



Corner Forest Drive and Logan Way  
Pinelands 7405

P O Box 396  
Cape Town 8000

T: +27 -0-21 532 6000

F: +27 -0-21 531 4877

Supporting best practices to improve teaching and learning outcomes in challenging, under-resourced and disadvantaged contexts.

**A supportive attitude and the ability to provide practical support could be all we need to enable under-performing schools to become achieving schools**

by

**Langhan, D, with Kariem, N, and Velensky, K**

Presenter: David Langhan

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## **Introduction**

This paper consolidates the findings of a school-based research and development project and six Master's research projects supported by the Maskew Miller Longman Foundation since 2008. All seven research projects are part of the Foundation's attempt to contribute towards providing insights in to what really happens in challenging, under-resourced and disadvantaged districts and their schools; and to exploring best practices to improve teaching and learning in such contexts. The research projects involved twenty-four schools in ten districts in Mpumalanga, KwaZulu/Natal, Eastern Cape and Western Cape<sup>1</sup>.

In an attempt to better understand why learners have continued to underperform on the Department of Education's outcomes-based assessments over the last decade, the paper provides evidence that outcomes-based education has not yet been implemented in many disadvantaged schools. Instead, the evidence points to the prevalence of values, attitudes and practices reminiscent of apartheid's Bantu Education system.

It then draws on ideas explored in the research that: a) Could help to explain why pre-1994 values, attitudes and practices may not have changed in these contexts; and b) Point to critical leverage points that could be the keys to enabling the change that the Department of Basic Education needs to effect.

Drawing on these ideas, the paper briefly outlines a School Development and Support Model developed to address these critical leverage points<sup>2</sup>. It then reviews how, within just two years, the implementation of this model enabled under-resourced and under-performing schools to achieve improved basic school functionality; embrace, and relatively successfully implement the NCS and IQMS; and achieve significantly improved learner results.

The paper concludes by proposing how this model could enable district officials to become the key in-service school development and support change agents they are intended to be, and how to go about achieving this.

## **The more things change, the more they stay the same ...**

The consistently dismal learner results produced by the majority of South Africa's state schools have been thoroughly analysed over the last decade<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, the reasons for this failure have been described, explained and analysed in great detail<sup>4</sup>. As a result, we know that 'Schooling in South Africa is a national disaster, and that schools are a disaster zone for most learners' (Bloch, 2009: 58).

We know that 'weaknesses at every level of the system – classroom, school and administrative structure – contribute to the crisis in schooling' (Taylor, 2008: 2). We know that the failure of OBE was predicted as long ago as 1998 (Jansen, 1998). We

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<sup>1</sup> Among these districts are three of the most under-resourced and poorly performing districts in the country: Libode, the 'mud school' district in the Eastern Cape; Bushbuckridge in Mpumalanga, the poorest performing district in the country for a number of years; and Umzinyathi, one of the poorest districts in KwaZulu/Natal. All three were part of the former Homeland and DET Education systems.

<sup>2</sup> Essentially, the model explored how to enable district officials and schools to do what they are expected to do.

<sup>3</sup> DoE, 2003 and 2005a; DoBE, 2011; Howie et al, 2007; Jansen, 1998; Moloi and Strauss 2005; Motshekga, 28 June 2011; National Planning Commission, June 2011; SACMEQ, 2009; Taylor, Muller & Vinjevoold 2003; Taylor, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Chisholm et al, 2000; Chisholm, 2003 & 2005; Christie et al, 2007; Christie, 2008; Bloch, 2010; Development Bank of South Africa, 2008; Fleisch, 2008; Jansen, 1998 & 2011; Jansen & Christie, 1999 in Xhalisa 2011; Taylor, 2008; Terreblanche, 2002.

know that, in spite of the Education Department's enormous curriculum reform efforts, there is still a disjuncture between policy guidelines and classroom practice; and that the values of pre-1994 educational policy continue to prevail (Jansen & Christie, 1999; Bloch, 2005; Prinsloo & Steyn, 2004; Prinsloo, 2005 – in Xhalisa, 2011:12).

We know that 'classroom teaching methods have not changed dramatically, and that forms of the rote method and restricted drill routines continue to dominate classroom interactions' (Fleisch, 2008:135). We know that disadvantaged learners are 'typically exposed to inappropriate teaching caused by a combination of a misinterpretation of the new curriculum, a lack of and under-utilisation of textbooks and readers, poor subject and pedagogical knowledge, and ineffective methods' (Fleisch, 2008: 138).

We also know that 'at the crux of the dilemma is the tragic fact that educational quality in historically black schools<sup>5</sup> – which constitute 80% of enrolment, and are absolutely crucial to national educational progress – has not yet improved significantly' (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2005; Terreblanche, 2002).

We know all of this, yet have still not been able to remedy the situation in the majority of our schools. This 'despite the activities of NGOs and donors, both international and local, directed toward this end for well over two decades, and of government since 1994' (Taylor, 2008: 2).

Instead, just three months ahead of the implementation of the new CAPS curriculum in schools, the Department of Basic Education appears to be set on a course of doing more of the same, more intensely by:

- Implementing the fourth - rushed and untested - revision of the national curriculum since 1994
- Through a content-driven, workshop-based training model
- With intensified emphases on compliance monitoring, performance evaluation, and results assessment systems that have not yet proven to function as transformational tools<sup>6</sup>
- Without increasing capacity or support to the districts that are responsible for ensuring their implementation
- Accompanied by the fourth complete replacement of all school textbooks in 17 years – also developed and produced in a rush and untested

Given what we already know, we would do well to pause and to reflect on how meaningful it is likely to be to introduce a new curriculum in the same ways as before, and to expect different results.

We are obviously missing something, and we desperately need to find out what it is. A good point to start is to take a fresh look at what is actually happening in the kinds of schools that represent the 80% of schools where things have not yet improved.

### **What is actually happening in disadvantaged schools?**

In less than a quarter of the research schools – former House of Representatives and House of Delegates schools in the Western Cape and KwaZulu/Natal – hybridized<sup>7</sup> versions of the NCS, incorporating significant proportions of conservative teaching practices, are producing mixed results ranging from very poor to reasonably good

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<sup>5</sup> These are the ex-Homeland and Department of Education and Training (DET) Schools.

<sup>6</sup> These comments exclude possible NEEDU initiatives since it is not yet clear how they may be integrated into, or impact on, the day-to-day functioning of district officials.

