



FEEDBACK REPORT ON NATIONAL EDUCATION BLUEPRINT

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INTRODUCTION

The Prime Minister released on September 11, 2012 the Preliminary Report – Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) and immediately after that on September 13, 2012, ASLI-CPPS hosted a small group discussion to receive feedback.

Prior to this, ASLI-CPPS had already undertaken two Roundtable Discussions to review feedback on education reform and in addressing the concerns within the education system so as to ensure that every Malaysian child and young person receives high quality education within the public system.

The two earlier discussions were held Feb 27, 2012 on ‘Vernacular Schools in Malaysia’ and the second was held on April 16, 2012 entitled ‘Educational Reform and Process of Consultation’. The findings of these were handed over to the Deputy Prime Minister & Education Minister by Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam on April 23, 2012.

This document records the two main press releases by ASLI-CPPS Chairman, Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam on September 12, 2012 and another after the focus group discussion on September 14, 2012. In addition we provide a brief summary of the deliberations that took place at the focus group discussion.

I take this opportunity to thank Ms Nor Arlene Tan for taking notes, writing the report and also in providing the logistic support for the focus group discussion.

Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria

CPPS Visiting Fellow/Research Consultant

December 5, 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ASLI's Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS), hosted a Roundtable Discussion (RTD) on September 13, 2012 to review the newly released National Education Blueprint (2013-2025). This was a small group of people but they represented a cross section of Malaysian society with educational expertise.

The Chairman of ASLI-CPPS, Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, moderated the RTD. Among those present were Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim (PAGE), Tan Sri Dr T Marimuthu (former professor of Education), Dato AR Peter (former Principal), Mr Khor Hong Yin (former Principal and Secretary of Methodist Schools), Ms Leow Lee Lin (educationist), Bro Anthony Rogers (Head, La Salle Schools), Dr Daniel Ho (former lecturer) and Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria (Ethnic studies, UKM) and many other education leaders

The RTD made the following observations & recommendations:-

Appreciate the Government for the Effort

All present recognised that the Ministry of Education had taken tremendous effort in public consultation, receiving input from professionals, educational experts, parents and the public, before bringing out a comprehensive preliminary report.

The RTD recognised that the Ministry of Education was in no illusion or seeking to cover up many weaknesses in the current state of the education performance and achievements of the educational system in Malaysia.

While also recognising major developments and achievements in education, the Report does acknowledge serious shortcomings when benchmarked internationally with other countries both at the content as well as in the delivery and learning outcomes, which have to be overcome at a much faster pace, to prevent further decline in our educational standards.

Strengthening English Language

While the importance of Bahasa Malaysia and English was rightly noted, however the emphasis of English requires stronger thrust in order for Malaysia to prepare Malaysians to become better able to compete in the globalised world, as Malaysians are losing their competitive edge.

Hence much more attention should be given to upgrading the teaching of English together with English literature studies. Furthermore, it is necessary to teach Maths and Science in English, especially at the secondary level. Also we need the introduction of English medium schools based on parental choice in selected schools. This attempt was felt would not weaken the commitment to the national language which we hold paramount.

In this connection, it was felt that the key findings of the international and local panel of experts be released including the feedback from the town hall gathering especially in the area of English language proficiency including the experiences Korea and Singapore in this respect.

Science & technology need specific mention

It was noted that the blueprint was weak in addressing the science and technology concerns and therefore the blueprint needs a very much stronger focus on this aspect, including the expansion of technical schools to meet the demand for technical and semi-professional manpower need in a rapidly developing country like Malaysia.

Concern over moral studies

Much concern was expressed over the teaching of morals and Islamic studies. There is a need to clearly describe how this will be done and more details on this matter.

The perceived Islamisation in national schools should be addressed urgently as this issue could be causing more polarisations in national schools and making national schools unpopular with parents and large sectors of the public.

This could be one reason why national schools are seen to be driving students away at the primary levels.

Clear roadmap for mission schools

It was felt that the legacy of the Mission schools is totally neglected and their immense contributions not adequately recognised. There is no reference or roadmap for the future of Mission schools and this is a major gap in the report. While the RTD appreciates the reference to both Pintar and Trust schools as new innovative approaches for private sector involvement, the tremendous potential of the Mission schools should not be neglected and should be enhanced.

In this context the RTD felt that these schools which were premier schools of the past and where today like other national schools with a majority of the students from the Malay community, these schools must be regarded as National schools with sufficient resources allocated for infrastructure development and common maintenance, as many mission and vernacular schools are in miserable conditions.

The traditional dichotomy of National schools and National Type Schools must be dismantled. This is because the students are all Malaysians and therefore the tax payers must benefit from universal public resources allocations. This sore issue itself is causing resentment and disunity. Hence any transformed education policy must seek to promote rather expand disunity.

It was felt therefore that Mission schools had the full potential of adopting the Trust school approach for greater community and private sector involvement.

Furthermore the blueprint does not mention School Boards, their potential and development which is a very good method for greater and more stable community involvement in the management of the schools. This aspect must be added into the blueprint.

Reposition Vernacular schools as full national school recognition

It was also strongly felt that in the case of the Vernacular schools there is a need for a clear statement of commitment and recognition that Vernacular schools contribute to the national

education development and should indicate a clear expression of our basis need to follow our national slogan of pursuing 'unity in diversity'. UNESCO studies show that children learn best in the early years in their own mother tongue and therefore this diversity of choice must be appreciated and enhanced in the Malaysian education system, especially at primary level.

In this context too all the Vernacular schools must be treated as national schools and the false dichotomy separating National Schools and National Type Schools must be discontinued as a matter of priority , to give more credibility to the blueprint!

The RTD recognised that the Federal Government has been making substantial funding available since 2008 for Vernacular and Mission schools .However this is viewed as 'ad hoc and piece meal' and even tentative .Therefore there must be in the educational blueprint, a major departure from the past to move towards to future where all streams have a legitimate place within the educational system. There must be a clear roadmap for both Mission and Vernacular schools like how the blueprint enhances 'the religious education pathway' (page 7-12).

The predominance of mainly Malay teachers in the whole education system is unacceptable especially to non-Malays, as this unhealthy trend alienates the system from non-Malays and creates disunity and reduced quality and competition among teachers and destroys empathy among teachers and students.

