



South Africa's Learning Backlogs

Reflection Workshop
3 February 2022



Agenda

13h00-13h15

Welcome & Introduction

Ruth Rakosa & Nzwaki Adonisi

13h15-13h25

Process Overview

Colleen Magner

13h25-13h40

Check-In

Colleen Magner

13h40-13h55

Report back from interviews

Nzwaki Adonisi

13h55-14h15

Group work

Colleen Magner & Nzwaki Adonisi

14h15-14h25

Break

14h25-14h35

Plenary reflections

Colleen Magner

14h35-15h20

Possible ways forward & priorities

Nzwaki Adonisi

15h20-15h30

Closing remarks

Marion Stewart & Nzwaki Adonisi

Workshop objectives

Reflection

Share and reflect on the data from the interviews

Relationship building

Opportunity for diverse stakeholders to meet and engage

Test

Assess where the energy and priorities of stakeholders lie for addressing the identified challenges

Process requirements when addressing complex situations

Systemic
Address root causes of problems

Cause and effect are far apart in time and space and are independent

No one actor can solve the Problem on their own

Collaborative
Bring those affected into planning and decision-making process

The future is unfamiliar and undetermined

Emergent / Experimental
Adapt to changing realities

*Who needs to be **in the process?***

*Those who like to
keep the status quo*

*Those who
collectively
represent a wide
spectrum of
viewpoints*

*Those who like to
change the status quo*

Required Agreements

	Conventional Collaboration	Stretch Collaboration
The common purpose	✓	X
The problem	✓	X
The solution	✓	X
The plan to implement the solution	✓	X
Who will do what to implement the plan	✓	X

Source: Adam Kahane, Reos Partners: Collaborating with the Enemy

Two Approaches to Collaboration

	Conventional Collaboration	Stretch Collaboration
How we relate with our collaborators	Focus on the good and the harmony of the team (one superior whole)	Embrace conflict and connection (multiple diverse holons)
How we advance our work	Agree on the problem and solution (one optimum plan)	Experiment our way forward (multiple emergent possibilities)
How we participate in our situation	Change what other people are doing (one paramount leader)	Step into the game (multiple co-creators)

Source: Adam Kahane, *Reos Partners: Collaborating with the Enemy*

The interview process

What did we ask you?

About you:

Your background with learning backlogs

Framing the issue:

What are learning backlogs and why do they exist?

Key concerns:

Where are we most stuck? What do we need answered?

