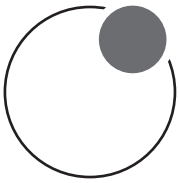

TEN YEARS OF IMPACT

Our Learning Legacy of Empowerment, Innovation, and Transformation

Compiled and Edited by:

DR GODWIN KHOSA &
DR LORRAINE MARNEWECK

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Dedication

to a generation that is eager to take
on tomorrow's infinite possibilities.

an **NECT** Publication

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

ABTs	Alternative Building Technologies
AfL	Assessment for Learning
AI	Artificial Intelligence
APLs	Anchor Planning Levers
AR	Augmented Reality
ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
BLSA	Business Leadership South Africa
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements
CES	Chief Education Specialist
COLT	Culture of Learning And Teaching
CSI	Corporate Social Investment
CSTL	Care and Support for Learning and Teaching
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBR	Design-Based Research
DBST	District-Based Support Team
DCAs	District Change Agents
DDSP	District Development Support Programme
DIP	School and District Improvement Programme
DoE	Department of Education
DSC	District Steering Committee
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECF	Education Collaboration Framework

EE	Equal Education
EEC	Education Excellence Consortium
EFAL	English First Additional Language
EGRS	Early Grade Reading Study
EMG	Education Management and Governance
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
ETAO	Education Technical Assistance Office
ETDP SETA	Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education Training Authority
FREF	First Rand Empowerment Foundation
FSS	Fresh Start Schools
GET	General Education and Training
GPLMS	Gauteng Primary Language and Mathematics Strategy
GTAC	Government Technical Advisory Centre
HL	Home Language
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDIP	Integrated District Development Programme
INEE	International Network for Education in Emergencies
ISC	Interim Steering Committee
JET	JET Education Services
LitNum Strategy	Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (Western Cape)
LMS	Learner Management System
LTSM	Learning And Teaching Support Material
LURITS	Learning Unit Record Information and Tracking System
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoUs	Memoranda Of Understanding
MPL	Mpumalanga
MQA	Monitoring and Quality Assurance
MSDF	Michael and Susan Dell Foundation
MVP	Mandatory Vaccination Policy
NASCEE	National Association of Social Change Entities in Education

NCCC	National Coronavirus Command Council
NDP	National Development Plan
NECT	National Education Collaboration Trust
NEIMS	National Education Infrastructure Management System
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLF	New Leaders Foundation
NLU	National Language Unit
NPC	National Planning Commission
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NRC	National Reading Coalition
NRP	National Reading Panel
NSC	National Senior Certificate
OECD	Organisation For Economic Co-Operation and Development
PEDs	Provincial Education Departments
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
PILO	Programme For Learning Outcomes
PIRLS	Progress In International Reading Literacy Study
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PQWs	Professional Quick Wins
PSPs	Professional Service Providers
PSRIP	Primary School Reading Improvement Programme
PSRIP HL	Primary School Reading Improvement Programme For Home Language
PSS	Psychosocial Support
PWC	PriceWaterhouseCoopers
QA	Quality Assurance
QLTC	Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign
RATPS	Recovery Annual Teaching Plans
RDL	Remote And Digital Learning
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
RPATS	Recovery Planner and Trackers
SA	Subject Advisor
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation

SACE	South African Council For Educators
SAFE	Sanitation Appropriate For Education
SASA	South African Schools Act
SA-SAMS	South African School Administration And Management System
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal (Sdg
SDP	Site Development Plan
SETA	Sector Education And Training Authority
SGB	School Governing Body
SITA	State Information Technology Agency (Sita)
SLAs	Service Level Agreements
SLP	Structured Learning Programme
SMT	School Management Team
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering And Maths
TAs	Technical Assistants/Advisors (Tas)
TIMSS	Trends In Mathematics And Science Study (TIMSS)
TSM	Three Stream Model
TTEQL	Teacher Education For Equitable And Quality Learning
UJ	University Of Johannesburg
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States Of America
VELLE	Virtual Educator-Led Learning Experiences
WC	Western Cape

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The NECT is profoundly grateful to the multitude of individuals whose contributions, dedication, and unwavering support have made this minilesson publication a reality. The collaborative effort that went into crafting this work has been nothing short of inspiring, and we are pleased to acknowledge the remarkable people who have played a pivotal role in its creation.

First and foremost, our heartfelt gratitude goes to the multiple contributors of this publication. Your expertise, passion, and commitment to advancing education have been the driving force behind the insightful content presented within these pages. Each author has brought a unique perspective and set of skills, enriching the overall depth and breadth of this work. This publication stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, and we are immensely thankful for your intellectual contributions.

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In closing, this publication stands as a collaborative achievement, a product of the dedication, expertise, and passion of numerous individuals with great range in terms of age and experience. We provided mentorship and advice to steer the authors through the complexities of writing, and by so doing expanded their capabilities. Collaborating in this process has had a positive impact on intellectual growth and development within NECT that will resonate far beyond the pages of this publication.

Our shared commitment to education and the pursuit of knowledge has manifested in these pages, and we are profoundly thankful to each and every person who has contributed to this publication.

OVERVIEW OF THE MINI-LESSONS

GODWIN KHOSA

The field of education improvement produces a wide range of lessons and useful observations, much of which remain unrecorded. Often, the recorded insights remain in management and evaluation reports that do not reach many current and future practitioners. The limited utilisation of the project insights is further exacerbated by evaluation approaches that are interested in impact and less on the implementation dynamics of the project. Furthermore, the evaluation and management reports are lengthy and academic in nature. This mini-lessons project was conceived to avoid the challenges cited above and to give voice to the implementation staff who are often treated as objects of the evaluations and management reports.

Many more lessons would have been produced from the NECT's ten years of programme designs and implementation, if it was not for the equally demanding efforts of implementation. Also, the mini-lessons were produced with an intention to encourage the implementers to reflect on their practitioner-cum intuitive, daily work. A dedicated effort has been made to include first time writers.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE MINI LESSONS

Over eighty topics were carefully curated from the ten years experience of the NECT. Once the writing process started, some were collapsed as they were found to be overlapping, and many others could not be completed due to time constraints. The total of forty-seven mini lessons that were selected for this publication are organised into three sections that are discussed below.

Section 1: Collaboration and Managing Large Scale Projects

This category of lessons is important in education improvement as large-scale programming has unique design and management dynamics as compared to small project dynamics. As it can be gleaned from the reporting, the NECT is the first intact partnership programme in South Africa to reach over 90% of the schools in the country. At the core of the NECT's extensive reach is the use of systemic approaches which seek to address improvement needs for the entire system with its various jurisdictions and levels which have various capacities and authorities. Systemic intervention approaches recognise the multi-tier nature of education systems; the importance of district-wide [or organisation-wide] goals; function-structure logic of systems made up of inputs, processes and outputs; geographic connectedness of sub-systems; and the influence of social and political milieus within which schools operate (Khosa, 2014:4).

The first mini lesson in this section shares a theorisation of the education chapter of the National Development Plan. The lesson suggests that it is important for planning documents to be interrogated to establish their underlying meanings before programmes, projects and activities are decided. Interrogation should lead to the improvement of the plan itself as these should ideally not remain stagnant for the intended period of implementation.

The rest of the lessons in this section reflect on lessons learned in setting up consortia which bring challenges relating to procurement and contracting, maintenance of the governance and stability of the members of the consortia, philosophical and methodological tensions within the consortia and between the consortia and the beneficiary entities.

As part of the consideration of the role of the NECT in its ten years of existence, the NECT management reflected on some fundamental questions regarding the necessity of education improvement initiatives – institutions and programmes – with a view to test the need of extra-governmental organisations such as the NECT.

It observed from South Africa's 25 years of history of education improvement that, we can safely conclude that without the extra-governmental support[1], the education system could have been worse off. We concluded from the reflections that what could be defined as 'booster programmes' (encompassing extra-governmental programmes) are a feature of many education systems in

1 Including initiatives such as the foreign aid funded national programmes such as the District Development and Support Programme (DDSP) and the Education Improvement Project (EIP), Imbewu project in the Eastern Cape and Khanyisa Programme in Limpopo that were funded through bilateral agreements and additional interventions were made through a wide range of programmes through NGOs such as JET, NBI, Molteno, and through fast-track government programmes such as the Foundations for Learning, Dinaledi and the Gauteng Primary Language and Maths Strategy (GPLMS).

It can be concluded from Section 1, that largescale interventions need to be designed from a perspective of how the whole system works, with due care taken to ensure alignment with policy and current programmes.

In addition, the design of collaboration mechanisms that involve the DBE, provincial departments and districts as beneficiary authorities, funding partners, implementation partners and teachers' unions need to be considered. All of these stakeholders and role-players wield authority over the design, adoption, implementation of change initiatives.

Extra-governmental support initiatives should not be a permanent feature, but 'booster initiatives' should be. Box 1 presents some prerequisites that NECT deems necessary for the design and implementation of effective programmes within government.

BOX 1

Capacity to design theoretically sound and bankable initiatives.

Organisational environment that enables quick deployment of initiatives.

Optimal flow of material and non-material resources among key actor- groups.

Strong focus on strengthening the capacity of the system.

Sufficient government 'absorptive capacity' characterised by the right qualities and quantities of expertise, leadership commitment, staff ethos, and complementary budgeting.

Social capital based on constructive dialogue and relationships (within tiers, between tiers and with professional and labour organisations).

developed and developing countries. These include deliberate government and non-governmental interventions such as the 'No-child left Behind' programme in the United States (2001), Education Action Zones in the United Kingdom, and the Tusome project in Kenya (2014).

Section 2: Schools and Districts

This section adds observations onto a well-researched body of knowledge on how to improve the functioning of schools and classrooms with effective support and monitoring from district offices.

Regarding districts, misalignment is highlighted between policy intentions and education programmes on the one hand and the operational plans, capacities and activities of the districts. Schools still face practical challenges relating to the unreliability of operational data that is sent to the upper levels of the system. Among these are time utilisation, completion of the curriculum and assessments. Strengthening of these forms of evidence bases could improve planning and accountabilities and subsequently improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the education system.

The section also presents observations that operational challenges at school and district levels are exacerbated by discourse clashes among the education development experts (officials, academics and NGO professionals). The notion of 'reading wars' and the different perceptions of structured learning pedagogies are examples that are used to show the divisions among professionals and the ultimate confusion that teachers' experience.

From these issues and dynamics, the NECT has concluded that education improvement will yield better and sustainable outcomes if it focuses on strengthening the planning and implementation capacity of the districts. Districts should be in a better position to translate education policies and programmes from the national and provincial levels into educationally cogent operational plans that are resourced and have realistic targets.

It is on this basis that the NECT has adopted and designed in 2023 an Integrated District Improvement Programme (IDIP) that aims to establish the sufficiency of district operational plans against strategic policy objectives and to support the districts to improve the planning, implementation and reporting on the operational plans.

Lessons in this section illustrate that for maximum systemic impact, school improvement programmes should not be implemented in individual schools or even in small groups of schools. Rather, a broader approach is needed.

Section 3: Change Management and Managing System improvement.

This section presents lessons learnt from managing change in the NECT and from the education system. It reflects the role of dialogue in the policy and programming space, the importance of structure and dedicated teams to lead

change. It further shares some observations on how the practice of the bureaucracy hinders efficient implementation of critical programmes. The cases of the upgrading of the school administration system and the rollout of emergency sanitation programme are presented as case studies. Furthermore, the section draws lessons from the management of the COVID-19 crisis in education and on the NECT's experiences in implementing a technical assistance programme.

Within the chapters that follow, you will find a rich tapestry of knowledge woven together with insights, perspectives, and ideas that have the power to reshape our understanding of the ways to improve our education system. We extend a warm invitation for you to venture into uncharted territories, question your preconceptions, wholeheartedly adopt the documented insights, and join us as we step into a fresh decade together. It is not the intention of these mini lessons to answer all the education improvement questions but to add to the discourse and to serve as the basis for continuous enquiry and search for new solutions.

The important role played by dialogue in large partnerships and change processes needs to be acknowledged. Dialogue is central to reducing perception gaps and maintaining common visioning among partners.

The section also highlights the necessity of dedicated structures and teams to lead change. The NECT and dedicated COVID-19 response teams are cases in point.

The NECT's technical assistance approach, which involves a quick embedding of required expertise, is suggested as a strategy to improve the pace of policy implementation and capacity building in a system that has expertise gaps.

It can also be concluded from this section that management development initiatives are required to prepare the next level of executive and to refresh the current cohorts. This approach will enable the education system to grow and maintain the required levels of critical expertise thereby reducing dependency on external expertise.

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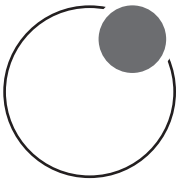
SECTION 1:

COLLABORATION & MANAGING LARGE SCALE PROJECTS



MINI-LESSON 1

The Education Chapter of the National Development Plan: A need to understand the underlying conceptual thinking. - GODWIN KHOSA

The NDP is a product of a two-year process of diagnosing the development challenges in South Africa. The diagnostic process and the subsequent development of the NDP were overseen by a 24-member National Planning Commission (NPC) appointed by the President of the Republic of South Africa in May 2010. The NPC comprised experts representing critical sectors of the economy chaired by the Minister of Planning in the Presidency. The deputy chairman of the NDP was the then Deputy President of the ruling African National Congress who became the State President on 15 February 2018. To prepare the NDP, the NPC commissioned papers and invited contributions from the public and various state departments, which were used to develop the NDP.

The NDP presents a vision for the nation and outlines strategies for achieving the vision and sets targets to be achieved by 2030. As per the launch statement of the NDP, 'South Africa needs well-researched, evidence-based input into policy processes that have long-term economic, social and political implications for development…. sound evidence and clear recommendations to government' (NPC, n.d). The NDP calls for actions that will lead to raising employment through faster economic growth, improved quality of education, skills development and innovation, building the capability of the state to play a developmental, transformative role and creating an active citizenry *(NPC, 2012:17)*.

One of the fifteen chapters of the NDP is dedicated to 'Improving Education, Training and Innovation'. This chapter focuses on Early Childhood Development, Basic education, Vocational education and training and higher education (and research). The following section discusses the basic education aspects of the chapter.

To construct an understanding of the education change theory underpinning the NDP, an analysis of the Education and Training chapter was carried out following a thematic analysis. The thematic analysis generated numerous concepts from which a five-constructs change theory was developed. The figure below presents the change theory.

Depiction of the basic education component of the NDP

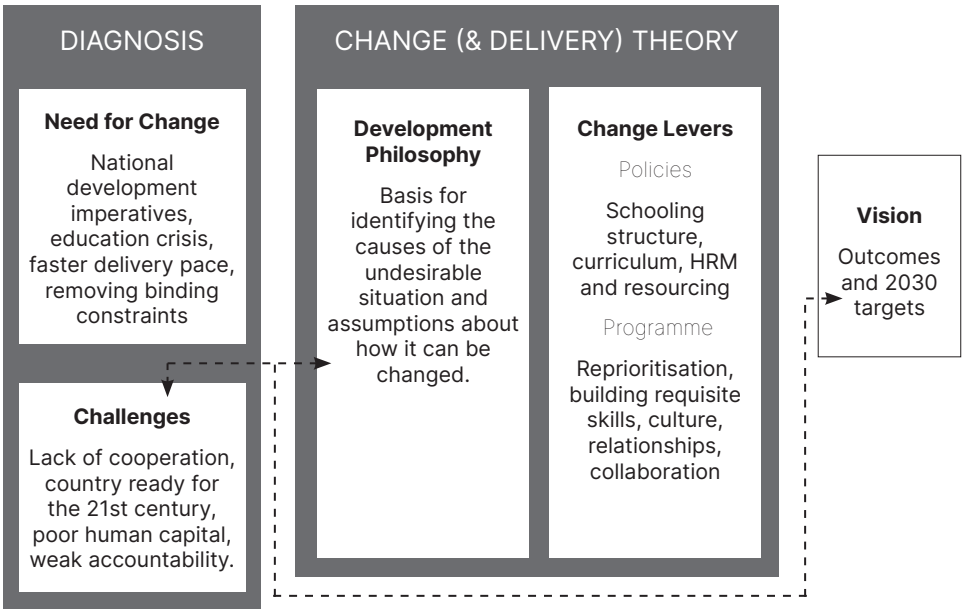


Figure 1.1: Depiction of the basic education component of the NDP

As per the outline, the change theory is informed by the 'need for change' and 'challenges' in the education system which in turn are used to determine the education vision. The NDP assumes a central role played by education in the development of the country and lays the basis for the need to improve education by stating that 'Improved education… will lead to higher employment and earnings, while more rapid economic growth will broaden opportunities for all and generate the resources required to improve education' *(NPC, 2012:26)*.

It further states that the education system requires urgent action suggesting that education is in a crisis and requires paced up delivery of education services including removing binding constraints in the operations.

These change imperatives and binding constraints (or challenges) arguably arise from the diagnosis that the NPC undertook to arrive at the proposals. The constraints/challenges include suboptimum education resourcing; relationships and coordination among stakeholders; human capital to drive the operations of the education system; weak accountability, anticipation of the 21st century educational needs.

Although not expressly presented in the chapter there is a sense of an underlying development philosophy through which the education problems and possible solutions are discerned.

The use of concepts such as human capacity development, performance incentives, accountability and monitoring and results oriented frameworks suggest an adoption of a human capital- managerial approach to development/change theory. The thirty-four-page chapter uses the concepts of 'human capacity' or 'human capital' forty times. Similarly, the chapter cumulative used the concepts of accountability, 'performance contract', 'monitoring' and performance targets forty times.

The chapter proposes a range of change instruments that can be organised into two change levers: policy and programmatic levers.

The policies proposed in the chapter include changing the schooling structure so as to improve the career pathing and efficiency of the flow of students, avoiding curriculum reforms, human resources provisions relating to recruitment of teachers and principals as well as their performance incentives; and the resourcing of schools as it has to do with class sizes and technology.

In addition to the policy lever, the chapter proposes a range of programmatic proposals which include the reprioritisation of improvement focus and initiatives, building the requisite skills in schools and districts, organisational culture and relationship changes and collaborations among stakeholders.

At a planning level, South Africa takes the narrative that education and skills development programmes are critical to global competitiveness. South Africa benchmarks its educational performance globally and often against first world countries. For instance, the NDP has set a target of achieving the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) average mid-score of 500 points by 2030 *(NPC,2012)*.

At the planning level, the chapter further proposes a national initiative involving all stakeholders to drive efforts to improve learning outcomes in schools, starting with the worst performers *(NPC, 2012:314)*. This is the basis against which the National Education Collaboration Trust was conceived.

The chapter envisages an improved education where learning outcomes have improved significantly and 'the performance of South African learners in international standardised tests should be comparable to the performance of learners from countries at a similar level of development and with similar levels of access' *(ibid, 296)*. It specifies the target scores that South Africa must achieve in international comparative studies such as the Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) and TIMSS. The targets equal about 21% increase for grade 6 language and mathematics on SACMEQ and 59% increase on grade 8 Mathematics for TIMSS in a period of ten years.

The targets are higher for grade 8 mathematics presumably because of the lower baseline. These targets are achievable. The TIMSS Grade 9 scores for math and science have already increased by 5,3% and 7,26% respectively during the period 2011 and 2015 (HSRC, 2015). The NDP envisages that in 2030, the 80% of the learners will achieve more than 50% in key subjects. This target was adopted as the vision statement for the NECT.

The education chapter has been criticised by the civil rights organisation Equal Education (EE) for its failure to firmly hold the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to delivering the goals including committing the department to minimum infrastructure standards and outlining clear roles of the district officials.

The criticism by the EE does not only raise questions about the responsibility of the DBE about the deliverables, but brought to light the issue about the driver of the education commitments, that is, between the DBE and the Presidency. This concern can be fathomed from the NDP's expressive emphasis that the chapter is based on the DBE's 'Action Plan' and that the chapter proposals are '…complementary not competing'.

The more general commentry on the NDP highlighted the risk of limited capacity and capabilities of the 'state to effectively implement, monitor and ensure that the plan is not captured by sectional interests that will relegate the vision into a state of oblivion' *(Zarenda, 2013)*.

In line with how the country has responded to the development challenges before; government, private sector, teacher unions and civil society representatives resolved to establish the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) to mobilise national capacity to assist government in addressing the education challenges profiled above (*NECT, 2018*).

Where the crisis in education formed the basis for the stakeholder dialogue, the NDP which was adopted in August 2012 created the momentum for the establishment of the NECT.

CONCLUSION

This mini-lesson presented a conceptual understanding of the NDP which was used to establish the NECT. It identified the underlying meaning of the chapter expressed in the factors, concepts, constructs, or variables, and relationships among them (Miles and Huberman (1994:440) & Jabareen, 2009:49).

The experience of the NECT is that whilst it is conveniently referred to in proposals, plans and articles, the education chapter has not received much critical reflection. It has not received much reflection on what it means, how cogent it is and whether the targets are practical. Eleven years after it was adopted, it is necessary that the underlying theorisation, proposed programming and targeting are assessed and updated.

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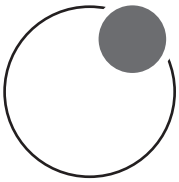

MINI-LESSON 2

Establishing and Managing the NECT Consortia. - GODWIN KHOSA

The Education Collaboration Framework (ECF) emerged in 2013 from the first consultative forum of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) and provided the mandate for the establishment of the NECT programmes.

The ECF envisaged 'a national initiative involving all stakeholders to drive efforts to improve learning outcomes in schools, starting with the worst performers. The focus should be on improving schools and districts and addressing weaknesses in teaching, management, administrative support and accountability' (NECT, 2013, 3).

The first primary principle was identifying and engaging multiple stakeholders to work together on the mandate. Nine years later, the NECT partners with over 100 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private sector organisations and teacher unions in implementing various programmes.

This number includes only those delivery partnerships that are based on Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), that is, excluding funding agreements. The forms of engagement involve large and smaller consortia, with the number of one-on-one contracts increasing in the latter years of the NECT's nine-year lifespan.

The following sections reflect on the developments, the reasons for the changes in the forms of engagement and lessons that were noted.

ESTABLISHING MULTIPLE ORGANISATION CONSORTIA

Following the launch of the NECT in the middle of July 2013, an open call for proposals from organisations that were interested in working with the NECT to roll out a school and district improvement programme in the provinces of the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Kwazulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape was disseminated through the media. The terms of reference were broadly informed by the low National Senior Certificate pass rate, the low pass rates in mathematics and science in particular and the low rate of bachelors passes, as well as by the education stretch target of the National Development Plan (NDP) - ensuring that 90% of learners pass with over 50% by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012).

The publicly defined challenges and the NDP targets created energy across the stakeholder groups in education. Over 35 organisations and groups of organisations responded to the call for proposals, with four of the proposals demonstrating relevance and potential to execute the required work. As depicted in Figure 2.1, four Implementation Lead Agencies were engaged to support the five target provinces of the NECT. Three consortia and one not-for-profit organisation were ultimately contracted.

Consortia and Not-for-profit Organisations

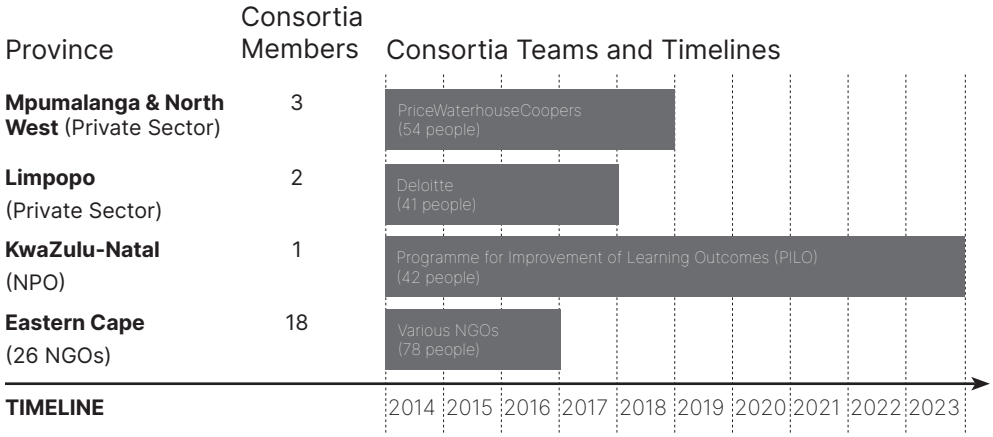

Figure 2.1: Consortia and not-for-profit organisations

The call for proposals was put out in search of Implementation Lead Agencies, in contrast to the commonly used consulting or service provider mode of delivery. The adoption of a Lead Agency approach was to ensure that the process of identifying and engaging other organisations and individuals for implementation was led by the contracted agencies under the guidance of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the NECT.