In this context too it was strongly felt that the position of coordinator or ministry official in charge of Vernacular and Mission schools, should be updated to Director Level with the establishment of a new Division for the management of both Vernacular and Mission schools urgently. This is necessary in order for the Ministry to give adequate priority to proper development of all streams of education without apparent discrimination.

The current system of management is unsatisfactory and is unable to address these concerns and also tap the full potential of our teachers and students, leading to mediocrity and not promoting meritocracy.

Decentralising & empowering the school heads

It was strongly felt that principal and school headship selection is very essential including providing the support needed. In this context it was felt that greater autonomy be given to school heads. A radical proposal of dismantling the district level educational administration and layer (PPD) and this was felt as imposing a debilitating burden on heads as it restricts the potential of the school heads and the Parents Teachers Association (PIBG) to pay a greater innovative role in effectively managing and leading their Schools progress.

It was felt that the schools and teachers are too burdened by administrative and bureaucratic requirements from the top administrators at the Federal, state and district levels. It was emphasised that both the heads and teachers be give autonomy with accountability. This is not adequately addressed in the blueprint and therefore requires a stronger input from the teachers rather than the bureaucrats.

Teacher selection and training including ethnic balance

It was felt that priority must be given to undoing the current ethnic imbalance of the teacher, heads of schools and also educational officials towards a better national reflection. While this is acknowledged in the blueprint there is however no roadmap in addressing this imbalance over the next few years.

A clear road map on recruitment and promotions must be in place. A stronger selection process must be introduced and non-interference during the training period especially to fail potential teachers who do not reach the mark while in teacher training. The key to transformation is empowering and enabling the teachers to improve the quality of the teaching and learning experience.

In this context it was also proposed that the private sector be allowed to provide teacher training courses in order to meet standards and the current shortage of subject proficiency teachers. Since there are private colleges and private universities, why can't there be private teacher training institute, to raise our education standards?

Creating a conducive multi-cultural learning environment

The national unity agenda in the blue print is too simplistic with a weak analysis and way forward. The RTD felt that this component of promoting a multi-cultural appreciation of Malaysian society must be strengthened not just from interaction but in fostering a radical change in the attitudes of current teachers as well as development a multi-cultural learning environment in the schools.

In this context address the ethnic imbalance in the teaching staff and heads is imperative and therefore a clear roadmap in addressing this matter is targeted. The RTD could not accept the claim that non Malays are not interested in joining the teaching profession especially now that teachers have had a big revision in the salary package.

We are surprise that the document does not make reference to the 1Malaysia concept of moving from tolerance to appreciation to acceptance. This is a very critical dimension that even within homogeneous and mono-cultural environment there can be a fostering towards multi-cultural dimensions.

Call for the release and public review of other Reports

The RTD strongly felt that the consultative approach adopted in the preparation of the blue print was also intended to address the increasing loss of public confidence in the educational system, which has deteriorated according to international studies. Therefore very effort to address this loss of confidence becomes essential and these big gaps in the report must be addressed speedily, as some of them quite incomprehensively have been ignored and omitted!

The RTD felt that the release of the reports by the Independent Review Panel chaired by Prof Tan Sri Dzulkipli and the National Dialogue – Town hall meetings chaired by Tan Sri Dr Wan Zahid and the other independent commission studies will enhance public confidence. It will address some of the poor perception problems.

More public discussions and debates are necessary, but more importantly there is a growing feeling that many of the proposals are heard but not taken seriously and worse still often ignored for political expediency.

ASLI-CPPS RTD appeals to all Malaysians and especially our political leaders to refrain from political interference and to pursue the progress of our educational system on a professional and long term basis to ensure the sustainability of Malaysian unity and competitiveness for our posterity of all races and religions in our multicultural society.

(Press release by Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam & Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria issued on Sept 14, 2012)

Statement by ASLI-CPPS

EDUCATION BLUEPRINT REQUIRES FURTHER WORK FOR A GREATER INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The ASLI's Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) welcomes the release of the Preliminary Report, Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) as timely and necessary for preparing the future intellectual and social and human capital of Malaysia, in a globalised world.

We recognise that there has been lot of hard work and effort in drawing public opinion and in the compilation of this report. We therefore congratulate this participatory effort especially through the town hall meetings for feedback as well as the academic and professional evaluative work.

We also recognise that the five system aspirations (page E-9) and the eleven shifts (page E 10) to transform the educational system are necessary and strategic.

However we note that there are also major and serious gaps in the report and therefore urge the Ministry of Education to undertake further consultative processes to review the findings and plans and to actually incorporate public views that are now overlooked.

In reading this extensive blueprint we have noted a number of areas that require further work as it does not reflect a comprehensive understanding of the educational requirements and aspirations of all the Malaysian communities. If ignored this can lead to greater polarisation and national disunity due to the following issues:-

First, the report rightly recognises the need for strengthening language proficiency in both English and Bahasa Malaysia (page E-10) including new provision at the primary level with intensive remedial support for struggling students after school hours (page E-12).The target of specific targeting vernacular stream students in Bahasa Malaysia is most urgent, but specific recommendations have to be spelt out to ensure proper implementation.

Second, the report also rightly places emphasis on improvements of the quality of education (page E-14) through the effective recruitment and training of teachers. The supervisory and support systems for teachers must be addressed.

In this context while the entry requirements of teachers by merit is very important nonetheless there is a no mention of the urgent need to have ethnic balance of both teaching staff especially in

primary and secondary schools including headship positions and positions in education departments at the Federal, state and district levels. This is very critical in ensuring the national character is maintained in all the educational streams and choices.

Third, there is a major conceptual issue to the way “the ethnically homogeneous environments” (page E-7, 3-21, 7-15) are described and analysed. While the document rightly highlights the unparalleled degree of choice for parents, the selective use of data focusing on Vernacular schools in the context of national unity is regrettable. It’s almost blaming the Vernacular schools as the cause of polarization when in reality the national schools are driving many students of all races, away from the national schools.

