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

Under-performing schools need district officials who can enable them to meaningfully fulfil policy expectations

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Introduction

This paper consolidates the findings of a school development and support project and six Master's dissertations supported by the Maskew Miller Longman Foundation since 2008. All seven are part of the Foundation's attempt to contribute towards providing insights into 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. Twenty-four schools in ten districts across four provinces¹ participated in the research.

In an attempt to better understand why learners have continued to underperform on the Department of Basic Education's outcomes-based assessments for more than a decade, Section One of this paper provides evidence to show that outcomes-based education has not yet been implemented in many disadvantaged schools. Instead, values, attitudes and practices reminiscent of apartheid's Bantu Education system appear to prevail. Section Two draws on the research to explain why values, attitudes and practices may not have changed in 18 years.

Section Three explains the strategies adopted by the School Development and Support Project to enable schools to make the necessary shifts towards embracing the values, attitudes and practices embodied in post-1994 policies. Section Four describes how these strategies are incorporated a model for enabling schools; the implementation of the School Development and Support Project; and the key leverage points it focused its interventions around. Section five summarizes the very encouraging impact of the project on 16 project schools between 2008 and 2011 in terms of school functionality; curriculum implementation; classroom practices; learner results; and agency among school staff members.

Drawing on the successes of the School Development and Support Project, Section Six summarizes the key challenges that district offices must address to mediate the transformation of under-resourced schools; provides recommendations about how they can address these challenges; identifies the support they will need in order to do so; and summarizes the District Partnership Project which is engaged in developing the capacity of three districts to do so by rolling-out the School Development and Support Project to another eighty schools.

¹ Among these districts are three of the most under-resourced districts in the country: Libode, the 'mud school' district in the Eastern Cape; Bushbuckridge in Mpumalanga; and Umzinyathi in KwaZulu/Natal. All three are responsible for schools that were part of the former Department of Education and Training (DET) and/or Homeland systems.

SECTION 1

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 decade². Similarly, the reasons for this failure have been described, explained and analysed in great detail³.

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 almost as soon as it was introduced (Jansen, 1998). We 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 policies 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 schools⁴ – 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, with the implementation of the new CAPS curriculum, the Department of Basic Education appears to be set on a course of doing more of the same 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 assessment systems that have not yet proven to function as transformational tools⁵

² 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 & Vinjevold 2003; Taylor, 2008.

³ 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.

⁴ These are almost exclusively ex-Homeland and Department of Education and Training (DET) Schools.

⁵ 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.

- Without increasing the capacity of or providing additional support to the districts that are responsible for ensuring its implementation
- Accompanied by the fourth complete replacement of all school textbooks in 17 years⁶

Given what we already know, we need to pause and reflect on how meaningful it is to continue to do more of the same, and to expect different results.

Since we are obviously missing something, and 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 schools reported on in this paper⁷, hybridized versions⁸ of the curriculum integrating combinations of what teachers consider to be best pre- and post-1994 teaching practices, are producing mixed results ranging from poor to reasonably good (Du Plooy, 2010; Hendricks, 2011; Kariem and Langhan, April, 2009; Ralphs, 2009). However, even the reasonably good results achieved by some of these schools do not compare favourably with curriculum expectations, 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 schools⁹ - mostly producing poor results - there was clear evidence that:

- The IQMS had not been embraced or meaningfully implemented
- No version of the OBE curriculum had been implemented
- A system resembling apartheid's Bantu Education prevailed

(Baty, 2011; Devcharan, forthcoming; Kariem and Langhan, April 2009; Xhalisa, 2011)

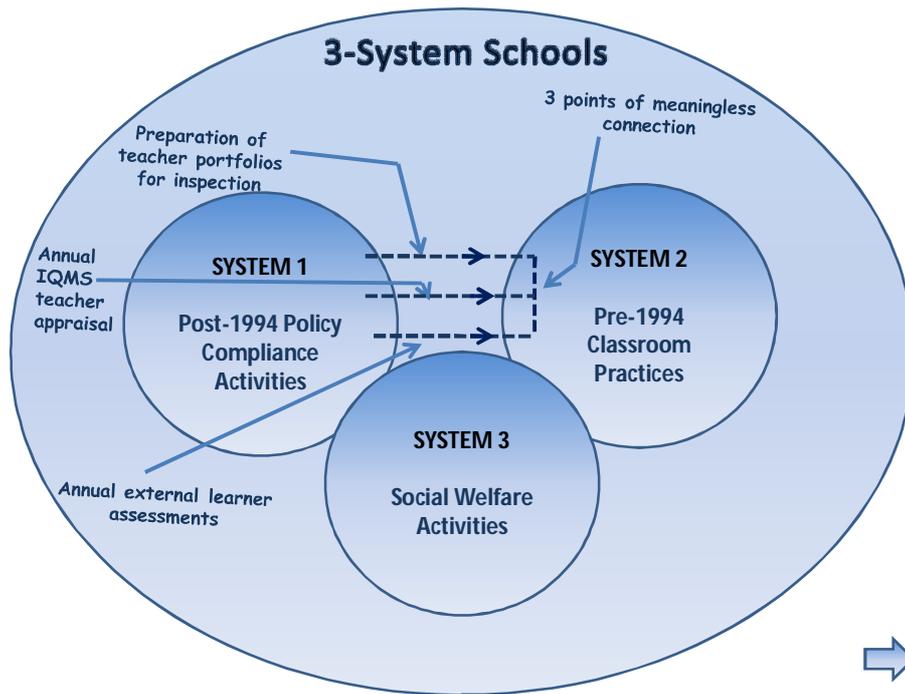
In these schools, rather than the 'imperfect' or 'hybridized' implementation of the NCS reported in most analyses of what is wrong with our schools (see footnotes 3 & 4), a very different kind of 'dislocated three-system model' appears to have evolved. This model, which functions simultaneously as a coping and avoidance response to post-1994 policies - incorporates three discrete 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).