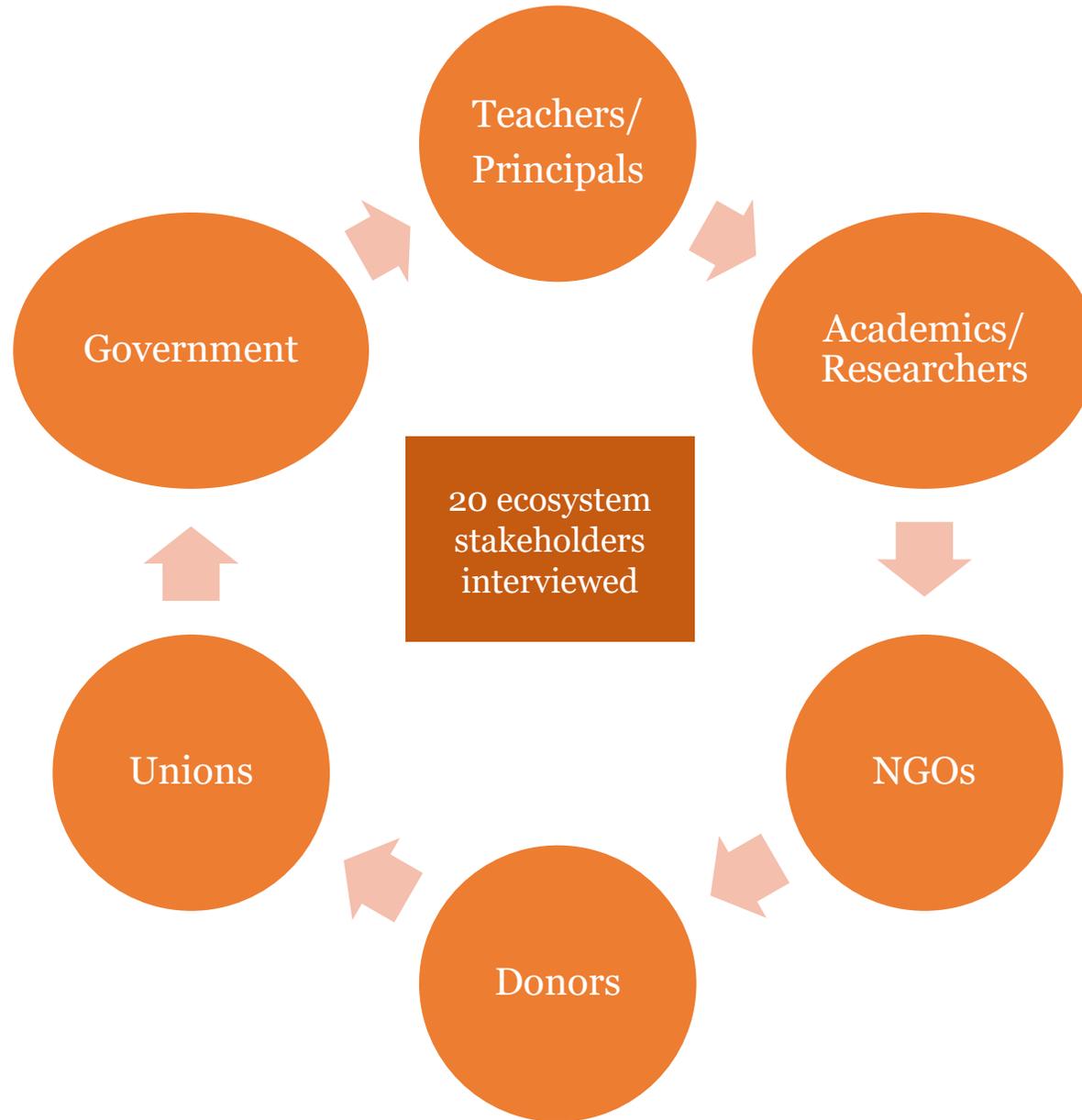
Lessons from the past:

What has worked/not worked well before?