There must be a clear revelation of data across all the 20 categories (page A-8) of educational institutions including the composition of students in residential schools, technical & vocational schools, matriculation and through other provisions such as preschool through KEMAS or secondary through MSRM institutions. The student and staff population by ethnicity is not revealed nor identified as one contributing factor separating Malay students from non-Malays especially in the secondary school system. “Where then is the transparency to encourage confidence in the blueprint?”

In this context the root reasons for exodus of non-Malay students which are due to the imbalanced cultural and religious environment in a majority of NATIONAL schools. This must be noted and addressed to win credibility and support for blueprint. In addition the document only adopts the approach of ‘direct interaction’ among students from various ethnic communities. However it must be noted that even within homogeneous environments there can be an effective orientation towards multiculturalism which can be fostered in order to enable student interaction in multi-cultural situations. It has to be emphasised that multiculturalism can contribute to national unity

The section on “Enhancement of unity in schools” (page 7-15 to 7-18) does not focus on how to ensure the environment of the school and the approach adopted by the school is truly appreciative of the multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural reflection of Malaysian society.

Fourth, the document lacks substantive data and statistics such as breakdown of data across the 20 categories of schools. The release of data in the blueprint has been selective and therefore not comprehensive. The earlier documents entitled “Pembangunan Pendidikan” (2001-2010) and the “Pelan Induk Pembangunan Pendidikan” (2006-2010) provided more comprehensive charts and tables which enable the general public to appreciate the complexity of issues as well as hold the Ministry officials accountable.

Fifth, the blueprint misses the opportunity to ensure an inclusive educational system. There is no specific mention how vernacular schools, mission and religious schools which are currently categorised as ‘National Type’, which also implies limited funding for infrastructure development can be truly incorporated as fully funded schools and national schools. A majority of students in Mission schools are Malay students and therefore a review of this issue is essential. Therefore the time has come in our National Education Policy to bring an end this dichotomy and ensure each of the different streams achieved the national character and inclusive nature in the interests of national unity.

This is why the objective of wave 3 (page 7-18) with the objective working towards “schools of choice for all” continue to create insecurities over constitutional protections towards Vernacular schools and religious schools. It is therefore imperative that the Blueprint takes the long-term view that the parental choices will remain—however with no compromise to the national agenda of national language, national unity and nation building.

It is in this context that CPPS feels that many of the community concerns raised by ordinary citizens and parents have been censured by some professionals and foreign and local consultants. Thus we would like the Ministry of Education to release the reports (page A-5) of the Independent Review Panel chaired by Prof Tan Sri Dzulkifli, the findings of the National Dialogues chaired by Tan Sri Dr Wan Mod Zahid as well as the commissioned academic and UNESCO reports. This will enable ordinary citizens to review these in the light of the Blueprint document.

The nation is looking for freshness in addressing the strongest asset of this country namely our younger generation. We need boldness and innovation from a critical but constructive dimension to ensure that our educational policy its implementation and institutions, bring out the best in our children to develop their full potential to serve the common good of this nation

We need to put into practice the slogan “people first, performance now” to ensure our education policy is truly transformed to enable our country to progress and not regress, due to a lack of political will to move innovatively and boldly forward.

(Press release issued as a by Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, Chairman ASLI-CPPS on 12 September 2012)

DISCUSSIONS & COMMENTS

Moderator’s Opening Comments - Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, Chairman, Centre For Public Policy Studies (CPPS)

Tan Sri Ramon congratulated the government for coming out with an Education Blueprint for this country. He believed it is a good start for a continuing dialogue and participation by the public and parents to extend our faith in the government. Although the blueprint is an opportunity that has yet to be fully realised, he commended the government to be a thinking agent in creating a better clarity or purpose for this Education Blueprint.

However, the Education Blueprint did not offer much substance in its review and recommendations. It is well presented in glossy covers but lacked innovation in its contents. Long standing issues such as Vernacular Schools were left out, while the preoccupation seems to be on the improvement of National Schools instead of revamping the whole education system. In fact, there is a lack of mentioning on technical skills education, and there ought to be a cursory approach on the improvement of English Language.

Tan Sri Ramon stressed that our survival as a united nation is largely based on our education, in which students are able to graduate with adequate technical knowledge, living skills, religious knowledge and other important values.

Reflections by Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria, Senior Fellow, Centre For Public Policy Studies (CPPS) & Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)

Datuk Dr Denison highlighted five basic points in reviewing the Blueprint:-

First is the positive use of a variety of methods in data collection and in producing the report. Among the methodologies is the town hall meetings concept of public consultation where over 12,000 people participated and a panel of speakers involved in each meeting. The meetings were chaired by Tan Sri Wan Zahid, former Director General of Education. In addition commission research was carried out by agencies such as UNESCO and other consultants. Independent panel members were also consulted which included some distinguished personalities, Tan Sri Dato' Zulkifli Abdul Razak, former Vice Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia was the chair. There were also academic inputs from various universities such as Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, as well as nine laps of various ministry and agency inputs.

The report itself is very bulky and well-illustrated in contrast to other earlier reports by the government. He stressed that the independent reports from the blueprint need to be released for independent review, especially on the analysis, major recommendations and outcomes from the town hall meetings. The education blueprint is consolidated and considered as a ministerial report instead of an independent panel report, as consultants and sub-professionals had sugar-coated the report to make it much more presentable, rather than being sufficiently critical of the system.

Secondly is the lacked of full figures and data to support the report. The post-2008 of the government reports are not revealing full tables and data, even the 10th Plan only revealed certain percentages and selected reviews. It seems that the data is used in a selective way to push certain agenda. Nevertheless, among pressing data revealed were: the assessment of the subjects on Math and Science in an international level over 74 countries, in which Malaysia came on the bottom end; 50% of the teaching delivery system is not effective; also a number of English teachers are not trained in the field and who for the next 20 years they will be within the system.

Thirdly is there is a major flaw in the blueprint on the perspective of the national unity. It highlighted an increasing ethnic-homogeneity or mono-cultural institutions such as vernacular schools and religious schools, and the blueprint linked the phenomena to unparalleled parental choice. Yet, the analysis did not highlight other schools with homogeneity environment such as MARA schools, technical schools, residential schools, vocational technical schools, pre-schools, and so on. The document did not give adequate data in all areas and it constantly rephrased from one particular school of thought that the vernacular schools is mono-cultural.