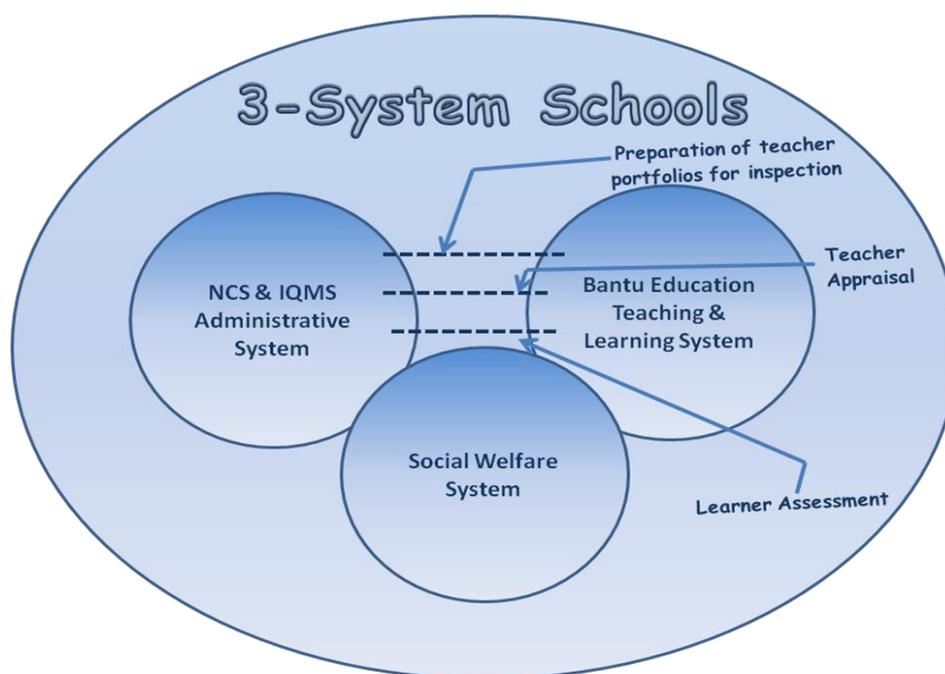
<sup>7</sup> See Fleisch (2008)

(Du Plooy, 2010; Hendricks, 2011; Kariem and Langhan, April, 2009; Ralphs, 2009). However, as will be discussed in more detail later in the paper, the apparently successful results achieved in these schools, do not compare favourably with the actual expectations of the NCS, and do not adequately prepare learners for success in contexts beyond their own schools (Ralphs, 2009).

Worse though, in more than three-quarters of the research schools - all former Homeland and Department of Education and Training (DET) schools in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu/Natal - there is clear evidence that:

- The IQMS has not yet been implemented
- No version of the OBE curriculum has yet been implemented
- A system resembling apartheid's Bantu Education prevails (Baty, 2011; Devcharan, forthcoming; Kariem and Langhan, April 2009; Xhalisa, 2011)<sup>8</sup>

Instead, of the 'imperfect' or 'hybridized' implementation of the NCS reported in many of the analyses of what is wrong with our schools until recently (see footnotes 3 & 4), these schools were implementing a very different, and almost identical hybridized model. This model incorporates what appears to be three parallel but separate systems, each accounting for roughly a third of each school's time and effort (Kariem et al, April 2009: 20 – 28; & September 2009: 14 – 37), as illustrated here:



### **System 1: OBE and IQMS paper-based administration**

Top-down IQMS and OBE directives to schools from the province and the district; authoritarian inspections of files and portfolios by officials, with the emphasis on compliance with directives; de-contextualized form-filling and box-ticking exercises; OBE and IQMS rhetoric by officials, school leaders and teachers. Notable, were the absence of classroom visits; and values, attitudes and practices consistent with the NCS.

<sup>8</sup> See also Fleisch (forthcoming) on 'residual practices' in schools.

### **System 2: Traditional /Bantu Education classroom practices**

Authoritarian attitudes and practices; the prevalence of a single and remarkably standardized 'chalk, talk or shout and chorus' teaching method, with the emphasis on repetition and memorization of limited amounts of content; and the almost complete absence of textbooks in classrooms. As above, the absence of values, attitudes and practices consistent with the NCS were notable.

### **System 3: Social welfare activities**

These included addressing matters related to poverty including: the school's feeding scheme; providing clothes for the poorest learners; organizing visits from mobile clinics; sorting out identity documents; dealing with trauma associated with rape and violence; supporting orphans and learners running child-headed homes; supporting illiterate community members to apply for grants and pensions, to name just a few. Significantly, these activities were characterized by values, attitudes and practices more consistent with the NCS.

The only obvious points of connection between the schools' administrative systems and their classroom practices were:

- 1) Preparation of teacher portfolios for moderation inspections by district officials once a year. Here it was not uncommon to note that whole weeks of teaching time were disrupted in order to get the necessary paperwork completed, and whole days lost to officials' inspections during school time.
- 2) IQMS teacher appraisals which involved school leaders and peers in rating each others' performance. Again, large chunks of teaching time were sacrificed in order to get the necessary paperwork completed and signed off by school leaders and officials.
- 3) Systemic Assessments<sup>9</sup>, and more recently, the Annual National Assessments and external Grade 9 and 12 examinations.

Not surprisingly, these schools' very poor learner results reflected very clearly the severe dislocations between compliant NCS and IQMS portfolios; and actual district, school and classroom practices (Kareim et al, August 2010).

To justify these claims, the following summary provides more detailed insights into observations made in the research schools over the last three years (Baty, 2011: 19 – 21, 68 – 95; Devcharan, forthcoming: 22 – 28; Du Plooy, 2010: 129 – 145; Hendricks, 2011: 5, 67, 120 – 133, 175 – 176; Kariem et al, 2009: 33 – 37 & August 2010: 6, 7, 9; Ralphs, 2009: 42, 53 – 58, 67 – 68; Xhalisa, 2011: 11 & 12, 47 - 48).

### **District support**

- Training and support for District Officials is inadequate or non-existent.
- Many District and Circuit Officials require support in understanding and meaningfully interpreting the practical implementation requirements of the NCS.
- The many vacant posts in district and circuit offices mean that curriculum advisors are too thinly spread to be effective<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> None of these project schools had previously been selected to participate in the Systemic Assessments, nor were they selected for to participate between 2008 and 2011, so they did not impact on the schools anyway.

<sup>10</sup> In the Libode, Bushbuckridge, and Umzinyathi districts, curriculum advisors were first appointed late in 2008 and in 2009. These newly appointed officials were recruited from schools that had

- What District support there is, emphasizes administrative compliance.
- Relations between officials and schools are generally adversarial and characterized by authoritarian attitudes, shouting and criticism on the one hand; and fear, anxiety, mistrust and passive resistance on the other.

### **School leadership and management**

- School leaders need orientation to their roles and responsibilities as curriculum leaders and managers, and practical coaching in implementing them.
- Most require as much support as teachers do in understanding, meaningfully interpreting and implementing the practical requirements of the IQMS and NCS.

### **Teacher training and support**

- Many educators are overwhelmed by, and unfamiliar with the NCS.
- Poor training has produced educators lacking confidence, competence, content knowledge and skills.
- Educators have not had practical training in, experience of, exposure to, or modelling of the teaching or assessment methods and styles required by the NCS.
- Few educators have had the specific, practical Learning Area training they require to adapt their previous Subject training for their new Learning Areas.
- Educators receive little or no classroom implementation support.

### **Provision of teaching and learning materials**

- Textbook deliveries to schools are generally late (sometimes as late as the third term), incomplete, or do not match the orders placed by schools
- In some years, textbooks are not delivered at all
- Most textbooks are stored in storerooms, many still in the wrapping they were delivered in

### **Teachers' practices were often characterised by:**

- Regular teacher absenteeism, particularly on Mondays and Fridays
- Authoritarian attitudes
- Shouting
- Forms of corporal punishment
- Verbal humiliation of learners
- Little or no evidence of lesson planning
- Time wasting activities
- Teaching the same content to different Grades
- Lecturing
- Low expectations of learners
- Very little content coverage
- 70 - 80% of input in an African language during English medium classes

### **Learning activities:**

- An extremely limited range learning and assessment experiences
- Listening to lengthy teacher explanations
- Copying teacher's notes or questions from the chalkboard
- Receiving answers from teachers

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themselves not received any previous curriculum training, and did not receive any significant training in preparation for their new roles.