This form of engagement ensured an extension of state capacity and allowed for additional innovation, but with the locus of control retained in the DBE. In other words, the chosen engagement method avoided buying and plugging in ready-made solutions and instead promoted co-creation of the solutions under the leadership of the DBE.

The key feature of the engagement was the secondment of capacity from the private sector and civil society, with the NECT playing the role of identifying and allocating the tasks involved, co-defining the various types of expertise required and providing remuneration frameworks.

BENEFITS OF LEAD AGENCIES IN EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT

Instant mobilisation of additional capacity without bloating the public service

The engagement of the Lead Agencies resulted in an injection of over 150 professionals into the four provincial education departments. The professionals brought in skills which government could not rapidly recruit into the system. Each of the four teams was led by highly experienced people in the areas of education improvement, consulting and project management.

The middle-level management and implementation teams comprised NGO personnel with deep knowledge of schools, including experience in school-level capacity building and education improvement designs; private sector personnel with project management and organisational development expertise; and retired government and university personnel.

Central to the approach is the flexibility of recruitment, remuneration and contracting. In the main, fixed-term contracts were used to recruit the additional staff, and common but flexible remuneration structures were used to recruit across the private sector, academic institutions and NGOs. A simple remuneration grading, as represented in Table 1.1, was provided to all Lead Agencies to grade their staff members seconded to the NECT programme.

The rates that were proposed here were much lower than market consulting rates and the rates published by the Department of Public service and Administration. Further, the domain dynamics pertaining to education could be considered. For instance, the programme was able to re-engage good people that had left the system or engage people who had entered the sector from other education systems (e.g. Zimbabwe and Nigeria) at a fraction of what they earned or would have earned in the public service. In addition to the human resource costs, the running costs of the Lead Agents' project offices, including rentals, transport and equipment, were permitted. And further, the Lead Agents were

allowed to bill 20% on their expenditure to cover their indirect management and institutional costs. This approach presents an opportunity to mobilise additional capacity for development and procure additional professional services into the public service without increasing its size, with the department maintaining a direct sight of the costs and alignment of the inputs to the government organogram.

Proposed PayScale - Total Guaranteed Packages

Support Level	Summary Description of Services	Public service comparative job	Paterson Band	Min	Lower Guide	Midpoint	Upper Guide	Ma
District Level	Technical Assistant	Chief Director	D5	R681 400	R749 600	R817 700	R885 900	R954 00
	Design consultant	Director	D4	R602 200	R662 400	R722 600	R782 900	R843 100
	Coordinator	Chief Education Specialist	D4	R602 200	R662 400	R722 600	R782 900	R843 100
School Level	Materials Developer/ Change Agent	Education Specialist	C5	R378 100	R350 100	R406 100	R434 100	R462 100
	Teacher Trainer	Deputy Chief Education Specialist	C2	R210 632	R191 700	R210 900	R230 000	R303 980

Table 2.1: Proposed PayScale - Total Guaranteed Packages

Creating new financial resourcing capacity

Implementing education improvement initiatives is a costly exercise. It involves costs which government departments do not budget for or would normally not have made allowance for. When this happens, resources must be redirected from other line items. Some of the significant costs are for labour, transport, accommodation and tools of trade.

Similarly, when the NECT started, it did not have all the funding required to engage and mobilise people across provinces, hire vehicles, pay salaries and move professionals between department offices and schools and training centres. In this instance, the required cashflow injection for the large-scale logistical planning was provided by the Lead Agencies.

We estimate that the Lead Agencies invested set-up costs of over R30 million for a period of four months before the NECT could mobilise the financial resources from funders and start paying for these.

The engagement of Lead Agencies with their own institutional clout and networks added to the confidence of NECT stakeholder groups that the organisation would meet the 'stretch targets'. By networking additional national capacity towards education improvement, social capital worth more than R980 million of private sector funding and over R1 billion of co-invested state resources were generated over nine years.

Creating Lead Agent consortia made up of reputable companies and organisations created a strong confidence base for the NECT to raise funding from the private sector and government, and unlocked cashflow and forward investment from the private sector companies and NGOs that were involved in the implementation.

The fact that organisations were paid within a period of 30 to 60 days also created another form of (cashflow) investment by the private sector organisations into the implementation. One programme, implemented by one organisation without the NECT's delivery networks, could not have created the funders' confidence enjoyed by the NECT.

Private sector provides excellent project management capabilities

Much of the challenge of large-scale project implementation lies in identifying and engaging the required inputs (people, content, funds etc.), coordinating these towards some common outcome and reporting. The Lead Agencies established by two consulting firms (Deloitte and PWC) brought to the NECT formidable project management capabilities.

The private sector organisations presented detailed plans, including resource deployment plans, which helped to minimise resourcing risks. In addition, reports submitted by these organisations were clearer and more comprehensive than those received from the NGO sector.

It is useful to engage private sector organisations in setting up large-scale project management systems, and although these organisations may not necessarily deliver on education improvement content, the two cannot be completely separated.

NGOs and private sector organisations bring in new ideas

We observed that NGOs and private sector consulting firms bring unique perspectives and approaches to education improvement. The NGOs brought deep and sophisticated knowledge of classroom improvement dynamics such as

reading and numeracy improvement and, to some extent, curriculum management. NGOs were better able to conceptualise initiatives in these areas than the private sector organisations. The confluence of the potentially complementary capabilities of the NGOs and private sector was under-exploited. This was the case because the three consortia presented bifurcated identities. They adopted either a pro-private sector or a pro-NGO identity.

For instance, the NGO consortium comprised about 18 pure non-for-profit organisations, the Deloitte Consortium co-opted senior educationists, while the PWC consortium involved a private sector small, micro, and medium enterprises (SMME) and a small-scale not-for-profit organisation.

MANAGING THE DOWNSIDE TO EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT CONSORTIA

Setting up, operating and managing consortia takes more than contract management expertise. From the experience of the NECT, a number of proposals can be made to sidestep the downside of consortia.

The consortium that had three to four member organisations worked better than the large consortium that had over 18 members. So the size of the consortium matters. Numerous variables could have contributed to the poor performance of the large-scale consortium. The following are possible causes:

A. Poor governance and coordination configuration, largely resulting from equal status and authority of member organisations:

Although the Education Excellence Consortium established an executive committee at a later state, the consortium was established from a perspective of equality among the 18 NGOs. This is, for instance, different from the approach taken by the USAID-funded District Development Support Programme (DDSP) of the pre-2000 period. The DDSP had one implementing agent with several grantee organisations that were contracted via SLAs. The grantees also had sub-contractees. This approach is similar to that which was followed by the private sector Lead Agencies, where Deloitte and PWC were the official leaders of their consortia with sub-contractees that were declared in the NECT contracting.

Reflections on the NECT Lead Agency experience suggest that a mixed engagement approach that draws from both non-commercial collaboration approaches and SLAs works better than either the weakly structured NGO collaborations or the pure SLA model.

B. Limited time for and limited intellectual investment into the preparation may undermine the potential of consortia:

Quick mobilisation of additional capacity and delivery through consortia is a desirable capability that governments and single organisations are not able to easily achieve. On the other hand, quick mobilisation is prone to producing inadequate common approaches, philosophies, structures and systems among the consortium members, leading to suboptimal exploitation of the potential that consortia carry. It is recommended that where projects have to mobilise capabilities and deliver quickly, sufficient effort is invested in defining and socialising consortia members to the terms of reference, developing relevant and coherent change theories and philosophies, and establishing effective management systems among the consortia member organisations, as well as between the consortia and contracting agency (the NECT in this case).

C. The 'thousand flowers bloom' syndrome:

The NECT experience showed that the involvement of several consortia with responsibility for both the design and implementation of the education improvement interventions has the potential of creating multiple competing designs within the same education system. Several months after engaging the Lead Agents, the NECT came to the uncomfortable realisation that the four Lead Agents were implementing four different improvement approaches in each of the five provinces. One Lead Agent drove its development intervention through a school management planning approach, the second used a typical organisational development approach, the third used teacher development and support with a focus on math and literacy improvement, and the fourth used a curriculum management approach. The differences in approaches – 'thousand blooming flowers' - did not only complicate the implementation management for the NECT but presented early signs of confusion in the education systems, eroding the grounds on which to scale up and institutionalise the interventions. Realising these emergent negative features, the NECT undertook to design a common programme within a period of three months. To achieve this, the NECT engaged experts from the education sector to analyse the different approaches with a view to sifting and selecting elements that could be used to design a new programme. Several clarification workshops were held with each Lead Agency, following which a common programme was adopted and implemented.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

Consortia are necessary to supplement government initiatives for improving education. They create grounds for additional human resources, cashflow injection and the introduction of new ideas, project management systems and expertise.

For optimum utilisation of consortia, the following are advised:

1. Make sure that there is one organisation that has the responsibility to lead the consortium and serves as the main contractee. Equal authority within consortia confuses coordination and accountabilities.

2. While consortia can be based on national commitment to address education quality, the engagement between the contractor (beneficiaries) and the contractees (Lead Agents and sub-contractors) should be based on sound SLAs. Therefore, the engagement should be a mixed approach, based on both 'nation-building commitments' and service delivery accountabilities.

3. Invest sufficient effort in designing a common change theory among the consortium members and between the consortium and the beneficiaries. The change theory should be supported by the co-creation of common philosophical outlooks and systems, which have to be maintained throughout the lifespan of the consortium engagement.

4. Whereas the consortia have to take off quickly for the purposes of building 'initiation energy', they should consider rolling out 'simple-to-implement', common preliminary activities. For instance, the NECT implemented a 'quick-wins' programme that involved school-community participatory programmes to fix broken windows, organise administrative files, catalogue textbooks and readers and collect books from households.

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MINI-LESSON 3

Setting up complex education improvement programmes: the case of the NECT-led school and district improvement programme - **Deva Govender**

From 1994 up to 2010, a raft of large-scale education improvement programmes were implemented by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector in collaboration with both the national and provincial departments of education. Many of these were funded by international donor agencies with a history of designing and financing similar initiatives elsewhere[1].

Others, such as the Quality Learning Programme, were funded by local corporations. Subsequently, various government programmes were implemented, for example, the Gauteng Provincial Literacy and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS) 2011-2014 to improve reading and Mathematics teaching and learning.

With the establishment of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) in 2013, the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the NECT and five provincial education departments (PEDs) launched the School and District Improvement Programme (DIP). This short paper reflects on the lessons and observations of setting up the NECT school and the DIP, which sought to consolidate and build on the experiences of the foregoing programmes.

It particularly focuses on the design and initiation processes that were followed and takes a temporal perspective, that is, how the programme grew over time.

1 Examples include the UK Department for Foreign International Development and The United States Agency for International Development.

It draws pertinent lessons with a view to guiding the design of future education programmes.

CURATING IDEAS FROM POLICY, LITERATURE AND PRACTICE

The design of education improvement programmes is a contested exercise, often informed by competing philosophical, theoretical and project management practices. The NECT programme design went through three phases.

The first involved an in-house framing of the design, the second involved implementing agents' designs aimed at their target districts, and the third involved a consolidation of the implementing agent designs. These phases are narrated in the sections below.

FRAMING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMMING FROM EVALUATIONS, POLICIES AND THEORY

Desk top analysis of previous education improvement programmes implemented in South Africa during 1994-2010. This was undertaken to ensure continuity along the development trajectory and to draw lessons going forward. The four key lessons are:

a. use a manageable number of tracking indicators, that are strategically selected to align with the envisaged programme results or outcomes,

b. the programme is best implemented by a consortium made up of two or three service providers,

c. there is a need for a clear theory of change that is understood by all players and

d. avoid the use of the 'cascade model' - rather work through the district and the provincial office.

Desk top analysis of national plans:

The key national plans used to inform the programme were: The Roadmap for Education (see Bloch, 2009); The DBE Action Plan to 2014 (DBE, 2010); Chapter 9 of the National Development Plan (NDP) (2011);

The NECT Education Collaboration Framework (2013); and the DBE Strategic Plan for 2014-2017 (2014). Table 3.1 shows the mapping of the six thematic areas to the relevant goals listed in the Action Plan to 2014.

Theory of Change for Lead Agents

Theme	Goals in Action Plan to 2014			
Theme 1 Professionalisation of the teaching service	**Goal 14** Motivated and trained teachers	**Goal 16** Improved teaching skills, subject knowledge and computer skills	**Goal 17** Teachers healthy and enjoy job satisfaction	**Goal 18** Curriculum covered as specified in policy
Theme 2 Courageous leadership	**Goal 21** Management processes in place for school functionality			
Theme 3 Improve government capacity to deliver	**Goal 23** Schools funded according to norms	**Goal 26** Schools implement inclusive education policy	**Goal 27** Quality school monitoring and support	
Theme 4 Improving resourcing	**Goal 19** Every learner has minimum textbooks and workbooks	**Goal 24** Physical infrastructure and environment		
Theme 5 Community and parent involvement	**Goal 22** Parent and community participation in the governance of schools			
Theme 6 Learner support and wellbeing	**Goal 10** Learners enrolled in school at least up to the year in which they turn 15.			

Table 3.1: Mapping of NECT thematic areas with Action Plan to 2014 goals

School and District profiling: This process began with a rapid review of the first cohort of 324 pilot schools selected by district directors (DDs) from six districts using four criteria:

a. falling enrolment,

b. poor learning outcomes;

c. poor school management; and

d. poor school infrastructure.

Additionally, to obtain a better understanding of the strengths and areas in need of improvement in the districts, each of the six districts across four provinces (Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West, Eastern Cape and Kwazulu-Natal) was profiled by a DBE-NECT team using document analysis and interviews with district leadership.

The team prepared a profile report for each district and verified the content with the districts concerned. The review of the circuit operations proved useful in that it was carried out by experienced teams comprising former and serving circuit and district officials, and it reoriented the profiling focus from each school to a cluster of schools under a circuit. This approach, with a focus on organisational development, is not often used either by government or academics.

All the above reviews led to an adoption of a macro-level framework comprising the following aspects:

1. Teacher professionalisation: Core initiative: Use of structured pedagogy in General Education and Training (GET) Home Language (HL), English First Additional Language (EFAL), Maths and Natural Science.

2. Courageous and effective school leadership development: Four modules to support the core initiative.

3. Improving government capacity to deliver: Subject advisor (SA) development in the use of Structured Learning Programmes (SLPs) to improve teaching and learning and district self-evaluation (referred to as Fundamentals of Performance [FoPs] for self-driven capacity building)

4. Improved resourcing: The provision of teacher tools such as curriculum planners, lesson plans, Foundation Phase (FP) reading resources, etc.

5. Community and parent involvement: District Steering Committees (DSCs) established, and parent involvement programme piloted.

6. Learner support and well-being: Pilot of learner support programme and psychosocial social support (PSS) programme.

DESIGNS BY LEAD AGENTS

On initiation of the DIP in 2014-2015, four Lead Agents were engaged to implement their programmes, which were informed by individual approaches. Table 3.2 shows the allocation of Lead Agents to five provinces, districts and the number of pilot schools, referred to as Fresh Start Schools (FSS).

Mapping of NECT thematic areas with Action Plan to 2014 goals

No	Lead Agent	Province	Districts		No of FSSs
1	Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO)	Kwa-Zulu Natal	Pinetown King Cetshwayo NB: Whole district approach used	1 200	
2	Deloitte	Limpopo	Waterberg Vhembe		120
3	Education Excellence Consortium (EEC)	Eastern Cape	Libode Mt Frere		89
4	Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC)	North West	Bojanala		56
5	Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC)	Mpumalanga	Bohlabela		59
TOTAL				1 200	324

Table 3.2: Mapping of NECT thematic areas with Action Plan to 2014 goals

Each of the Lead Agents used a particular school improvement approach based on the six thematic areas as the organising framework for planning and delivery.

PILO consistently working through the provinces and districts to improve school management and curriculum completion; Deloitte adopted an approach to bring about deep learning through change management processes.

The EEC approach attempted to respond to a range of challenges - curriculum, management, governance and parent support - while PWC used a strong data driven approach to school improvement. All Lead Agents used training and support as a primary strategy to improve school functionality and teaching and learning.

Clearly, the varied approaches sought to bring about improvement in school functionality, teaching and learning.

The NECT and the DBE realised that there is an urgent need to increase coordination and use a common approach to school and district improvement, based on the following imperatives:

1. Driving the policy imperatives, namely, effective implementation of the National Curriculum Policy and curriculum management:
2. Focus on a manageable number of key priority programmes moderated by the principle of value for money:
3. Using the district as a locus of change, for example building the capacity of subject advisers to lead the change process at school and classroom levels;
4. Working more closely with the provincial and national offices:

Therefore a 'clearance point' was created where each Lead Agent presented their strategy, programming and a resourcing plan, from which the best ideas were distilled into a single NECT approach and theory of change, endorsed and supported by the DBE.

CRAFTING A NEW CHANGE THEORY

Figure 3.1 illustrates the theory of change that all Lead Agents use in planning their programmes, consisting of three key drivers: (a) quarterly training of subject advisers and teachers, (b) resourcing of teaching tools, (c) in-school support by subject advisers, circuit managers and NECT Change Agents to achieve the goal of improved learning outcomes. The design of the programme was based on the above change theory, which argues that when teachers are provided with the required tools for teaching and learning, are given professional development opportunities, supported by subject advisers and school leadership in teaching and assessment, get parent support and are equipped to provide learner support, then the quantity and quality of learning will increase. This is a complex change process because it has six identified variables operating in diverse environments, which are likely to influence learning outcomes.

An important part of the programme is the Monitoring and Quality Assurance (MQA) process and framework consisting of the definition of outcomes, indicators, data collection and feedback, agreeing on the process and protocols of monitoring and reporting and finally, engagement of external/independent evaluators for verification and quality assurance. Programme implementation had to move away from let a thousand flowers bloom (many ideas from many sources) to a single consolidated model and programming. At commencement, the programme implementation agents were given leeway to use their own innovative approaches.

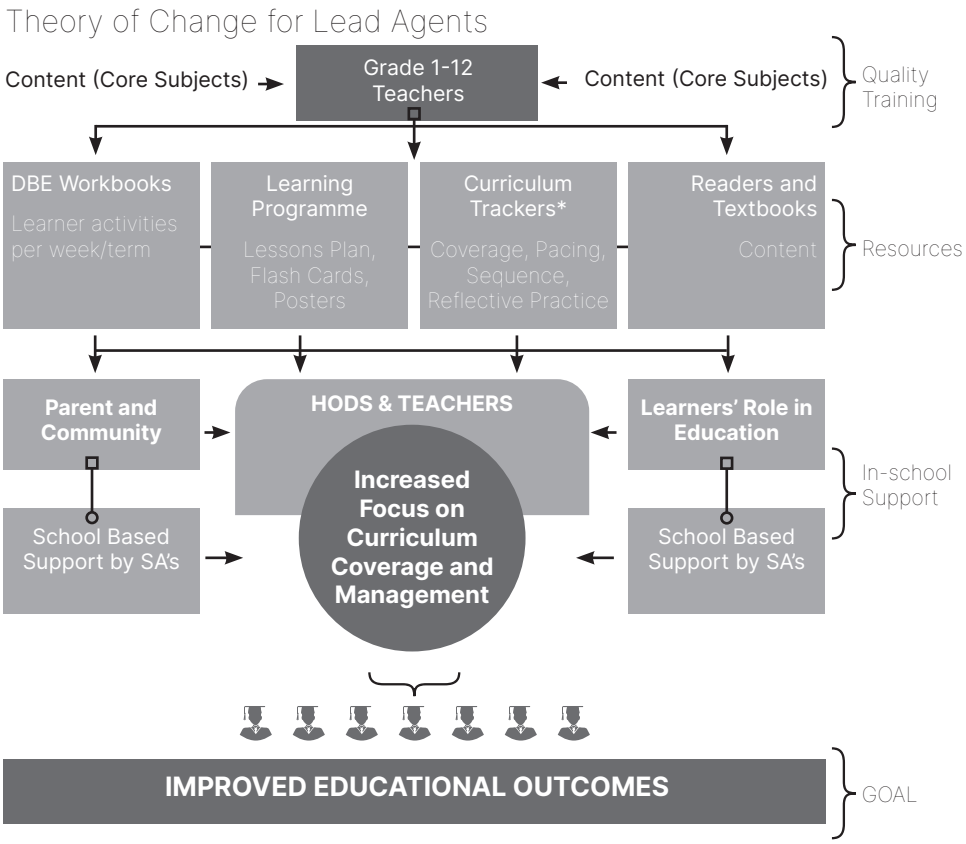

Figure 3.1: Theory of change for Lead Agents

However, this proved to be unproductive, due largely to the lack of coherence in their approaches, and therefore re-structuring towards a common model and theory of change was warranted. The restructuring was achieved by adopting a common approach that took account of the useful lessons and ideas presented by the implementation agents.

Progressive scale up involved increasing scope and complexity, which were accommodated as the programme was scaled up.

In programme implementation, one may use the big-bang approach to go to scale or carefully test an intervention, starting with a micro-pilot and then gradually increasing the programme's reach. The former carries a greater risk of a 'clusterfug' (failed scale up) than the latter, given the magnitude of investment and the complexity of system change.

Figure 3.2 shows how the Structured Pedagogy Programme started with 324 schools (1.4% of all public schools) and was taken to 19 803 schools (85.8%) over a period of seven years.

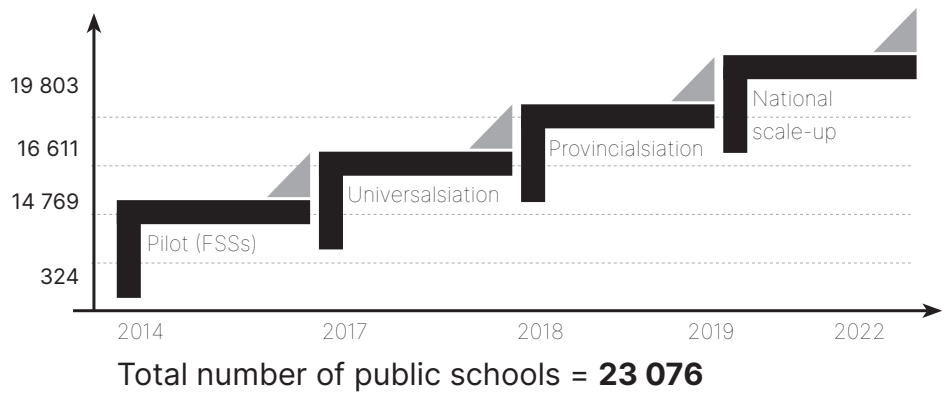

Figure 3.2: Step-wise scaleup as part of programme design

Change management required programming to be undertaken by using the 'layering method' in order to give the system time to absorb the changes without causing a culture shock, overload and fatigue.

In the first stage/layer, teacher tools were jointly developed with the DBE; secondly, the tools and training on how to use them were then provided to subject advisors and teachers.

The third stage/layer involved capacity building of school leadership and circuit managers to support the changes. Finally, initiatives were introduced to involve parents in the education of their children and to engage learners to take greater responsibility for their learning.

LESSONS ON SETTING UP COMPLEX EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMMES

1. Programme design must follow policy, macro-level plans and good practices gleaned from previous school and district improvement initiatives: for example, – using a collectively developed change theory and an MQA Framework to raise the quality of learning outcomes.