The solution to national unity suggested by the blueprint is interaction through direct encounter, but it did not highlight other factors such as the location of the school, what is the neighbourhood, state or environment the schools are situated. The fact is, most of the communities in Malaysia are mono-cultural, it is impossible to expect more multi-cultural mixing in places such as in Kelantan, Terengganu, certain parts of Kedah, Perlis and so on. It is not coming out in any part of the report and data on the possibility for a mono-cultural environment to have a multi-cultural appreciation and perspective.

Neither it is addressing the shift in the national schools environment which is very Malay and religious, which is also one of the factors that are driving out parents out from the national schools, nor any reference to the percentages of ethnicity of teachers – 81% are Malay, 14% are Chinese and 5% are Indians, but the data did not reveal whether the Chinese and Indian teachers are from the Vernacular Schools or National Schools. He urged that the government to release the report in a more detailed analysis. With breakdown of ethnic composition of teachers and students in all the education options available in the public system.

Moreover, it does not have a definite measure to national unity. Experiences of marginalisation, victimisation within the system and cultural sensitivity across board can be monitored quite well in a national unity theme. Unfortunately, national unity problems are associated to vernacular schools without presenting clear details. The theme of national unity needs to be relooked at, especially the challenge of building the environment, values and ethos of multiculturalism in places where there is a mono-cultural setting.

Fourthly, in the context of Vernacular schools, the blueprint does acknowledge that one major problem in our education is the poor language proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia and English, and the eventual removal of Remove Classes by 2017, although its strategic plan is not fully developed. The blueprint does acknowledge the need for improving and managing the transition from the primary vernacular school into the secondary school

While the blueprint started off in promoting diversity and richness and affirms the place of Vernacular schools (page 7-16), but its ultimate goal and conclusion is to narrow the stream of choice with the possible limiting of vernacular schools (page 7-18). Vernacular schools are here to stay but it is not affirmed as a contributing heritage towards national unity. The Vernacular schools are in fact national schools with a different medium of instruction in schools.

Fifthly the blueprint does mention about enhancing religious education in an Islamic context but there is no real focus to strengthen the Mission schools. There is reference to the new Trust schools which are managed by Yayasan Amir and there is a target to increase to 500 schools by 2025. This avenue provides missions schools to utilize a similar pathway however there is no reference to Mission schools such as their historical contributions and their future.

The current demarcation between fully-aided and partially-aided does great injustice to the school system especially as there is very little public funds for capital expenditure and for infrastructure development. It is important to highlight that majority of students in Mission schools are Malay Bumiputra students and not Christian children.

In the context of Mission schools and Vernacular schools, one of the reasons they are mostly being neglected from government policy and evaluation because the officers concerned are junior positions in the Ministry of Education. Therefore there is a need to review the structural requirement and upgrade the officers for both vernacular and missions schools to a JUSA position.

Datin Noor Azimah Rahim, President, PAGE Malaysia

Datin Azimah expressed concern that the Prime Minister didn't seem to be aware of our National Science Policy and National Science and Technology Policy when the blueprint was being drafted. It is important to review back the history of our science and innovation education. Although the Prime Minister had been to New York to explore the advancement of the Science Education there, unfortunately the blueprint did not reflect the outcome of such desire.

She also stressed that the Ministry of Education did not pick up a lot of the international advices on the blueprint. Among highlighted by the international advisers, 50% of South Korean national education budget is invested in teaching Math and Science in English. Also, advices from Professor Lee of the National University of Singapore whom highlighted Singapore benefitted a lot from the English medium schools. Another thing is the UNESCO report, which was commissioned by the Ministry of Education in April 2012, one of the high priorities was to review the language of medium of instruction for Science and Math.

She attended some of the dialogues held by the Ministry of Education and three main topics were raised during the dialogue: the Ministry should not be a politician such as the example of South Korean Education Ministry, the reintroduction of English medium schools, and the teaching of Science and Math in English. None of these were taken into consideration in the blueprint, and this is quite serious as there is no transparency within the Ministry of Education.

She informed that Tan Sri Dato' Dr. Wan Mohd. Zahid Mohd. Noordin who headed the review panel and the council had his own independent report, while Prof Tan Sri Dzulkipli Abdul Razak also had his own independent report from the review panel. These two reports were handed to the Director-General of Education, Tan Sri Abd Ghafar Mahmud, and basically he has the utmost authority on selecting the contents of the blueprint. There is no collaboration between the three parties.

She also explained that the implementation of LINUS to improve the learning standard of children who are weak in reading and writing was flawed because there were cases of teachers who were cheating on the paper markings, due to the need to attain better KPI.

She added that the push of decentralisation was mooted by Director General Tan Sri Asiah Samah in the 80s era, yet there is no real implementation of decentralisation and it is still being discussed. She also informed to others that in the PBS book, it is stated clearly that we cannot question the credibility of teachers. In term of racial composition, there is a deliberate attempt by the ministry to ensure majority of the teaching staff are Malays.

Regarding on the allocation of funds, as the Deputy Chairman of SMK Sri Hartamas which is supposedly one of the top schools in Kuala Lumpur, also does not receive any funding from the JPM (Jabatan Pendidikan Malaysia) or MOE (Ministry of Education) for repairs and maintenance of the school facilities. In fact, they have a science lab that is unmaintained and in dire need for repair due to the lack of funding.

Datin Azimah expressed the importance of PAGE to push PPSMI as a movement comprising other NGOs rather than as a lone NGO to ensure a larger voice and engagement towards the Ministry. She suggested for ASLI-CPPS to endorse on PPSMI's memorandum to the government on teaching Math and Science in English, in which CPPS eagerly support.

Dr Daniel Ho, Senior Pastor, DUMC Dream Centre

Pastor Ho believed that the Malaysian education system is very much politicised, affecting the whole education institution and causing the Malaysian public to express confusion. The flip flop education policy is detrimental to our nation as a whole. He stressed that the Malaysian education ought to be in the hand of education experts instead of politicians. This would set the nation backward as a whole in terms of development, achievement and contribution.

Education is important as it can reduce poverty in a nation, and people can contribute to the economy and society, as well as can compete with the world. It is crucial to recognise that a good education will enhance the socio-economy of ordinary Malaysians, especially for those who come from very poor background.