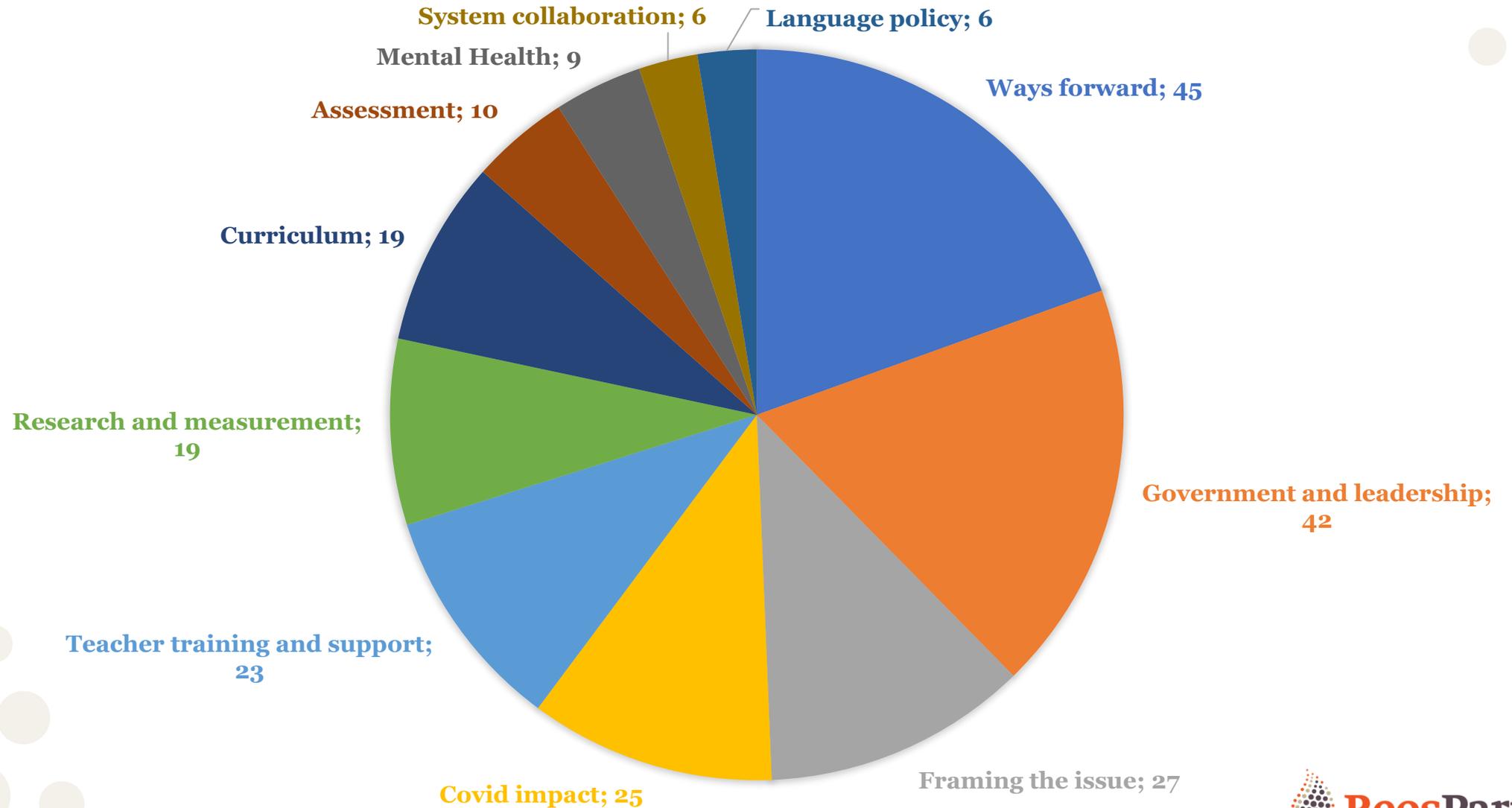
Aspirations:

How could it be better?