2. Programme design for system change requires a tri-level approach that targets (a) schools and community, (b) districts and (c) the province and national office (DBE). According to Fullan (2006) this basically means pursuing strategies that promote mutual interaction and influence within and across the three levels.

3. Programme design and plan must be based on a carefully (strategically) selected set of change levers which are sensitive to the implementation environment, for example, the provision of teacher resources that are language relevant, affordable if used at scale and linked to the taught curriculum.

4. Programme design and plan has to be given legitimacy by the education departments and teachers organised into teacher unions and professional associations so that teachers and school leaders accept programme activities as part of departmental interventions.

5. An MQA Framework with identified success requirements needs to be developed so that a bi-directional feedback loop is established to be used for tracking implementation progress and success.

A LEARNING POINT ABOUT DESIGNING LARGE SCALE EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMMES

Setting up education improvement programmes requires an understanding of macro-level development planning at DBE and provincial levels and, the selection of appropriate change levers based on previous experiences so as to ensure continuity and build on previous initiatives.

In addition, it requires programme advocacy at district and provincial levels for buy-in and support to ensure sustainability. Additionally, a rigorous monitoring and feedback loop is required for tracking progress and making timeous adjustments or recalibrating plans. Feedback has two elements – support and accountability based on agreed upon targets or performance indicators.

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MINI-LESSON 4

Collaboration as a corequisite for programme sustainability - **Mzamani Mdaka**

The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) was established in 2013 based on the Education Collaboration Framework (ECF) (NECT, 2013) that resulted from considerations to operationalise the National Development Plan (NDP) (National Planning Commission, 2012) regarding education.

Key in the establishment of the NECT is the principle of collaboration, defined as the process of creating and sustaining a negotiated temporary system which spans organisational boundaries, involving autonomous stakeholders with varying capabilities including resources, knowledge and expertise, and which is directed toward individual goals and mutually accountable and innovative ends *(Eynon, 2016; Keyton, 2017)*. This principle refers to the process of working together with others to achieve a common goal.

In the NECT's case, it involves individuals or groups combining their skills, knowledge and resources to accomplish education improvement in South Africa. This is summarily captured in the NECT's mission statement: "to mobilise national capacity to assist government to achieve distinctive, substantial and sustainable improvement in education". In particular, collaboration that seeks to support government through the Department of Basic Education (DBE), Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) and Education districts to attain the NDP goal of ensuring that 90% of learners pass mathematics, science, and languages with at least 50% by 2030.

Implied in the principle of collaboration and mobilising national capacity is the counterparts process, wherein individuals, groups or organisations partner and work together to conceptualise, design, plan, implement, monitor, and provide feedback on booster initiatives meant to improve education in South Africa. Counterparts play a crucial role in ensuring substantive success and sustainability of a programme by sharing responsibilities, resources, and expertise *(Lozano, Barreiro-Gen and Zafar, 2021)*. Lozano, Barreiro-Gen and Zafar (2021) argues that collaboration is instrumental in developing more sustainable organisations through providing elements that include new technologies, business models, innovation, research, and education. This short paper reflects on how the NECT utilised collaboration as corequisite for programme sustainability.

COLLABORATION IN PROGRAMMES

The NECT considered an education district as a nexus point for strengthening the education system. This resulted in the conceptualisation, design and testing of the education booster initiative called the District Improvement programme (DIP). The focus of the programme was based on the theory of change (ToC) that postulates that a conglomeration of increased professionalisation of teachers, improved school functionality, sustainable development of districts, and increased accountability of parents, communities and learners will yield systemic change, resulting in improved learner outcomes.

Through the DIP, the NECT created a platform for individuals, groups and organisations to counterpart on contributions to improve learning outcomes, guided by the six themes outlined in the ECF. Achieving outcomes set in the DIP required counterparts to serve as critical partners who contribute to programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, thereby enhancing the prospects of sustainability and long-term impact.

Multiple levels of collaborations emerged through the DIP. At the initiation phase, government collaborated with civil society to create an avenue for open, honest engagement around key educational issues which need resolution and action for educational reform to be successful in South Africa. The civil society counterpart was constituted by educationists, academics, business, unions and government. Solutions from engagement with the counterpart were very important to inform programming and planning by the education sector.

Another collaboration happened at the resourcing level, wherein the government joined hands with business to fund the programme. This collaboration was crucial as it created a conducive environment for programme implementation, and an intensive level of collaboration was evident during implementation. Programme managers had provincial and district officials to collaborate with,

ensuring that programming and planning of the DIP was aligned to the priorities and activities of both the provinces and districts. Leadership and management coaches collaborated with circuit managers and school management teams, capacitating them in courageous leadership, creating a positive school culture, curriculum management and data use for evidenced-based planning. Subject specialists in Mathematics, Science and Languages collaborated with subject advisors and teachers for pedagogical capacitation as a means to enhance professionalisation.

The testing phase of the DIP took place in four districts, two in the Eastern Cape and two in Limpopo, covering 324 schools. (DBE, 2018, Education Management Information System). It was so successful that the programme was scaled up to cover all schools in the pilot districts, a process of universalisation, and then provincialised to cover all schools in the pilot provinces. It was subsequently further scaled up to cover five provinces and then nationalised to all schools in the country (see diagram below). The scaling-up was made possible by collaborating with subject advisors in the provinces, who cascaded teacher professionalisation within their districts with the support of the NECT.

Scaling up of the DIP

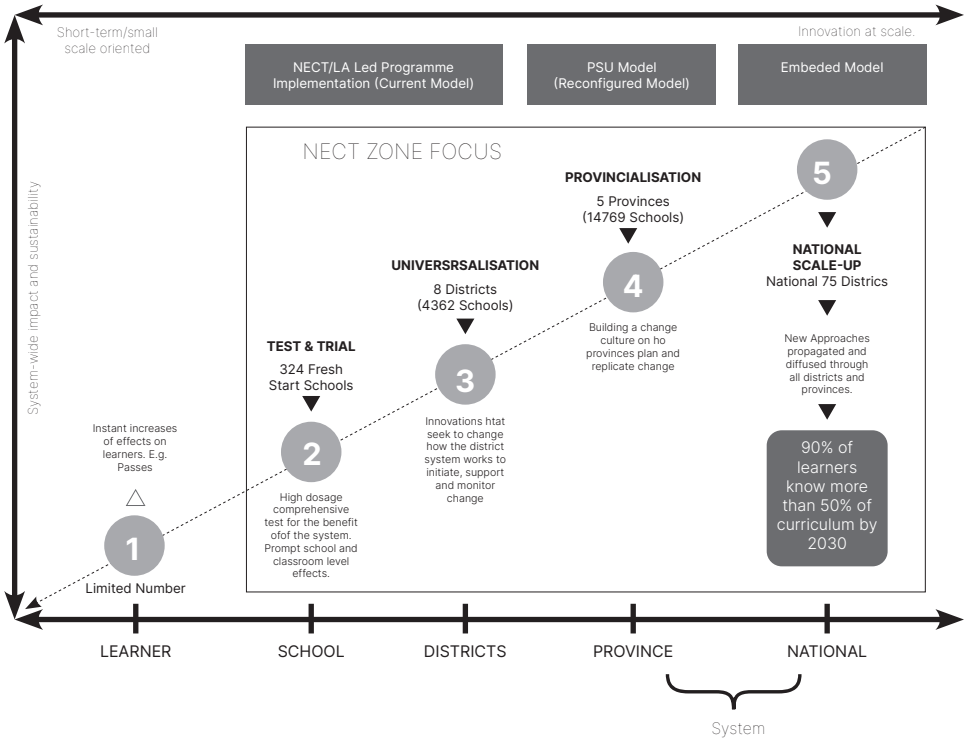

Figure 4.1: Scaling up of the DIP | Source: Khosa, 2022

PROGRAMME SUSTAINABILITY

Programme sustainability often relies on the involvement and commitment of multiple stakeholders (partnerships), including government entities, non-profit organisations, community members and other relevant parties (Bodkin & Hakimi, 2020). These counterparts play a crucial role in ensuring the long-term success and continuity of a programme by sharing responsibilities, resources and expertise.

By engaging counterparts as co-requisites for programme sustainability, organisations can leverage diverse perspectives, tap into local knowledge and networks, and foster ownership and participation through cooperation, coordination and communication (Eynon, 2016).

This collaborative approach helps build capacity, resilience and institutional support, which are essential for sustaining programmes beyond their initial implementation phase. Thus, collaborative programme implementation underpins the successes of programme sustainability.

KEY SUCCESSES

Some successes recorded by the NECT through collaborative programme implementation include, but are not limited to:

1. The reopening of the Vuwani schools after the unrest that saw 27 schools damaged and burnt: The NECT through its District Steering Committee in the Vhembe district, successfully mobilised for the reconstruction and renovation of infrastructure, safeguarding of the schools by parents and communities and the provision of to, catch-up lessons, extra-classes and learning camps for learners.

2. The rebooting of the education system during and after COVID-19 disruption: The NECT played a vital role in creating a platform for multi-stakeholder partnerships that collected school data to inform decision makers on the readiness of the system to accommodate learners when schools re-opened after lockdowns.
   This resulted in a four-tier system of learners returning to class, namely: i) schools using rotational timetables; ii) schools using traditional timetables; iii) schools using a combination of rotational and traditional timetables; and iv) schools not affected by the school closures.

3. The facilitation of learning continuity and recovery through remote and digital learning (RDL): The NECT facilitated a conglomeration of multi-stakeholders to provide and launch multi-media platforms for learner support through broadcast and e-learning.

KEY CHALLENGES

It is valuable to note that the collaborative implementation of programmes, while successful for the NECT, certain challenges were experienced that resulted in some of the programmes not being able to be scaled up or sustained. Some of the challenges experienced include:

A. **Inadequate resources:** The COVID-19 pandemic created strain on most of the NECT's partners, who thus had to reduce or curtail their support. This resulted in the NECT also having to reprioritise its programmes.

B. **Lack of capacity of key stakeholders:** Parent members of the school governing bodies (SGBs) were key stakeholders required to cascade the Parent and Community Involvement Initiative to other parents and members of the community. The lack of capacity among the SGB parents made it impossible to sustain the programme.

KEY LESSONS ON COLLABORATION

Counterparting is an important success condition for programme sustainability as it:

1. Fosters for buy-in and ownership of the programme as officials are involved throughout the programme process, from inception;
2. Improves communication amongst stakeholders involved in programmes, thereby enhancing the development of trust between counterparts;
3. Ensures capacitation of officials through on-the-job skills transfer;
4. Enables embedding and institutionalisation as officials are supported to do the work routinely by learning from counterparts.

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MINI-LESSON 5

Managing and raising co-resourcing
- Sandile Mkhonto

Since its inception in 2013, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) has raised about R2.5 billion in programme funding. According to the Education Collaboration Framework (NECT, 2013), the NECT would be set up to serve three roles: to improve the coordination of business and initiatives aimed at improving education quality, ensure their integration with the government reform agenda and increase their effectiveness and value.

To achieve the fund-raising objective, a fundraising prospectus was developed to guide the NECT and the funders on the fundraising approach. The prospectus envisaged creating a co-financing modality for government and the private sector, overseen by the NECT board of trustees. Government was expected to contribute R300 million towards eight initial distributions, and Business Leadership (BLSA) agreed to raise R200 million through an initial contribution equal to 0.004% of each participating company's market capitalisation and an initial contribution of R1 million for unlisted companies, with small, medium-sized and foreign companies contributing R500 000.

The implementation of the funding prospectus and the respective approaches evolved over the ten- year lifespan of the NECT. The evolution, which responded to the programming priorities and the needs of the funding partners as well as the performance of the economy, is summarised in the diagram below.

Implementation of the Funding Prospectus and the Respective Approaches

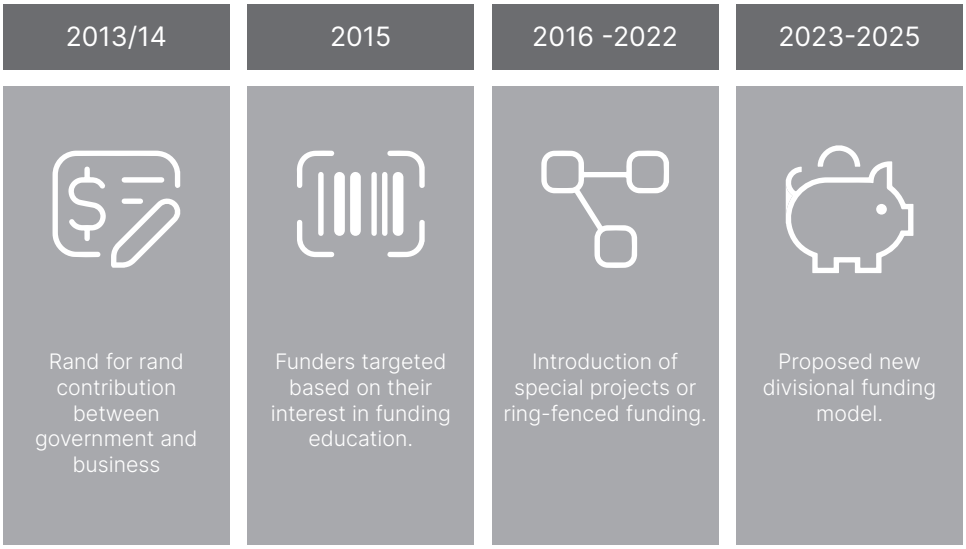


Figure 5.1: Implementation of the Funding Prospectus and the Respective Approaches

The implementation of each of these elements or models is briefly discussed below in the following sections, which give the background of how each of the models came about, their pros and cons and the lessons that can be gleaned from each. The management intricacies associated with each of the models is touched on.

2013/14: RAND FOR RAND CONTRIBUTION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS

When the NECT opened its doors in 2013, it was envisaged that the partnership between the private sector, labour, civil society and government would be reflected in the funding formula. The government, being the biggest stakeholder, was to match each rand contributed by all the other partners combined.

With the endorsement and support of Business Leadership South Africa (BLSA), it was envisaged that the NECT would convince businesses listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange to contribute 0.004% of their preceding financial year market value to the NECT's programmes. A proportionate, predetermined, fixed contribution amount would be raised from the listed companies based on their size measured by their annual turnover. On the basis of this model, the NECT raised total funding amounting to R116.8 million from both government (R77.5 million) and the private sector (R38.8 million), resulting in a 67/33 ratio.

The private sector funding was contributed by 19 businesses and one labour organisation. The target ratio was not achieved as the fundraising model faced a number of challenges, as enumerated:

1. The global and domestic economies were still recovering from the devastating effects of the economic crisis of 2007/08. South Africa was still experiencing low demand for its exports and a decline in foreign direct investment. The private sector, the main funding partner outside government, was generally operating in a strained economy and was therefore cautious in committing to what were considered to be new and non-core initiatives.

2. Despite its strong foundations and its noble mission, the NECT was too new, and its funding model too unconventional and untested. Some companies were, understandably, skeptical about the effectiveness of the initiative and did not make contributions.

3. Some companies in the private sector had their own educational corporate social investment (CSI) initiatives and did not see the need to put their money into a common pot which did not give them optimum brand equity.

4. While this model was approved and accepted by all the NECT stakeholders, including the private sector, at the planning stage, the NECT management, upon realising the changing environment at the implementation stage, had to make quick adjustments to the model for the sustainability of the organisation. The key lesson is that even the Social Entrepreneurs need to be on the lookout continuously for changes in the environment to detect obstacles early and make necessary adjustments to survive. That is how the funding model based on common interest described below emerged.

2015: FUNDING BASED ON INTEREST IN COMMON EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

Due to the challenges alluded to above in respect to the 2013/14 approach, in 2015, the NECT decided to focus its funding efforts on organisations that had shown keen interest in the NECT's specific education initiatives and in educa-

tion in general. Some of these organisations committed to multi-year funding agreements, which greatly boosted the NECT management's ability to plan for the long-term.

Based on this approach, the NECT raised a total of R186.5 million in funding from both government (R124.4 million) and the private sector (R62.1 million), resulting again in a 67/33 ratio between government and the private sector. The R62.1 million from the private sector was contributed by 23 funders.

The targeted approach seemed to have borne fruit because a number of the private funders that contributed in 2013/14 increased their contributions to the NECT in 2015. This funding approach continues to be utilised up to the present day to raise core funding. The approach has enabled the NECT to build a long-lasting relationship with the top five NECT funders who have been consistently contributing to the NECT since 2013/14.

Despite not raising the budgeted funding, the NECT's achievements and the value delivered to the funders in the NECT's first year were evident. This enabled the organisation to retain funding partners for many years through long-term funding agreements with increased contributions.

While the focus on the few funders enabled the NECT to build strong relationships with these funders, it also increased the risk associated with reliance on a few funders. In order to manage this risk, management had to identify new funding opportunities and income streams, as explained below.

2016 -2022: SPECIAL PROJECTS/RING-FENCED FUNDING

This model can be described as a coincidental funding model in that it responds to specific, immediate needs. By 2016, the NECT had managed to build effective capacity to quickly mobilise funds and efficiently execute projects at short notice.

The NECT partners, realising the collaborative initiative's capability, started seeking to execute education projects that needed agility without compromising on quality, effectiveness and efficiency. For example, when Vuwani schools were targeted for destruction during service delivery protests in 2016, the partners used the NECT as a platform to mobilise and distribute resources to recapacitate the schools.

The NECT platform was also used to facilitate conversations with communities to deescalate the crisis, prevent a reoccurrence and turn the community from having a negative attitude towards (public) schools to being protectors of the schools.

Since then, the NECT has come to be viewed as a good platform for mobilising emergency responses to emerging education needs and crises. In 2020, the NECT played a key role in mobilising R36.5 million in funding towards the COVID-19 response; in 2021, R16.1 million in funding was raised towards the July 2021 riots response project; and in 2022, R24.3 million was raised for the victims of the Kwazulu-Natal floods. The NECT platform is also being used to meet other needs in education such as eradicating pit latrines and improving reading in the country.

The value of the NECT's active special projects has continued to grow, from R19.7 million recorded in 2016 to R949.3 million recorded at the end of 2022. From 2020, the special projects income leapfrogged the core income, indicating the partners' high level of interest in special projects. The high interest in the special projects/ring-fenced funding model can be attributed to the following:

1. Private donors seem to view special projects as being more transparent, with a higher level of accountability, since the funding is ring-fenced for the particular project.

2. Private donors seem to be more interested in short-term, service delivery projects for their CSI performance score cards and reporting. Because CSI personnel are usually not education specialists, they may be less interested in systemic long-term initiatives.

3. The special projects contracts are more easily enforceable compared to the core funding agreements as the special projects' contracts contain clear deliverables and timeliness.

4. While the increase in special projects can be seen as a good thing, there has been a debate amongst the NECT stakeholders on whether the NECT is best suited and competent to carry out some of the special projects, especially those that require specialised skills, for example, the Sanitation Appropriate For Education (SAFE) and South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS) projects. There has also been concern that the special projects are starting to overshadow the NECT's core programming.

The key lesson from this funding model is well-summed up in the words of Albert Einstein, who said, 'In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity'. The success of this model was enabled by the NECT's proven implementation track record and agility.

2023-2025: PROPOSED NEW DIVISIONAL FUNDING MODEL

In August 2022, the Board resolved that the NECT would continue beyond its initial 10-year life span and that its strategy should be reoriented to ensure relevance and sustainability. The Board also emphasised the need for the NECT to be self-sustainable to ensure financial sustainability in the long run. The new proposed divisional funding model aims to decentralise fundraising to the NECT divisions to allow for targeted and localised/provincial fundraising and partnerships. Management plans to increase self-generated revenue and reduce reliance on donor funding (for core funding) over time by, inter alia:

1. Maximising surpluses on special projects by ensuring that the contractual deliverables are met at less cost;
2. Increasing internally earned income through maximisation of the investment income and retained project management fee margins;
3. Using the NECT's strategic position as a preferred partner of both the private sector and government for projects that require rapid implementation (using the NECT as a platform for education development initiatives in line with the NECT's proposed re-organisation strategy);
4. Using the NECT's current accumulated surplus to leverage additional funding through partnerships (leverage model); and
5. Mapping and targeting funders linked to the divisions, accompanied by an increase in accountability and more effective communication between programmes and funders.

This model aimed to take advantage of the funders' growing interest in special projects/ring-fenced funding over the years.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

The following list is a reflection on key funding/fundraising lessons from 2013 to 2023.

1. Adapt: The NECT has managed to survive all these years by being able to respond quickly to the continuous changes in the CSI landscape, and this is demonstrated by the changes in the funding models used.

If the NECT had insisted on maintaining only the leverage model adopted in the original NECT prospectus, it might not have survived for this long.

2. Social Entrepreneurship: The NECT special projects funding, which is now exceeding the core funding, arose from agility and being able to respond quickly to opportunities and crises presented by the environment (as mentioned above).

3. Relationships: The NECT has managed to retain its five key funders since its inception due to:
    a. Delivering on its promises efficiently and on time;
    b. Involving the funders in programming and the NECT's strategic direction;
    c. Ensuring alignment between funders' interests and the NECT;
    d. Effective and efficient delivery: The NECT is a preferred partner for projects that require rapid implementation. The NECT's processes are flexible and agile, which enables it to deliver projects in a short space of time.

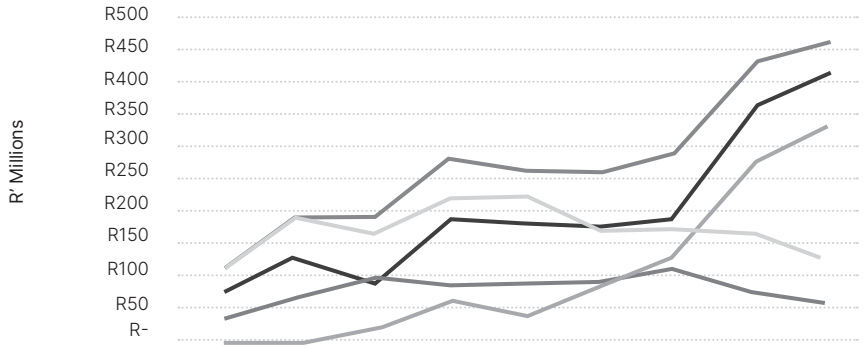
In my opinion, an enabler of the above achievement was the organisation's lean structure, which allowed for:

1. Quick decision making;
2. Quick organisational changes in response to changes in the environment;
3. Mobilisation of the required human resources within a short time to undertake or execute emergency projects.

South Africa needs social compact organisations such as the NECT, organisations that are less bureaucratic, with the capacity to innovate and pilot at a small scale and that also assist the government to respond to emergencies.

The graph and table on Figure 5.1 summaries the NECT funding trends over last the 10 years.

Summary of the NECT funding trends over last 10 years

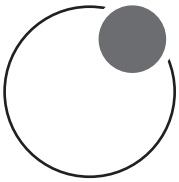


	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total core funding	116.8	186.5	162.9	217.6	220.9	168.3	174.1	158.5	134.9
Total Special Projects	-	-	19.8	57.2	35.0	86.7	120.7	275.1	331.4
Total Government & SETAs	78.0	124.4	85.5	196.5	174.0	170.0	185.7	357.7	412.7
Total private sector funding	38.8	62.1	97.2	78.3	81.8	84.9	109.1	75.8	53.7
Total funding	116.8	186.5	182.8	274.8	255.9	254.9	294.8	433.5	466.3

Figure 5.1: Summary of the NECT funding trends over last 10 years

References

National Education Collaboration Trust (2013). Education Collaboration Framework: Business, labour and civil society initiative to support the National Development Plan and the Education Sector Plan. *https://nect.org.za/publications/nect-and-sector-documents/education-collaboration-framework-document/view*



MINI-LESSON 6:

Lessons from strategic evaluations of complex organisations such as the NECT **- Nimrod Mbele**

The National Development Plan (NDP) calls for increased collaboration among stakeholders to improve educational outcomes, especially in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects. It is within the context of the many intersecting inequalities associated with the education system in South Africa, and guided by the NDP, that the work of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) needs to be understood.