⁶ As with each call for new textbooks to support successive versions of the OBE curriculum, curriculum documents were hastily developed and released to publishers very late, resulting in very short production deadlines. This allowed no time for critical engagement with curriculum requirements and culminated in over-hastily produced textbooks.

⁷ These are former House of Representatives and House of Delegates schools in the Western Cape and KwaZulu/Natal.

⁸ See Fleisch (2008) and (forthcoming) on 'residual practices' in schools.

⁹ These are former Homeland and Department of Education and Training (DET) schools in the Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu/Natal.



System 1: Post-1994 policy compliance activities

Characteristics: Top-down IQMS and OBE directives from the province and district; authoritarian attitudes; de-contextualized inspections of planning portfolios; teacher appraisals through form-filling and box-ticking exercises; no classroom visits.

System 2: Pre-1994 classroom practices

Characteristics: Authoritarian attitudes; transmission and repetition teaching methods; limited content coverage; and the almost complete absence of textbooks in classrooms.

System 3: Social welfare activities

Characteristics: Values, attitudes and practices consistent with post-1994 policies; activities addressing matters related to poverty including among many others: feeding scheme activities; providing clothes for the poorest learners – particularly during winter months; 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.

The only obvious points of connection between Systems 1 and 2 appear to be three annual 'evaluative events' administered by district officials through System 1 as follows:

- 1) Preparation of teacher portfolios for moderation inspections by district officials. 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' portfolio inspections during school time.
- 2) IQMS teacher appraisals. 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 Assessments¹⁰, and more recently, the Annual National Assessments and external Grade 9 and 12 examinations.

While these activities divert teachers from their routine teaching activities for significant periods of time each year, they appear to have functioned more as meaningless 'window-dressing exercises' than developmental interventions because they have had no impact on the nature or quality of teaching practices in these schools. This is confirmed by consistently poor learner results which reflect the severe dislocations between compliant curriculum planning portfolios and teacher appraisal forms on the one hand; and actual classroom practices on the other (Kareim et al, August 2010).

To support these claims, the following summary of observations over the last three years provides a sense of how the three-system schools and their districts are actually functioning (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; Ralps, 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 interpreting the practical requirements of post-1994 policies.
- Many vacant posts in district and circuit offices mean that curriculum advisors are too thinly spread to be effective¹¹.
- District support emphasizes administrative compliance.
- Adversarial relations between officials and schools.

School leadership and management

- Need orientation to their roles and responsibilities as curriculum leaders and managers.
- Require as much support as teachers do in understanding and implementing policy requirements.

Teacher training and support

- Many teachers are overwhelmed by, and unfamiliar with the NCS.
- Poor training has produced teachers lacking confidence, competence, content knowledge and skills.
- Teachers need:
 - Classroom implementation support.
 - Practical training in and experience of the teaching and assessment methods required of them.
 - Practical training for the new subjects they are required to teach.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ In the Libode, Bushbuckridge, and Umzinyathi districts, curriculum advisors were first appointed late in 2008 and in 2009. Most newly appointed officials were recruited from schools that had themselves not received any previous curriculum training, and did not receive any significant training in preparation for their new roles.