- Frequent class choringing

**Classrooms are characterised by the absence of:**

- Charts, posters or learner’s work on the walls
- The use of Teacher’s Guides
- Textbooks and other learning materials
- Consistent use of English in English medium classes
- Thinking, reasoning or problem solving activities
- Independent, peer or group learning opportunities

This evidence clearly illustrates the extent of the ‘disjuncture between theory and practice’ (Xhalisa, 2011:12). It also suggests that rather than attempting to implement the NCS imperfectly, former Homeland and DET schools have side-stepped it. For these schools, the NCS exists in rhetoric and in administrative systems, but has no bearing on school leadership, management or classroom practices.

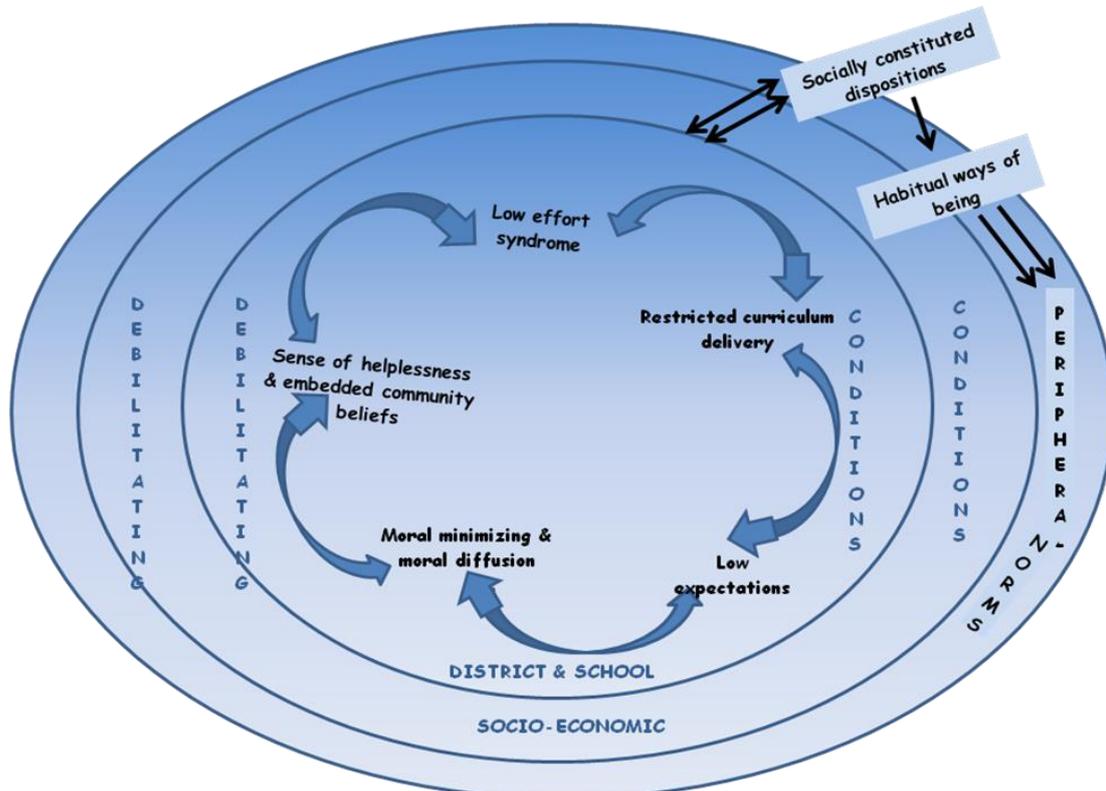
If these findings are in any way applicable to the majority of former Homeland and DET schools, then the poor learner results we been analyzing for more than a decade, probably don’t tell us very much about the effectiveness or suitability of OBE at all.

What they probably do tell us, is that we have been using appraisal and assessment criteria that are completely out of alignment with how teachers are teaching, what they are teaching, and what learners are learning.

**Thoughts on why things may not have changed in 17 years**

The following is an attempt to integrate insights from the seven research studies into a model that illustrates how pre-1994 values, attitudes and practices may have been perpetuated in disadvantaged schools.

**How school communities develop and sustain peripheral norms**



### **Debilitating socio-economic conditions**

The impact of disadvantaged socio-economic conditions on the everyday life of schools in poor communities is profound. Efforts to address its impacts on learners, teachers and community members can consume as much as a third of the teaching time in a year (Devcharan, forthcoming: 17; Hendricks, 2011: 6; Kariem et al, 2009: 15; Xhalisa, 2011: 17). When these conditions remain unchanged, or deteriorate over decades, they contribute towards the development of a sense of despondency and helplessness (Clarke and Linder, 2006: 62 in Du Plooy, 2010).

### **Debilitating district and school conditions**

This sense of helplessness is compounded by working in a dysfunctional and under-resourced school, within a similarly dysfunctional and under-resourced district and community. Trying to get schools working without meaningful community support; without the necessary facilities and resources; with annual delays in the delivery of stationery and textbooks; without meaningful training or support; and in particular, in the context of adversarial relations between officials and teachers, intensifies the sense of despondency, de-motivation and helplessness (Clarke and Linder, 2006: 62 in Du Plooy, 2010; Kariem et al, 2009).

### **Moral minimising and moral diffusion**

In trying to understand the impact of the profoundly debilitating experience of teaching in a dysfunctional school, Du Plooy, (2010: 18 – 19) explores Fataar and Patterson's 2003 concepts of 'moral minimising' and 'moral diffusion'.

Moral minimising is the process by which teachers develop a specific identity, which is rooted in the helplessness they feel about being unable to change the schooling context in which they work. These teachers end up acting in ways that minimise moral responsibility, and use the constrained circumstances in which they work to justify their minimum participation in schooling processes. Moral minimising therefore represents a coping or defence mechanism, which teachers adopt to deal with the dysfunctional environment in which they work (Fataar and Patterson, 2003: 18).

Moral diffusion is a corresponding institutional coping response which reinforces moral minimising. Moral diffusion occurs where the management of a dysfunctional school cannot muster the moral authority to recruit teachers into a process where the staff as a whole may collectively engage with a vision for their school (Fataar and Patterson, 2003: 19). The school leaders use this situation as a means of justifying their limited effectiveness at mobilising change at the school.

### **Embedded community beliefs**

(Kariem et al, August, 2010: 8 & 9) found that there may also have been fundamental mismatches between the values, attitudes and practices required by the NCS on the one hand; and deeply held community beliefs on the other. For example:

#### **Norms around respectful adult-child relationships**

While the NCS expects learners to engage in interactive communication, critical thinking and express independent opinions; observed practices reflected the community norm that learners are expected to listen to educators respectfully and not to question or challenge them, or express independent opinions. The same norms were observed in the ways in which

school leaders and teachers were expected to behave in the presence of senior community members and district officials.