Since its inception, the NECT has focused on designing, testing and mainstreaming interventions that support the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in reaching the NDP goal of 90% of learners achieving passes of at least 50% for Maths, Science and Languages by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012).

In a quest to evaluate the work of the NECT, Tshikululu Social Investments commissioned an impact evaluation on behalf of the First Rand Empowerment Foundation (FREF). The Human Science Research Council (HSRC) and Citofield, together with Insight Strategies, were appointed to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the NECT's performance and accomplishments since its establishment in 2013.

The evaluators' brief was to investigate the accomplishments and systemic contributions of the NECT and the extent to which it was fulfilling its mandate as set out in the NDP and the Education Collaboration Framework (ECF) (NECT,

2013). Importantly, recommendations for improvement in terms of structure, processes and strategic positioning would enable the NECT to better meet its mandate and respond to a changing education environment.

As can be expected, the strategic evaluation of the NECT yielded several lessons, ranging from articulating the context of the NECT operations, drafting terms of reference for and appointment of the evaluation service providers, developing terms of reference for and identification of Lead Evaluators and reference groups, engaging with provinces to access provincial offices and drafting of inception reports and final reports. This iteration process is rich in lessons that will be reflected on in this piece.

CONTEXT MATTERS IN EVALUATIONS

FREF has invested more than R200 million from 2013 and has as such partnered with the NECT to deliver strategic initiatives such as the District Improvement Programme (DIP). Given the size of the FREF investments, it was necessary for the NECT to be subjected to external and independent evaluation processes.

The strategic evaluation of the NECT had to be viewed in the context of many intersecting inequities associated with the education system in South Africa.

The evaluators had to understand and appreciate the complexities of the education system and the role of the NECT in supporting the DBE towards realising the NDP goals. Specifically, the evaluators had to view the work of the NECT through Chapter 9 of the NDP, which calls for the coordination of social partners. This broader contextual consideration paved the way for a deeper appreciation of a systemic intervention as a vehicle for transforming the quality of education in South Africa.

Articulation of the complex nature of the education system and the extent to which the work of the NECT is framed within these complexities and interdependencies shaped the thinking of both the service providers and the Lead Evaluators. This understanding was instrumental in influencing the design of key questions and appropriate research methodologies which ultimately provided insights and observations that are useful in determining the role of the NECT moving forward. Achieving a shared understanding amongst key players of the context of the NECT operations was critical for arriving at a report that added value to the commissioning organisation, the NECT, the DBE, and indeed, the country as a whole.

As indicated, the work of the NECT was framed within the complexity of the education system and the interdependencies within the overall system and subsystems. The system and sub-system orientation shows the sheer magnitude of

the complexities. Against this background, it was critically important to elevate the evaluation beyond the programme. Typically, a programme evaluation has limited actor groups and a relatively small scope. In contrast, the NECT configuration is that of an organisation that is not only complex but complicated.

The key lesson here is that if the NECT evaluation had been reduced to a straightforward project evaluation, it would have lost the complexity of the organisation, and consequently, the results would not have served to inform key decision makers on what it takes to change an education landscape riddled with inequalities and inequities at national, provincial and district levels.

VALUE OF ROLE CLARITY AND ALIGNMENT AMIDST COMPLEX EVALUATIONS

The strategic evaluation of the NECT involved multiple players, including the DBE, FREF as the funding partner through Tshikululu, the evaluation service providers and the Lead Evaluators, each with their own values, ideologies and interpretations of project scope and deliverables.

It was therefore necessary for the players to be aligned on the expectations of the evaluation and reach agreement on the brief, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Key actors in the evaluation process are discussed below.

Lead Evaluators

The Lead Evaluators served as the interface between the NECT, the FREF Board as well as the NECT reference group. Given the strategic role of the Lead Evaluators, it was important to demonstrate the different roles they were expected to play in guiding and quality assuring the outputs at various stages of the evaluation process. It was on this basis that terms of reference for the Lead Evaluators had to be scrutinised to address overlaps and to ensure consistency.

The Lead Evaluators were at the apex of the evaluation process. The uniqueness of the NECT's strategic evaluation warranted the careful selection of education experts with substantial knowledge and experience in managing complex and complicated large organisations.

This critical success condition led the Board to approve a team of three Lead Evaluators, whose key role was to provide overall strategic guidance and oversight of the evaluation and, when required, to interact with FREF and NECT Boards. Below is the profile of Lead Evaluators approved by the NECT Board and by FREF through Tshikululu.

1. Prof Molefe Ralenala – Former Professor of Education, University of Limpopo
2. Prof Mvuyo Tom - Former vice-chancellor of the University of Fort Hare
3. Prof Elaine Unterhalter - Professor of Education and International Development, University College London (UCL)

As the custodians of the evaluation, the Lead Evaluator team had to straddle governance and operations. At the operational level, the role of the Lead Evaluators was to quality assure the work of the service providers. Cardinal to their strategic role, the Lead Evaluators had to approve the sampling framework, which was partly random, partly purposive.

The key lesson here is that if the sampling frame was not balanced at the level of Board members to be interviewed and the number of NECT funders, education partners, union members and provincial officials across different directorates, the evaluation would not have yielded the insights needed by FREF and other funding partners to make informed decisions about the work of the NECT.

Role of evaluation service provider

The roles and responsibilities of the evaluation service providers were clearly defined in the evaluation's terms of reference. The terms of reference identified five areas of focus: teaching, teacher development and curriculum; school leadership and management; partnerships, collaboration and stakeholder relations; capacity of the state; governance and resources. However, the NECT has eight programmes, and to preserve their integrity, the evaluation team opted to organise the evaluation around these eight programmes. This meant that the findings were presented per programme, but when it came to the conclusions and recommendations, the programmes were integrated within the five focus areas.

The HSRC was tasked with focus areas 1 and 2, while Citofield and Outsourced Insights attended to the remaining three focus areas. To ensure consistency and a shared understanding of the different workstreams and their potential overlaps, several engagement sessions were held between the service providers and the Lead Evaluators.

Without clearly defined terms of reference and engagement processes between the Lead Evaluators and service providers, it would have been difficult for the

evaluation to yield coherent insights, observations and recommendations necessary for the FREF and NECT Boards to make informed decisions about the NECT's operations.

Role of the NECT

As the NECT's systemic work was a 'subject' of the evaluation, it was imperative that the NECT's role was also clearly defined to ensure the independence and credibility of the evaluation report. As such, the NECT's role in the evaluation was confined to secretariat support, including compiling and making available sets of documents and reports such as performance/progress and related financial reports; programme datasets; M&E frameworks; research and evaluation reports; and details of stakeholders. In addition, the NECT scheduled meetings for the reference group and coordinated meetings between the Lead Evaluators and service providers.

WHY THE ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD) DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE (DAC) EVALUATION MODEL?

Hans Lundgren and Megan Kennedy (2009, 17-18) argue that many governments and organisations are moving from 'opinion-based policy' towards 'evidence-based policy'. Evidence-based policy has been defined as an approach which 'helps people make well informed decisions about policies, programmes and projects by putting the best available evidence at the heart of policy development and implementation' (Davies, 1999).

Since the NECT plays a significant role in implementing initiatives which support government education policies, it was important that the evaluation was based not on opinions but on evidence. For the FREF and the NECT Boards, this would provide insights into the NECT's performance and accomplishments since its establishment in 2013 and assist in assessing the extent to which the NECT was effective in discharging its mandate.

Against this backdrop, the FREF and the Lead Evaluators chose to utilise the OECD DAC model for the evaluation. Informed by the principles of accuracy, relevance, impact and sustainability, the model enabled the evaluators to determine the merit, worth and significance of the NECT's interventions. The model's criteria describe the desired attributes of interventions: relevant to the context, coherent with other interventions, achieve their objectives, deliver results in an efficient way, and have positive impacts that are sustainable.

Together, the criteria provide a comprehensive picture of the programme interventions, the process of implementation and the results.

Considering the already achieved outcomes, the evaluators worked with these criteria to assess how the NECT could be made more strategic and which technical areas of operation could be improved.

The criteria were used to identify evidence gaps and generate findings and recommendations for improved delivery of the NECT's work with the DBE, in support of strengthened implementation of the NDP and ECF. A key observation is that the DAC evaluation criteria assisted the evaluation to unearth issues related to education change that involve a range of education stakeholders, critical to the NECT's mandate and work.

KEY TAKE HOME LESSONS:

1. Any evaluation of a programme like the NECT needs to be undergirded by a theory of change. A change theory for effecting improvements in the basic education sector was presented in the ECF (NECT, 2013). This change theory is premised on four key change drivers: 1) the generation and/or collection of evidence as a baseline from which improvements can be driven; 2) the development of teacher content knowledge and teaching skills; 3) the enhancement of accountability through building accountability mechanisms into systems and practices; and 4) the provision of resources in targeted areas.

2. The NECT has partnered with several organisations who stood to benefit from the strategic evaluation. This line of thinking necessitated terms of reference that were broader and all-encompassing so that any funding partner would be comfortable with the evaluation's outcome.

   The structure of the evaluation team included an evaluation reference group, made up of key stakeholders and funders of the NECT. This stakeholders' representation included representatives drawn from funders, labour unions, government, founding partners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society. This broad representation ensured the legitimacy of the evaluation.

3. Given the stature of the NECT as a national initiative, it was imperative that service providers undertaking the strategic evaluation were rooted in national and international evaluations processes. Service

providers such as the HSRC elevated the stature of the evaluation, befitting an organisation such as the NECT. By the same token, the credibility of the evaluation was enhanced by the approach of overlaying service providers with the Lead Evaluators since the findings had implication for funding partners other than FREF. The significance of this approach avoided multiple evaluations, which would have resulted in fatigue and a sense of confusion.

4. The strategic evaluation of the NECT had to be viewed in the context of many intersecting inequities associated with the education system in the country. The contextual issues and consideration paved a way for an appropriate evaluation methodology, which considered variables such as relevance, effectiveness efficiency, sustainability and impact.

   It was equally important for the evaluators to understand and appreciate the complexities of the education system and the role of the NECT in supporting the DBE towards realising the NDP goals. This understanding meant that the NECT evaluators elevated the evaluation beyond programme evaluation as the organisation operates in a complex and multi-layered education system and sub-system. It was on this basis that the NECT and FREF Board approved the OCED DAC research methodology as being relevant and applicable to the NECT's strategic evaluation.

5. Finally, the value of a carefully designed governance structure for evaluation cannot be underestimated. Strategic evaluations succeed on the basis of clearly defined boundaries and rules of engagement. The terms of reference were subjected to a rigorous process to allow service providers to understand and to raise questions of clarity.

   The Lead Evaluators and reference groups provided guidance on issues such as the sampling framework and research questions that would provide insights that could take the NECT forward. The Lead Evaluators and reference group also played key roles in unblocking challenges in relation to data collection in provinces and sampled schools. They were instrumental in allowing the evaluation to be completed amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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MINI-LESSON 7

Large scale teacher professional development - **John Thurlow**

Large-scale teacher development involves the systematic and intentional effort to provide training and support to a significant number of teachers across a broad geographic region, with the aim of improving teacher pedagogy and subject matter knowledge and, ultimately, learning outcomes.

Large, in-service teacher development initiatives also play a substantial role in addressing the skills gaps of teachers across the country. Taking many forms, including workshops, seminars, online courses, mentoring programmes and coaching, these programmes have the potential to build the knowledge and skills of teachers and to provide them with the tools and resources they need to effectively support learning.

WHY LARGE-SCALE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA?

Improving the quality of education in the country is essential for improving the prospects of learners, for developing a skilled workforce and, ultimately, for building the country's human capital. However, the legacy of apartheid has plagued South Africa's education system with low levels of learner attainment and high levels of inequality. Upskilling teachers, who may have themselves been disadvantaged by the historical system of education, can have a far-reach-

ing and positive impact. The persistent need to address the achievement gap and to improve the quality of teaching and learning makes large-scale teacher development crucial in South Africa.

The only way to improve lives and livelihoods is to create better opportunities for learners, and this is best possible when skilled and well-trained teachers take control of the learning environment.

To this end, as education is a key driver of economic growth and sustainable development, large-scale teacher development has the potential to contribute to the socio-economic advancement of South Africa

LARGE-SCALE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA TO DATE

Two notable examples of large-scale initiatives in South Africa are the Gauteng Primary Language and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS) and the Western Cape's Literacy and Numeracy (LitNum) Strategy. The GPLMS was launched in 2011 and focuses on improving the teaching and learning of Language and Mathematics in primary schools in Gauteng.

The programme has reached over 2,000 primary schools and trained at least 18,000 teachers and 400 subject advisors. The Western Cape's LitNum Strategy, implemented between 2011 and 2014, focused on improving the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy skills in primary schools in the Western Cape.

The programme upskilled all Language and Mathematics teachers from Grades 1 - 9 and reached all 1 449 schools in the province during its lifespan.

Both the GPLMS and the LitNum Strategy had a significant reach, impacting a large number of teachers and learners in their respective provinces. Both provinces continue to be top performers in the National Senior Certificate results, indicating the impact of these foundational programmes over time.

Following the NECT's provincial teacher development activities in five provinces (Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West, Eastern Cape and Kwazulu-Natal) between 2014 and 2016, the Primary School Reading Improvement Programmme (PSRIP) was the NECT's first national-scale teacher development programme.

It was launched late in 2016 for national-roll out in 2017 and set out to upskill and resource subject advisors and teachers to improve reading in primary schools. To date, five iterations later, it has reached 1 229 subject advisors and 40 887 teachers, impacting 5 571 schools.

LARGE-SCALE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE PSRIP

Planning the PSRIP was a complex task. While the PSRIP is a reading support programme, it aids the delivery of the English First Additional Language (EFAL) and Home Language (HL) curriculum across all primary school grades. For this reason, it was paramount that the design was informed and owned by a number of divisions within the Department of Basic Education (DBE). This involved collective planning among, and subsequently delivery by, the DBE's:

a. Reading Directorate;

b. Teacher Development Directorate;

c. Curriculum Branch; and

d. Education Management and Governance (EMG) Directorate.

Early implementation highlighted the need to also work closely with provincial education departments (PEDs) to ensure programme adoption. At the beginning of the second iteration of the programme in 2019, the EMG directorate was included for the first time to secure the participation of school managers.

Implementation proved that it was important for school managers to be a central part of the process – not only for information and planning but also to support programme delivery. These multiple involvements highlight the systemic scale of an intervention such as the PSRIP. It is large, not only in terms of the number of teachers trained, but also in terms of the extensive supportive environment for the programme and for the teachers.

The PSRIP's cascade training model requires subject advisors to travel to a central venue in Gauteng for three days of residential training, twice a year: once in January to prepare them for terms 1 and 2; and once in June to prepare them for terms 3 and 4. After the training sessions in Gauteng, subject advisors return to their provinces and train a cohort of teachers at district level.

Many of the provinces conduct their own regional dry-runs to ensure that subject advisors are fully prepared. Each subject advisor trains and supports between 20 and 40 teachers. Teacher training takes place over two days in districts and covers a number of topics and activities that include programme methodology, policy, international best practices, and peer demonstrations and feedback. Teachers are provided with a full set of Structured Learning Programme (SLPs) for the grade/s that they teach.

The SLP is an educational intervention aimed at changing the ways teaching and learning are conducted within a classroom setting. Teachers are provided with training; accompanying resource packs; and school-based support to

improve curriculum delivery and its associated learning. During the training sessions, teachers are navigated through the SLPs by subject advisors, who have been trained centrally by master trainers. The limitations of the cascade approach are negated by including high-quality video clips to convey technical and complex concepts and content. Subject advisors receive these clips on flash drives and use them at dedicated points in the training of their teachers.

Whilst the programme resources drive implementation in classrooms daily, it is the programme's strength that has determined its success over time. Impact can be measured against the programme objectives, which include:

A. Strengthening the capacity of teachers to teach learners how to read more effectively using the different reading methodologies cited in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), that is, Shared Reading, Group Guided Reading, Independent Reading;

B. Enhancing the skills of subject advisors to provide effective support to the targeted teachers in their districts;

C. Establishing and maintaining a supportive environment at a systems level both nationally and provincially;

D. Providing opportunities for teachers to be exposed to new trends in teaching learners how to read with understanding and meaning;

E. Improving learner performance in EFAL; and

F. Improving teaching routines and repertoires in classrooms and schools.

The success of the programme, and its adoption by the Teacher Development Curriculum and Management (TDCM) Lekgotla (or forum) in 2019 as the Sector Approach to the teaching of reading can largely be attributed to the high-quality training, supported by the SLPs, that translates into good quality teaching at classroom level.

SUCCESSES OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT LEARNED FROM THE PSRIP

The success of the PSRIP's national training programme can be attributed to several factors, including: the provision of high-quality training; the alignment of the programme with the needs and priorities of the system (including responding to curriculum changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic); the level of support provided to teachers during and after the training; and the development of lasting capacity in the system.

As a large-scale teacher development programme, the PSRIP's notable successes to date include:

1. **Improved teacher pedagogy:** The programme demonstrated improved pedagogical skills of teachers, enabling them to more confidently deliver the curriculum. This, in turn, translated into increased learner engagement, participation and achievement.

2. **Enhanced content knowledge:** Pre- and post-testing incorporated into the training process noted gains of between 5% and 16% in teachers' understanding of content and policy. The training sessions also promoted a culture of continuous learning among teachers. The training kept them up-to-date with the latest research, teaching methods and approaches.

3. **Bridging theory and practice:** By providing teachers with practical, hands-on training and support, the programme helped them to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This improved the teachers' ability to apply what they learned in the training sessions.

4. **Increased teacher confidence:** The programme has built the confidence of teachers and improved motivation levels. This is evidenced by time-on-task increasing by, in some instances, up to 30%.

5. **Stronger teacher collaboration:** The peer engagement components of the training programme have encouraged collaboration and sharing of best practices among teachers. This has resulted in a stronger sense of community and shared responsibility for learner outcomes.

6. **Improved learner outcomes:** Perhaps the most important success of the PSRIP is the improvement in learner outcomes.
   The external evaluation of the PSRIP in 2019 noted that learners benefiting from the programme showed improvements in all four of the reading subtasks (letter sound, familiar words, oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension), and generally scored better than learners who had not benefitted from the programme. Whilst it could be argued that such successes may also have been achieved at a smaller scale project, it is important to acknowledge the impact of the scale. Since its inception in 2017, the PSRIP has reached in excess of two million learners of primary school age.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

While the PSRIP national training programme has had many successes, there are also several lessons that were learned in its implementation. These are not exclusive to the PSRIP but are common to other similar, large-scale programmes:

1. **Funding constraints:** Large-scale teacher training is costly, and without sufficient dedicated funding, programmes become limited in scope and reach.

   They also become limited in terms of sustainability once the direct funding stream is no longer available. In 2018 and 2022, the funding for the PSRIP formerly provided by the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education Training Authority (ETDP SETA) was not secured, and for this reason, implementation during these years was limited.

2. **Limited training resources:** While the PSRIP model relies mostly on the subject advisor and the SLPs, the training programme also incorporates aspects of technology, which, at the very least, require a computer and a data projector.

   In some parts of the country, these resources were lacking, and this negatively impacted the quality of the training.

3. **Unequal training:** The cascade approach of the PSRIP means that teachers across the country experience the training differently.

   The training experience is directly linked to the strength of the subject advisor delivering it: the capacity and commitment of the trainer thus influences the experience of the teacher and the overall lasting impact of the intervention.

4. **Limited follow-up and support:** A challenge facing large-scale teacher development programmes such as the PSRIP is that of a lack of follow-up support to teachers.

   While the model builds in follow-up in-school support, the reality is that subject advisors do not have the time to visit each teacher and provide them with the ongoing support they may require.

IN CONCLUSION

Teacher development programmes have played a critical role in improving the quality of education in South Africa. They have helped to support the development of skilled and effective teachers who are better equipped to meet the needs of learners in diverse contexts.

Funding and sustainability remain challenges, but there is no doubt that these development programmes have had a positive impact on the quality of education in South Africa. By continuing to invest in large-scale teacher development, it will be possible to build on the successes of initiatives such as the GPLMS, the Western Cape's LitNum Strategy and the PSRIP.

What is important now is to embed the work already started and to encourage PEDs to take ownership and ensure sustainability at regional levels.

MINI-LESSON 8

Leveraging and sustaining multiple partnerships to support matric learners - **Tukisang Senne**

The purpose of this mini-lesson is to reflect on the utility of partnerships within the education sector, with lessons drawn from the programming implemented by the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) to support matric learners during the COVID-19 lockdowns and thereafter.

THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION

The COVID-19 pandemic had an unimaginably disruptive effect on life in general and forced schools around the world to move to remote learning.

In South Africa, an initial month-long shutdown of the school system meant that no normal schooling took place from 18 March to 30 April 2020[1] . Education managers and staff had to adapt to a different way of teaching and learning[2].

Evidence of long-term structural learning losses which threatened to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities in the system emerged, in that:

1. An estimated 40% loss in curriculum learning for all grades became evident.

1 President Ramaphosa closed schools on 18 March 2020. See https://www.gov.za/speeches/statement-president-cyril-ramaphosa-measures-combat-covid-19-epidemic-15-mar-2020-0000.
2 See also Mini-Lesson 42: Education in Emergencies: Remote and Digital Learning by Dhianaraj Chetty.

2. Adjusted for quality, five months of schooling loss was equivalent to the loss of 0.6 years of schooling.

Other factors that pointed to the risk of learning losses included:

1. Increasing food insecurity and mental health challenges, which reinforced learning losses
2. Signs of rising school drop-out and teenage pregnancy rates
3. Continuing prevalence of digital inequality and a lack of regular, affordable access to connected digital devices and the internet that were preventing most learners from participating in curriculum catch-up and exam preparation via online and digital learning platforms.

Mitigating the systemic effects of structural learning losses became a central concern of the national education system. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) embarked on a multi-pronged emergency catch-up and education recovery plan that included a differentiated approach, in line with the national government's Risk Adjusted Strategy (RAS)[3] (DBE, 2020).

Included in the education recovery approach was investment in remote and digital learning (RDL), which necessitated investments in partnerships for educational broadcasting.

THE REMOTE AND DIGITAL LEARNING (RDL) CAMPAIGN

The NECT initiated its Remote and Digital Learning (RDL) Campaign to address the immediate education problems mentioned above that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main purpose of the campaign was to offer a supplementary learning support programme that could help learners to catch up on curriculum learning and revision and enable teachers and parents to offer learners care and support and assist them with exam preparation.

The RDL Campaign incorporated support to learners in Grades R to 11 and matric learners through the *Tswelopele*[4] and *Woza Matrics*[5] platforms respectively.

The principles that guided the RDL Campaign included:

3 See https://sacoronavirus.co.za/covid-19-risk-adjusted-strategy
4 See https://www.tswelopele.org.za
5 See https://www.wozamatrics.co.za

1. Promoting the national public good: The campaign was premised on promoting the national public good in response to the unabated COVID pandemic.

2. Enabling learning continuity: The campaign was informed and driven by the need to promote and enable learning continuity amid significant learning losses experienced by all learners in general, and matric learners specifically.

3. Delivery through multi-stakeholder partnership: The RDL Campaign was guided by the need to mobilise a wide range of stakeholders and partners behind a strong, national public education programme.

PROGRAMME DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

At the heart of the RDL Campaign design was a strategic intent to build on the work of wide-ranging existing initiatives, programmes, and projects and, in so doing, anchor the Campaign's work by establishing partnerships with different organisations, institutions and other programmes.

The approach was articulated as a plan to establish and maintain a national RDL network. The concept of a network was very loosely defined as an entity which mobilises wide-ranging partners around a specified set of objectives.

Thus, the RDL Campaign sought to create partnerships with the RDL platform and content providers who could support the provision of curriculum and psycho-social content, broadly defined as content for Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL). It also aimed to provide access to multiple digital and non-digital platforms, live and on-demand access to educational resources, advocacy, and marketing, as well as monitoring, evaluation, reflection, and learning.