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 they have placed.
- 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
- Authoritarian attitudes
- Forms of corporal punishment
- Verbal humiliation of learners
- Little or no evidence of lesson planning
- Time wasting activities
- Transmission of content
- Limited content coverage
- Teaching the same content to different Grades
- Low expectations of learners
- 70 - 80% of input in an African language during English medium classes

Learning activities:

- A narrow range of learning and assessment experiences
- Listening to lengthy explanations
- Copying teacher's notes or questions from the chalkboard
- Receiving answers from teachers
- Frequent class chorusing

Classrooms are characterised by the absence of:

- Charts, posters or learner's work on the walls
- Textbooks and other learning materials
- Thinking, reasoning or problem solving activities
- Independent, peer or group learning opportunities

This evidence illustrates the extent of the 'disjuncture between policy and practice' in many disadvantaged contexts (Xhalisa, 2011:12). It also suggests that rather than attempting to implement the numerous versions of the OBE curriculum imperfectly, many former DET and Homeland schools may have side-stepped it. For these schools, post-1994 policies appear to exist in rhetoric and in files that have no bearing on school leadership, management or classroom practices.

If these findings are in any way applicable to the majority of disadvantaged schools in the country, then the poor systemic and annual national assessment results produced over the last 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 in disadvantaged districts and schools:

- There is widespread non-implementation¹² of post-1994 policies
- Pre-1994 values, attitudes and practices prevail

¹² As opposed to non-compliance as has generally been reported.

- Teachers are appraised against criteria they are not exposed to or even attempting to implement
- Learners are assessed against criteria they are not exposed to
- There is widespread window-dressing at school, district and provincial levels to create and sustain the 'illusion' that policies are being implemented

This understanding of what is really going on in disadvantaged contexts helps to explain how it has been possible for learner results to remain so resistant to improvement over almost two decades. It also points to the need to understand the causal factors underlying this perplexing situation. In this regard, the next section explores the following question:

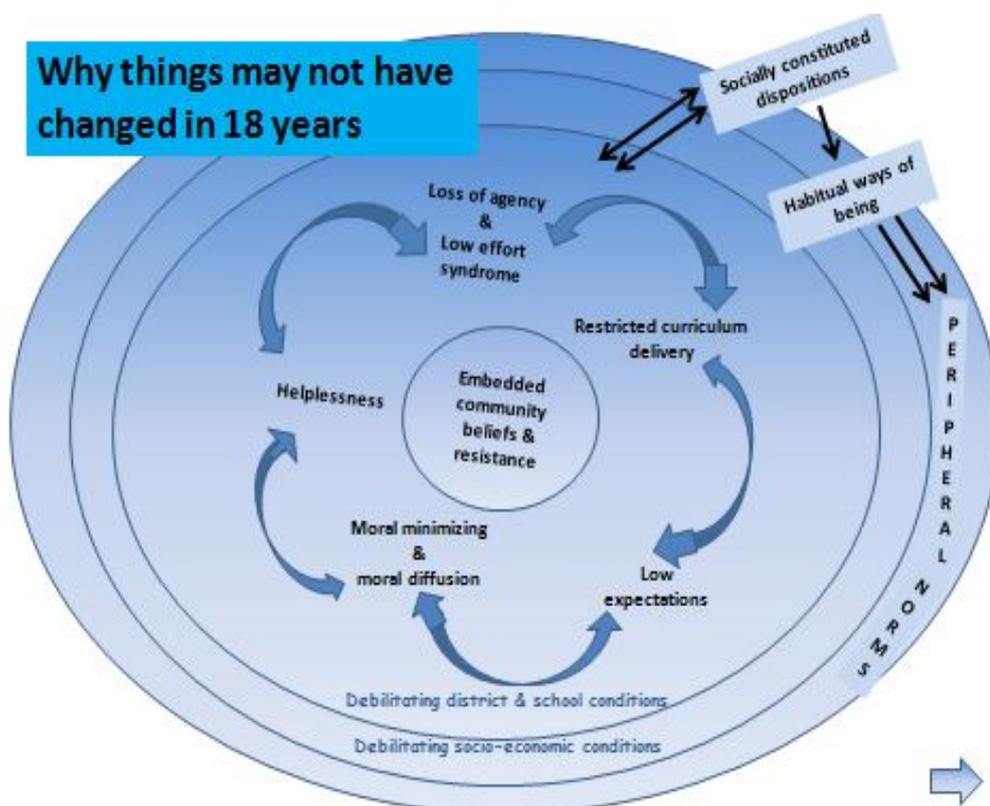
Why have school communities that were once at the heart of the struggle for liberation, adopted strategies to avoid post-1994 policies and sustain the pre-1994 values, attitudes and practices they sought to escape from?

SECTION 2

Thoughts on why things may not have changed in 18 years

This section is an attempt to integrate insights from the research into a framework that helps to explain how pre-1994 values, attitudes and practices may have been perpetuated in disadvantaged districts and school communities.

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 an under-resourced school, within a similarly under-resourced district and community context. 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 the context of adversarial relations between officials and teachers, intensifies the sense of despondency, demotivation and helplessness (Clarke and Linder, 2006: 62 in Du Plooy, 2010; Kariem et al, 2009).

