

Brief report on the MML Foundation's High Schools, with reference to donated LTSMs: PESA's Grade 12 X-Kits and MML's Focus Series and Study Guides

November 2011

Introduction

The School Development and Support Project has provided strong evidence to show that in the kinds of disadvantaged schools it is working in (which represent 60 – 80% of under-performing schools in the country), it takes a minimum of two to three years to establish basic school and classroom functionality. This includes developing an appreciation for the role of teacher's guides, textbooks and study guides, and establishing the practice of using such resources more or less systematically.

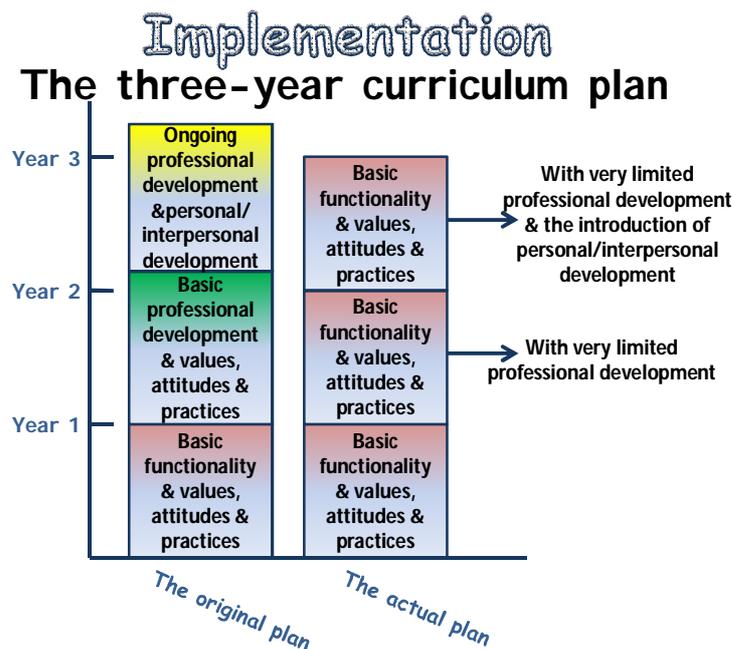
Although progress towards achieving basic school and classroom functionality has been much slower than anticipated, the project has also demonstrated that even the most basic improvements in functionality, accompanied by more regular use of LTSMs, can significantly improve Primary School results.

Unfortunately, the High Schools on the project have been far more challenging environments to work in, and have not yielded the same kinds of improvements in learner results yet. This is really not surprising, given the cumulative impact of a dysfunctional education system on the quality of disadvantaged learners' education over the 12 or more years of their school careers. The disastrous Grade 12 results; the number of learners unable to achieve university entrance passes; and the number of those who are able to, but then fail in their first year – all confirm that our school system is a long way from producing the kinds of learners it should be.

Overview of progress in the project High Schools

In brief, the High Schools have not made nearly as much progress as the Primary Schools.

Like the Primary Schools, after three years of developmental support, they have not yet got past the 'basic school and classroom functionality' phase begun in year 1 of the project, as illustrated in the following diagram.



Although all of the Grade 12 teachers are in possession of the MML LTSMs donated to them in January 2009 (the Focus Series Teacher's Guides, Textbooks, Workbooks, Study Guides and Exam Banks) and the PESA X-Kits donated at the end of 2010, it is still a very new experience for all of the teachers to have all of the LTSMs they need. As a result, at the end of 2011, their use of the LTSMs is still inconsistent, often unsystematic and far from the way they are intended to be used. This is as a result of a number of contributing historical factors that remain very real in the present, including:

- The English medium challenge these schools face
- The very poor English competencies of both teachers and learners
- The non-literate culture in the school communities and within the schools themselves
- The culture of not using textbooks that is embedded deeply in most schools
- The late and non-delivery of textbooks to schools by the Department of Education
- Very poor – and in many cases, non-existent - curriculum training prior to project implementation
- Poor and restrictive teaching practices
- The knowledge and conceptual gaps that both teachers and learners carry with them from Primary School, through teacher training and into the classroom
- A general discomfort with books and a lack of confidence about using them

Not surprisingly, the schools' experience of having all of the LTSMs they need for the first time, and actually being expected to demonstrate consistent use of them, has had an initial impact akin to an 'information overload' experience.

As a result, in spite of access to donated MML LTSMs and PESA X-Kits and our encouragement to use them:

- Teachers are still generally under-utilizing them. More specifically, many are not ready, or able, to integrate all of them into their classroom practice meaningfully. For example, the Focus Study Guides and Exam Banks have been explained and demonstrated to all schools every year for 3 years, and they are still hardly being used by any of the teachers, who are still coming to terms with using just the Teacher's Guides and textbooks.
- Similarly, learners are still generally not ready to use, or are not demonstrating clear evidence of using either the MML or PESA the study guides independently. This is in spite of the fact that they have copies of both the Focus study guides and X-Kits and that they take them home. Some evidence of this is provided below:

Although there is evidence that some learners do use the study guides as personal reference tools; our project managers have noted that only a few exceptional and really interested learners use them, and that they only do so at examination times of the year. Apart from these glimpses of their use, there is no evidence of their consistent use throughout the year in any of the project schools.

Although the 2010 overall pass rates did improve over 2009 rates in two out of six High Schools, (as per the results report submitted to PESA in July 2011) they did not

significantly improve in terms of the quality of the results in specific subject areas. Notably, only three learners from the six project High Schools achieved university entrance exemptions in 2010.

These results confirm that learners have not yet begun to make even minimal meaningful use of either the MML or PESA study guides independently.

Apart from the reasons already given for this poor or non-use of potentially very helpful resources, two other interesting factors have emerged:

- Learners are generally more confident about using, and better at making sense of LTSMs (including study guides) than their teachers. This has had both positive and negative spin-offs. For example, learners who have read ahead of their teachers' have been observed to ask questions and interact far more in lessons than those who don't.
- However, this 'independent behaviour' by learners is generally been perceived by traditional High School teachers as threatening. As a result, some teachers revert to restricting/limiting learner access to LTSMs as a way of protecting themselves from being exposed as less competent than their learners (see the discussion of 'restrictive practices' in the Kenton Conference paper I sent earlier today).
- This puts learners under pressure to limit their focus to the work that their teachers present to them and prioritise for them (See the discussion of 'minimum/low effort syndrome' also discussed in the Kenton Conference paper).

Conclusions

Basic school and classroom functionality in dysfunctional Primary Schools can be dramatically improved to impact significantly on learner results within three years. However, there are several reasons why this is likely to take much longer in High Schools. To adequately transform the values, attitudes and practices that are deeply embedded in the culture of dysfunctional schools requires much more than the donation of LTSMs and training in their use.

Given what has been reported here, it is not possible to comment meaningfully on how accessible, readable, relevant or useful either the PESA or MML Study Guides are for the target learners. It will probably not be possible to do so until both teachers and learners have become comfortable enough about using teacher's guides and textbooks, to have the confidence to actually attempt to meaningfully integrate the use of these additional LTSMs.

As a result of the insights briefly reviewed in this report, the MMLF's Board of Trustees is currently considering the extension of the School Development and Support Project by another year. It is hoped that the basic school and classroom functionality that has now been better established in most project High Schools will provide a firmer platform for an intensified focus on the proper use of LTSMs and associated teaching and learning practices in 2012.

Since we are particularly concerned about the restrictive practices of teachers who feel threatened by more capable learners, during the extra year, we intend to place equal emphasis on:

- Building teacher confidence and competence; and
- On encouraging actual use of both the Focus and PESA study guides by the learners.

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