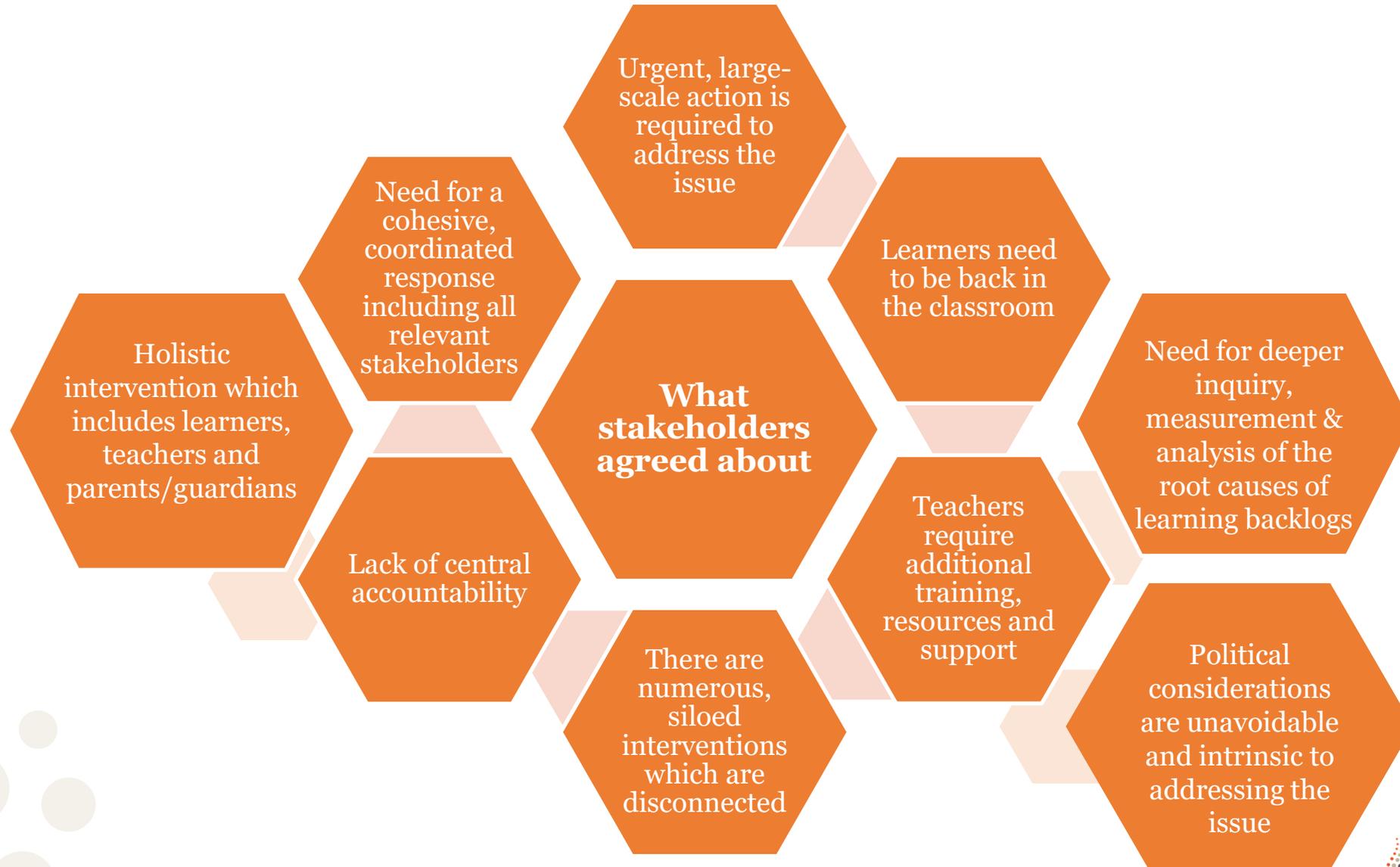
Which parts of the system did we speak to?