Embedded community beliefs

Kariem et al (August, 2010: 8 & 9) found that there may be fundamental mismatches between the values, attitudes and practices required by post-1994 policies on the one hand; and deeply held community beliefs on the other. For example:

Norms around respectful adult-child relationships

While the post-1994 curriculum guidelines expect learners to engage in interactive communication, critical thinking and expressing independent opinions; practices in schools reflect very different community norms. Learners are expected to listen to adults respectfully, not to question or challenge, or to express independent opinions. The same norms were observed to apply in relations between teachers and their seniors such as community leaders and district officials visiting their schools.

Norms about how knowledge is conveyed

The post-1994 curriculum expects teachers to engage learners in constructing knowledge for themselves. In contrast, observed practices confirm a deeply embedded community belief that a good teacher transmits information to learners who are expected to demonstrate how effectively they can absorb and reproduce that information.

These potential mismatches go some way towards explaining why schools might have resisted embracing the OBE curriculum. They may also help to explain what appears to be a widespread lack of agency in relation to embracing the curriculum. This was widely observed as an absence of initiative on the part of key role players¹³ to take responsibility for developing their own understanding of the new curriculum; and for driving the transformation required of their own, and their teachers' attitudes and practices in order to implement it.

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'.

¹³ Here we refer to community leaders, parents, officials, school leaders, teacher unions and teachers.

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 their 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.

Low expectations

The cumulative impact of the above help to explain the low expectations observed at district and school levels. Both circuit managers and school leaders had extremely low school functionality expectations; while 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

These low expectations explain the restricted curriculum delivered by many teachers. The following summary of observed curriculum restrictions provides additional evidence of how uniform this phenomenon appears to be 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'¹⁴ 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
- 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. Through a process of 'code-meshing' (Michael-Luna and Canagrajah, 2008 in

¹⁴ The kinds of dis-advantaged schools discussed in this paper.

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 because they were limited to rote learning and memorization in all classrooms, regardless of the medium of instruction', thus 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 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).

Loss 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.'

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, consistently low teacher expectations and constant under-stimulation reinforce the lack of agency expected of learners.

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).

Similarly, it is not 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.

Socially constituted dispositions and habitual ways of being

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: prevailing socio-economic conditions, the hierarchical structures and authoritarian procedures in the education system, and the restricted curriculum delivered by teachers
- The incorporated structures (people's existing mental models and ways of being) such as: embedded community norms, moral minimising, moral diffusion, lack of agency 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 competence at the peripheral level, fail to achieve the norms and standards at the centre. This is because '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

While this perspective on why things may not have changed in 18 years points to a bleak of picture internalized oppression; it also identifies leverage points that could be critical in understanding how to approach the 'educational emancipation' of school communities.

While this is a complex situation in which socio-economic, systemic and psycho-social factors interact to sustain peripheral norms that undermine curriculum change and its intended social transformation, a complex solution is unlikely to succeed. On the contrary, the simplest, most cost-effective and most easily replicable needs-driven solutions are the most likely to be embraced, implemented and sustained.

In this regard, the project sought to:

- Identify the critical combination of factors that could be addressed simply and meaningfully, within existing district budgets, by district officials, to the greatest effect, in the shortest possible time.
- Develop a model that could enable over-stretched and under-resourced district officials to strategically address the factors that would have the greatest impact and the most significant knock-on effects in schools, in a short a time as possible.

Based on 'strategic common sense' and intuition, the project embraced the DoBE's national priority of curriculum implementation as the key focus area through which to mediate the desired transformation in schools. Some time into the project this focus was affirmed by Bernstein's argument that 'to halt, or interrupt the process of the social reproduction of inequalities in a society, changes must be made to three levels simultaneously:

- The existing curriculum
 - The transmission and acquisition of knowledge
 - The evaluation criteria'
- (1967 in Devcharan, forthcoming: 17)

Following Bernstein, given that the DoBE has made significant progress in addressing the first and the last of these necessary changes, addressing the way knowledge is transmitted and acquired has to be the new national priority.

Section 3 below explains the strategies adopted by the School Development and Support Project to address this priority and Section 4 explains the interventions they led to. However, before these are explored, it may be helpful to briefly consider the kinds of assumptions that informed the selection of strategies.

SECTION 3

Mediating new ways of transmitting and acquiring knowledge

The Maskew Miller Longman Foundation initiated a School Development and Support Project in 2008 to explore the development of a model to enable district officials to enable under-resourced and under-performing schools to embrace and implement the new curriculum meaningfully¹⁵. The findings discussed in this paper so far, have informed the ongoing development of the model, which focuses on the practical implications of 'how to' enable schools that are locked into peripheral norms that deviate from required central curriculum norms, to do what they are expected to. This section provides an overview of the perspectives informing the model's approach to mediating the required practical changes.