### **Norms about how knowledge is conveyed**

While the NCS expects teachers to engage learners in constructing knowledge for themselves; observed practices suggest a deeply embedded community belief that a good teacher transmits information to learners who are expected to demonstrate how effectively they can reproduce that information.

These potential mismatches go some way towards explaining why schools seem to have simply side-stepped the OBE curriculum, and maintained a remarkably uniform alternative across districts and provinces. They may also help to explain what appeared to be a widespread lack of initiative on the part of all key role players<sup>11</sup> to take ownership of, or responsibility for developing their own understanding of the NCS and its requirements; and for driving the transformation required of their own, and their teachers' attitudes and practices in order to fulfil them.

### **Low expectations**

The cumulative impact of the above factors may well help to explain what were observed to be low expectations at both district and school levels. Both circuit managers and school leaders had extremely low school functionality expectations; and curriculum advisors, teachers and learners all seemed to share equally low teaching and learning expectations for every grade, other than grade 12 (Kariem et al, 2009).

### **Restricted curriculum delivery**

The factors described so far, may help to explain why teachers have been delivering the severely restricted curriculum already described. The following summary of observed curriculum restrictions provides additional evidence of how complex and remarkably uniform the phenomenon is across districts and provinces.

#### **Restricted knowledge and skills**

Du Plooy (2010: 14) cites (Fleisch, 2008: 2) to confirm her observation that children in the 'second system of schools acquire a much more restricted set of knowledge and skills than children in the first system'; and that teachers focused on 'lower-order cognitive tasks as a way of managing children's lack of mastery of language' (2008: 106).

#### **Restricted mathematics practices**

Devcharan (2011: 17) found that the 'classification, framing and pacing of Intermediate Phase mathematics in disadvantaged schools exposes learners to a restricted curriculum characterised by:

- Strong control by the teacher of what learners learn - content and no skills;
- How much they learn - extremely limited content coverage; and
- The pace at which they learn -very slowly.

#### **Restricted literacy practices**

Xhalisa (2011) describes how localized versions of both English and IsiXhosa were used for teaching purposes in ways that are inadequate for learners' development in Standard English for test purposes in the Foundation Phase.

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<sup>11</sup> Here we refer to community leaders, parents, officials, school leaders, teacher unions and teachers.

Through a process of 'code-meshing' (Michael-Luna and Canagrajah, 2008 in Xhalisa, 2011: 51), teachers used isiXhosa as the primary teaching language, with English concepts assimilated into it, to teach English medium lessons; thus restricting learners' exposure to English.

Xhalisa (2011: ii) also found that 'literacy teaching practices in both IsiXhosa and English medium classrooms did not facilitate successful learning. This because literacy practices were limited to rote learning and memorization in all classrooms, regardless of the medium of instruction' (2011: ii), limiting the learners' exposure to a one-dimensional teaching and learning experience.

### **Restricted practices across the curriculum**

Similar restrictive trends were observed in the teaching of geography in Grades 10 - 12 (Baty, 2011); Economic Management Sciences in Grade 7 (Hendricks, 2011); in all subjects in the Intermediate Phase (Du Plooy, 2010); and in all subjects in all phases (Kareim et al, 2009).

### **Restricted teaching methods**

These have already discussed (see pages 6 - 8 of this paper).

### **Restricted discourse**

Ralphs (2009: 45) observed how learners are 'apprenticed into the normative domain rules of the school' and that 'far more value is placed on learners conforming with these, than on curriculum learning'. She notes how teachers invest 'a great deal of time in regulating and maintaining the domain-specific rules of the school such as: standing up and greeting visitors, praying before and after break, wearing the required school uniform' and how they present 'reading and writing by way of procedures that conform to these rules, rather than to any pedagogic principles' (45). She concludes that teachers appeared to see learner 'fluency' in the regulatory rules as an indication of successful teaching and learning' (69).

### **Absence of agency**

Xhalisa (2011: 63) reports on how 'teacher-led classroom practices constructed learners into governable, passive beings, thus limiting positive learner agency'. Du Plooy (2010: 133) notes that 'there appears to be no agency in the teachers' pedagogical encounters with the children inside the classroom. Significantly, Du Plooy (2010: 21) drawing on Panofsky (2003: 424) argues that the experience of these kinds of attitudes, and of this kind of restricted curriculum in the process of schooling is of 'central importance to the development of a student's sense of identity and agency.'

All of the above factors, combined with the legacy of Bantu Education, provide the ideal environment for eroding the development of a sense of agency.

### **Low effort syndrome**

Related to the absence of agency, Du Plooy (2010: 23) explores the concept of 'low effort syndrome' (Ogbu, 2003: 23). This is a 'norm of minimum effort' which learners themselves recognise and use to explain both their academic behaviours and their low academic performance for reasons related among others to: negative peer pressure (not wanting to appear smart during lessons); poor study habits; the inability to focus on tasks; and inadequate teachers.' In addition, this syndrome among learners is as likely to be a response to teachers' low expectations of them; to the constant under-stimulation provided by a severely restricted curriculum; and to the lack of agency expected from them.

It is hardly surprising that learners who are so comprehensively under-stimulated throughout their school career, and whose agency is 'singularly undermined by these restrictive teaching practices, are unable to engage with or fulfil the expectations of the NCS, which has at its core, the development of individual and group agency' (Xhalisa, 2011: 90 & 93).

It is also hardly surprising that, generation after generation, such learners become the parents, teachers and officials who end up 'teaching the way they were taught' (Xhalisa, 2011: 82) and in so doing, sustain a restricted curriculum in their own schools.

### **Habitus: socially constituted dispositions and habitual ways of being**

In considering how schools are a key arena in which social reproduction maintains existing class structures and social inequalities Du Plooy (2010: 13 - 18) explores how Bordieu's concept of habitus addresses how people operate in ways that are compatible with their social situation. She explains how habitus are 'socially constituted dispositions, or mental structures' on the basis of which people 'habitually act and develop embodied ways of being in the world'.

She explains that socially constituted dispositions develop out of a two-way relationship between objective structures on the one hand; and incorporated structures on the other.

For example:

- The objective structures of prevailing socio-economic conditions, the hierarchical structures and authoritarian procedures in the education system, and the restricted curriculum delivered by teachers on the one hand; and on the other,
- The incorporated structures (people's existing mental models and ways of being), such as moral minimising, moral diffusion and low effort syndrome.

When these structures interact, people develop the socially constituted dispositions that create their destiny, since their dispositions are attuned to the structures of which they are a product (Lingard and Christie, 2003: 322; Bernstein, 1967 in Devcharan, 2011).

### **Peripheral normativity**

Ralphs (2009), draws on Heath (1983) to provide useful insights into how schools go about localizing education standards through a process of peripheral normativity. She explains that the process involves the downscaling and localisation of the ideal educational standards at the centre of an education system - as set by the national curriculum - to attainable local levels of possibility. This localisation results in specific teaching and learning practices that are problematic because they move away from the hegemonic norms of the centre. This means that learners who display adequate or successful skills at the peripheral level, fail to achieve the norms and standards at the centre. This is because the 'locally valid, restricted and context-specific forms' of peripheral learning 'do not travel well, nor retain their validity and acceptability in other contexts beyond the school and its community' (Ralphs, 2009: 25, 30, 69 and 75).

