Vally 2010). Teachers in rural African schools in particular found themselves at a loss. Rapid implementation of curriculum changes in 2003-05 compounded confusion and placed great pressure on publishers and writers as well as schools and teachers. OBE was a disaster for publishers (DACST 1998). They adapted to and survived in the new environment with difficulty. At first, as long as there was no catalogue from which to select books, publishers were obliged to market their books directly to schools, adding to their costs. They lost staff and revenue and many went out of business.

But, third, there were other, deep systemic problems that continue to the present day linked to processes of selection, procurement, ordering and distribution of textbooks. The system set in place after 1994 was cobbled together from existing systems and new finance and governance frameworks. Section 21 schools – former white, Indian and some coloured and African schools – have the right to buy their own textbooks direct from publishers who deliver via booksellers with whom schools have developed a close relationship. Most section 21 schools are in the provinces with urban centres. In the Eastern Cape, there are many section 21 schools that are poor and have limited capacity to manage this process. Nonetheless, they do. The South African Booksellers Association (SABA) has emerged as a powerful agency in section 21 schools (Gilmour and Soudien 2010). Section 20 schools include mainly township and rural schools. They do not have the right to buy their own textbooks. All provinces buy textbooks on their behalf once they have received the requisitions. These are bought against the ‘norms and standards’ allocations to schools for textbooks. Sometimes, when there is a cycle of curriculum implementation, provinces will buy for all schools, both section 20 and 21 (Interview with publisher, Cape Town, 14 February 2013).

On the whole, the system that section 21 schools use works. But not always. There is evidence that when section 21 school principals spend their ‘norms and standards’ allocations for textbooks on other priorities they may have, there is usually nothing left for learning and teaching support materials (LTSMs). When this happens, books are ordered, but suppliers not paid. In 2012, with the new curriculum coming into operation, the Eastern Cape attempted to buy textbooks for section 21 as well as section 20 schools, but the former resisted this in a court case and the effort was halted.

The system for section 20 schools works well to a greater or lesser degree in all provinces. Most section 20 schools are served by a variety of agents with whom provinces contract to supply and deliver. These are either booksellers, or agents like Edu-

solutions in Gauteng, Mpumalanga and KZN, or the East London Credit Bureau in the Eastern Cape, or a variety of SMMEs that are contracted on tender and may change from year to year. These deliver from the warehouses to schools in provinces like the Free State, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and North West. In some provinces the situation is even more complicated, with one company possibly dealing with capturing orders and another taking care of warehousing and supply. According to one key informant from the publishing industry, interviewed on 14 February 2013 in Cape Town, publishers offer discounts to provinces and third parties. These discounts can either be taken as profit (as in the case of Edusolutions, which also adds a fee on top of the discount) or ploughed back into provincial LTSM budgets. Here there is scope for corruption.

Several provinces spend more than 90% of their budgets on salaries, leaving a minimal amount for textbooks, infrastructure and other necessities. This means that provinces with high teacher salary burdens, those that do not manage their supply and demand of teachers well, can also ratchet up bad debts with suppliers. One way of bringing textbook prices down when there is little overall is by bulk-buying (centralised ordering). Most provinces are keen on keeping their systems intact and not having a national process.

The process of placing orders with publishers and ensuring books are delivered to schools is unwieldy, involving several major steps in getting school texts and materials to schools. Systems have to date been poorly coordinated across provinces. A 2008 OECD report pointed out that there are 'significant differences among provinces in submission dates, time-frames, submission fees to be paid by publishers, evaluation and re-evaluation rules and many other aspects of the provision process' (OECD 2008: 182). Many of these steps require close co-ordination between different sections and directorates and strong management systems. Since the Limpopo crisis, a national management plan has been set in place to ensure greater coordination.

The system has also provided possibilities for mismanagement and corruption. This was evident as early as 2000 when the first Curriculum Review showed that provincial officials did not properly understand the process and missed or simply condoned or renegotiated deadlines. This inevitably resulted in delivery delays. There were cases where books were delivered late, locked up and saved for the following year. In Gauteng and the Eastern Cape, furniture removal companies and butchers who did not have warehousing or storage facilities were awarded tenders to supply books (Chisholm et al 2000, see pp 62-75). Another reason for non-delivery is provided by Gilmour and Soudien. Their 2010 ADEA study found that a general problem across all provinces is poor contract specification with suppliers and inadequate monitoring. Many suppliers, they noted, 'have interests outside of education such as engineering or catering' (Gilmour and Soudien 2010: 38).