Recurring topics



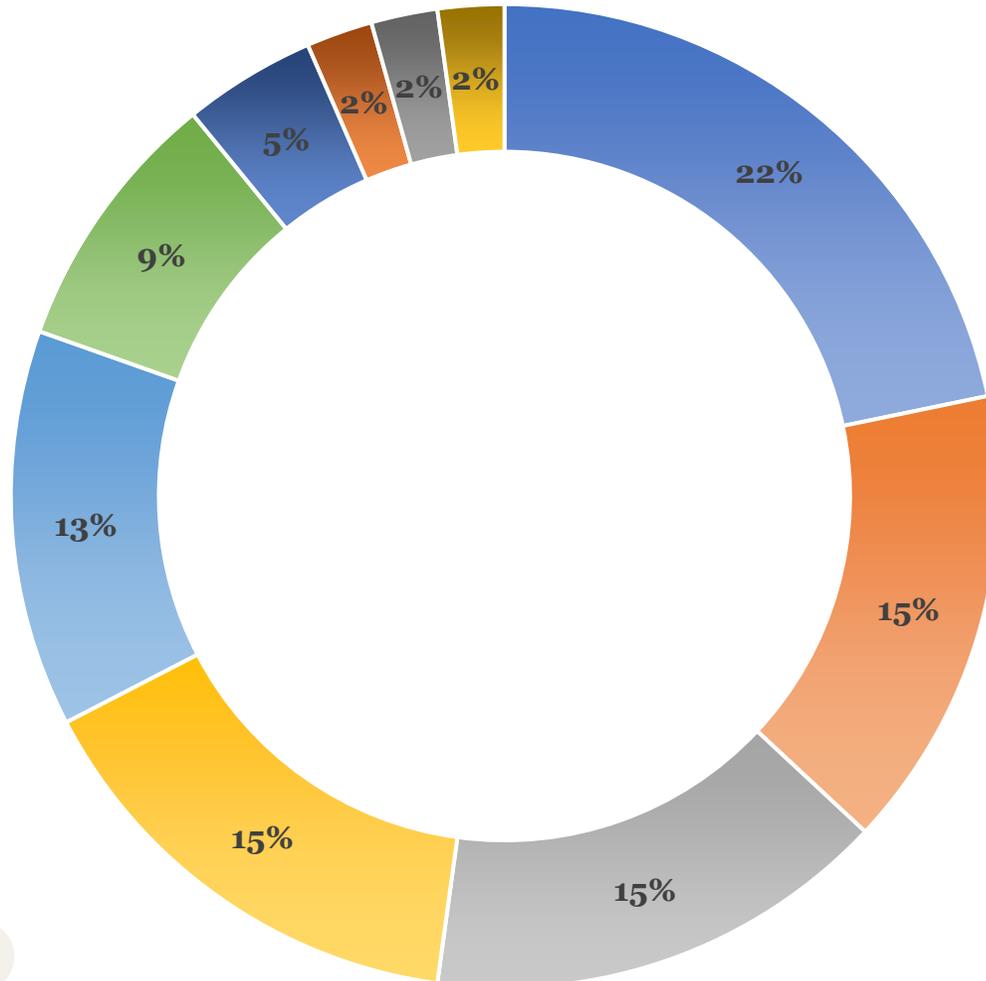
Challenges in the system: consensus



Challenges in the system: dissonance

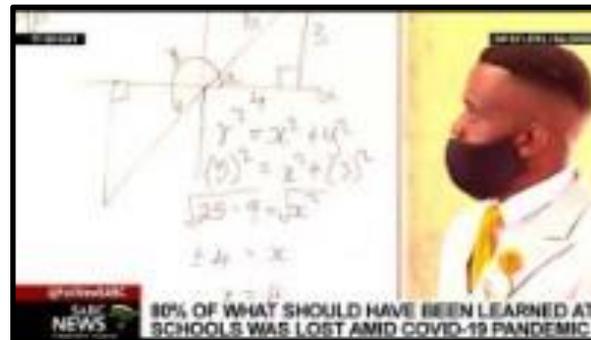


Views on possible ways forward



- Holistic approach: student, teacher, parent/guardian
- Back to the classroom
- Long-term approach
- Technology and infrastructure
- Paths to motivation for students & teachers
- Tailored approaches/policies for students with different skills/goals
- Auxilliary teachers from matric/university students
- Community education
- Research and measurement
- Increased sense of urgency

Learning backlogs: topical & trending





Notable quotes:
Framing of the issue



“It is not a term I have tended to use and is often premised on the assumption that you need to catch up with something that is ahead. That framing is potentially limited and places strong emphasis on curriculum coverage, with less emphasis on the learner and their learning needs.”

“ A big mistake in social science is to look for a common language. Much like I discovered when looking at decolonization, everyone has a different perspective. Don’t look for consistent definitions, rather continue to clarify what each stakeholders means”

“I don’t mind what word you use, just be clear on what you mean”



Notable quotes:
Sense of urgency

Notable quotes: Sense of urgency



“2022-2024 are decisive years that the system can use to bring kids up to speed. We need to actively start working on fixing the system in 2022.”

“Time is up. We need to get going and take the bull by the horns. The outcomes have deteriorated, and it has happened on our watch”

“The devastation of the number of dropouts during Covid... learners are losing school fitness in the same way we lose work fitness. School fitness requires daily engagement with the brain. How do we keep brain fitness alive?”



Notable quotes: Historic inequality

Notable quotes: Historic inequality



“If you compare a primary school in a suburb to one in a township - the learning is richer than a township school can have - is that a backlog or a loss? It is not going to be made up, so to call it a backlog is muddying the water. You’re not going to have the time or resources to catch it up. The fundamentals are a backlog because they have to be made up. This will continue in future, inequality is always going to be there. Our gap is vast and historical and haunting us.”

“Education is capitalistic and producing inequality.”

“A few private schools had the ability to shift to online learning and very few public schools (Model C), a small percentage of them were successful... Most schools had to grind to a halt.”