### **Observations**

Together, these insights provide one way of understanding how it is that communities, their districts and their schools have remained trapped in the past, unable to embrace the new curriculum since 1994. While they paint a bleak picture of

a complex reality; they also point to what could be the critical leverage points we need to address to enable the necessary shifts to support curriculum transformation in schools.

If we follow Bernstein's view (1967 in Devcharan, forthcoming: 17) that 'to halt, or interrupt the process of social reproduction of the inequalities in a society, changes must be made to:

- The existing curriculum;
- The transmission and acquisition of knowledge; as well as
- The evaluation criteria'

The DoBE has made concerted efforts to address the first and the last of these changes. What remains, is to find effective ways to effect changes to the ways in which knowledge is transmitted and acquired, so that these three elements of transformation are actually aligned with each other.

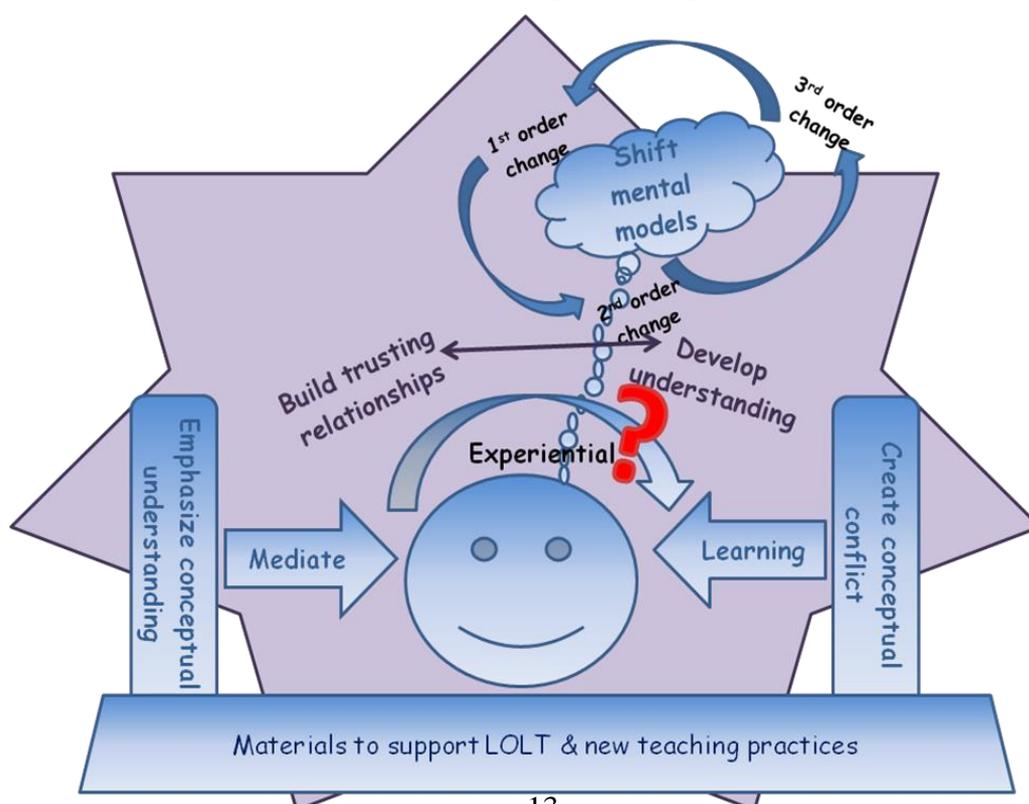
### Thoughts on how to change the way knowledge is transmitted and acquired

According to Moola (2011:310) the reason why policy guidelines that 'appear to provide all the answers to the challenges being faced by practitioners' are not being successfully implemented, is because they only go as far as 'conceptual framing, but do not engage with the practical implications thereof.'

For this reason, in developing the School Development and Support Model, it was necessary to incorporate perspectives and strategies intended to:

- Foster the development of individual and group agency necessary for change
- Create a conducive environment to support change efforts
- Shift embedded socialised dispositions
- Change embodied ways of being and doing

### Developing agency through shifting embedded mental models and changing embodied ways of being and doing



### **Develop understanding and build trusting relationships**

Drawing on ideas related to person-centred communication (Rogers, 1972) and interpersonal effectiveness and group work (Johnson, 2003; Johnson and Johnson, 2003) it was clear that mediating change would depend heavily on the degree to which trust and mutually respectful relationships could be established with the schools. For these reasons, the project incorporated a six-month baseline study period to allow time to develop these relationships.

In this process, care was taken to model values, attitudes and practices consistent with the NCS in the way project managers related to the school and all of its staff and learners; and attention was paid to developing a thorough understanding of their curriculum related challenges and support needs before discussing any possible solutions (Karien and Langhan, October, 2009).

### **Provide materials to support LOLT and new teaching practices**

There is little doubt that most disadvantaged primary schools have opted to implement English medium language policies that do not serve the best interests of the majority of learners. This is mainly because so few of the necessary conditions for successful English medium instruction are met by these schools and their communities (Langhan, 1996: 16). However, as has been discussed already, there are also a number of factors that undermine pro-mother tongue medium arguments. Among these is the growing phenomenon of multi-language and multi-cultural schools and classes that make the medium of instruction choice more complex. Perhaps most significant though, is Xhalisa's observation that the one-dimensional teaching method that is so widespread in schools, undermines learning regardless of the medium of instruction.

Given these challenges, and the school's existing language policies, the project was set up to improve the conditions necessary to support English medium instruction within the DoBE's current additive bi-lingual model of education (Langhan, 1996: 13 - 27) In particular (Langhan, 1996: 16):

- The need to provide good training and support for the use of English as language of teaching and learning; and
- The need to ensure that learners are exposed to as much English as possible.

Similarly, it emerged clearly from the research that teachers needed support to address content, skills, pacing and sequencing challenges in most subject areas across the curriculum.

A powerful way to support all of these needs in disadvantaged contexts is to ensure the provision of suitable curriculum approved teaching and learning materials, and to ensure that they are properly used (Fleisch, forthcoming; Karien and Langhan, October, 2009: 37 – 39; Richards, 2001: 31; Taylor, 2008). According to Richards (2001: 31 – 32) this is because teachers guides and textbooks provide 'on-the-job' training for teachers, the English they need for teaching purposes, the required content, and the teaching, learning and assessment activities required to fulfil curriculum expectations.

Fleisch (forthcoming) supports these views unequivocally. In proposing how to change the embedded pre-1994 'residual practices', he argues that 'materials are the key to teacher learning, sequencing, pacing, content and skills'. He goes on to argue that what is needed in schools are:

- 'Complete sets of materials that represent the new teaching practice

- Prescriptive lessons in teacher's guides and learner materials
- Coaching and just-in-time training in the classroom and at school
- External assessment'

### **Mediate experiential learning**

For optimal learning, it is helpful to mediate experiential learning processes (Piaget, 1969 & 1977 in Rodseth 1996:8) that guide learners through zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978 & 1986 in Rodseth, 1996: 9). In other words, to enable learners to develop from assisted learning to independent learning through cycles of: engaging new learning with assistance; internalising new understandings through guided reflection; producing evidence of understanding through structured activities; reflecting on strategies to improve future efforts; and finally performing tasks independently.