The contents of the subject taught matters to ensure children develop well and can compete. If teaching of the Malaysian history and global history is narrow, people would not understand the nation and the world, thus not being able to engage with people around.

The poor quality of today's teachers is a far cry, they lacked passion and standards. Most teachers are clueless of their profession and lacked motivation in comparison to the teachers of the yester years.

Brother Anthony Rogers, Director, De La Salle Brothers Malaysia

Brother Anthony Rogers stated that it is crucial to revitalise our board of governors as part of the process to transform education system. He recognised three areas to strengthen in the Education Blueprint.

Firstly, *Sekolah Kebangsaan* is divided into fully-aided and partially-aided, but the partial-aided schools are unable to improve their quality because the funding is mostly spent on repairing and maintenance of the school buildings and facilities. He recommended all *Sekolah Kebangsaan* to be given full capital grants.

Second area is to strengthen the teaching staff, especially in teaching English. English is an important global language and the focus should be on having English to teach of math and science subjects. With the competitive edge in math and science, students can improve their socio-economic well-being.

Schools should also promote subjects such as arts, science and technology, and vocational skills learning that encourages creativity and innovation. The government should also provide learning centres to read and write for the special needs and rural children. While, having bilingual language proficiency would be an added advantage for Malaysians by inculcating the learning of mother tongue or foreign languages, besides mastering English and Malay.

Thirdly, is to establish a more efficient instrument of government for a certain degree of autonomy by decentralising the education policy. For instance, schools that were under the PPSMI had their own English language lab. Schools should be entrusted with responsibility in educating students.

The La Salle Mission school have always collaborated with the government, NGOs and the community, it has always emphasised on the concept of unity and integrity. In fact, more parents are concerned about the future of their children's education and also want to have a say in our education system. He suggested adopting a principal of Maximum Consultation in the formulation and implementation of the Malaysian education policy.

Tan Sri Dato' Dr T Marimuthu, Trustee, MIED

Tan Sri Marimuthu acknowledged that for the first time the Ministry of Education was not in denial about the report regarding our terrible PISA ranking in the world.

There are a lot of statistics that are useful for the assessment of the Malaysian education in the blueprint. Nevertheless, he agreed with Dr Denison with regards to vernacular schools. The whole world has gone multicultural, and catered to the multicultural society. In the case of Vernacular school, children learn better in their own mother tongue, but it will not jeopardise national unity as the children of Vernacular schools and national schools will resume their education together in the secondary schools, and they will still learn English and Malay subjects in school.

The government may claim that they celebrate unity in diversity, but they most often neglected Vernacular Schools, especially in the unequal allocation of funds to partially-aided schools (*sekolah bantuan modal*).

He also stressed on the importance of learning beyond the 'Dwi-Bahasa' (Malay and English languages). The government is encouraging Malaysians to learn Mandarin as China is becoming an important global economic power. He believed it is equally important to learning a third language, by focusing on learning global languages besides the mother tongue languages.

There are two thirds (2/3) of English teachers whom did not pass the Cambridge examination for English proficiency. The mastery of English language is very important and he stressed the need to use local teachers in teaching English as these teachers would understand the Malaysian culture better.

Children who are mentally and physically challenged, the Orang Asli children and children of rural areas were neglected in the report. This raised the question of how Malaysia can compete in the global standard while these issues are not addressed.

Empowerment of in the PTD (*Pengawai Tadbir Diplomatik*) is vastly lacking due to the PTD officers being mono-ethnic and disregard of the need for type-school. In fact Vernacular schools are treated as second-class in terms of aids or budget allocations. There are such varieties of type-schools in Malaysia, such as *Sekolah Kebangsaan* (National school), *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina* (National Chinese-type School), *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil* (National Tamil-type School), *Sekolah Agama* (Religious School), *Sekolah Persendirian Cina* (Independent Chinese School), *Sekolah Swasta* (Private School), *Sekolah Antarabangsa* (International School), and Mission School, these are the schools that can actually contributed to national unity.

Tan Sri Marimuthu stressed that radical reform is needed. 81% of teachers in national schools are Bumiputras, they are not able to understand the plight of students from different races.

He also informed cases of rural kids who took Math and Science in English had the overall scores of Math and Science gone up in national schools because they were being taught by quality teachers. Hence it is unacceptable to claim that rural kids can't cope in Math and Science due to English being the medium of instruction.

Dato' A. R. Peter, President, Brinsford Alumni Association Malaysia & Vice Chairman, Malayan Christian Schools Council

The education system and schooling in the past were great experience for the students, teachers and schools due to the existence of autonomy and the absent of structure within the school's system, especially in the area of sports.

He informed that the role of PTD is equivalent to the role of a Director General of a district. The purpose of having decentralisation is to create more autonomy. The autonomy should be with the Guru Besar (head of school), not with the PTD. In the olden days, everybody in the school as well as the community were involved with the students' sports activities in comparison to nowadays, it is not surprising that the standards of our sports have gone down tremendously.

In fact, nowadays the schools have become a system of oppression as children are expected to master everything. For example, the school's co-curriculum requires each student to be an all-rounder through the government's "One uniform, One sports and One society" campaign.

Moreover, the Malaysian education system is very paper-oriented, teachers are expected to manage the curriculum syllabus and test the students in numerous examinations, as well as coping with the huge clerical work.

Mr Cheli Nadarajah, The Reading Bus Ministries Malaysia & an teacher in a secondary school in Kuala Lumpur

Mr Cheli is a passionate teacher and has been teaching for 30 year, he served in Sarawak for 27 years. Over the last 30 years, many plans were introduced to the Malaysian education. Unfortunately, most of the teachers do not know nor care about the blueprint. He doubted the effectiveness of the blueprint, as the only time teachers were to find out about the existence or the contents of blueprint was during the interviews. In reality, teachers are living their lives from a day to day basis, they do not have the stamina and energy to multitask and cope with various responsibilities.

These teachers are hard pressed by computer keying and marks for students' test scores, especially during major examinations (UPSR, SPM and PMR). The whole country literally gets jammed up with half a million of teachers keying in test scores marks to the system, these can get very stressful for the teachers.