The 2000 Review had recommended doing away with the tender system, ring-fencing LTSM budgets, implementing textbook retrieval policies and compiling a national

recommended list of textbooks for each subject. It also proposed an interprovincial team to coordinate textbook management, and project teams at provincial level to manage LTSMs. None of these materialised except for the introduction of a national catalogue for secondary schools. Another Review of the Curriculum was conducted in 2009, almost a decade later. It reported that many teachers still had an aversion to using textbooks. It also found that systems for the procurement and provision of textbooks were still very complex. There was ongoing discord between the government imperative to develop local entrepreneurs and the need to get quality textbooks into learners' hands efficiently (Department of Education 2009: 52-3). Textbooks, the Review said, were a 30% more costly owing to the complex supply chain that exists between the publisher and the DOE. This complexity, the Review argued, 'has the effect of causing inefficiency, poor quality, unevenness and wastage in the system.'

The result, as the OECD Report had put it a year earlier, was that learners still 'had to share books' while 'readers, wall charts, teachers' guides and reference books were either absent or in short supply.' Photocopied notes and chalk and talk teaching methodologies were 'ubiquitous' (OECD 2008: 182). And so the Review recommended among other things making better use of resources through bringing down prices of textbooks via central ordering, a national catalogue of textbooks for primary as well as secondary schools – a catalogue for secondary schools had successfully been introduced under Pandor – a textbook retrieval policy, and communication to teachers of the effective role and use of textbooks. It reinforced the recommendations made by the OECD Review to strengthen funding and improve pricing and book retrieval practices (OECD 2008: 209-10).

The new Minister of Basic Education acted on these recommendations with conviction and determination, her watchword being efficiency. Her Action Plan of 2010 made it one of her priorities to ensure a textbook in each subject for each learner. Her experience in Gauteng province had convinced her of the inefficiencies of a decentralised system, the need for better prices on textbooks and the benefits of a national catalogue and system of procurement. In the effort to keep costs on textbooks down and bypass cumbersome provincial delivery procedures, the Department thus produced workbooks in 2011 for Grades 1 to 9 at a fraction of the price of textbooks procured from publishers. In addition, the Shuttleworth Foundation was willing to allow the Department to deliver its maths and science textbooks for Grades 10 to 12 to schools at dramatically reduced prices. These free workbooks and textbooks were delivered to schools directly by the national department instead of through the decentralised channels in 2012.

The effort to improve pricing by delivering workbooks for Grades 1 to 9 and Grade 10 science textbooks to schools for free and to put in place a national catalogue and system of procurement had radical implications for new and old players already in the market. Working with a team under the leadership of Veronica McKay from UNISA and John Aitchison from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the Department produced

literacy, numeracy and life skills workbooks at R13 per workbook, including delivery. This compared with workbooks produced by commercial publishers and sold for between R60 and R90 in bookstores (M24i 2012). The Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) saw this as a 'war' on the publishing industry, and fought back, arguing that these steps would 'destroy local publishing' (M24i 2012; see also McCallum 2009).

Limiting the number of texts in the catalogue included some publishers and excluded others, and instituting national procurement to effect economies of scale also disturbed the book market. The conflict this provoked between the state and publishers was manifested in the anger that found expression in what became known as 'the textbook debacle'. Compared with the apartheid period, when a few large Afrikaner publishing houses dominated the market and multinationals had a smaller share, the picture now is more mixed, with multinationals, including transformed South African public houses, having the largest share and smaller, local companies still having a share. Publishers were angry about the new pricing and centralisation policy, tight deadlines, the nature of selections made and exclusions from lists. At least one publisher took the Department to court because of the exclusion of one of its titles from the national catalogue. This kind of conflict is not unusual internationally; conflicts between the state, publishers, markets and pressure groups are common across the world (Nishino 2009), the main reason being that 'textbooks are published within the political and economic constraints of markets, resources and power' (Nishino citing Apple, 1993).