### **Emphasise conceptual understanding**

The schema theory of learning (Piaget, 1977; & Ausubel, 1978, in Rodseth, 1996: 28 – 29), probes a little deeper, proposing that learners approach new knowledge with existing network's of knowledge and skills, called schemata. In encountering new knowledge, they assimilate and accommodate new knowledge, thus altering and elaborating their schemata. Applying this theory in a teaching and learning process involves:

- 1) Activating the learner's existing network of background knowledge (existing schema)
- 2) Correcting this schema if it is faulty
- 3) Preparing the learner to assimilate and accommodate new knowledge by:
  - Using concrete experience to establish basic concepts
  - Letting learners discuss and write about these concepts to construct better understanding
  - Questioning them in ways that help them to anticipate the new knowledge to be encountered
  - Assisting the learner through, explanation, modelling and mediation, to accommodate new knowledge into a changed schema
  - Assist the learner to produce evidence of having constructed a new and improved schema

In addition, an important principle is to 'establish the nature and essential properties of unknown concepts in accessible terms' (Langhan, 1996: 32 – 36). This implies a process approach to teaching and learning that incorporates:

- A reduction in the number of new concepts introduced in a given learning period
- A realistic understanding of a learners existing knowledge
- Definite strategies for relating new concepts to existing knowledge
- A clear understanding of the new concepts to be introduced
- A clear focus on the new concepts being introduced
- Awareness of hidden levels of abstraction that need to be unpacked
- A commitment to de-mystifying the abstractions by unpacking necessary layers of conceptual meaning

### **Create conceptual conflict**

For these kinds of experiential learning processes to actually shift learners through zones of proximal development towards new conceptual understanding, mediation should also create conceptual conflict. In this regard Piaget's notions of disequilibrium and accommodation are useful for understanding how to approach

mediating or teaching for conceptual change, as follows (Kuhn, 1970; Hewson, 1992 in Velensky 2011):

Disequilibrium involves:

- First, uncovering learners' preconceptions about a particular topic or phenomenon
- Then exposing them to alternative conceptions that create the possibility to become dissatisfied with their current conceptions
- Then creating conceptual conflict about their preconceptions that lead to the possibility of their accepting an alternative notion as intelligible, plausible, and fruitful

Accommodation involves:

- Mediating conceptual restructuring that results in the possibility of a changed conceptual framework

It is important to note that an essential condition for mediating conceptual conflict is the opportunity for discussion during which learners feel safe in sharing their viewpoints as they consider and evaluate other perspectives that may conflict with their own (Bruning, Schraw, & Ronning, 1999; Scott, Asoko, & Driver, 1991 in Velensky, 2011).

### **Change mental maps**

Kariem (forthcoming) explores a closely related educational change theory (Zimmerman, 1998; Neisser, 1967; Duncan, 2010) that applies the principles of developing conceptual understanding through conceptual conflict, to mediating organisational change. In this case, existing networks of knowledge and skills, or existing preconceptions (schemata), are the equivalent of mental maps (also schemata). The focus of this theory is the mediation of changes to the mental maps of the members of an organisation, by an external agent, in order to enable changes in organisational behaviour. It proposes three stages of change:

#### **First-order change**

First-order change involves an external agent in enabling people within an organisation to recognise and acknowledge that the current ways of doing things may not serve the best interests of the organisation. First-order change happens when incremental modifications are made to the mental map or schemata, when realising that existing frameworks no longer work optimally.

#### **Second-order change**

Second-order change involves an external agent in facilitating reflexive processes that enable the members of the organisation to consider other, possibly better ways of doing things. As for conceptual conflict, initiating second-order change usually involves introducing a state of cognitive dissonance that results in the modification of an existing mental map.

#### **Third-order change**

Third-order change involves enabling an organisation to make the kinds of modifications they believe they need to make to their previous ways of doing things, based on their modified mental maps. Third-order change happens when a new way of thinking and working begins to operate for the benefit of everyone in the organisation.

**Foster the development of agency**

Related to the discussion of socialised dispositions proposed earlier in the paper (Du Plooy, 2010), Fay (1987; in Lazarus, 1988: 122) confirms the notion of ‘individuals as embodied, traditional, historical and embedded, and that there is a need to recognise the hold of ideology on human agency’.

Drawing on critical social science, which explores the ideological forms which maintain social systems, Lazarus (1988: 121), proposes that ‘emancipation is only enabling when it helps people to understand what they can do differently.’ This she suggests, can be achieved through engaging people in self-reflective critique of the ‘distorted knowledge which conceals the interests of a (previously) dominant class in society’ (Cochrane, 1987); and that ‘masks contradictions which are unreflectively accepted by society members’ (Grundy, 1987). Similarly, emancipation can be facilitated by exposure to and reflection on ‘the positive and enabling aspects of and alternative ideology’ (Fay, 175 & 1987; Wexler, 1987; in Lazarus, 1988, 121).

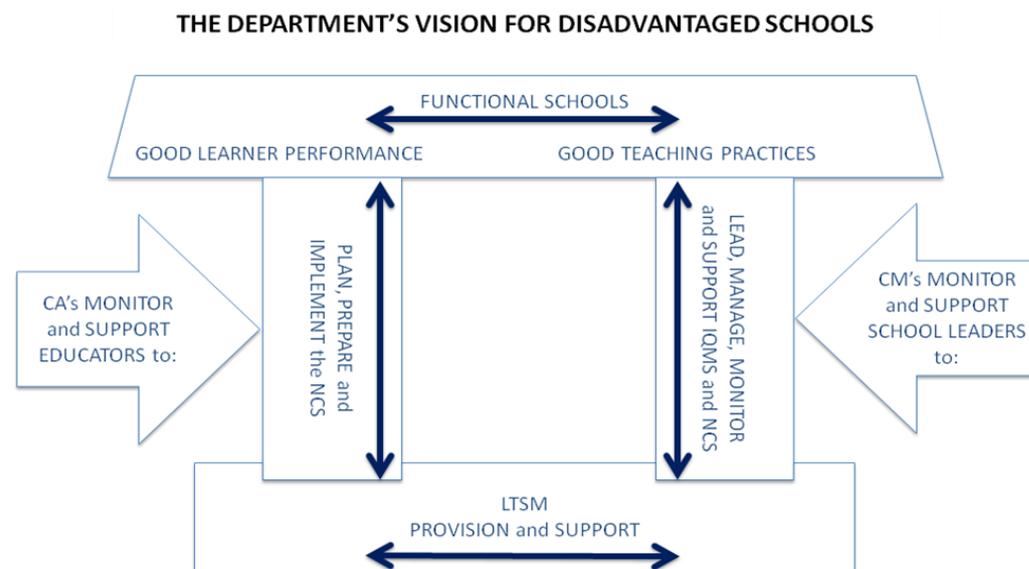
**Observations**

All of the above perspectives informed the way the project attempted to address the low levels of agency observed in the research schools. In particular, the project aimed to explore ways of mediating the ‘educational emancipation’ of schools from pre-1994 values, attitudes and practices through exposure to the alternative ways of thinking, being and doing, as outlined in the NCS guidelines<sup>12</sup>. The following section summarises the practical steps implemented in trying to achieve this.