From the outset, one of the most critical aspects of the design of the RDL campaign was strengthening the ecosystem of partners and stakeholders involved in the initial education broadcast programme led by the DBE in partnership with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). The NECT was brought on board by the DBE as the lead implementing partner in the Woza Matrics 2020 Catch-Up Campaign and, via the NECT, a range of additional partners participated.

A strong partner network and ecosystem emerged between 1 September and 8 December 2020 that supported the management and implementation of

the RDL Campaign. The partners were led by the DBE and the NECT and included the Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO), SABC, MultiChoice, eMedia Investments, Bidvest, Satrix, UNICEF South Africa, Mindset Africa, Monyetla Trust, DigiCampus, Western Cape Education Department (WCED)-Stellenbosch University Telematics Programme.

With a need to further expand access to educational resources for learners using mobile and online education platforms, in 2021, the partnership grew to include Matric Live and Velle (mobile apps), DBE Cloud & Siyavula Education (online repositories) and CSTL providers (loveLife and the South African Depression and Anxiety Group [SADAG]) to enhance care and support to learners, teachers and parents alike. Regular meetings with partners ensured that there was alignment and synergy of efforts, and mitigated possible conflicts of interest, with the public good being paramount.

PROGRAMME WINS

Several sponsors donated generously. Three broadcasters (the SABC, Multichoice and eMedia) put aside their competitive hats and gave the campaign access to their television channels to broadcast lessons on a no-fee basis.

Several content providers (nine) donated their content for free.

Media24 donated space in their publications for promotional and marketing purposes.

Several institutions and individuals made their expertise available to assist with delivering the Woza Matrics and Tswelopele programmes.

Through the multiple partnerships, the RDL Campaign provided matric learners with:

1. Support in key subjects, namely, Accounting, Economics, English First Additional Language (EFAL), Geography, History, Life Sciences, Mathematics, Mathematical Literacy, Physical Sciences
2. Curriculum support and revision lessons on SABC 3 (2020) and SABC 1 (2021), plus interactive exam preparation lessons with sign language interpretation for hearing impaired learners, reaching 5.8 million people monthly
3. Curriculum support and revision lessons on the DBE TV Channel on Openview, reaching an average of 493 531 and 492 530 people monthly in 2021 and 2022 respectively

4. On-demand access to matric lessons broadcast on SABC and DBE TV via Multichoice's Catch- Up and ShowMax platforms

5. Access to a total of 597 DBE/NECT-owned content assets (videos, interactive lessons, and lesson notes) and 145 content assets sourced through multiple platforms

6. Matric study guides for high enrolment subjects (42), low enrolment subjects (24) and home language creative writing (12), which were distributed nationally via digital means

7. Access to digital learning and support. This was offered to 100 006 learners via Matric Live (lessons, exams), Velle (tutoring) and YouTube (lessons).

PROGRAMME LIMITATIONS

The RDL Campaign was curtailed by the reality of digital inequality among different communities, thus limiting the depth of access to some of the digital resources curated to supplement learning and teaching.

There was limited scope to optimally include teacher development more centrally as part of the RDL Campaign, with only a few audio-visual guides made available for teachers to assist them to integrate the digital resources into classroom practice and remote teaching, rather than just encouraging the learners to watch passively.

When learners were at home, parents took on the role of teacher to support their children with learning. There was insufficient focus within the partnership to support parents more meaningfully so that they could fulfil this role more comfortably.

Some potential partners required remuneration for their contributions – content, expertise and/or platforms – which created a conundrum as the premise of the emergency response sought to leverage goodwill ahead of profit.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

Through partnerships, the following were achieved:

1. Partnerships assisted to ensure that learners had access to the technologies and resources they needed to succeed.

2. Partnerships provided learners with additional support, such as tutoring and homework help.

3. Partnerships helped to connect learners with mentors and role models.

4. Partnerships catalysed the creation of a more supportive and collaborative learning environment.

5. Partnerships contributed to raising awareness of the importance of RDL.

6. Partnerships shone a light on the need for comprehensive policies and strategies that support RDL.

Key lessons learnt from the multiple partnerships were that:

1. Political and key educational leadership support are essential in providing legitimacy for mobilisation. Any future projects of this nature would require the same political leadership if they were to be successful.

2. In managing the partnerships, it was vital to have a concerted stakeholder engagement approach that created a safe space for trust building (internal and external), knowledge sharing and management of expectations among those who ordinarily would compete against each other.

3. A well-coordinated stakeholder engagement model as seen in the Woza Matrics Programme could – in time – deliver on the identified needs in the system and help to address the context-induced digital inequality gaps and yield a quicker turn-around time. The partnership approach enabled stakeholders with different interests to come together and harness their expertise for education advancement.

4. A fair degree of agility was required to programmatically respond to a dynamic emergency, with an evolving and changing context due to the government regulations, and the impacts on school attendance, curriculum coverage and assessment.

5. There are inherent funding challenges often faced by the DBE and provincial education departments (PEDs) when implementing technology-based initiatives and programmes.

   It is thus necessary for them to consider creative funding models for these programmes, as the RDL Campaign did. Such funding included, but was not limited to, in-kind donations (platform use, content developed), corporate funding through corporate social investment (CSI) or other Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) strategies, public-private partnerships, and special levies/endowments. These approaches allow for more touchpoints for partnership-driven programmes such as the RDL Campaign.

6. The success seen with the Woza Matrics Catch-Up Campaign was catalysed, in the main, by the NECT's ability to mobilise partners across different sectors in a relatively quick manner to conceptualise and implement a supplementary programme to support matric learners during COVID-19 disruptions.

   Such smart partnerships between the education system, the corporate sector and non-governmental and civil society organisations require agility, meaningful engagement, and political and educational leadership support for legitimacy and to make them work.

7. Future programming of this nature needs to take into consideration the context of digital inequality, the centrality of teacher involvement and development, as well as parental support to optimise the social capital that these partnerships amass.

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MINI-LESSON 9

Resuscitating collaboration in research - **Joshua Bell**

Research is crucial to development. It informs growth through learning and inspires innovation that is built on a foundation of knowledge. Research has seen the creation of cities, sent people to space and showcased the depths of human ingenuity. A through line, which connects the greatest rewards harvested from research efforts, is collaboration. If the end goal of research is the gaining and validation of knowledge, then effective research is successful in as much as it imparts knowledge.

A national research agenda established by the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) sought to open the black box of South African classrooms to provide nuanced and qualitative understandings amid the lexicon of quantitative studies that speculate on, without engaging with, classroom dynamics. In the endeavour to promote effective research, distinguished by its capacity to share knowledge gained, the NECT ensured the broad-based involvement of South African universities to collaboratively unpack the dynamics of South African classrooms which are endowed with rich qualitative meanings and information.

Through the advancement of research efforts, numerous areas of specialty have emerged from various sectors and institutions. Research is conducted by universities, development organisations, private sector actors and government institutions, among other structural groups.

Each of these actors is capable of producing research findings that are able to drive progress and innovation which is unique to their context, structure and work. While it is crucial for these actors to drive research efforts, the importance of shared knowledge should not be understated.

While the diverse array of actors engaging in research have unique and pertinent individual insights, there is a danger of siloed research, which holds significant potential for innovation and progress, but produces knowledge that is bounced off the walls of institutional and organisational echo chambers.

CLASSROOM RESEARCH COLLABORATION

The NECT was founded on the principle of collaboration, of bringing societal actors and groups together in the effort to improve education in South Africa. This approach has not been limited to interventions and programmes, but has extended to research. In this regard, the NECT has sought to resuscitate collaboration in research through bringing together an assortment of structural groups to serve a joint goal of improving education in South Africa.

A project which is emblematic of this impetus is the project on classroom research. This project brought together members of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and provincial education departments (PEDs), teacher unions, development organisations, private sector businesses, education associations and university institutions to serve the joint goal of understanding the pedagogical practices and realities of South African classrooms. A national study of this kind emphasises the pertinence of research collaboration. The NECT's CEO highlighted in the inaugural information briefing for the project on 16 May, 2022 that the worth of the knowledge gained through this research lies in the fact that it will be across the landscape of South African education. Work towards the project began with the presentation of the idea through the Information Briefing. An outcome of the briefing, and a shared sentiment among the diverse group of action partners who connected through the briefing, was the importance of gaining a firm grasp of the existing literature.

Following from this feedback, the NECT collaborated with the University of Witwatersrand to conduct a scan of the existing research on classroom dynamics. In gaining a grasp of existing understandings of classroom research and areas of growth within it, the NECT circulated a call for expressions of interest for interested groups and researchers to participate in the project. Through this call, the NECT partnered with the Teacher Education for Equitable and Quality Learning (TEEQL) research consortium, which consisted of ten South African universities to undertake the project.

While undoubtedly an important goal, a national project of this scale which is undertaken by the collaborative effort of such an expansive group of actors is not without its challenges. However, it is through this national research agenda that the NECT has gained lessons in the resuscitation of collaboration within research.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. The first lesson gained in the undertaking of a national study on classroom research is the importance of ideological and institutional humility.

   While each of the actors involved in the aforementioned project held the expertise and research wherewithal to provide unique findings relevant to the project's goals, the true value of the project relied on the synergy of expertise to produce research findings that are holistic and comprehensive.

   Humility, in this goal, is crucial. Here, the NECT recognised the scope of its research capacity and engaged an assortment of groups within education to extend beyond that scope, recognising that for all that can be done, more can be done together.

2. The second lesson is of equal engagement, which is closely linked to the importance of humility. In seeking to resuscitate collaboration in research, it is of the utmost importance to ensure that collaboration is equal and without institutional domination.

   While the NECT sought to facilitate equal engagement in the project from its initialisation through an information briefing which positioned an array of actors on an equal platform to engage with the research, equal engagement is a goal to be continuously worked towards.

   While action partners equally have value to add to research, it should not be assumed that engagement will be equally accessed, and it is crucial to ensure that all partners have an equal platform to facilitate collaboration.

   In engaging with the TTTEQL research consortium, the NECT actively sought to ensure the avoidance of institutional dominance and fair institutional representation, which is an effort that reflects the ongoing negotiation of equal engagement.

3. Lastly, a key insight gained is that collaboration in research should be long-lasting. Resuscitating collaboration should not be a short-term goal. Instead, collaboration in research should be viewed as a long-term effort that seeks to foster relationships among various social agents and institutions to ensure that collaboration is not only impactful but is impactful over time.

   In the classroom research project, the overarching goal of the study was to drive policy and programme changes in South African education. Such an ambitious goal cannot be achieved through siloed research or once-off efforts.

   For the project to be effective as a research agenda, partnerships are crucial to drive the impact of the project's findings, which should be shared among a diverse array of actors to create wide-spread change that is sustainable over time. In this way, an essential aspect of resuscitating collaboration in research ensuring that there is a strong and continued pulse in research collaboration thereafter.

Resuscitating collaboration in research requires humility, equal engagement and the support of long-lasting relationships.

MINI LESSON 10

Pros and cons of a collaborative funding model for public/private partnerships – a case of the NECT implementing the South African School Administration & Management System **- Mamello Khuto**

The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) was founded on the basis of collaboration among business, government, labour and civil society. To date, the NECT has been able to raise about R2.5 billion in funded programmes from these collaborations[1].

Despite the teething problems in funding encountered when it was first launched, by 2016 the NECT had built enough muscle to mobilise funding owing to its quick turnaround time for implementing projects. This notable achievement led other collaborators to take note and they approached the NECT to execute special education projects that sought to increase efficiency, success and impact.

One such special project is the South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS) Modernisation Project, which attracted collaborative funding from the state, philanthropic organisations and the private sector (SA-SAMS, 2021).

This article profiles the pros and cons of the collaborative funding model for SA-SAMS and identifies and discusses lessons that emanate from the implementation of the project.

1 As shared by the NECT CFO – NECT's internal 10-year celebration, 23 June 2023

WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE FUNDING?

Let's start with understanding the operative term first – collaboration. Collaboration is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as 'working jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavour'. This translates into a process through which groups or organisations work together towards achieving a mutually beneficial outcome. Several factors may be collaboration catalysts – a problem, a shared vision, a desired outcome to name but a few (Zenex Foundation, 2016). Flowing from the interpretation of collaboration above, the collaborative funding model is described in other sources as either 'pooling of funds from national or local foundations and philanthropists for organisations supporting similar goals' or as a way 'to align … philanthropic giving based on shared long-term goals, geographic areas of interest, beneficiary populations, or some other commonality' (Spicer & Robinson, 2023).

As the authors point out, collaborative funding therefore enables the participants in the relationship to 'magnify their capacity to address large-scale social, economic, and environmental challenges and better contribute to change' (Spicer & Robinson, 2023, pg. 5). Collaborative funding can therefore be a key to creating systemic change by building resources and momentum. With this discussion in mind, what are some of the pros and cons that come to mind with the insight garnered so far in the journey for the modernisation of SA-SAMS?

PROS AND CONS OF COLLABORATIVE FUNDING – THE CASE OF SA-SAMS

According to the observations made by the NECT stakeholders over the years, the growing interest in collaborative funding for special projects can be attributed to the following:

1. Special projects are seen as more transparent and provide increased accountability since the funding is ring-fenced for the project.
2. Private sector funding tends to lean more towards special projects that add to their environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiatives, especially if this boosts their philanthropic efforts, performance scorecards or reporting requirements.
3. From a contracting point of view, special projects arrangements are more likely to be easier to implement as they have clear deliverables and milestones as compared to other organisational core programmes.

ABOUT SA-SAMS MODERNISATION

SA-SAMS is characterised by the following aspects:

1. It is a core school management and administration system used in public schools in South Africa.
2. It consists of 13 modules that capture all school-related information on learners, teachers and the school. The data on the system is then used as the source for several other systems of the Department of Basic Education (DBE), such as the Learning Unit Record Information and Tracking System (LURITS).
3. It is an old technology platform supported by Visual Basic 6 (VB6), with a back-end Access database. The technology is no longer supported by Windows, and computers with Windows 10 and later versions experience problems running this application.
4. Copies of the system reside at the school level, where data is input. It is a stand-alone system, which makes collection of data costly and time consuming.

The SA-SAMS Modernisation Project was launched to replace the current SA-SAMS solution with a modernised one (SA-SAMS, 2021).

THE COLLABORATION

In 2018, the temporary Trustees of the NECT, the DBE, the First Rand Empowerment Foundation (FREF), the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation (MSDF) and the ELMA Philanthropies Services Africa (ELMA) concluded and entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that defined the basis on which the SA-SAMS Modernisation Project would be implemented and outlined the roles and responsibilities of the project partners (SA-SAMS, 2018).

According to the signed MoU, the total amount of collaborative funding to be raised was R100 million. The private sector component required to be raised by the NECT was estimated at R60 million, split equally between FREF, MSDF and ELMA. The contribution of public funding from government would be R40 million over two financial years. The latter was split between the DBE (R20 million) and the nine provincial education departments accounting for the balance (R20 million), split according to the learner headcount per province. What were the pros and cons of this collaborative model and what lessons can be learnt?

The collaborative funding model for implementing the SA-SAMS modernisation project proved to have several pros and cons. Here are some of the key advantages and disadvantages noted to date.

Advantages

Joint risk-sharing: The collaborative funding model allowed for the spreading of financial risk among the parties. The R60 million funding that the NECT raised on behalf of the DBE from private donors reduced the financial burden that would otherwise have fallen to the sector over a two-year period.

Increased speed of delivery: Collaborative funding models, especially where private funding is involved, can enhance the efficiency of releasing funds for the quick delivery of infrastructure projects once agreements have been made on clear deliverables and timelines. Based on the pooled funds, the SA-SAMS project benefited from early fund releases from all partners, as and when milestones were met.

Increased funding access: The private sector's involvement in the collaborative funding model was able to provide funding resources to the SA-SAMS project to finance other project requirements, thus accelerating project implementation. This was in instances where the public sector would have required consultative authorisations before proceeding, leading to possible delays in the process.

Multiparty governance structure: Using the collaborative funding model called for an inclusive governance structure representative of all the collaborators. This entailed improved coordination and reporting mechanisms, leading to transparency and risk management in accounting for funding utilisation.

Disadvantages

Self-interests of private funders: Collaborative funding can collapse where the public and private funding interests and 'ways of doing things' are misaligned. Unless clearly defined, it is often common practice for private funding partners to base their continued involvement in funding on defined expectations based on their interests. A case in point for the SA-SAMS project was when MSDF and ELMA withdrew their funding in 2020, citing 'an opportunity cost' when the DBE, through the NECT, could not move quickly enough to appoint a technical vendor to proceed with the modernisation requirements of the project (NECT, 2020).

Lack of full understanding of private and public internal workings: There seems to be a disconnect between how government and the private sector work

when it comes to decision-making and authorisations, especially related to procurement or governance. The issue of the State Information Technology Agency (SITA) bid cancellation in 2019, notwithstanding the lengthy the due diligence process called for by the DBE, as well the cancellation of the NECT bid process because of serious reservations of the NECT Board and the DBE about the suitability of the selected vendor, led to the private funders pulling out. This pointed to a disconnect between public and private sector funding decisions and the factors that inform them.

Inflexible public sector procurement processes: Special projects like the SA-SAMS project find it hard to attract collaborative funding due to stringent procurement regulations in the public sector. A myriad of procurement and governance processes involving multiple inter-governmental players and different layers of decision-makers makes it impossible for quick turnaround times. This makes it unattractive to private funders as they perceive the process to be complex and time-consuming.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

Given the experiences and insights gained so far in the journey of the SA-SAMS modernisation project implementation, what are the main takeaways or important lessons? Three important lessons emerge:

1. **Understand and document all co-funders' mandates:** Private sector and philanthropic funding always bring with it mandates from shareholders and scorecards to be met.

   Develop an inclusive process to understand the collaborating partners' respective mandates. Keep the Boards of co-funders' aligned and apprised of project activities and engage in proactive stakeholder management that ensures full and consistent support from each co-funder's home base.

2. **Agree upfront on appropriate governance and procurement model that covers all aspirations:** Given interested investments into the project from different funders, arriving at a decision-making structure that accommodates all aspirations will remain a challenge. However, all parties must agree up-front on an ideal governance and procurement model that will work for the collaboration.

   Having these difficult conversations from the onset will ease tensions down the road when things don't go faster because of certain governance or procurement issues that have to be resolved.

3. Evolve and adapt: For first collaborative funding projects, it might be important for all parties to make deliberate effort to see to it that these pioneer projects are successful. For this to happen, they might need to ease and cede to some demands respectively. The public sector might choose to relax its stringent governance and procurement regulations for special-ringfenced projects, with explicit written submission to National Treasury for such.

   For the private sector, there is a need for funders to familiarise themselves closely with the requirements of public legislation like Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) which governs procurement in the public sector. Going this way might set a precedent that would make it easier for both public and private partnerships to attract additional philanthropic investment on friendlier terms in the future.

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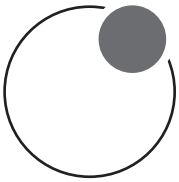

MINI-LESSON 11

The quick wins project – A way to gain traction in developmental initiatives - **Pat Sullivan**

According to one of the world's leading development economists and specialists on education reform Professor Lant Pritchett, South Africa is the single biggest learning underperformer relative to GDP per capita among low- and middle-income countries. In short, we get extremely poor education outcomes despite our high levels of public expenditure. (Schirmer & Visser, 2023)

Despite concerted efforts over the years to address poor education outcomes, education interventions in South Africa have a chequered history and have not always achieved success. In the light of this, when the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) was established in 2013, it resolved to focus on schools that were seriously dysfunctional and to test new models of school improvement and new thinking.

During its inception phase in 2014, the NECT thus identified schools that were consistently failing due to many factors, including poor infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers and demotivated teachers and learners. There were, and still are, many such schools across South Africa, and transformation programmes have mostly only worked on a small scale. The NECT undertook to try to address the issues and, in doing so, take stock of what initiatives had gone before and what challenges they faced. The assumption was that considering the challenges and possible solutions would provide a basis from which to try a different angle to getting schools to improve.

It was agreed to focus on provinces which had a high number of failing schools, or a great need for improvement, and were mainly rural. The provinces that were selected were Mpumalanga, the North West, Limpopo, Kwazulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. The NECT undertook research to profile the level of need in four of the five provinces and worked with the Programme for Learning Outcomes (PILO) in Kwazulu-Natal.

The research led to different change models being developed for each province. These models were championed by NECT consortium partners, led by Deloitte in Limpopo, PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) in the North West and Mpumalanga, and a collective of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the Eastern Cape. Both Deloitte and PWC subcontracted others, such as local NGOs and education consultants, who complemented each other in their work foci. Each partner understood they had taken on a major task that would require consistent effort and the testing of new models. They were also aware of the lack of success in previous initiatives with schools and the responsibility they were taking on to correct this.

It must be noted that dysfunctional schools know that they have challenges. While they may not admit to this openly it has been found in working with such schools that most are keen to receive help in any form. The NECT acknowledged this and felt that giving these schools something uncontroversial, such as a Smart Board or fixing broken windows, would sow seeds of trust for when the focus of its work moved to improving curriculum management and teaching methodology. It was envisaged that these first steps taken in working with dysfunctional schools would provide a set of pointers on how to effect change, which could then be gradually taken to more schools.

The selected schools, called Fresh Start Schools (FSS) to capture the essence that this was a new beginning, were chosen by the districts, and all were asked if they wanted to be part of the change programme. A programme of support and training of school management teams (SMTs) and teachers was devised, with circuit managers and subject advisors working towards the same goal.

IDENTIFYING 'QUICK WINS'

The FSS were asked to identify what was needed in their schools, that, if dealt with quickly, would positively impact on teaching and learning.

Each school, assisted by the circuit manager, was asked to identify four to six issues that could be fixed in 30 to 60 days by means of simple actions that could happen alongside mainstream activities. Some examples of the actions suggested were:

1. Organising the files/paperwork in the principal's office, to make it professional;
2. Providing sanitation items, cleaning-up of toilets by parents and learners being given feedback on how to maintain the toilets;
3. Carrying out minor repairs to doors and windows, using school funds if available, with labour provided free if possible;
4. Improving signage for the school;
5. Fixing or buying new green boards;
6. Creating and maintaining a school garden;
7. Improving the storage of textbooks and resources, with an asset register being put in place;
8. Creating a library, well stocked with donated and required books for learners.

The common characteristic of the quick wins was the involvement of all school stakeholders, including parents and, if appropriate, the broader community. The latter was to create a sense of pride in and ownership of the schools.

What was observed was that the schools were delighted to get help in small areas which had the biggest impact on staff and leaners. Thereafter, they were prepared to work with the NECT and its partners on academic issues.

STEPS IN THE QUICK WINS PROCESS

There were several steps to follow in establishing quick wins:

Advocacy

Advocacy is essential for building trust and understanding between school stakeholders and the district and the planned intervention. Thus, developing a relationship with each identified FSS was crucial. The schools had to be asked if they wanted to be part of an intervention programme implemented by the NECT, and if they did, whether they were committed to working with a range of stakeholders on quick wins as well as being part of a process to improve teaching and learning.

Advocacy involved first meeting the principal and staff and then the school governing body (SGB). All the major stakeholders of the school were made aware of the process so that they would be supportive of the intervention. Meeting the circuit manager was also seen as an essential step, as his/her support was necessary to ensure that the intervention would be embedded.

Generally, quick wins are tangible and easy to measure, whereas working on improving teaching and learning involves changing behaviour patterns. Old behaviour patterns can often be difficult to change and new ones hard to sustain. Nonetheless, the FSS acknowledged what was required and agreed to and did cooperate.

Response

The FSS were very excited about getting some of their niggling problems solved and, accordingly, cooperated fully with the NECT partners. Where advocacy had been completed satisfactorily, teachers and parents were eager to be involved. Each chosen quick win was to be completed within a timeframe of 30 to 60 days, and the circuit managers and the districts offered support. The circuit managers responded to calls from the principal and visited schools to observe what was happening. Frequent conversations were held on actions undertaken and brainstorming about the problems was a common activity.