At the moment, parents can access their kids' grades online. With the huge burden piled at the teachers, they can become defensive when parents come to question their teaching ability. The blueprint may look very impressive, but teachers are the actual implementers and the blueprint needs to directly address these concerns.

He also highlighted the enrolment number of male teachers and male students are very low in schools, and this can create a major issue in the future.

Another concern is teachers also spend more time teaching tuition instead of teaching in class. Reality is everyone is taking private tuition where tuition centres mushroomed in every neighbourhoods and towns. The government needs to tackle this issue seriously and in fact abolish the practice of private tuition.

Mr Khor Hong Yin, Executive Director, Council of Education of Methodist in Malaysia

Mr Ho stated that the allocation of funds for Assisted-schools, Mission Schools and Vernacular Schools were given RM100 million each by the Ministry of Education. The amount may be large but there are 458 Mission Schools in Malaysia to be distributed from the RM100 million allocations. He thanked the government for looking into the contribution of the government-aided schools.

He also mentioned that over the year 2008-2009, due to the change in the political landscape in Malaysia, the government has given RM428 million to Mission Schools, a major portion of the allocations have been given to SMK (Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan) and SK (Sekolah Kebangsaan). But the allocations are not institutionalised and are given as a one-off contribution.

Mr Khor is from a Methodist concept of education; he informed that there are 57 Methodist schools in Malaysia except for Perlis, Kedah, Terengganu and Sarawak, consisting of 34 Methodist primary schools and 23 Methodist secondary schools. He expressed his sadness over schools such as SMK Tanjung Malim, SMK Ayer Tawar, and SMK Sungai Siput, because the condition of these schools and its facilities are poor and unbearable. The Headmasters and principals have been very stressful in seeking funds to improve the condition of their schools.

The Methodist schools were made into national schools in 1950s with the understanding that the government will improve and maintain the quality of the schools. The government refused to acknowledge that the lands and buildings of Methodist Schools belong to the Mission authorities; therefore no funds were given by the Ministry. The Mission board and alumni play an important role, but the blueprint did not recognise the importance of the board.

In regards to the concept of Maximum Consultation expounded by the Mission education, the Malaysian Christian School Council has presented the paper on Maximum Consultation to the Ministry of Education and it is now being recognised by the Director-General of Education. The Director-General alerted all the *Pengarah* (state department) to also recognise the ethos or *watak* of the Mission schools.

Back in the early days before the 90s, mission schools were considered premier schools on the ground unlike today, although very few retained such status such as St. John Methodist School, MGS Penang, MBS Ipoh, and MBS Keramat.

He stressed that the head of school plays an important role in ensuring students receive quality education in good school environment, that is the reason the Mission schools are very particular in the selection the headmasters and principals through the Maximum Consultation.

The Mission Schools would like to have a deflected racial composition regarding on the teachers intake to ensure a more balanced racial composition. In SMK, the racial composition is almost 70 %. According to the experience of his daughter in Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) enrolled as a student trainee five years ago, it was hardly any other races like Chinese or Indian students to be seen. He was saddened by the statement of Professor Dato' Dr. Aminah binti Ayob, a Vice Chancellor of UPSI at that time justifying the lack of non-Malays in the teaching profession was due to non-Malays not interested to take education as their career of choice. In fact, as the principal in MBS at that time, he witnessed some of his students were being rejected by UPSI even though they scored well in school.

Another issue is the level of stress teachers are facing nowadays. Teachers are forced to do an overwhelming work of data entry for the ministry. The government agency, PEMANDU, is responsible to gather data from these teachers in order to assess the result outcome of the NKRA (National Key Result Area) on our national education.

Another area of concern is the role and function of PTD which started during the early 80s. It was meant for the purpose to decentralise the education system within the government. The PTD has huge control over the schools in their respective districts by monitoring the distribution of students and teachers in both primary and secondary schools. Indirectly, the role of the JPM (Jabatan Pendidikan Malaysia) has in reality become redundant and irrelevant.

He recommended the government to maximise the human resources and finances of the country by providing more freedom and autonomy for the headmasters and principals to be accountable to the school's administrative system. In addition, the Federal administration can monitor the progress of the education system in the school, as well as having the auditor to do check and balance of the school's account.

Ms Leow Lee Lin, Director of Academic Studies, Methodist College Kuala Lumpur

Ms Leow highlighted the need for transparency in the teachers training selection. The Ministry tends to select teachers who are not qualified and less credibility in teaching to be teachers. The Ministry also needs to be transparent in the teacher training performance, as they tend to pass teachers who do not have the adequate competency to teach, this would affect the overall performance of the students. In fact, competent teachers were being rejected from being teachers. There is virtually no career development by the ministry to develop teachers to be competent, especially in teaching English. In fact, 17,000 teachers failed at the Cambridge placement test.

Mr Ho Chai Yee, Citizen Network for a Better Malaysia

Mr Ho argued that the weaknesses of the blueprint need to be addressed to the Ministry, issues like the question of unity, politicising of the education, resistance toward teaching English in Math and Science, the quality of teachers in teachers training programme, and the lacked of ethics and spirituality education. All these could have negative consequences in the implementation of the blueprint and our education system.

Ms Ho Sook Wah, Educator, Universiti Putra Malaysia (Apologised unable to attend, Datuk Dr Denison spoken on behalf)

Ms Ho highlighted the increased number of hours for Moral subject in comparison to Math and Science subject. Moreover, Islamic studies and Moral studies were recommended to be taught together in the blueprint, in which she raised her concerns regarding on ambiguity of the merged lesson, such as who would be the teachers teaching, the contents of the syllabus, and the number of hours for the lesson.

Mr Teo Lee Ken, Research Assistant, Institute of Ethnic Studies, UKM

Mr Teo spoke from the perspective of an academic and research background. He stressed that the most important part of the blueprint is Chapter two on 'Vision and Aspiration' by elaborating more on the content of the chapter and building the right premises. Where else, the rest of the chapters are merely ministerial documents which can be placed as appendix.

In analysing the blueprint, he noted that he was not keen on the statistics and data as it could be misleading and selective, and would prefer to analyse the wordings and content value of the blueprint. The blueprint lacked vision and values in reflecting the kind of society it aims for Malaysia - either a multicultural society or an open and democratic society. The blueprint has to make the effort to achieve these goals.