¹⁵ Although the project aimed to involve district officials as partners in exploring how best to enable schools, the officials did not engage actively in the first 3 years of implementation. However, in the light of the impact of the project after 3 years, the District Partnership Project has been initiated, with full support from the districts, to enable officials to roll out the School Development Model to more schools.

First steps: Addressing resistance to change

Build respectful, trusting relationships and develop understanding

Drawing on Rogers (1972)¹⁶, Johnson (2003), and Johnson and Johnson (2003)¹⁷ the model recognises that mediating change depends on the degree to which trust and mutually respectful relationships can be established with schools. For this reason, the model incorporates a six-month baseline study period prior to introducing any intervention. During this time, the main aims are to:

- Build trusting, non-judgemental relationships
- Understand actual practices at the school
- Model required values, attitudes and practices
- Present policy expectations
- Reflect on disparities between expectations and actual practices
- Understand policy implementation challenges
(Karien and Langan, October, 2009).

Identify and prioritize support needs

The baseline study phase was followed by a needs-analysis process that focussed on negotiating and prioritizing the support required to enable schools to fulfil curriculum policy expectations over a three-year period. The following is a summary of the strategies adopted to address these needs.

Next steps: Addressing resource and classroom challenge issues

Provide materials to support required new teaching practices

There is little doubt that most disadvantaged primary schools have opted to implement language policies that do not serve the best interests of the majority of learners. While most high schools do not have a choice in this regard, the medium of instruction remains a significant challenge. This is mainly because so few of the necessary conditions for successful English medium instruction are in place (Langhan, 1996: 16).

However, regardless of the medium of instruction choices schools may or may not have, there are a number of factors that undermine mother tongue medium arguments. Among these is the growing phenomenon of multi-cultural and multi-language schools where the choice of medium of instruction is not a simple matter. Other significant factors are:

- The one-dimensional teaching method that undermines learning regardless of the medium of instruction (Xhalisa, 2011: ii)
- That the majority of teachers do use English as the language of teaching when they should (Kariem et al, 2009)

¹⁶ Rogers (1972) addresses person-centred communication.

¹⁷ Johnson (2003) and Johnson and Johnson (2003) address inter-personal effectiveness and group work.

Given these challenges, the model aimed to explore how to most easily achieve two¹⁸ of the necessary conditions for successful English medium instruction in any context:

- That teachers actually use English as the language of teaching and learning
- That learners are exposed to as much English as possible at school (Langhan, 1996: 13 - 27)

Similarly, it sought to address challenges associated with low teacher expectations and restricted curriculum delivery.

According to Richards (2001) and Taylor (2008), suitable teaching and learning materials used properly can be a powerful means of supporting these kinds of needs in disadvantaged contexts. This is because teachers guides and textbooks provide 'on-the-job' training for teachers; the English they need for teaching purposes; the content; and the teaching, learning and assessment activities required to fulfil curriculum expectations (Richards, 2001: 31 – 32; Kariem and Langhan, October, 2009: 37 – 39).

Fleisch (forthcoming) supports these views. In proposing how to change 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'

For these reasons, teaching and learning materials formed the foundational resource component of the model, as discussed in Section 4.

Ongoing steps: Addressing leadership, management, planning and teaching challenges¹⁹

Mediate experiential learning

According to (Moolla, 2011:310) 'the reason why policy guidelines that appear to provide all the answers to the challenges 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.' The evidence presented in Section 1 confirms that little or no mediation of post-1994 curriculum policies has actually happened at either district or school level. For these reasons, the project drew on learning theories that emphasize mediation through guided, practical, experiential learning²⁰, as outlined in the rest of this section.

¹⁸ Three other necessary conditions for successful English medium education are: 1) The parents/community desire that their children learn English; 2) Parents regularly expose their children to English at home; and 3) The learners are regularly exposed to English in their social life outside of school. While the first of these is often in place in disadvantaged contexts, the second and third are not.

¹⁹ Although many of the principles outlined in this section refer to the learning of children, they are equally useful in adult learning. This is particularly the case since this model aims to 'model' for teachers, the practical teaching and learning experiences they are expected to provide for their learners.

²⁰ These theories also underpin the constructivist approach of the OBE curriculum.

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 - school leaders and teachers in this case - 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
- Performing tasks independently.