Notable quotes: Mental Health



“Mental health is an issue - the emotional and psychological state of teachers and students. It has been an incredibly stressful period since March 2020...If we can't even do the basics, how can we expect a child in a rural area to go to emotional counselling? That is the tragedy of South Africa.”

“Children have been traumatized, especially township children. You know everyone in your township, it is not like the suburbs. Your neighbour is your aunt or uncle. What have we done to address the death all around them, they know so many more people...there was no national program of healing”

“Give people the tools to understand that if I am doing my best, that's ok. We can't provide psychologists to everyone, so how do we tell a nation, you are actually good enough?”



Notable quotes: Covid impact

“The system scrambled because it was caught unawares.”

“We were screwing up before the pandemic.”

“We really dont know, Covid may have taught us many things that we might not have learnt, perhaps we should speak about learning losses and learning gains.”

“The capacity within government departments more broadly is very weak, and it was made worse by Covid. It is a broader systemic issue, there is a lack of accountable leadership”



Notable quotes: System Collaboration





“We need to ask ourselves as stakeholders (government, business, researchers, less organized parts of civil society, smaller political parties) what is the purpose of education? If X is the purpose, is the way that education is currently organized serving the purpose? If not, why is it not?”

“We have to position ourselves along the continuum at different phases- support at the right time and criticize at the right time”

“It is difficult to coordinate people, not everyone will agree on the theories, science. My philosophy is to work with the willing...Sure, we differ but how can we bring our own bits and pieces together?”



“We can't just have lesson plans and teach teachers different ways of doing things...the system is problematic. What kind of teacher is going to come out? You can't just change the teacher; you need to change the system. The teacher is produced within the system.”

“If there is a country that can do this, it is South Africa. That is what we need to harness now. The state of institutions right now are at risk. We need to locate the conversation in the political aspect as well. We must defend our institutions and make sure they work for the most excluded and marginalised”



Notable quotes: Government leadership

“We know what to do, it is not rocket science. We need the political will and momentum to take this forward”

“We are not here to bash DBE, we are here to help them, the NECT has an important role to play- they can move quickly and support the DBE.”

“We need a concerted effort to lobby the Department of Basic Education, they need to be held accountable for their ‘business as usual stance’”

“The education sector is too focussed on school and teachers and narrow outcomes and not on the broader system within which education operates. We cannot address the problems in a classroom because that is not where they started.”



“What is most important is the provincial departments of education...They are not building around learning outcomes”

“The DBE has to lead in that respect, we are not doing enough to advocate for the call, we have started to bring different players and work intimately with them. These include teacher development, curriculum and assessment...The next step would be broader research within the community that is not working intimately with the DBE. We can use this as a framework for further advice and recommendations... Some institutions prefer to be slightly on the outside for whatever reason. So we are convincing people to come on board, the DBE is open and concerned about learning loss and recovery. People should approach the DBE.”



Notable quotes: Research & measurement

“We need to give teachers a simple tool to test children’s developmental levels”

“We need to recognise the limitations of extrapolated data from a small sample, but it does give us an indication of what is happening in the system.”

“It is clear that there is a backlog, this is measured by where people are in the curriculum. This is the equivalent of closing the door once the horse has bolted”

“We need to know the number of backlogs and the extent of it...There is just a generalized sense of the backlog, snapshots and samples but no universal testing to intervene.”



Notable quotes: Back to school

Notable quotes: Back to school



“I really only have one thing to say on this subject: schools must be fully reopened immediately, without platooning of shift attendance. All children need to be back on a full-time basis.”

“With regards to getting back to the classroom, the kids who couldn't read for meaning were there before Covid and they were going to school.”

“It is time for schools to go back to normal. Everyone is consistent on this and in SA we are very lackadaisical around this. We did our best at the beginning of Covid and it is not time to be slow to go back to school”



“There is currently no education.”

“Rotational timetables must go- the fear & anxiety in schools does not outweigh what learners are losing. Vaccinations are free and readily available to people over 12 years old. School has to become an everyday thing.”