Education should also be humanitarian in nature, as freedom is not only achieved by hard work but also by having civil and political rights. Democratisation and decentralisation in education is very important and it has too run through the whole system. If the aim of the education is to create an open, democratic, critical and mature society, the Malaysian education system must have procedures and mechanism that allows democratic participation, openness and transparency at all levels.

Besides, instead of allowing PTD and JPM officers to control and monitor the schools and education system, power ought to be channel to the schools itself and the PIBG to decide on the direction of the schools and the education system. The government may facilitate the process.

In addition, he also found out that there is no synergy between the Ministry and the various government agencies. For example regarding on the issue of student's welfare and the access to schools, the effort to address it would involve a number of agencies and ministries, such as the Welfare Agency, Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), and *Maktab Perguruan*. The government

needs to address the parallel structure within the government and create a conducive, supportive ecosystem for the Malaysian education system.

Consequently, there is a need to recognise that the blueprint has its own limitations as it is only within the purview of the Education Ministry. The Blueprint would be unable to reform the Malaysian education system without having proper supporting ecosystem. Besides, the whole blueprint is merely a copycat of previous blueprints and existing facts and data.

Mr Teo, having to study at the National University of Singapore (NUS) for a year, informed that the president of NUS speech is in fact a better mission statement for the Malaysian education system in comparison to the blueprint. The president talked about how NUS can remain competitive in the global world and how Asian universities need to innovate themselves to gage to world standards.

Moderator's Closing Remarks

Tan Sri Ramon stressed that reforming the Malaysian education system is a political decision, and thus the importance to putting pressure towards the people in power at the Ministry of Education. The Ministry has the power to reform our ailing education system.

The government needs to recognise these weaknesses and provide clear measures to improve the system. Among the recommended reforms are the emphasise on science and technology in a competitive world, increasing the standard of proficiency in English, the teaching of Science and Math in English, improving the quality of the education system, improving the country's national unity and eventually improving the quality of life for all Malaysians. He believed the vision of our Malaysian education should be the pillar to improving our education system.

APPENDIX

PROGRAMME

CPPS-ASLI Focus Group Discussion on the National Education Blueprint (NEB)

Date : 13 September 2012

Time : 02:30 PM - 04:30 PM

Venue : Boardroom, Malaysian Institute of Management (MIM), Level 11, Tower
1, Jaya 33, No 3, Jalan Semangat, 46100 PJ

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak will be launching the National Education Blueprint on Sept 11 with an action plan for implementation over a thirteen year period between 2013 and 2025. This document will be available for public review and then by the end of the year it will be finalised for Cabinet approval.

Earlier this year CPPS-ASLI hosted two Educational Roundtable Discussions namely on Feb 27, 2012 on Vernacular Schools and on April 16, 2012 on Education Reform. Both of these reports were submitted to the Deputy Prime Minister who is also the Education Minister.

Therefore CPPS-ASLI has adequate input and expertise:-

- To review the National Education Blueprint by making specific comments and analysis.
- To review if earlier recommendations made were incorporated or not
- To make new recommendations in the light of the NEB

In this context, CPPS will be inviting about 10 people who were part of the earlier two roundtables to review the NEB and provide expert input and feedback. The Focus Group Discussion will be moderated by Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam. Our collective output will be to make some detailed comments on the NEB which will be submitted to the DPM who is also the Education Minister.

PROGRAMME

Word of Welcome, Introduction and Moderator of the discussion: Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, Chairman, CPPS

Overview and Comments: Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria, Senior Fellow, CPPS/ KITA-UKM

Open Floor Discussion from Participants

Reflection: Mr Teo Lee Ken, Research Assistant, UKM

Forward and Summary: Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, Chairman, CPPS

PARTICIPANTS LIST

No	Name	Organisation
1	Dato' A. R. Peter	President, Brinsford Alumni Association Malaysia & Vice Chairman, Malayan Christian Schools Council
2	Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria	Senior Fellow, CPPS & KITA-UKM
3	Nor Arlene Tan	Researcher & Admin Assistant, CPPS
4	Tan Sri Dato' Dr T Marimuthu	Trustee, MIED
5	Brother Anthony Rogers	De La Salle Brothers Malaysia
6	Ms Leow Lee Lin	Methodist College Kuala Lumpur
7	Mr Khor Hong Yin	Council of Education of Methodist in Malaysia
8	Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam	Chairman, CPPS
9	Datin Noor Azimah Rahim	PAGE Malaysia
10	Tunku Munawirah Putra	PAGE Malaysia
11	Mr Ho Chai Yee	Citizen Network for a Better Malaysia
12	Mr Cheli Nadarajah	The Reading Bus Ministries Malaysia & school teacher
13	Mr Fadzmel Fadzil	Special Officer to YB Saifuddin Abdullah
14	Mr Teo Lee Ken	Research Assistant, Institute of Ethnic Studies, UKM
15	Dr Daniel Ho	DUMC Dream Centre
16	Samuel Goh Kim Eng	Citizen Network for a Better Malaysia
17	Mr Ram Anand	Journalist, Malay Mail

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

Reflections on the Education Blueprint

By Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria

THE Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) provides a comprehensive write-up on the current status of Education in Malaysia and charts the future direction. This is a significant piece of work, written after much consultation with various stakeholders.

As one reads this document one can reflect on many key issues and concerns such as improving the quality of teaching and learning experiences through enhancing the quality of teachers, their training including addressing critical concerns pertaining to headship and management of schools. The reflections in this article will focus only on matters pertaining to national unity and fostering a multi-cultural diversity through the school systems.

NATIONAL UNITY AGENDA

The term used in this document is “ethnically homogeneous environments” meaning environments where a majority of students are from one ethnic community. The singular analysis provided is that the school options promote this situation.

In this context specific references and data is made available on vernacular schools such as 96 per cent of Chinese students are in SJK(C) and 56 per cent are in SJK(T) at the primary level and reference to Malay students at the secondary level in religious schools.