The involvement of the district was crucial, and a template was developed by district officials and principals for capturing all visits to schools and progress in the quick wins. It was appropriate for the chairperson of the SGB to accompany the circuit manager on school visits and for the template to be completed with input by all. From this information, barriers to implementation and successes could be plotted, and a District Action Plan developed, which could include:

1. Meeting with the school principal and teachers and SGB, if necessary;
2. Walking around the school to observe the quick wins;
3. Sorting and filing documents at the school with the involvement of the principal/SMT;
4. Developing questions to guide a discussion with school staff involved in the quick wins; and
5. Reporting on school visits by the district using a template developed for this purpose.

PROFESSIONAL QUICK WINS

In addition to the quick wins discussed above, there were also, importantly, 'professional quick wins' (PQWs), which were also needed in the FSS. PQWs related directly to the conditions of teaching and learning and generally would have had a greater impact on teaching and learning in the schools. However, they were more difficult to achieve as they mostly related to behaviour change and required much discussion. Some examples of PQWs include:

1. Raising money for maths kits, posters and library books by approaching donors and creating circles of support among teachers who would decide on how these special resources would be used;
2. Sharing of educators, facilities and equipment among neighbouring schools, that is, creating a circle of support between teachers at different schools;
3. Developing a database using information and communication technology (ICT) and training the principal and others on how to use and read data;
4. Resolving grievances/disputes timeously (30-60 days);
5. Engaging with volunteers who wished to work with the school.

The NECT observed some FSS taking up a PQW. Sharing of books between schools was observed to take place, but not sharing of educators. This is where principals could have been the catalysts to encourage discussions. PQWs took much longer to achieve than quick wins but were more likely to have brought about the desired changes in teaching and learning

The main observations regarding quick wins, reflections and lessons were shared with stakeholders and formed a basis for continuing actions to improve the schools.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

The FSS really appreciated the quick wins and felt that working on teaching and learning with the service providers was worthwhile, as the NECT was there to assist and had solved some issues already through implementing the quick wins. Thus, the FSS committed to the bigger process.

Moreover, some schools extended the quick wins into their communities and did the following:

1. Schools and households took all books out of their storerooms and made them available to learners;
2. A local church set up a library and encouraged learners to read out aloud at services;
3. Unions supported the drive for reading to become central in the school and encouraged teachers to set up their own book club;
4. Schools chose a cross-age book to be read by learners during story-time or at assembly once a week, making reading central to what happened in the school
5. Creating feelings of worth upon which change in behaviour can be developed is essential.
6. Building trust and identifying school problems without placing blame on anyone is a good starting point for better-functioning schools. Quick wins can eliminate some of the factors that have become normal in our schools, such as poor infrastructure, lack of basic resources etc. Having strong support from and a partnership with a district official makes schools feel they 'are seen' and are worthwhile.

TRUST and SUPPORT creates feelings of belonging and wanting to do better. QUICK WINS are the starting point for this.

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SECTION 2:

SCHOOLS & DISTRICTS

MINI-LESSON 12

Learning from a rapid assessment of provincial education operations **- Godwin Khosa**

Between 60 and 150 of the NECT staff have been working alongside education officials from various levels of the system, that is, from school through to the circuits, districts, provinces and the national level.

These interfaces have taken place in the realms of policy, programming and implementation, and most involved working towards making the bureaucracy more efficient. This mini-lesson discusses the observations made in an assessment of three provincial education systems in 2022.

BUREAUCRACY: AN AUTOPILOT MODE THAT SHELTERS MEDIOCRITY

As most improvement initiatives do, they are cautious not to unsettle the bureaucracy as it has been conceived and practiced for centuries. This could be the reason many initiatives fail to achieve rapid and sustainable impacts. This impression was established in the case of the rapid review of the provincial system carried out by the NECT in three provinces[1].

Overall, the assessment concluded that the quality of visioning and planning varies starkly among provincial systems. Where visioning and planning are

1 Note that the assessment focused on one provincial district system which was compared to two others.

weak, education systems simply focus on maintaining less meaningful bureaucratic processes. They simply replay annual operations in the same way for decades, irrespective of whether they have an effect on educational outcomes and outputs.

MISCONSTRUED NOTION OF QUALITY EDUCATION: CENTRIFUGAL FORCE IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The second broad and resounding observation from the assessment was that the notion of a good education is misconstrued by society. Political leadership, the public, academics and officials presented a warped perception of what good education is.

The National Senior Certificate (NSC) was perceived as the measure of good quality education and as a result, most material and non-material resources from households and government are disproportionally allocated to the senior grades. The NSC as a measure of performance is also misunderstood, and the over-publicised pass rates hide many important elements of education.

For example, there was a wide public outcry that Limpopo's NSC performance declined significantly in 2021. This misunderstanding was based on the national NSC league table, which is based on the percentage of passes. Further reasons for this misinterpretation are outlined below, regarding Limpopo as an example.

A. The 2021 decline was calculated against the 2020 pass rate, which was much higher because a comparatively lower number of students sat for the NSC examinations in that year. The year 2021 saw 26 406 students (33,6%) more learners sitting for the exams than in 2020.

B. That the nominal number of NSC and Mathematics participants was higher and that more learners passed Mathematics in 2021 were factors not taken into consideration.

C. The increase in the number of bachelor degree entry requirement passes in 2021 was also overlooked.

The skewed understanding of what good quality education is leads to provincial strategy and efforts being misaligned with system needs.

As was the case in Limpopo, the provincial department mounted extensive accountability sessions that increased pressure on high schools with the aim of increasing the pass rate and moving Limpopo from the last position in the provincial league tables. This process moved took the focus away from sound planning and execution and moved it to accountability.

OPPORTUNITY IN EDUCATIONALLY MEANINGFUL STRATEGIC PLANS

With respect to the provincial education system, the assessment observed that weak strategic planning at the provincial level dissipates focus at all the levels of the system (schools, circuits, districts and the provincial level itself), undermines effective resource allocation and misses the opportunity to define and focus operational energies on a few goals.

Strategic planning and the resultant plans differ starkly between provinces. While plans are expected to include adequate critical background information, one of the three provincial plans reviewed was found to fall short of the expected public service planning standards.

The plan with gaps appeared to be built on inadequate educational understanding and theorisation and presented an unclear education improvement logic. The strategic plans that were found to be coherent and comprehensive were crafted to respond to national and international evaluation reports and education theory. The better-quality plans were also found to be better aligned with operational planning and reporting at the provincial level. Arguably, good quality strategic and operational plans would form a good basis on which to start sound and sustainable improvement in provincial education systems.

As suggested above, planning in the provincial education system is biased towards the NSC and towards school functionality in general. Generally, the focus of the plans leans more towards the senior grades at the expense of the lower grades, primary schools and curriculum delivery. While there was some focus on the improvement of primary schooling, this focus was still insufficient in two of the three provincial systems; however, even in the province where there was a focus, this could be more deliberate, better structured and monitored.

It was a common observation among the three provinces that took part in the assessment that planning focuses less on the upstream, long-term intervention aspects such as deep improvement of the quality of teaching, inculcating a desirable public service ethos and recruitment strategies. A sense of short-termism and a greater focus on downstream indicators could be discerned in all the strategic plans.

DISTRICT STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES

The assessment intimated that the wide variations in district-level structures and planning approaches among the 75 districts explain the differences in the districts' performance and the effects on school performance.

The differences in provincial-level district support systems were found to determine how well districts plan and perform. Effectively, where the provincial-level districts support is weaker, district directors become pathfinders instead of managers. Some provinces portrayed significant in-province differences. Other observations that can be considered in improving district effectiveness are as follows:

1. The biographies of the district directors presented an interesting profile which can be mined further and used to drive talent management. Overall, the demographics of officials in the 10 districts that were assessed show that the districts have experienced officials in district director positions. Most of them had been in the system for up to 30 years and had been in the district director position for over 10 years. A profiling of age, skills mix, training disciplines and educational perspectives could be usefully brought into human resources planning processes to ensure that a desirable 'district capabilities mix'.

2. The assessment observed that some district systems could not readily provide expected standard information relating to planning, operations and monitoring. This state of affairs suggests some level of dysfunctionality in districts and could be indicative of the unavailability of critical plans or a non-response ethos.

   The effectiveness of individual district directors and/or that of the provincial-level district coordination system appeared to explain the efficiency of the district in this regard. It appears, therefore, that attention should be paid to both strengthening the institutional support to districts and the choice of district directors.

3. As introduced above, the configurations of the district functions across the three provinces are different. In the district plans, different improvement levers and configurations could be discerned across the districts. The district strategic change levers could not be easily linked to the identified district goals and change processes. These observations suggest weak change theorisation within districts and weak alignment of change theories across the districts.

   Without a common set of change levers to drive education improvement and with such disconnections, districts individually do the best they can. This may be part of the reason for the variability in performance across districts and from year to year.

4. Another concern in this regard is that the focus of the district plans (and the planning levers and resourcing) could not be related to the provincial-level imperatives. This was more prevalent where the provincial-level strategic and operational planning was not strong.

5. The assessment argued that districts across the country should have a sub-set of common improvement levers or focus areas, which could be termed 'Anchor Planning Levers' (APLs). Let's say that half of the improvement levers should be the same in all the districts. These could include levers such as reading improvement, numeracy and school functionality.

   The APLs could be further broken down into sub-levers and monitoring indicators. APLs could create minimum standards for planning, resourcing and monitoring in districts across the country and create a common basis on which the district system could prepare and share relevant operational tools and insights about district improvement. APLs could be cascaded to school level to ensure that schools, too, focus on common improvement levers.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. A consolidation of visioning and plans based on sound educational evidence, policy and theory carry the potential of building and dovetailing the required energies for improving the quality of education in provinces.

   This consolidation could provide a good basis for creating common targets, defining clear improvement paths and eradicating siloed objectives. Heads of departments should drive the development and institutionalisation of these visions and plans. Much stronger planning and monitoring units will be critical to achieve this imperative.

2. More structured district operational planning frameworks are required to lift the operational standards across all the districts and to weed out in-province district differences in planning, budgeting, implementation and resourcing.

   Consistent school performance should be guaranteed through district systems rather than through the dynamism of individual district directors.

MINI-LESSON 13

School-level Bottlenecks - **Dhianaraj Chetty, Luisa Roscani and Desi Magwiro**

Since its inception, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) has worked on developing an evidence base of school level dynamics including curriculum delivery and management, teacher professionalisation, leadership and management, learner welfare and community engagement. From 2015 onwards, data collection began more systematically in large numbers of schools with a more in-depth focus on the impact of curriculum management on teaching and learning. Many school improvement initiatives focus strongly on collecting and analysing learner performance data and downplay the analysis of data on school and classroom operations, which are early upstream processes. Essentially, by the time learner assessment is collected, much would have gone wrong at the level of school, classroom and teaching processes.

This mini-lesson reflects on the importance of using monitoring data to guide school improvement. The data referred to here is from provinces and districts that are supported by the NECT's teacher professionalisation programmes. The mini-lesson will highlight the school and classroom level dynamics at work in curriculum delivery and of the lessons learnt from implementation monitoring over the past 10 years. Analysing what is taught and learnt in our typical classrooms and identifying the learning 'bottlenecks' is a complex issue. However, doing this is essential to the theory of change underpinning the school and district improvement model. The bottlenecks can take several forms but can be

defined as the teaching and learning practices in many schools that limit or undermine effective curriculum delivery and achievement of learning outcomes in the classroom context.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE RIGOROUS, VERIFIABLE EVIDENCE AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL?

From 2015 onwards, implementation monitoring in the NECT classrooms took place in a rapidly changing environment as structured pedagogy and learning programmes were being developed and disseminated at scale by the NECT, in collaboration with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the provincial departments of education (PEDs). These innovations were based on recent international and local evidence on the efficacy of structured pedagogy in early grade language teaching programmes. Gauteng's Primary Language and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS) and the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS) had both used lesson plans and structured pedagogy and showed promising improvements (Fleisch, 2018). The purpose of implementation monitoring was threefold: a) to give feedback to implementing teams on the quality and fidelity of programme delivery; b) to quality assure training; and c) to provide the NECT executive and partners (including funders) with up-to-date information on progress.

KEY POINTS OF LEARNING

Curriculum coverage is a useful proxy for what is taught in classrooms and needs to be monitored at school level regularly and effectively. The NECT's approach to implementation monitoring included the use of tools to measure curriculum coverage as one means of understanding what is taught in a typical classroom. This decision is in line with the DBE's Action Plan to 2024 in which goal 18 states: 'Ensure that learners cover all the topics and skills areas that they should cover within their current school year. (DBE, 2020, vii).

Some provinces and professional bodies, for example, the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysers Unie (SAOU) have introduced their own tailor-made tools for curriculum coverage monitoring (SAOU, n.d.). These tools have value in the absence of accessible and reliable data on what is taught and learnt in Grades R - 11 since the discontinuation of the Annual National Assessments (ANA) in 2014. Whilst newer data will be available through the revamped Systemic Evaluation process, these assessments although based on smaller samples, will nevertheless shed more light on classroom dynamics. Later this year (2023), there will be the Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS) which will be assessing African languages from Grades 1 - 5.

Collecting, analysing and using data at school level. Much of what goes on in a typical South African classroom is still not very well documented or analysed and what data there is not used either internally or externally. There are many reasons for this, as the NECT has experienced over the past 10 years in its programmatic work, including:

1. The time required to collect data is onerous for teachers who are working under pressure.
2. Teachers bear the burden of data collection for compliance purposes.
3. There is an absence of routines through which data is collected for use in curriculum planning and management.
4. Classroom observation is time consuming and complex.
5. There is professional resistance to supervision.
6. Subject advisors may lack the skills, tools or time to collect and analyse relevant data at class or school level.
7. There is pressure to focus on Grade 12, where accountability is higher.

Learning outcomes are inconsistent with self-reported data on curriculum completion. Survey data invariably report that teachers believe they have covered the curriculum adequately (NECT, 2021). The NECT's approach has always sought to start from the vantage of point of teachers' self-reported data on levels of curriculum coverage; however, this process has not proved reliable. Curriculum trackers, implemented as part of structured learning programmes to support teachers and heads of department with pacing and remediation, have also not delivered the expected results due to inconsistent use (NECT, 2016).

Critics of using curriculum coverage measures and structured curricula rely on the default defence of protecting teacher autonomy and the need for more pedagogical skills (Bertram, Mthiyane, & Naidoo, 2021). These beliefs borrow heavily on a sociology of the public sector which interprets the quest for performance as a set of power relations driven by indicators, targets and evaluations ('performativity') – to the detriment of teachers (Ball, 2010). In other words, accountability for delivering the curriculum effectively, a key weakness in underperforming schools, is subsumed by the need to protect the professional identity of teachers.

There is undoubtedly a tension between pacing, pitch and sequencing in curriculum management, hence the design of structured pedagogy, the intention of which is to support more effective curriculum delivery and coverage. However, despite the availability of structured support (through lesson plans, curriculum trackers and/or in-school support), data on work covered in lower performing schools on a large scale clearly illustrates a) patterns of low coverage; b) 'cherry picking' of content areas; c) neglect of higher order skills; and d) poor learning outcomes. The data below concerning English First Additional Language (EFAL) and Mathematics outcomes underlines the points above.

Example of Curriculum Coverage Data for in Mathematics and EFAL in Grade 3

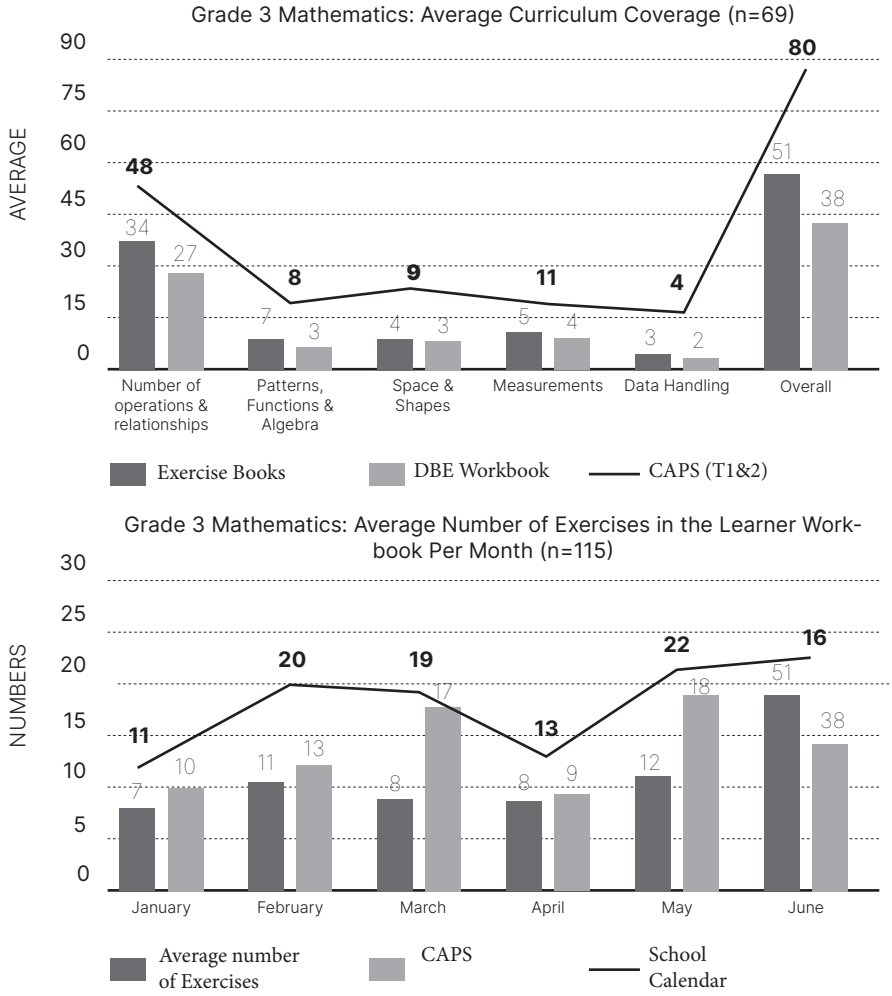

Figure 13.1: Example of curriculum coverage data for in Mathematics and EFAL in Grade 3. Source: KZN baseline data, NECT, 2018 for this and all subsequent figures

NOTES:

Figure 13.1: Example of curriculum coverage data for in Mathematics and EFAL in Grade 3. Source: KZN baseline data, NECT, 2018 for this and all subsequent figures.

a. Gr3 had covered 63,75% of the curriculum by the end of Term2

b. Space & Shapes andMeasurement had received the least attention with both below 50% coverage.

c. March and June have the least number of exercises as these normally assesment months.

d. CAPS requires a minimum of 80 writtern exercises for terms 1& 2 and there are 101 days to write.

e. Learners wrote on average on 48 days.

Concerns about managing 'depth and breadth' in delivering the curriculum resonate strongly with teachers and in the research literature. However, it is difficult to explain the root cause of the patterns: Are teachers resisting pressure to 'chase' curriculum coverage targets?

Is it that teachers are less confident about teaching higher order skills? Are there content areas in which they haven't been sufficiently trained? Or is it a case of managing classes of widely varying ability, meaning that teaching to the middle is the only realistic coping strategy?

In reality, the time available for curriculum coverage is 25% less than the notional time in a typical school term calendar. The pacing of curriculum delivery must be understood against a realistic assessment of the time available for curriculum coverage.

The diagram in Figure 13.2 is an example from 2018 (pre-COVID) and shows the notional time available (43 weeks) against the number of days per term for teaching Mathematics and EFAL as per Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS).

When assessment periods and other activities are factored in, the time available is effectively reduced to 32 weeks – a loss of 11 weeks (25,5%). In a nutshell, the curriculum design does not match the reality of timetabling, and this is a significant bottleneck.

Time Available for Curriculum Coverage

School Calendar According to the DBE - 2018*					
Grade 4	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Total
	11 weeks	11 weeks	11 weeks	10 weeks	43 weeks
	50 days	51 days	51 days	47 days	

* Expected teaching time per term, as prescribed by the DBE.

Tracker for 2018**					
Grade 4	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Total
	10 weeks	8/9 weeks	8/9 weeks	6/8 weeks	34 weeks
Maths	50 days	45 days	45 days	30 days	
EFAL	50 days	40 days	50 days	40 days	

** NECT Trackers are a guide to teaching for the term in order to cover the curriculum as per CAPS norm.

Actual for 2018#					
Grade 4	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Total
	8	8	9	7	32
	41	41	42	34	

Loss of teaching time owing to school activities.

Table 13.1: Time available for curriculum coverage (as extracted from NECT Presentation)

Curriculum trackers aim to protect and maximise the use of precious teaching time against the backdrop of numerous 'time-eating' activities. Assessment periods typically see a precipitous decline in the amount of work completed by learners (see below). Likewise, assessment often means learners in lower grades are forced to vacate their classrooms because of space constraints when exams are conducted. To emphasise the point, this means a forced loss of teaching time for the lower grades. The lesson here is about the priority of strengthening the instructional core – teaching must start on day 1 and should continue until the end of the term. Furthermore, there is a reasonable expectation that learners must show evidence of work completed daily (time on task) – especially in Mathematics and Language.

The graphs below illustrate the disparity between the number of teaching days and the evidence of work completed (based on dates) in learners' workbooks. At school level, this is yet another bottleneck which has to be managed by heads of departments as part of their supervision and support roles.

Time on Task and Work Completed in Grade 3 Mathematics

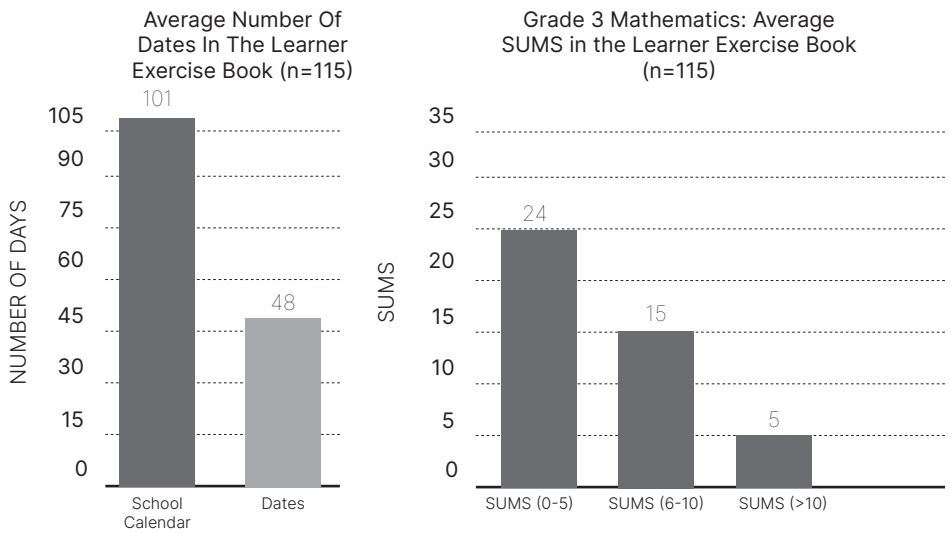

Figure 13.3: Time on task and work completed in Grade 3 Mathematics

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Figure 13.3: Time on task and work completed in Grade 3 Mathematics (Grade 3 Mathematics: Time on Task & Quality)

As per the calendar, the actual teaching dates totals to 101 days (T1&2) yet only an average 48 dates of writing. CAPS requires a minimum of 80 exercises for Term 1&2 which means at least 80 dates.

Conceptual understanding and procedural fluency in Mathematics requires daily practice of mathematical concepts and skills. This means learners should be writing more.

An average of 24 exercises displayed 0-5 sums.

The majority of work is done at this level which is lower order. According to CAPS, Level-One thinking consists of the following skills:

a. Recalling
b. Identifying
c. Estimating and rounding
d. Using appropriate facts and vocabulary

Exercises that fall in the SUM >10 category, show a higher volume of working out (practice), which is an essential component in that allows for deliberate practice which leads to mastering skills and improving understanding in mathematics. At most it will also require reasoning skills.