Emphasise conceptual understanding

The schema theory of learning (Piaget, 1977; & Ausubel, 1978, in Rodseth, 1996: 28 – 29), proposes that learners (teachers in this case) approach new knowledge within the framework of existing schemata or networks of knowledge and skills. In encountering new knowledge, they assimilate and accommodate new knowledge, thus altering and elaborating existing schemata. Applying this theory in a teaching and learning process involves:

- 1) Activating the learners' existing network of background knowledge
- 2) Correcting this if necessary
- 3) Preparing the learner to assimilate and accommodate new knowledge by:
 - Use concrete experience to establish basic concepts
 - Let learners discuss and write about the concepts to construct better understanding
 - Question in ways that anticipate new knowledge
 - Facilitate the assimilation of new knowledge through explanation, modelling and mediation
 - Assist learners to produce evidence new knowledge or skills

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

At a deeper level, to actually shift learners (and teachers) through Piaget's 'zones of proximal development' (Rodseth, 1996) towards new conceptual understandings, mediation should include an element of conceptual conflict. In this regard Piaget's notions of disequilibrium and accommodation are useful for understanding how to

approach 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 (teachers) 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 related educational change theory (Zimmerman, 1998; Neisser, 1967; Duncan, 2010) that applies the principles of conceptual conflict to mediating organisational change at the level of leadership and management.

In this case, existing preconceptions (schemata) are the equivalent of mental maps. The aim is to mediate changes in the mental maps of the members of an organisation, in order to enable changes in organisational behaviour. The theory proposes three stages of change:

First-order change

When an external agent enables the members of an organisation to recognise and acknowledge that current ways of thinking about and doing things may not serve the best interests of the organisation.

Second-order change

This is the facilitation of reflexive processes that enable an organisation to consider more appropriate ways of doing things. As for conceptual conflict, this usually involves introducing a state of cognitive dissonance that results in the modification of an existing mental map.

Third-order change

This involves enabling an organisation to re-align its practices with the modified mental map, so that new ways of thinking and doing begin to operate for the benefit of everyone in the organisation.

Foster the development of agency

Related to socialised dispositions discussed in the previous section, 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'.

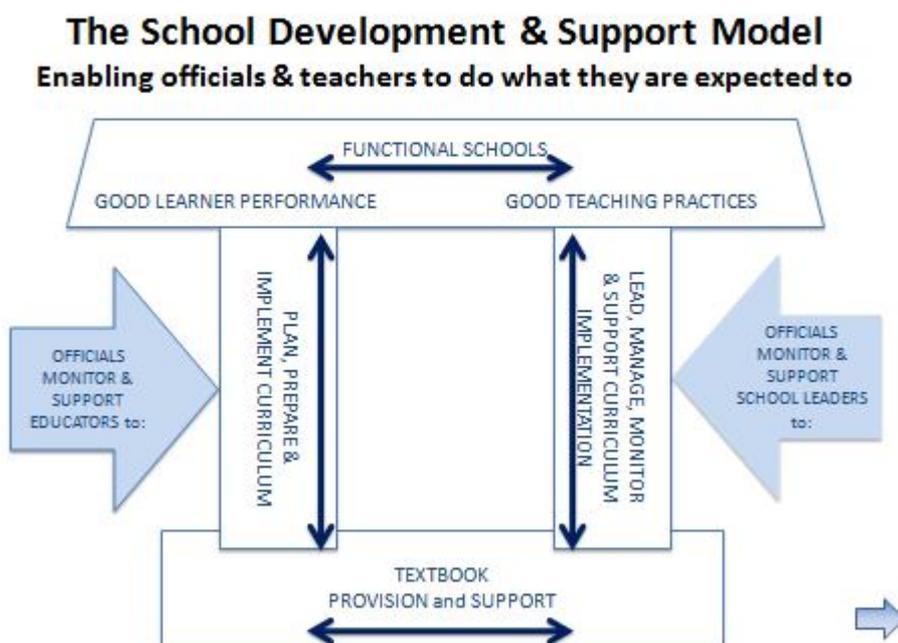
Drawing on critical social science²¹, Lazarus (1988: 121) proposes that ‘emancipation is only enabling when it helps people to understand what they can do differently.’ This she suggests, can be achieved through engaging people in self-reflective critique of the ‘distorted knowledge which conceals the interests of a 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 an alternative ideology’ (Fay, 1975 & 1987; Wexler, 1987; in Lazarus, 1988, 121).

This section has summarised the perspectives that have both consciously and intuitively informed the model’s approach to attempting to mediate the ‘educational emancipation’ of schools from pre-1994 values, attitudes and practices. The following section outlines the leverage points targeted by these strategies and the practical steps of implementing them through the School Development and Support Project.

SECTION 4

A project to effect desired change

The key focus areas of the School Development and Support Model, in line with post-1994 policy requirements, are illustrated below.



Implementing the model - the School Development and Support Project

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 official expectations of schools
- Explaining the nature of the project, support offered and modus operandi

²¹ Critical social science explores the ideological forms which maintain social systems.