**A project to bring about desired change**

The School Development and Support Project aimed to explore how the Department’s existing District Support system could emancipate and enable the majority of disadvantaged and under-resourced schools to implement the NCS in as short a time as possible, as cost-effectively as possible (Kariem and Langhan, October 2009).

The following diagram attempts to capture those aspects of the Department’s vision for disadvantaged schools that the project set out to enable schools to achieve.



<sup>12</sup> Here, the NCS’s Critical Cross Field and Developmental Outcomes are especially relevant.

## **Pre-implementation**

This stage, from July - November 2008 involved building relationships and preparing the ground for implementation in 2009. It included:

- Presenting the DoBE's expectations we proposed to support schools to fulfil
- Explaining the nature of the project, support offered and modus operandi
- Negotiating voluntary participation and performance agreements
- Conducting a baseline study to developing understanding
- Building trusting relationships

## **Observations**

### **Developing understanding and building trusting relationships**

This involved three critical elements:

- Getting to know each other which involved: clarifying the values, attitudes and practices that we wanted to characterize our partnerships; non-judgemental observation to properly understand how they actually did things; ongoing comparisons of what was observed with what was actually expected; reflecting on why they thought the disparities existed between current and expected practices; and identifying what support they might need in order to fulfil these expectations.
- Building trust involved: fulfilling our commitments to the schools and expecting them to fulfil theirs to the project; and focussing on the support required to improve current practices, rather than on criticising inappropriate practices.
- Developing mutually respectful relationships involved: treating each other as equal partners working towards common goals; negotiating mutually agreed tasks for each school visit, and for the periods between visits; ensuring that the parameters of our mutual responsibilities were clear; and agreeing on how to hold each other accountable for responsibilities.

### **Negotiating performance agreements**

In negotiating a performance agreement with each school, we took care to ensure that the district officials, school community, the school governing body, teachers unions, all staff, and learners were involved in the decision for the school to participate in the project voluntarily.

We took equal care to ensure that the partner's respective roles, responsibilities and expectations were incorporated, and that the processes to be implemented would be negotiated and prioritized by the partnership, according to the school's needs.

Similarly, it was agreed that we would relate to each other on the basis of trust and mutual respect, and that the provision of support would be balanced by holding each other accountable for the completion of agreed upon tasks to be monitored mutually and reflected on supportively during each school visit.

We also agreed that each partnership would be reviewed by the partners annually, and that either partner was free to withdraw from the project if they were not satisfied with the other's performance.

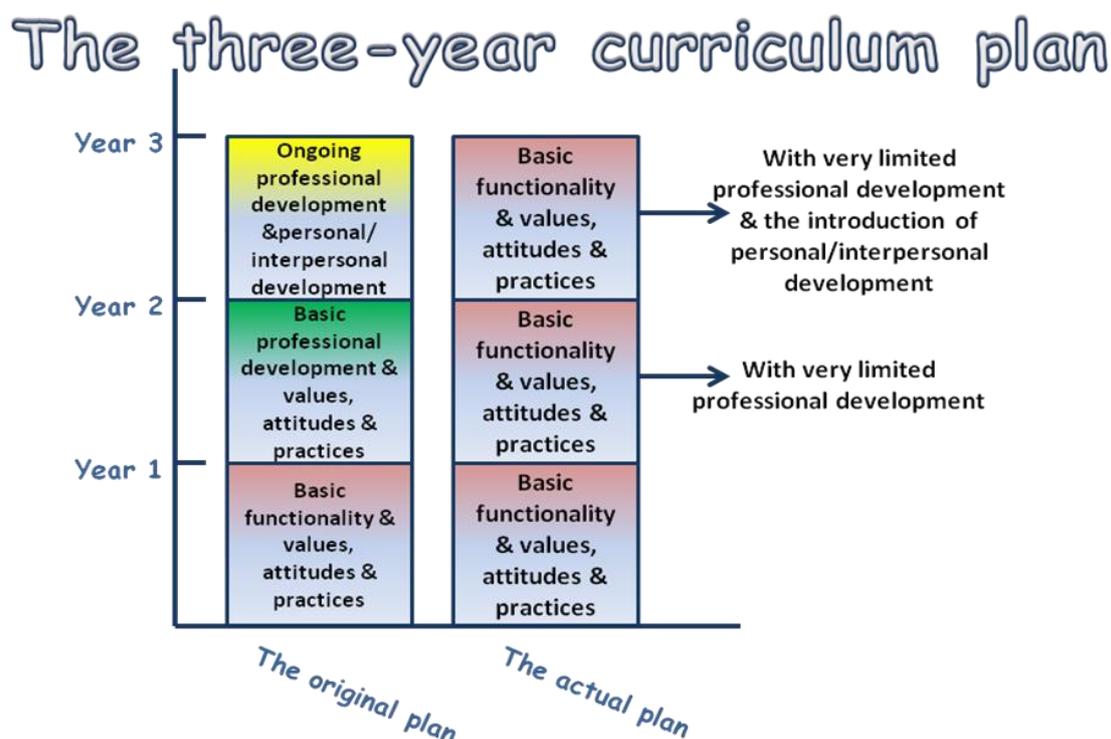
### **Support - the most important element of the project**

Significantly, it emerged clearly at every school - with the support of teacher unions, learners, their communities and their district officials - that they all wanted to work in

the proposed constructive, supportive partnerships. Also significant was that there was no resistance to implementing the new curriculum itself. For these schools, it was the offer of support to enable them to comply with requirements they did not feel they understood, that was the leverage point that opened the way for the project.

### Implementation

Implementation was scheduled for three years, from January 2009 – November 2011. Following the six-month baseline study, and collaborative needs analyses, the project and its partner schools set out to implement the following three-year school development plan:



As illustrated, the process proceeded more slowly than anticipated. However, in the process, we discovered that slowing down to the pace of each school to consolidate new understandings and practices was critical in supporting them to make meaningful shifts, as is discussed under successes achieved later.

### Phase one: achieving basic functionality

This phase focused on addressing dislocations between policies and practices. Essentially, this meant getting the most basic elements of school functionality and classroom practice in place and functioning at least reasonably well. This was achieved through combining two main interventions:

#### A) Addressing systemic and resource issues

This involved identifying and addressing key obstacles and leverage points at the level of the 'objective structures' impacting on schools. Here we identified key obstacles that could relatively easily be addressed:

- Limited classroom resources
- Late delivery of textbooks<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Since these are both Departmental responsibilities that are budgeted for annually (National Planning Commission, June 2011), ensuring that this happens in all disadvantaged schools has no additional

- Lack of district capacity to provide training and support
- One-dimensional approach to monitoring schools
- One-dimensional approach to teaching

The key leverage point was to ensure that every teacher and learner had the basic teaching and learning resources necessary, from the first day of school. As per Fleisch (forthcoming), the project provided complete sets of materials<sup>14</sup> that embodied the new teaching practices in 'complete lessons' in teacher's guides and learner materials, and were accompanied by school-based training and classroom-based coaching at regular intervals over the full three year period.