Notable quotes:
Holistic, sustainable approach

Notable quotes: Holistic, sustainable approach

“Education is more than schooling, it involves a community , attitude to education and family interventions. Interventions that have worked well have focussed on family engagement collectively on learning... 70% of learning happens outside of the school...The best performing schools have parental involvement, we need to mirror this in under-resourced communities.”

“We need to stop ‘one size fits all’ and we should try using the things already in place in the market.”

“When we have streamed incorrectly my frustration is that a child battles with a bad matric result and decides to go into plumbing then they have to do pure maths for plumbing? Why? The system needs to adjust to the needs, children are not trained properly.”



Notable quotes: Curriculum

Notable quotes: Holistic, sustainable approach



“We have an incoherent strategy which is confusing to students”

“What are the crucial concepts in mathematics and what can be left out as we address the backlogs? In this catastrophic environment we need to know what the bare minimum is.”

“It is a waste of time to add on hours if it is not targeting or optimizing learning.”

“Differentiate between the amount of work and the critical work”

Reflections on recurring topics

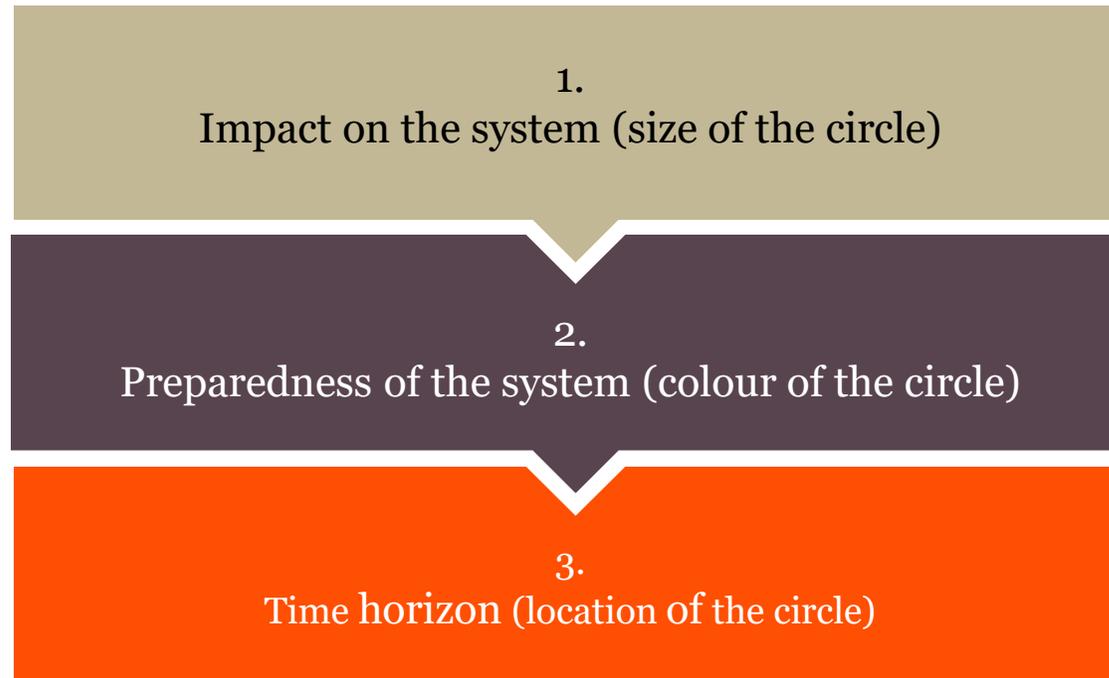
On Mural, let's capture:

- What resonated with you?
- What was new to you?
- What did you disagree with?
- What questions emerged for you?

Learning Backlogs: Heatmap

A [heat map](#) is a tool for quickly assessing the nature of trends related to learning backlogs.

It considers three variables:



In other words, a trend that has a high strategic temperature for learning backlogs will be a combination of high impact, low level of preparedness + limited time.

Check-out

As you leave this workshop:

- Are you leaving a cynic or a believer about what is possible?
- What was most valuable to you?
- What do you wish we could have covered which we did not?

Please post these in the Zoom chat.

Thank you.