The Limpopo textbook saga and ongoing non-delivery and shortages of textbooks in provinces historically plagued by shortages have concentrated attention on procurement and delivery systems. But what was the practical result of the state and NGO campaign to improve delivery? In Limpopo, UTI Logistics has taken over and integrated data management of ordering, stocking, warehousing and supply of textbooks to schools. Information and tracking systems exist to identify what has happened to each order and textbook delivered. These include school orders being sent and managed by UTI, delivery by UTI and receipt and computer entry of proof of deliveries by receiving school principals. Warehouses exist for receipt of stock, picking and packing, delivery and topping up. At any one time, a warehouse will have stock to mitigate shortages that may arise between the ordering and delivery. The proof of delivery form should help identify problems immediately so that they can be rectified. The solution is respect for data in both schools and provinces and constant attention to updating information on the Education Management Information System (EMIS).

In many cases where there are allegations of shortages or non-delivery, one of the following has been found to be true: receiving principals sign proofs of delivery without checking their orders and requesting the correct order (the form to be signed enables a principal to correct the order if there are errors) or principals make orders inappropriate for their schools, such as a principal who ordered only up to Grade 7 and then claimed shortages for Grades 8 and 9.

In conclusion, inadequate attention to systems of textbook provision during the crucial transition years, OBE and the consequent emergence of an extremely complex and fragmented system of textbook provision based on poor data systems in provinces and diverse systems of delivery have all compromised delivery. The Limpopo textbook saga in 2012 highlighted these issues as never before, but also brought into being a national process to coordinate provision. Overall, though, provincial interests have proved stronger than the desire to improve systems or bring down prices: central procurement has not come into existence, for example. The national department's knowledge of provincial systems has improved, and a national plan and process exist. But with few exceptions, as Metcalfe (2012) showed for Limpopo, provincial systems for communication and recording textbook orders accurately, as much as overall systems of data management and control, are weak. Without this, incorrect deliveries will continue. In addition, textbook retrieval policies exist but are unevenly implemented across provinces.

Specificities of the crisis in Limpopo

Analysis of the specific crisis in Limpopo which resulted in a failure to order textbooks in time for delivery in 2012 must also refer to the cash-flow crisis, management failures and contracts that were 'prejudicial to the state' entered into by the Limpopo Department of Education. This was explicitly discussed with school principals and districts at meetings held across the province by the Minister of Basic Education, during July and August 2012. The essence of the narrative is this: Limpopo's finances had been in a tenuous position for several years, but the problems came to a head in June 2011 when Treasury stepped in to arrest over-spending. Six months later, in December 2011, five Limpopo departments, including Basic Education, were placed under national administration. The education department alone was heading for a shortfall of R2 billion in March 2012. The main reasons for over-spending in the Limpopo Education Department were the same as in the Eastern Cape when it was placed under national administration in March 2011: first, inappropriate and over-priced contracts and, second, poor management of the teacher supply and demand system and a corresponding escalating teacher salary budget which crowded out all funding for programmes such as textbooks, transport, the school nutrition programme, infrastructure, and so on.

As soon as the Department was placed under administration, all its contracts and financial operations were subjected to forensic scrutiny. This included the Edusolutions contract for distribution of textbooks, which was overpriced at approximately R565 million, according to Karodia, the second national administrator for the province. Textbooks were eventually delivered at just over R125 million. Karodia's March 2012 report to the National Council of Provinces indicated the dilemma he was in, as textbook orders had not yet been made. The Department's Book Unit had been dismantled when Edusolutions had taken over. Edusolutions had taken possession of

records of school orders and the departmental database for delivery. The Department had to negotiate for release of this database before it could appoint new service providers. Edusolutions lost its court case against the Department for reinstatement of the contract.