While this strategy is in conflict with NCS guidelines that require teachers to consult multiple resources to develop their own lessons; it's potential to address the lack of resources and the poor teaching and learning practices the schools were perpetuating was obvious. So, in apparent contradiction to the above NCS guidelines, the provision of materials was an essential part of creating the enabling learning environments necessary to support effective curriculum implementation in disadvantaged schools (as also required by the NCS guidelines).

### **B) Addressing the softer people issues**

Here the 'incorporated structure' obstacles identified included the:

- Values, attitudes and practices consistent with Bantu Education
- Poor self- esteem
- Absence of agency
- Low expectations

The key leverage points were to:

- Model and nurture the values, attitudes and practices outlined in the Constitution, the NCS<sup>15</sup>
- Provide regular, supportive, practical, school-based monitoring, reflection, training, coaching and mentoring, with the specific aim of enabling schools to comply meaningfully with NCS and IQMS requirements.

### **Development and support activities**

These included the following activities for the School Management Team; the school clerk and general workers; and the Heads of Departments and teachers:

- Clarifying roles, responsibilities and policy expectations
- Training, coaching and mentoring in how to practically implement these
- Providing guided experiences of successful implementation
- Setting structured tasks for independent implementation
- Regular monitoring, reflection and supportive feedback and mentoring on independently implemented tasks<sup>16</sup>

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financial implications for the DoBE. It does however require that requisitioning and delivery procedures are completely overhauled.

<sup>14</sup> This involved the provision of a teacher's guide, charts and posters for every teacher for each subject they taught; textbooks and workbooks or study guides for every learner for every subject; classroom kits of readers, dictionaries and atlases; and a computer with software and printer to support the processing of learner results. Total value across the 18 schools was R3.5 million.

<sup>15</sup> The kinds of values, attitudes and practices that the OBE curricula aspire to are clearly outlined in the Constitution (1996) and in the Critical Cross Field and Developmental outcomes in all of the curriculum guideline documents for C2005, the RNCS and the NCS.

<sup>16</sup> For details about the components of the School Development and Support Model, what they target, and how they addressed them, see Kariem et al, 2009.

### **Successes achieved within three years**

In spite of the slower than expected pace of change, after just three years of project implementation, all of the schools are definitely on the road from under-performing schools to achieving schools.

### **Evidence of improvements**

The following improvements have been achieved since 2009 (Kariem et al, 2009; 2010; March 2011; & May 2011):

- Improved basic functionality
- Improved classroom practices
  - Better organized portfolios
  - Reasonably systematic use of teacher's guides and textbooks:
    - Improved lesson planning
    - More frequent use of English as LOLT
    - Broader range of teaching methods and strategies
    - Broader range of learning opportunities
    - Broader range of assessment activities
    - More learner participation in speaking, reading and writing
- Improved learner results
  - Eight of the ten Primary Schools achieved Grade 3 and 6 Literacy and Numeracy average improvements of between 50% and 200%
  - Two High Schools achieved improved overall pass rates of between 14% and 57%
  - The other four High Schools achieved improved functionality, but their results have not yet begun to reflect this

(Kariem et al, March 2011; & May 2011)

### **Evidence of increased agency**

The above improvements provide good evidence of increased agency within the primary focus areas of the project.

In addition, the following are examples of broader school improvement initiatives undertaken independently by the schools in cooperation with their local communities during the course of the project (Kariem et al, March 2011; & May 2011):

- Liaising with local authorities to secure funds for school renovations
- Liaising with local authorities, a District Director, the Chair of the school governing body and ESKOM to connect a school to the electricity grid
- Liaising with an NGO to secure a water connection to a school
- Renovating administrative office space to create a reception area for parents
- Renovating a dilapidated classroom to create a school library
- Refurbishing staff rooms
- Providing teaching staff with secure cupboards
- Involving unemployed ex-learners in repairing desks and chairs
- Building a new kitchen area for a school feeding scheme
- Getting parents to donate the bricks to build a new classroom
- Building three new classrooms to replace a Foundation Phase mud classroom
- Liaising with a District Office to arrange busses to transport learners
- Inviting District Officials to come and monitor their portfolios, rather than waiting to be called

Compared to where the project schools started from in 2008, these improvements provide compelling evidence that the challenge of emancipating and enabling disadvantaged and under-performing schools is, with the support of external agents,

within the DoBE's reach. The challenge that lies ahead is in enabling district offices to do the same for the Department.

### **Enabling district officials to become key in-service change agents**

Based on the experience of the School Development and Support project, the Department faces the following key challenges in transforming disadvantaged schools:

- Addressing deeply embedded pre-1994 values, attitudes and practices
- Enabling District Offices to provide the re-orientation and practical hands-on training that school leaders and teachers actually need in order to embrace and implement a new curriculum
- Revising the assumption that the majority of teachers have access to the kinds of resources that will enable them to develop their own lessons in order to fulfill new curriculum requirements
- Rectifying the teaching and learning materials delivery problem

The following practical recommendations are proposed to assist in addressing these challenges.

### **Recommendations**

Two shifts in approach and emphasis, combined with a clear focus on ensuring that six minimum conditions are in place, could enable district officials to transform under-performing schools into achieving schools within as little as three years.

The shifts in focus and emphasis:

- 1) Adopting supportive rather than judgmental attitudes
- 2) Enabling schools to implement policy guidelines practically

Put another way, this means balancing the provision of practical, hands-on training and coaching support on the one hand; with clear non-judgmental accountability expectations on the other.

The six minimum conditions that need to be in place:

- 1) All necessary teaching and learning materials must be in place before the school year begins
- 2) All teachers properly understand how curriculum approved textbooks embody and deliver the new curriculum into their classrooms, and know how to use them properly
- 3) All school staff properly understand their roles and responsibilities, and how to implement them practically
- 4) All school staff properly understand the policy intentions and guidelines they are responsible for implementing
- 5) School visits focus on enabling schools to implement policy guidelines before attempting to monitor their compliance
- 6) Teachers receive supportive school- and classroom-based monitoring, and practical training and coaching in how to actually implement policy guidelines

### **Conclusion**

It is necessary to find ways to enable district officials in disadvantaged contexts to implement these recommendations. However, Moola (2011: 8) reminds us that 'this has not been an easy transition. Lack of expertise, relationship dynamics and

capacity challenges have left personnel at district level feeling challenged in terms of their ability to respond to the needs of schools holistically and in a co-ordinated, collaborative way’.

Given these challenges, the DoBE needs to find a way to enable its district officials to support schools in the required ways. To do this, it needs to prioritise district and school development and support over monitoring, evaluation and assessment - at least until there is sufficient evidence of new practice that can be meaningfully evaluated and assessed with existing criteria.

To this end, from 2012, the Foundation is implementing a District Partnership Project with the three districts it has been supporting schools in. The project aims to develop an effective model to enable district offices and their officials to more successfully mediate the whole school development they are responsible for enabling in schools.

At the same time, the Foundation is collaborating with Pearson Education Achievement Solutions<sup>17</sup> to develop a commercially viable School Turnaround package that will provide district offices and their officials with the training, support and materials they need to guide and support school development and support activities in disadvantaged contexts.

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<sup>17</sup> This is a commercial Education Development Company within the Pearson Southern Africa Group of companies that supports the Foundation.

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