- Negotiating voluntary participation and performance agreements
- Conducting a baseline study to developing understanding
- Building trusting relationships

Developing understanding and building trusting relationships

This involved three critical elements:

- Getting to know each other involved: clarifying the values, attitudes and practices of the partnership; non-judgemental observation to properly understand how schools actually did things; ongoing comparisons of current and expected practices and reflection on disparities between them; and identifying what support schools might need in order to make necessary changes.
- Building trust involved: fulfilling commitments to each other; 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

Care was taken to ensure that the relevant district officials, the school community, school governing body, teachers unions, all staff, and learners were involved in the decision-making process.

Care was taken to ensure that the partner's respective roles, responsibilities and expectations were made explicit; and that initiatives 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 that would be monitored mutually and reflected on during each school visit.

We also agreed that the partnership would be reviewed 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

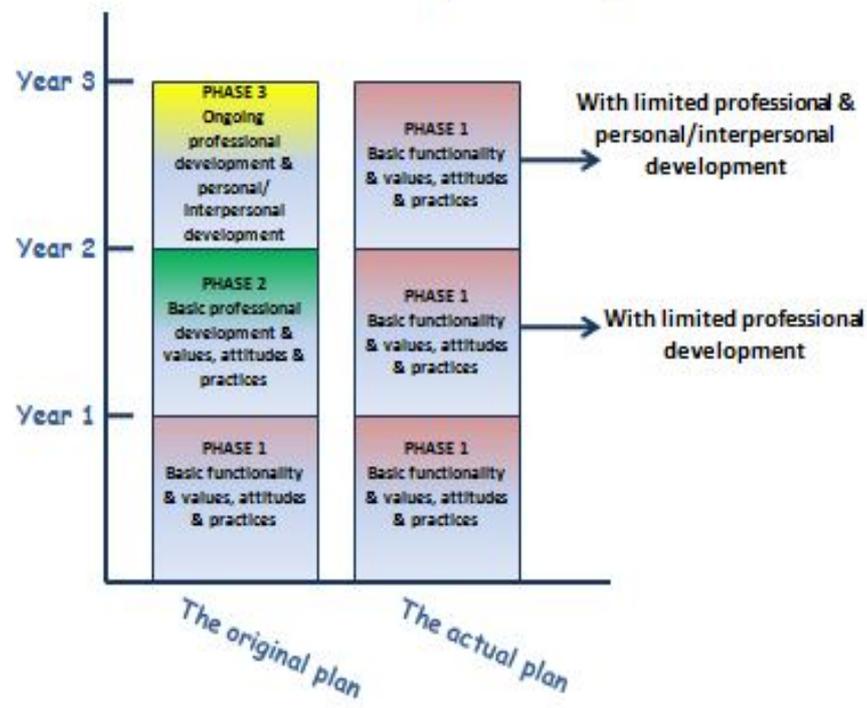
It was significant to discover that resistance due to 'lack of understanding' and the lack of explanation and support (mediation) from the districts contributed more or less equally towards hindering curriculum change in schools. Once the project schools more clearly understood what was expected of them, and that the project would support them to achieve these expectations, without exception, every school expressed eagerness to receive support and engage with the new policies. Their main reason for wanting to participate was the offer of support to enable meaningful compliance with requirements that they had not previously properly understood.

Implementation

Implementation was scheduled for three years, from January 2009 – November 2011. Following the six-month baseline study that culminated in the analyses and prioritization of needs, the partners set out to implement a three-year school development plan. As illustrated overleaf, the process proceeded more slowly than anticipated, with most schools remaining primarily in phase 1 for all three years.

However, slowing down to the pace of each school was critical in enabling them to make meaningful shifts, as is discussed towards the end of this paper.

The school development plan



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 interventions that aimed to mediate the required values, attitudes and practices through modelling, demonstration and guided practical experiences. Both aim to compensate for the fact that most teachers' have no practical experience of the required new school and classroom practices, and find it very difficult to imagine what they should look like, or to visualize how to go about being or doing things differently in order to realize them.

1) 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 the focus was on the following obstacles that correspond to priority areas illustrated in the model on page 19:

- Limited classroom resources and late delivery of textbooks²²
- Lack of district capacity to provide training and support
- One-dimensional approach to monitoring schools
- One-dimensional approach to teaching

To address all four obstacles, the project identified two key leverage points:

- Ensure that every teacher and learner had the basic teaching and learning resources they needed from the first day of school. To do this, the project provided complete sets of curriculum approved materials²³ that embodied the required new teaching, learning and assessment practices.
- Provision of school-based teacher training and classroom-based monitoring and coaching in how to use the materials optimally twice a term (eight times per year).

These two interventions contributed significantly towards creating the enabling learning environment necessary to support effective curriculum implementation.