The Edusolutions contract was but one of a number of overpriced contracts; there were several others, suggesting not only the considerable scope for corruption that existed in the Limpopo Department until it was placed under national administration, but also a literal looting of the state by both officials and contractors outside the state. Given the extreme financial straits Limpopo was in at the beginning of 2012, the third national administrator for education in Limpopo procured textbooks on the national catalogue at a reduced rate from publishers and instituted processes for the appointment of a new distributor at a much lower price than Edusolutions offered. Edusolution's case to have its contract reinstated was dismissed with costs.

But the cost to the provincial Department of this and other overpriced contracts is small compared with the costs imposed by teacher salaries or the Occupation-Specific Dispensation and maladministration of the teacher supply and demand system. Both place severe pressure on budgets in all provinces. According to the National Treasury, compensation of educators at public schools was expected to increase from R58 billion in 2005/06 to R106 billion in 2011/12. The OSD arrived at in 2008 and 2010 placed pressure on budgets in all provinces. The 2008 salary agreement provided an immediate increase for teachers in real terms of around 5%, and promises of substantial future increases, in particular for better-performing teachers.

Compounding this pressure in both provinces is the Post-Provisioning Model, in terms of which posts are made available to schools on the basis of learner numbers. At the beginning of each year, schools indicate their learner numbers and the province allocates posts on this basis. Teachers in excess are expected to move where there are vacancies. Instead, excess teachers often do not move, so vacancies are filled by temporary teachers. This means that the province pays twice for one post. 'Double-parking' of teachers also adds to the cost burden. Both Limpopo and the Eastern Cape have high vacancy rates and high numbers of excess teachers. The cost to Limpopo of teachers additional to the available basket of posts has been calculated at more than R1 billion. The only solution for the state, within the short term, to remain within budget is to freeze vacant and unfilled posts, and to fill vacant posts with excess teachers. Good implementation of textbook retrieval policies become pertinent in this context (Limpopo Department of Education 2012).

Managing this PPM has proved extremely challenging for those provinces with poor communication systems and weak human resource management systems. It is deeply contested at the local level. A study on the model conducted for the Education Labour Relations Council by Musker and Associates in 2005 (Musker et al. 2005) concluded that it is not so much the model that is the problem as the way it is understood and

managed. Its effective implementation requires good information about learner and teacher numbers. The Education Management Information Systems in both provinces leave something to be desired and underlie many of the inaccurate orders and deliveries of textbooks too. And so one of the things that both Limpopo and the Eastern Cape have undertaken with the help of Treasury and StatsSA, in the effort to improve their systems, is a physical head count of learners. For it to be sustainable, this as well as other sections of the public service will need to be professionalised. In addition, a new model for post-provisioning needs to be considered.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, this article has argued that the textbook ‘war’ that erupted in South Africa in 2012 over the non-provision of textbooks to children in Limpopo was more complex than media discourses presented it as being. The specific crisis of 2012 in Limpopo was multi-layered and multi-faceted, bringing to a head long-simmering tensions between state and civil society, between state and market and within the ruling party and government. As such it also brought into play classic broader themes illustrating the deeply social character of textbook provision in developing countries. Corruption entered into the story in specific ways.

Limpopo placed its textbook orders too late in 2011 for textbooks to be delivered to schools on time in 2012. Deliveries began too late because of a financial crisis in the province and the fact of the province being under national administration. The context of non-delivery was primarily economic, the course of the saga highly political. Underlying systemic issues and policy conflicts were largely invisible. This article has tried to start disentangling some of these elements. Corruption in textbook procurement was not something new, or particular to this administration, as the popular media discourse presented it; mismanagement and corruption in provision processes have been embedded in the way the system came into being, with little planning or forethought. Currently it is an amalgam of previously-existing systems and new provisions for financing education that combined state and market players in a mixed and differentially decentralised system. Numerous reports over the past two decades have drawn attention to and proposed solutions to address the weaknesses in textbook provision, but few have been implemented. The most important of these are the pernicious effects of the tender system. Provision and national systems for the management of provision have improved, but whether these will reach into the long term is uncertain, as fundamental underlying matters of the politics of organisation and information remain.

Acknowledgements

Another, earlier version of this paper was presented at the PARI – Princeton Symposium, Institutionalising Government: International, Comparative Perspectives on Corruption, held at the University of the Witwatersrand on 6 August 2012.

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