Time on task can be further understood through the graphs below, which analyse aggregate curriculum coverage and the content areas which are taught or not taught. This indicator can be tracked through the usage of the DBE workbook, a ubiquitous resource in most schools and which has multiple uses, including for revision, homework and practicing skills taught in class. Workbooks are structured around the content required by CAPS and should therefore provide evidence of work completed alongside the evidence from learner's own exercise books. The graphs on Figure 13.4 show clearly that the average number of exercises completed in the learner workbooks is less than 50% of the expected output, and the quantity of writing and comprehension is the lowest among the skills evaluated. When reviewing learner work completed in two sources (exercise books and DBE workbooks), more work is being done in language use, but the writing output remains worryingly low.

These patterns have been confirmed by the NECT across a number of provincial studies and reflect a discrepancy between lower and higher order skills, with writing and comprehension being the more demanding. A cynical view is that teachers do not encourage more written work because more written work increases the volume of marking to be done. The simple lesson is that without increased and regular practice in the early grades, these skills will not develop at the necessary pace.

This point about the need to increase time on task is emphasized by the graph below, which shows the number of dates on which work is completed by learners against the time available in the timetable, per month. On average, evidence of work is available on just under 30% of the days in the period January to June. It does beg the question of what are learners doing on the other days? It also highlights that language and mathematics are not being taught and practiced every day – as is required for fluency in the early years.

Number of Exercises Completed in EFAL in Grade 3

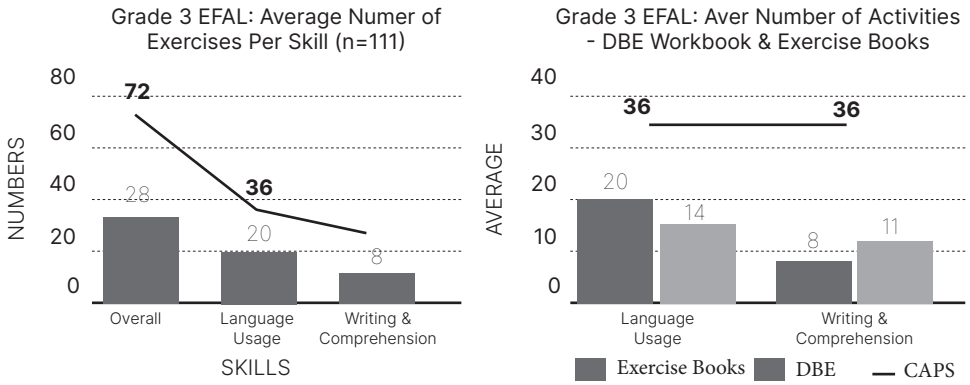

Figure 13.4: Number of exercises completed in EFAL in Grade 3

NOTES:

Figure 13.4: Number of exercises completed in EFAL in Grade 3 (Grade 3 EFAL: Overall Exercises)

a. The norm for all skills is 72, being 36 for each set of skills.

b. Overrall coverage of 28 shows a deficit of 44 exercises in learner exercise books.

c. Writing and comprehension are the more complex of the skills.

d. More exercises completed for language use than for writing and comprehension in both learner exercise books and DBE workbooks.

Time on Task in EFAL in Grade 3

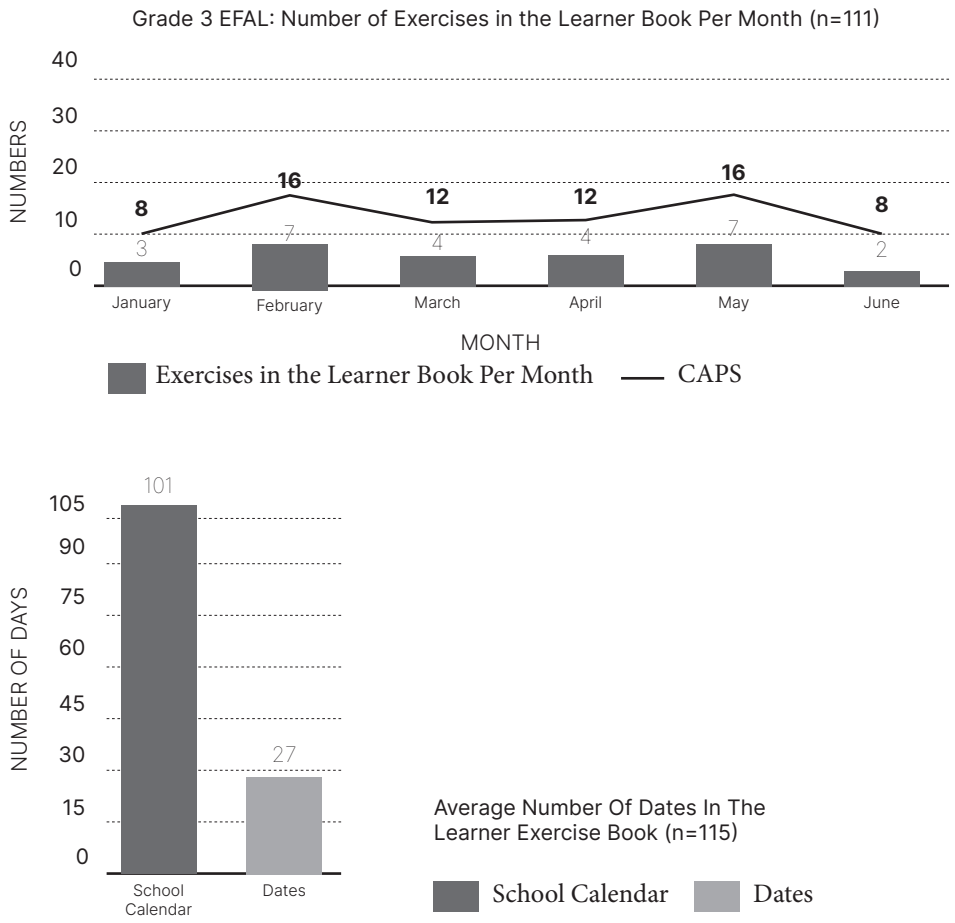

Figure 13.5: Time on task in EFAL in Grade 3

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Figure 13.4: Number of exercises completed in EFAL in Grade 3 (Grade 3 EFAL: Time on Task)

a. There is a deficit in the exercises completed when compared to those expected for all months.

b. The biggest gaps are in February and May where writtern work is less than 50%.

c. An average of 27 dates of written work in the exercise books.

Critics of the approach to quantifying work completed by learners have argued for an equal focus on the quality of work being done. The NECT responded to that concern and developed tools to monitor quantity and quality, all of which were made available freely to provincial and district officials. The tools can easily be adapted by departmental heads for use at school. For example, in the early grades, it is possible to analyse whether and when a learner can write a full sentence or paragraph. In numeracy, the tool can establish when learners are proficient in 2- or 3-digit division. The excerpts on table 13.2 illustrate this type of quality assurance practice.

Grade 3 EFAL Quality of Learner Exercises (excerpt from NECT data collection tool)

12.7 Recognises and uses some suffixes
(e.g. -es, -ies, -ly, -ing, -ed). Integrate with Listening and Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Language Use
12.8 Recognises some differences between sound/spelling relationships in home and additional language
(e.g. 'cat' and 'icici'). Integrate with Listening and Speaking and Reading.
12.9 Distinguishes between different vowel sounds aurally
(e.g. 'bird' and 'bed'; 'ship' and 'sheep'). Integrate with Listening and Speaking and Reading.
12.10 Distinguishes between long and short vowel sounds orally
as in 'boot' and 'book', 'fool' and 'full', 'kite' and 'kit'. Integrate with Listening and Speaking and Reading.
12.11 Recognises known rhyming words
(e.g. fly, sky, dry, cry, try.
12.12 Recognises the first sound (onset) and the last syllable (rime) in more complex patterns
(e.g. dr-eam, cr-eam, scr-eam, str-eam)

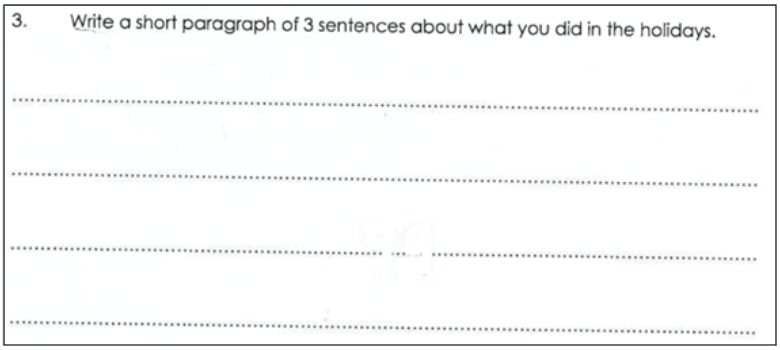
Table 13.1: Grade 3 EFAL Quality of Learner Exercises (excerpt from NECT data collection tool)

11.3 Total number of Numbers, Operations & Relationships exercises completed			
TOPICS	**RANGE**		
	YES	**PARTIAL**	**NO**
11.3.1 Count Objects	500-800	200-400	50
11.3.2 Count forward and backwards	500-800	200-400	100
11.3.3 Number symbols and number names	500-800	200-400	100 (symbols) and 50 (names)
11.3.4 Describe, compare, and order numbers	Using most / least - 800	100	50
11.3.5 Place value	Of 3 digits (800)	2 digits (75) to 3 digits (100)	2 digits (50)
	Multiples of ones,10 and 100	Multiples of ones,10	Multiples of ones
	Identify and state value of each digit (3 digits) - 800	Identify and state value of each digit (3 digits) - 200	Identify and state value of each digit (3 digits) - 100
	Round off in tens		
11.3.6 Problem solving techniques	Use concrete apparatus.		
	pictures to draw story sum.		
	building up and breaking down numbers.	Breaking down	
	doubling and halving;	doubling	
	number line to solve problems and explain solutions to problems		
11.3.1 Addition and subtraction	Solve word problems in context and explains solutions up to 800		
	Change	change	change

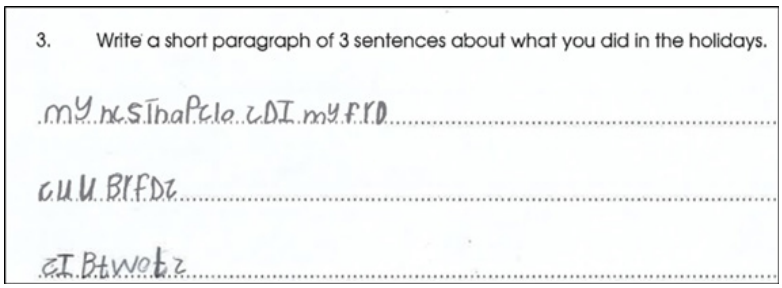
Table 13.2: Grade 3 Mathematics Quality of Learner Exercises (excerpt from NECT data collection tool)

Examples are given below of Grade 3 writing responses in Quintile 1 - 3 schools to illustrate assessment outcomes at Grade 3 level in simple tasks.

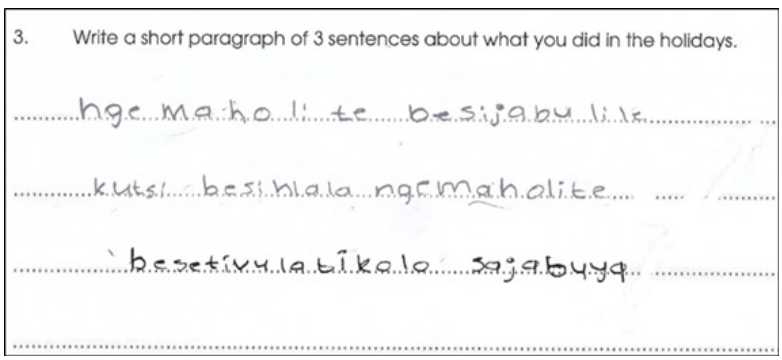
Some learners were not able to attempt the task at all.


3. Write a short paragraph of 3 sentences about what you did in the holidays.

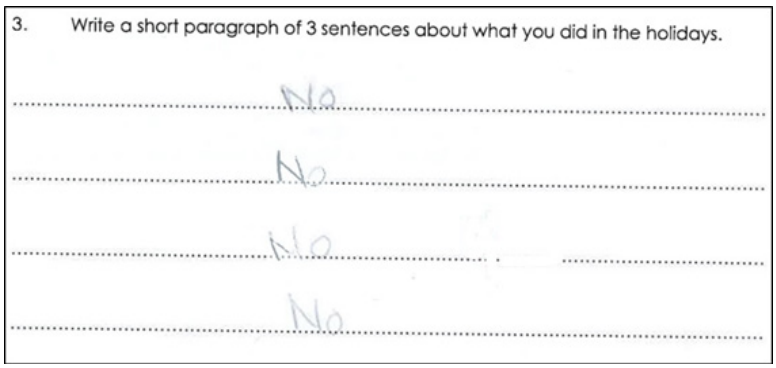
Other learners could not express themselves in English and wrote in unintelligible language


3. Write a short paragraph of 3 sentences about what you did in the holidays.

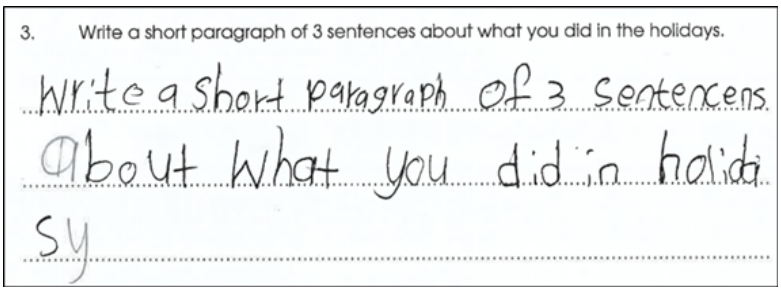
Others understood the task but responded in their home language.


3. Write a short paragraph of 3 sentences about what you did in the holidays.

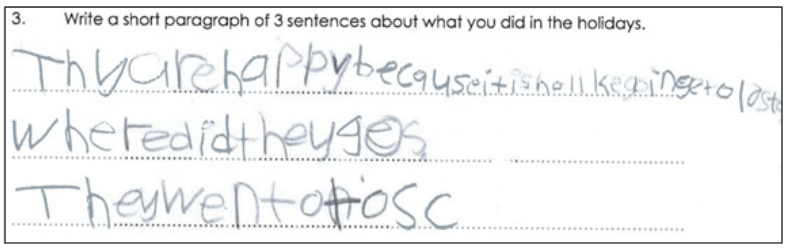
Some learners did not understand the question.



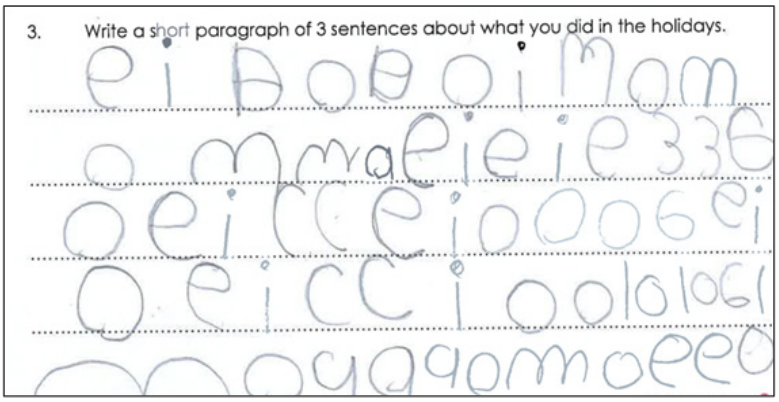
Some learners copied the question or other writing in the question paper.



Some learners could not space words.



Some learners had not yet mastered letter formation.

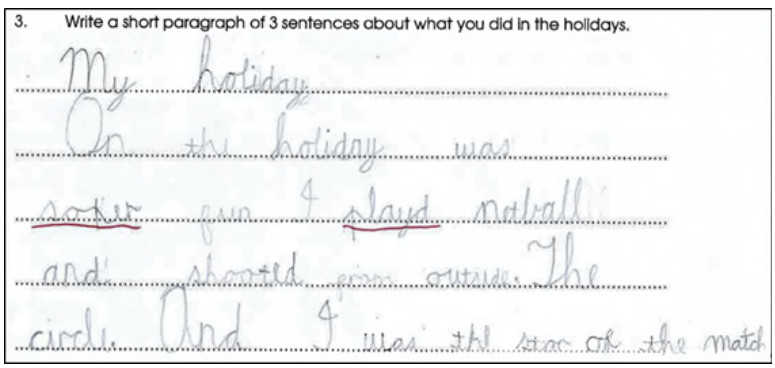


Furthermore, the contrast between the above outcomes and those recorded in Quintile 4 - 5 schools is instructive of the gap between poorer and wealthier schools, or schools where English is used as a first language. The examples below and the comments illustrate the contrasting quality of language (a key indicator) produced in Quintile 4 - 5 schools.

A. There is evidence that joint script has been taught (cursive). This is recommended as it improves the speed of writing.

B. There is also evidence of the use of invented spelling, e.g. the word beach is spelt 'bich'. This is encouraged as the child can communicate and can be corrected after marking.

C. This is an emergent writer as there are still some aspects of writing, such as spacing of words and punctuation that the child still needs to work on.



D. This learner is aware that a writing piece should have a heading.

E. The learner also shows knowledge of the structure of a paragraph. Sentences do not need to start at the beginning of the line.

F. The learner shows understanding of the task by staying on topic and sticks to the stipulated number of sentences.

G. The learner uses the conjunction 'and' to correctly form a more complex sentence.

H. The learner shows knowledge of punctuation conventions.

It is expected that learners are explicitly taught how to write creatively, using the writing process (DBE, 2021). This involves the teacher modelling the task for learners first. However, creative writing remains the most complex of the language skills, as there is an expectation for learners who are still acquiring an additional language to produce the language through writing. It requires a synthesis of their vocabulary, language structures and conventions, imagination as well as mastery of letter formation and word spacing.

The faster the learners can acquire and manipulate the language (through reading, listening and speaking), the faster they will be able to reproduce it satisfactorily.

Prioritise teaching and assessment of higher order skills. The NECT's analysis is that 'cherry picking' is a widespread practice in teaching – usually resulting in an overemphasis on lower order skills and a consequent neglect of more demanding content and skills. This practice runs counter to the design of CAPS and structured pedagogy, which is sequenced to enable scaffolding and skill development.

In early grade Language teaching, an overemphasis on language structures and conventions – at the expense of time spent on higher order skills like reading comprehension – is a familiar pattern. In Mathematics, shape and space, data handling and measurement are often minimised or neglected. These skills are more demanding to teach than number operations, the lowest level skill.

There is a valid argument that highly skilled teachers, who don't need structured pedagogy, must have the freedom to choose which topics to deliver when and to pace their teaching based on their professional assessment of where learners are and how to cover the prescribed content in the time available. Teachers working with classes of widely differing abilities may also argue that covering higher order skills cuts into the time they need to remediate with learners who are

struggling. Decisions on these choices are made at school and classroom level by teachers and their departmental heads. The lesson here is about breaking through school level bottlenecks to extend the horizons of what learners can achieve, not just teaching to the lowest common denominator.

Teachers and Department Heads must monitor reading and numeracy outcomes at school level regularly to achieve better reading outcomes. In early grade Language teaching, it is generally accepted that learners should be proficient in phonics by the end of Grade 2 and be able to read fluently by Grade 3. Similarly, in early grade Mathematics, number operations is a fundamental skill required for more complex tasks and should ideally be mastered by the end of Grade 3[1].

The Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP) has encouraged the use of teacher administered reading assessments such as the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) at school level as a diagnostic tool.

In Kenya's TUSOME programme, a curriculum manager routinely visits classes and evaluates reading outcomes, which are reported at district level (Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE), 2023). Importantly, these are not considered high stakes evaluations.

Implementation experience is that it is difficult to get teachers to use the EGRA consistently, especially with large classes and without a system in place to collect and use the data effectively. Until recently, the system had no reliable benchmarks teachers could use but that gap has now been resolved (Khulisa Management Services, 2020).

Do teachers have the time to use EGRA? Is it considered an 'add on' to their existing administrative load or a useful tool in the planning of their teaching? Despite years of being urged to adopt the practice, the possibility of finding the EGRA used correctly or consistently for diagnostic purposes in most schools is still remote.

CONCLUSION

Overcoming school level bottlenecks will need a mix of external pressure coupled with internal accountability. Relying on the professional judgement of teachers is undoubtedly the preferred alternative but poor practice needs a stimulus to change. This paper has tried to illustrate the extent to which the practices persist and the ways in which they undermine better teaching and

1 In the Foundation Phase (Gr R-3), the time weighting allocated to number operations content area is between 65 – 58%. 'In Grade R - 3, it is important that the area of Numbers, Operations and Relationships is the main focus of Mathematics. Learners need to exit the Foundation Phase with a secure number sense and operational fluency. The aim is for learners to be competent and confident with numbers and calculations. (DBE, 2012, 10)

learning outcomes. Conventional wisdom has it that Department Heads, with their mandate to support and manage curriculum effectively, are best placed to make the necessary changes in behaviour and practice.

Whilst the sector continues to wrestle with poor learning outcomes based on national and international assessments, there is an urgent need to understand and decisively act on bottlenecks at school level that are some of the root causes. Teachers must be part of the solution, with a balance of accountability and support that leads to better performance.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. Curriculum coverage is a useful proxy for what is taught in classrooms and needs to be monitored at school level regularly and effectively.
2. Collecting, analysing and using data at school level is important to reveal gaps.
3. Learning outcomes are inconsistent with self-reported data on curriculum completion.
4. In reality, the time available for curriculum coverage is 25% less than the notional time in a typical school term calendar.
5. Prioritise teaching and assessment of higher order skills.
6. Teachers and Department Heads must monitor reading and numeracy outcomes at school level regularly to achieve better reading outcomes.

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MINI-LESSON 14

District-level bottlenecks - **Dhianaraj Chetty**

This mini-lesson focuses on the planning, management and delivery of education at the district level in South Africa. It examines implementation evidence of work done through provincial departments of education (PEDs) and education districts by the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) over the past 10 years.