The document does not provide any analysis of why this polarisation has occurred or possible causes for this development other than the inference of “parental choice” which is referred to as “unparalleled degree of choice for parent and students” (page 7-15). This analysis of national unity is unsatisfactory and could be regarded as misleading for a number of reasons: —

First, data and illustrations are selective as details on other ethnically homogeneous environments are not mentioned other than reference to religious schools. A more comprehensive picture must be presented as other options available also contribute towards this situation such as Malay students in preschool choices especially through Kemas in the local community, student population in residential schools, technical, vocational, matriculation etc.

Comprehensive data on these are not revealed but all these too are largely “ethnically homogeneous environments”. Therefore to single out vernacular schools is inaccurate and too simplistic. Second, the ethnic composition of national schools is provided with 81 per cent Malay teachers, 14 per cent Chinese and five per cent Indians.

The details on school heads and administrators are not provided however this too reveals an ethnic imbalance. This situation too contributes towards an unhealthy national unity situation as the environment and culture of schools have shifted towards a more mono-cultural and mono-religious rather than a multi-cultural teaching-learning environment in schools. This is not seriously addressed in the blueprint. Third, the solution proposed for enhancing unity is to increase level of interaction among the various ethnic groups within SK and SMK (page 3-7). The implied conclusion is that if the choice options were narrowed then national unity will be achieved.

The level of interaction in secondary schools where there is a high percentage of multi-cultural population is not described or analysed. Being under one roof does not necessarily mean unity and cultural appreciation unless the school environment and teachers promote a very strong multi-cultural exposure and experience. It is therefore proposed that the blueprint does not focus only on a singular analysis on national unity from the choice element of vernacular school options but recognises that there are many other homogeneous environments. There must be a more transparent and fairer presentation of the context and situation.

With a clearer analysis the blueprint must address more specifically how a greater appreciation of diversity can be incorporated into the blueprint. It is sad to note that even the theme of 1Malaysia is not mentioned in the blueprint where the focus is from tolerance to appreciation and acceptance.

It is also important to note that a child could be in a mono-cultural environment but be able to foster a multi-cultural appreciation through a right teaching, environment and role models. It is almost impossible to have ethnically mixed schools due to demographic trends.

This is possible by fostering a national and pro-Malaysian cultural appreciation at all schools. There needs to be a clear action plan and targets to address ethnic imbalance among the teachers, heads and especially among the administrators at federal, state and especially the district level.

Administrative posts dominated by one ethnic group with very little diversity is not conducive. We must see a healthy transformation of the teaching post for fairer ethnic representation and in the appointments and promotions too. There must be short-term or long-term targets set in this context between 2013 and 2025.

ENHANCING MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION AS A LEGITIMATE OPTION

It is a real pity that vernacular schools are only described in the context of national unity or lack of it. It is felt that after all the political talk of commitment to vernacular schools the blueprint should have described the strength of these options as a true reflection of a multi-cultural and plural society. In the blueprint in one section there is a statement that “national-type primary schools where the medium of instruction is in Chinese and Tamil will be maintained” with the option for parent to decide where to send their children (page 7-16).

However at the end of the document the policy target by the third wave (2021-2025) is to see SKs and SMKs “as the schools of choice for all parents” (page 7-18). This approach will continue to create cultural insecurities among the communities. The blueprint is not recognising the vernacular school option as a real heritage to be cherished and contributing to nation building. Many sections of Malaysian society will be very unhappy over this stereotype writing which does not enhance and appreciate other cultural traditions within the larger Malaysian identity.

The blueprint could have provided a departure from this way of thinking towards recognising and appreciating vernacular schools. This is because Unesco and other studies have shown that children learn best in the early years in their mother tongue. Therefore we need to think innovatively on how to consolidate this vernacular school tradition but at the same time enhance ethnic relations and interactions.

The blueprint rightly recognises the need for effective transition programmes between the vernacular schools at the primary to the secondary and also the improvement of Bahasa Malaysia performance (page 7-17) including removing Remove class by 2017. There is a need for the blueprint to drop this dichotomy between national school and national type and provide adequate funding to all national school options. In this context to create a special division at the Ministry of Education for the supervision and management of these schools as the current position of the office is a non-graduate, junior administrative post.

EMPOWER MISSION SCHOOLS TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF ENGLISH

The blueprint has missed a tremendous opportunity to undo a great injustice to mission schools. Historically the major education providers were mission agencies and we have a legacy of schools such as Anglo-Chinese Schools, Methodist Schools, Convents, La Salle. The blueprint does not make any reference to the historical contribution and future of these schools. Many national leaders are products of national schools and these schools have contributed towards building the human capital of the nation.

Now that Malaysia is struggling to regain a competitive edge in education especially in improving English, it would be really great if the blueprint could recognise a major role that these historical-primer schools could play. Why not reconvert these schools into English medium with a formal commitment to National language especially teaching Maths and Science in English at the secondary level in these schools. Also at these schools there can be a renewed interest in English literature.

This could be undertaken under the Trust School concept promoted in the blueprint where there is a call for private sector involvement. The mission schools have run education for 100s of years and therefore deserve the first option to reconvert their primer schools into Trust schools.

Furthermore what is most critical is recognising these mission schools as fully national schools with adequate funds especially the government to pay utility bills for these schools and also undertake full infrastructure development.

It is important to note that the students in Mission schools are not from one religious or ethnic community in fact a majority 50-70 per cent of students in mission schools are from the Malay-Muslim community. Why deprive these kids from tax payers funds by discriminating against these schools just because the land and building technically belongs to the Missions. In reality we need to note that all mission school land is designated as education land and there is not strictly private land. This false dichotomy must be broken by tearing down the dividing walls of nation and national type.

The federal government must stop ad-hoc assistance and now focus through the blueprint to give autonomy to mission schools so that they are free to upgrade the quality of teaching-learning and provide the choice that parents and tax payers are demanding.

WAY FORWARD

There is an urgent need to review the national unity agenda as well as a key appreciation for the multi-cultural dimensions and rich cultural diversity as a strength to be built upon and appreciated with a clear educational outcome that every Malaysian child/youth is able to have a very strong

multi-cultural, lingual and multi-religious educational learning so as to be a better human being in this globalised society.

(Source: Malay Mail: 17 September 2012 <http://www.mmail.com.my/story/reflections-education-blueprint-30241>)