2) Addressing the ‘softer’ but more complex people issues

Here the ‘incorporated structure’ obstacles identified included:

- Pre-1994 values, attitudes and practices
- Poor self- esteem
- Low expectations
- Absence of agency

The key leverage points were to:

- Model and foster the expected values, attitudes and practices²⁴
- Enable schools to comply meaningfully with policy requirements

To do this, the following interventions were provided for the school management team, the school clerk and general workers; and the Heads of Departments twice each term:

- Clarifying roles, responsibilities and policy expectations²⁵
- Training and coaching in how to implement these practically
- Guided experiences of successful implementation
- Negotiated tasks for independent implementation between school visits
- Supportive monitoring, reflection, feedback and mentoring on independently implemented tasks²⁶

²² Since these are both Departmental responsibilities that are budgeted for annually (National Planning Commission, June 2011), ensuring that this happens in all schools has no additional financial implications for the DoBE. It does however require that requisitioning and delivery procedures must become far more effective.

²³ This involved the provision of a teacher’s guide for every subject taught by every teacher; 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 16 schools was R3.5 million.

²⁴ The values, attitudes and practices embodied in the South African Constitution (1996) and all new curriculum guideline documents.

²⁵ Whole School Evaluation, Improving Quality Management System and National Curriculum Statements.

SECTION 5

Impact of the project within three years

In spite of the slower than expected pace of change, after just three years of project implementation, all of the project schools had made significant progress along the path from under-performing schools to achieving schools.

Evidence of improvements: 2008 - 2011

The following improvements have been achieved since 2008 (Kariem et al, April & October 2009; February 2010; March & May 2011; February 2012):

- Improved basic functionality
- Improved classroom practices
- Better organized portfolios
- Significantly improved use of teacher's guides and textbooks leading to:
 - 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 by the end of 2010
 - 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 achieved improved functionality, but their results had not yet begun to reflect this
- Sustained improvements in learner results by the end of 2011
 - Many more learners engaging successfully with a broad range of OBE activity types
 - Significantly fewer learners scoring zero for almost all activity types
 - Significantly more learners scoring over 35%, improving overall pass rates
 - Significantly improved grade averages
 - The worst performing schools in 2008 consistently achieving the greatest improvements in 2011

²⁶ 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.

- The levelling out of the vast disparities between the worst and best performing schools in 2008, with a number of the worst performing schools scoring at levels comparable with their better performing counterparts in 2011
- Significant improvements and/or consistently good achievements in 30 of the 35 participating primary school classes

Evidence of increased agency

The above improvements already 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):

- Inviting District Officials to come and monitor their portfolios
- Liaising with local authorities, a District Director, the Chair of a 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
- Liaising with local authorities to secure funds for school renovations
- Renovating:
 - Administrative office space to create a reception area for parents
 - A dilapidated classroom to create a school library
 - Staff rooms to provide teachers with secure cupboards
- Involving unemployed ex-learners in repairing desks and chairs
- Building:
 - Three new classrooms to replace a Foundation Phase mud classroom
 - A new kitchen area for a school feeding scheme
 - Getting parents to donate the bricks to build a new classroom
- Liaising with a District Office to arrange busses to transport learners

These improvements provide compelling evidence to show that the challenge of emancipating and enabling disadvantaged and under-performing schools is not as complex as it may seem, and that it can be mediated far more quickly than has been the case since 1994. The real challenge, and the opportunity that lies ahead, is to enable district officials to actually do this for schools.

SECTION 6

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 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 conditions are in place.

Shifts in focus and emphasis of district officials:

- 1) Adopting supportive rather than judgmental attitudes
- 2) Enabling schools to implement policy guidelines practically before monitoring their compliance with them

Put another way, this implies 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 conditions that need to be in place, as per the School Development and Support Model, are:

- 1) All necessary teaching and learning materials must be in place when the school year begins
- 2) All teachers must 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 must properly understand their roles and responsibilities, and how to implement them practically
- 4) All school staff must properly understand the policy intentions and guidelines they are responsible for implementing

- 5) School visits must focus on enabling schools to implement policy guidelines before attempting to monitor their compliance
- 6) Teachers must receive regular, supportive school- and classroom-based monitoring, and practical training 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 development through capacity building in at least the key areas identified in this paper. It also needs to prioritize their focus on 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 against existing new criteria.

To this end, from 2012, the Foundation is implementing a District Partnership Project with the three more disadvantaged districts it has been supporting schools in since 2009. The project is engaged in partnerships intended to develop the capacity of district officials to roll-out the mediation of the School Support and Development Model to more schools in their districts.

At the same time, the Foundation is collaborating with Pearson Education Achievement Solutions²⁷ to develop a commercially viable School Turnaround Programme that will provide district offices and their officials with the training, support and materials necessary to support the implementation of the model in all of their schools.

²⁷ This is a commercial Education Development Company within the Pearson Southern Africa Group of companies that supports the Foundation.

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