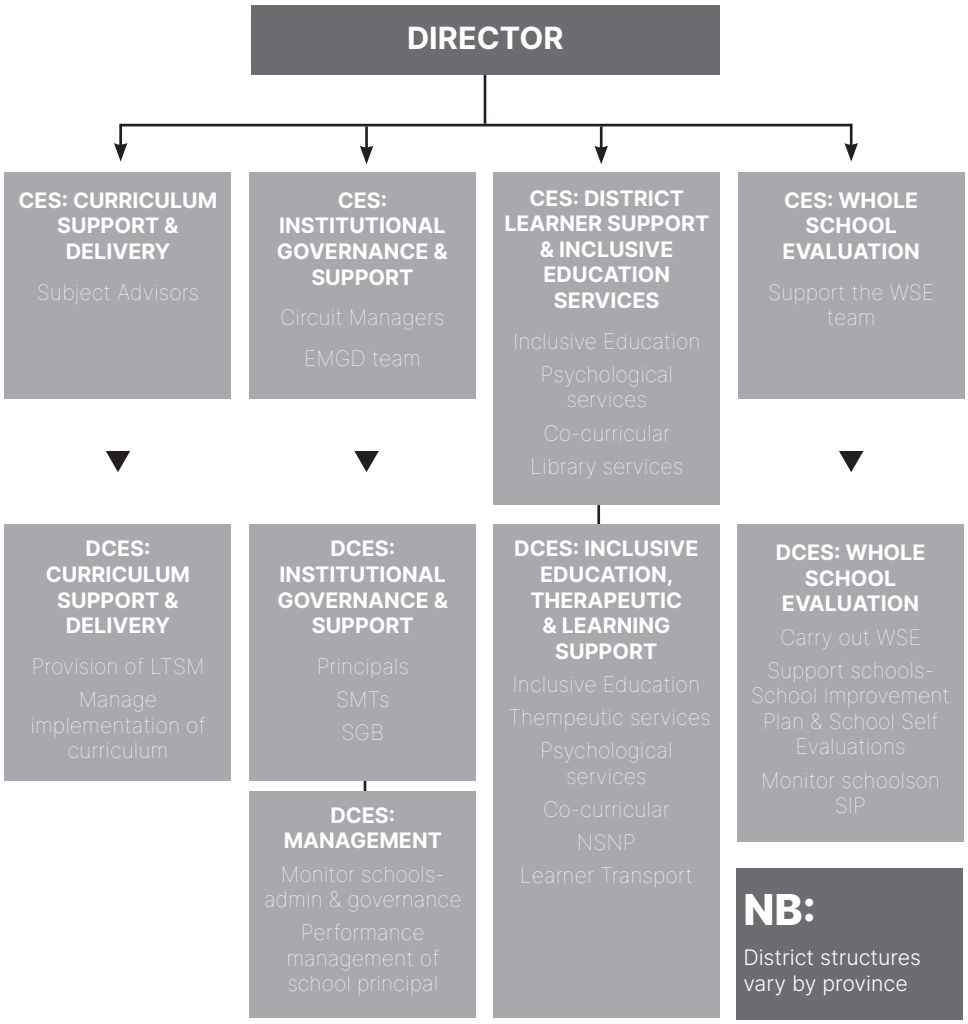
Specifically, it identifies the points at which the system's built-in bottlenecks need to be addressed in order to improve the functionality and performance of education districts. Lastly, it posits some emerging lessons from the initial phase of work on the Integrated District Development Programme (IDIP), which is being implemented by NECT in collaboration with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and PEDs.

THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONING OF EDUCATION DISTRICTS

Education in South Africa is delivered through a system of 75 districts, which are responsible for education management and programme delivery. The system is guided by the Policy on the Organisation Roles and Responsibilities of Education Districts (DBE, 2013) and subsequent amendments. The DBE has overall responsibility for coordination and support at national level, in collaboration with provinces. Districts are headed by a district director and a management team who have key functions in terms of curriculum management, institutional support and governance, finance and human resource management, and other

services[1]. The diagram in Figure 14.1 outlines the ideal type of structure and functions of a district education team based on the latest proposed amendments to the district policy (DBE, 2022). In 2016, the normative ratios between schools, circuits and districts were also expressed in policy (DBE, 2016).

No. 46879: Government Gazette, 9 September 2022



Govt Gazette 2nd December 2016 section 34 & 35 on Circuit and district size norms:

34.1 An education circuit office must be responsible for no less than 25 and no more than 30 schools; and

34.2 An education district must comprise no less than 10 and no more than 15 education circuits

35. No district should have fewer than 250 schools or more than 400 schools.

Figure 14.1: Structure and functions of a district education team - Source: DBE, 2016; 2022.

1 The organisation of district offices differs across provinces, based on the principles of affordability and context. The ideal type is reflected in the 2018 amendment to the education districts policy (see DBE, 2018).

After a decade of implementation, the system is maturing but districts are at varying points in their development and differ widely in their operational contexts, sizes, levels of functionality, capabilities and performance.

Chapter 9 of the National Development Plan (NDP), a cornerstone of NECT's founding mandate, highlighted the importance of the district level in the education system (NPC, 2012, 10).

The debate on the importance of districts and the need to transform their role was already active in the late 1990s, soon after the establishment of the post-apartheid education administration (Roberts, n.d.). At that time, although districts were not uniformly defined or well developed, the emphasis was on driving change in school improvement from the district level. A range of school improvement initiatives proliferated in response to this impulse (Sayed, Kanjee & Nkomo, 2013).

The NECT's initial approach was designed to drive school improvement in a selected group of provinces and districts by testing innovations in Fresh Start Schools (FSS)[2]. Since then, district-level development and support over 10 years has included intensive capacity building for subject advisors, department heads and teachers that includes professional development, district management and planning through the Foundations of Performance (FOP) Programme, providing districts with monitoring and evaluation (M&E) support and capacity building, and establishing stakeholder forums in the form of district support committees (DSCs).

In late 2022, spurred by a strategic review and pressure to strengthen its systemic impact, the NECT began reviewing the structure and functions of district offices. Government had also developed and promoted a new district development model aimed at improving planning and strengthening the impact of service delivery (see Department of Cooperative Governance, 2020).

As the new school year was imminent, a pilot approach was adopted to examine planning and preparations for 2023. This mini-lesson reflects on some of the data from a small sample of pilot districts, selected to illustrate critical differences in structure, scale and factors affecting functionality[3] .

A group of key informants in each district, including managers, subject advisors and circuit managers, provided most of the evidence, which was verified with documentary sources where possible.

Table 13.1 outlines the sample districts in terms of school type, scale (number of schools) and socio-economic status (quintiles).

2 See for example, https://nect.org.za/regions/eastern-cape
3 This paper relies on work done by the NECT's Monitoring Research and Feedback team.

Sample Districts in Pilot District Study

SCHOOL TYPE				SCHOOL PHASE				QUINTILE CLASSIFICATION			
	CAPRICORN SOUTH	DR KENNETH KAUNDA	OR TAMBO COASTAL		CAPRICORN SOUTH	DR KENNETH KAUNDA	OR TAMBO COASTAL		CAPRICORN SOUTH	DR KENNETH KAUNDA	OR TAMBO COASTAL
Public	438 (95%)	203 (89%)	631 (97%)	Primary	263	128	566	Q1	89 (21%)	50 (26%)	566 (87%)
Private	20	22	16	Second-ary/High	163	56	81	Q2	162 (38%)	20 (10%)	68 (11%)
Public Special	9	7	3	Com-bined	5	5	0	Q3	159 (37%)	83 (42%)	13 (2%)
Private Special	0	0	0	Interme-diate	0	7	0	Q4	5 (1%)	36 (18%)	0 (0%)
				Special	0	7	3	Q5	16 (4%)	7 (4%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL	**467**	**232**	**650**		**431**	**203**	**650**				

Table 14.1: Sample districts in Pilot District Study

The initial data gathered provides an important lens through which to understand the size, scope and functionality of districts. A normative district would include between 250-400 schools in 10-15 circuits. Each of these pilot districts was chosen because of its characteristics in terms of size (number of schools), rural/urban profile and province.

Capricorn South is heavily urban and considered close to the typical district size; Dr Kenneth Kaunda is a mix of rural and urban and smaller in terms of the number of schools. OR Tambo Coastal dwarfs the other districts based on the number of its schools, its heavily rural character and proportion of Quintile 1 schools (poorer schools).

The initiative was expanded in 2023 under the umbrella of the IDIP led by the DBE to cover all 75 districts.

EMERGING LESSONS

Education districts are still significantly variable in their size, organisational arrangements, and the contexts in which they operate, all of which may act as

bottlenecks to their functionality. For historical, financial and operational reasons, districts like OR Tambo Coastal in the Eastern Cape province exceed the normative district size by 62%.

This has implications for their ability to support schools and achieve the levels of performance expected on system-wide standardised measures.

Districts are at differing points in their evolution and capacity development.

The professional capacity of subject advisors to support schools at district level remains a critical bottleneck that has its origins long before 1994. The ratio of subject advisors to schools is prescribed in the policy for education districts but is far from reality in poorer and more rural districts.

The NECT's analysis of the ratios of subject advisors to schools in the Foundation Phase (FP) illustrates the scale of the challenge; for example, the ratio is 1: 263 in Capricorn South (Limpopo) and 1: 283 in OR Tambo Coastal (Eastern Cape).

In the Intersen Phase (IP), the ratios for Mathematics advisors are 1:132 in Capricorn South and 1:566 in OR Tambo Coastal (NECT, 2023). The ratios have shifted in some provinces with the appointment of more subject advisors, but the challenge of filling the capacity gap remains.

Analysing functions across districts is also not easy due to the variations in organisational structure, provincial context and financing.

School support is not a nice-to-have, and schools still prefer face-to-face interactions.

Districts typically have norms for school support visits conducted by subject advisors. Support is not equally spread across all schools; underperforming schools need more support and that informs the allocation of professional resources.

The flipside of this is confirmed by district responses indicating that some schools were never visited in any given year.

Furthermore, schools still consider face-to-face interactions more valuable than virtual/remote support. These dynamics are confirmed by responses from the three pilot districts in the data outlined in Figure 13.2

Subject Advisor Visiting Statistics

25.1 How often are you expected to meet with your schools?				
Vacant position	**Once a Term**	**Once a Month**	**Once a Week**	**Occasionally**
CAPRICORN SOUTH	✓			
DR KENNETH KALINDA		✓		
OR TAMBO COASTAL	✓			
25.2 How often are you actually meeting with your schools?				
CAPRICORN SOUTH				✓
DR KENNETH KAUNDA		✓		
OR TAMBO COASTAL				✓

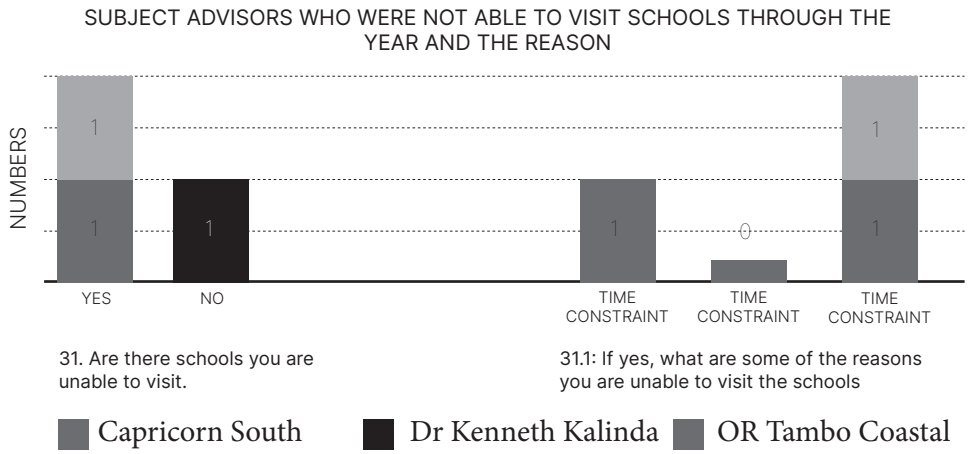


Figure 14.2: School Visits from Subject Advisors in the Pilot Districts | Source: NECT, 2023

Policy dissemination and adoption are slow and impacted by uneven capacity in the districts. Supporting 566 primary schools in a district like OR Tambo Coastal presents specific challenges when implementing new policy changes or professional development for department heads and teachers. This was evident from the district responses about mediating curriculum policy changes for the 2023 Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs).

In late 2022, changes to the existing Recovery Annual Teaching Plans (the last iteration of teaching plans aimed at recovering learning losses) had still not been finalised, but schools were expected to begin implementation by term 1 of 2023. These changes are traditionally cascaded from national, to provincial, to district and finally to school level, through the distribution of policy statements (circulars) and meditation workshops. The data illustrates that none of the trial districts had begun their mediation sessions by the end of 2022, meaning a lag in policy adoption of at least 1 term was inevitable.

Evidence based planning, programming and reporting should be at the heart of district operations. District offices are the nexus at which data of various types, including school performance, enrolment and teacher provisioning, is gathered and aggregated. At subdistrict level, circuits are expected to submit reports to district offices on a regular basis. Initial findings confirm that whilst the reports are submitted, the use of the reports in planning and programming at the district level is limited, at best. While subject advisors have been trained in developing monitoring instruments, data collection and analysis - for example, subject advisors and teachers have been trained in the use of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) - no systematic or regular monitoring of reading outcomes takes place in most districts.

Poorly resourced district offices will not fulfil their mandate to support schools. Findings from the districts paint a bleak picture of the shortages in the tools of the trade and basic resources to support professional service delivery.

The table below indicates these gaps. However, this begs the question of how much more effective district offices would be in their support of schools if adequately resourced. It remains to be seen if districts have exploited the impact of the COVID pandemic in changing workplace practices such as communication. The sample districts suggest not. All districts confirmed their preference for face-to-face training, despite the switch to online meetings and support during the pandemic.

Availability of Resources in Sample Districts

Resources	CAPRICORN SOUTH				DR KENNETH KAUNDA				OR TAMBO COASTAL			
	AVAILABLE		**SUFFICIENT**		**AVAILABLE**		**SUFFICIENT**		**AVAILABLE**		**SUFFICIENT**	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Desktop computers	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓			✓
Laptops	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓			✓
Modem/ dongle	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓			✓
3G cards	✓			✓		✓		✓		✓		✓
Printer/ Scanners	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓			✓
Wi-Fi in office	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓			✓
Office space	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	
Fleet	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓

Table 14.2: Availability of Resources in Sample Districts

Vacancies in critical posts are a bottleneck to effective programme delivery. Officials working in an acting capacity are commonplace, with implications for accountability and continuity. Again, OR Tambo Coastal showed the highest rate of vacancies overall, notably at chief education specialist (CES) level and at circuit manager level. All districts showed vacancies at subject advisor level, and there were 29 acting principals in OR Tambo Coastal. Newly appointed principals mean that more support is needed from circuit and district levels.

Vacancies in the pilot districts based on district directors' responses

Vacant position	**CAPRICORN SOUTH**	**DR KENNETH KAUNDA**	**OR TAMBO COASTAL**
CES			✓
Institutional Support		✓	✓
Auxiliary Services	✓		✓
Circuit manager			
Subject Advisor	✓	✓	✓
School principal			✓
Teachers			✓

Table 14.3: Vacancies in the pilot districts based on district directors' responses

Number of staffing vacancies in the pilot districts

District	STAFFING VACANCIES				
	CIRCUIT MANAGERS	**DEPUTY CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST (DCES)**	**SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**	**ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF**	**GENERAL WORKERS**
DR KENNETH KAUNDA	0	3	7	11	8
OR TAMBO COASTAL	0	0	29	70	198

Table 14.4: Number of staffing vacancies in the pilot districts

CONCLUSION

It is expected that once data from all 75 districts is available, it can be shared nationally and used for more regular tracking of planning, programming and performance in the short term. More importantly, the data will provide an up-to-date evidence base for development initiatives and support to those districts needing dedicated attention in the long run. It will also be possible to discern

trends/patterns across the system, both positive and negative, which should inform the next iterations of policy. In policy terms, the district system is now a decade old and at the point where its fitness for purpose is coming under increased scrutiny. Overall, the district policy framework has focused heavily on defining staffing norms – referred to as 'post provisioning' in public administration.

What is far less developed in policy is an education change theory which should underpin the policy, and which should drive the performance of a district towards improving education outcomes.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. Education districts are still significantly variable in their size, organisational arrangements, and the contexts in which they operate, all of which may act as bottlenecks to their functionality.
2. Districts are at differing points in their evolution and capacity development.
3. School support is not a nice-to-have, and schools still prefer face-to-face interactions.
4. Policy dissemination and adoption are slow and impacted by uneven capacity in the districts.
5. Evidence based planning, programming and reporting should be at the heart of district operations.
6. Poorly resourced district offices will not fulfil their mandate to support schools.
7. Vacancies in critical posts are a bottleneck to effective programme delivery.

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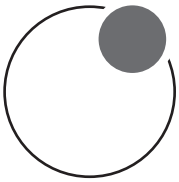

MINI-LESSON 15

District Profiling - **Deva Govender**

The confluence of three nationally significant policies introduced between 2011 and 2013 - the National Development Plan (NDP) in 2011 (National Planning Commission, 2012), the Department of Basic Education (DBE) Action Plan to 2014 (DBE, 2010) and the District Policy in 2013 (DBE, 2013) - affirmed the importance of the district office in supporting school functionality and improving the quality of learning in classrooms. The need to lift up and formalise the role of districts was one of the resolutions taken at the African National Congress's 2009 policy conference.

In 2013, the Education Collaboration Framework (ECF) for education improvement was developed from three sources, namely: (a) consultation with government and social partners regarding education improvement: (b) recommendations on education in the NDP; and (c) targets set in the DBE Action Plan to 2019. The ECF called for the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) to support government to make districts the delivery nodes for high quality school support services. To carry out this mandate and inform the programming and planning of a district development agenda, the NECT was required to first develop profiles of the districts.

This short reflection recounts the story of the profiling of eight districts across five provinces. A baseline report was produced for each district profiled and informed the selection of content, pacing and programming for district development initiatives that were implemented in the five provinces from 2015.

The profiling was done in late 2013, after the release of the Policy on District Roles, Responsibilities and Organisation.

THE RATIONALE FOR THE INITIATIVE

The reasons for district profiling were to:

A. Obtain a deep and comprehensive understanding of district dynamics, human resourcing, availability and use of tools of trade, planning, operations and processes used to support schools to continuously raise the quality of leadership and learning;

B. Test the methodology and instrumentation for relevance and reliability;

C. Make use of the information to co-design responsive initiatives to strengthen district performance.

It was resolved to seek the involvement of the District Co-ordination Branch or Chief Directorate to share and learn how best to conduct authentic district profiling.

The three sections that follow describe:

1. key observations made during district profiling;
2. recommendations regarding district profiling; and
3. a key lesson for the future.

IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS DURING DISTRICT PROFILING

District profiling was a relatively new idea and was unfamiliar to provinces and districts. Furthermore, the scale of this type of work put the district profilers on a steep learning curve, largely due to a lack of a common understanding of district organisation, roles and responsibilities and the differing formats of the existing District Improvement (operational) Plans.

The flow diagram below shows the sequence of steps used in the district profiling process, from setting up the Profiling Team to the production of a District Profile Report.

The district profiling plan was sanctioned by the DBE in 2013, and a team of four officials was nominated by the then Director General (DG) to accompany

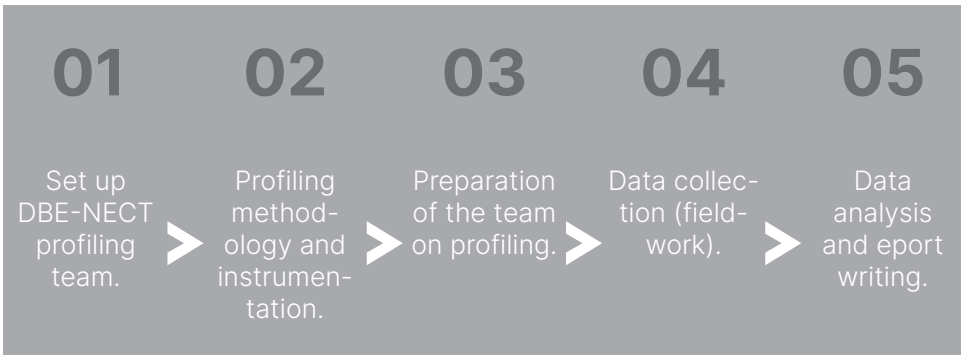

Figure 15.1: Steps in the district profiling process

the NECT team comprising four specialists. The team members were retired senior managers with over 40 years of experience in education. The DBE informed each provincial head about the purpose, process and dates of profiling in each district. The letter from the DBE to provinces made the process a legitimate one.

PROFILING METHODOLOGY AND INSTRUMENTATION

The methodology used a qualitative research approach, using a purposefully selected sample of eight districts - a decision taken with the provincial leadership. Districts were requested to identify the following participants:

1. District Director;
2. Chief Education Specialist (CES): Curriculum;
3. CES: Leadership and Management;
4. Deputy Director: Infrastructure and Finance;
5. Deputy Director: Human Resources; and
6. Three Circuit Managers.

Six interview instruments were designed to collect demographic data and evidence on priorities, strategic objectives and targets, district plans, implementation capacity, management of operations, data use for decision-making, monitoring implementation and current projects.

Questions in each instrument were revised and refined with the Profiling Team after each of the first three profiling exercises. The research methodology and the instruments produced a reliable picture of the functioning of each district as the content of the reports produced was affirmed and accepted as valid.

PREPARATION OF THE TEAM ON PROFILING

Preparation, fieldwork (data collection) and debriefing were done for each district over three days, as shown in figure 15.2.

Preparation of the team on profiling

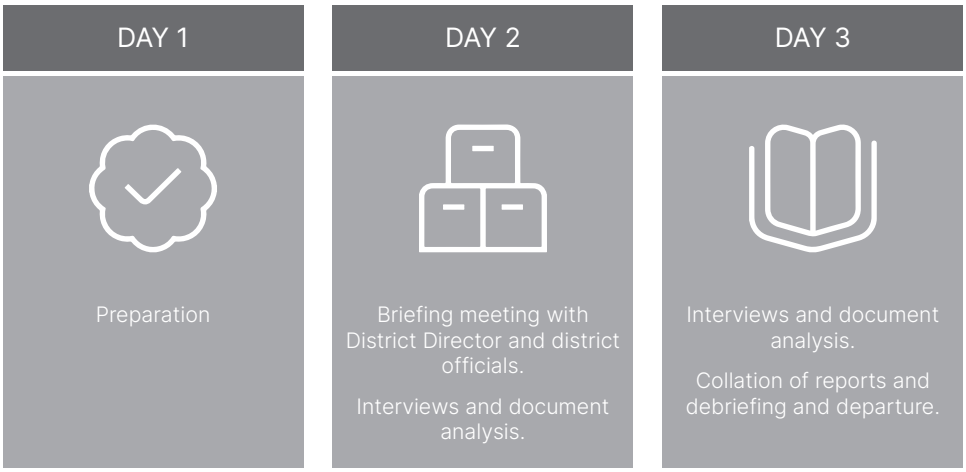

Figure 15.2: Preparation of the team on profiling

Given the political pressure to initiate a programme based on stakeholder collaboration and the urgency to roll out the programme in response to needs on the ground and expectations of funders (government and business), the profiling was planned with a tight timeframe and completed by the end of 2013 – within three months.

Preparation was not a once-off event, but was a continuous learning process. The screening, selection and induction of the Profiling Team – people with experience and expertise in education system analysis is critical.

DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND REPORT WRITING

On the scheduled day, the District Director convened a meeting of the senior managers for a briefing. The team leader from the DBE explained the background, purpose, objectives, process and ethical principles to be followed in conducting the review. Thereafter, an interview schedule was drawn up for interviews with the identified officials.

Interviews with document collection were done over two days by the DBE-NECT team. The observation is that district officials cooperated fully and were honest with their responses, often declaring that their understanding of roles and responsibilities was affirmed and deepened.

Given the tight timeframes to analyse and interpret data and also produce reports within two weeks, the first report was quality assured at least twice and thus could be used as a template for the subsequent district profile reports.

Each report had seven sections: 1) Introduction; 2) Profiling: purpose and methods; 3) District at a glance; 4) Profile of a district office and a circuit office; 5) Curriculum support; 6) Infrastructure; and 7) Human resources.

Each report was edited, presented to the district for input, revised and presented at a full district meeting. A notable observation is that the district officials engaged with the report, made corrections and additions and accepted the report as a valuable source to undertake district improvement planning with the NECT.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations on the planning, process and practice of district profiling are noted for programme designers and implementers:

1. District profiling needs to be preceded by consultations between the DBE, provinces and the partner organisation (if involved).
2. Profiling Team members must have an understanding of education policies and practices, a good grasp of education leadership and system expertise, with hands-on classroom experience – this makes training of the team less time-consuming.
3. The profiling initiative has to enjoy a legitimate mandate via a request sent from the office of the Director General provincial heads.
4. The profiling has to be grounded in sound research methods to ensure acceptance and reliability.
5. A district meeting convened should be convened by the District Director where the participants are briefed on the purpose and process of profiling, on the focus of interviews to be conducted and on documents that will be required.

6. There must be clarity of the intention and purpose of the exercise and an undertaking that inputs from provincial officials on the draft report will be seriously considered.

7. It is essential to point out that profiling is not the same as an evaluation, is not intended to be judgemental and is not conducted for the purposes of ranking.

8. Although the reports on the districts are particularly useful to the districts concerned, it is hoped that the instruments, observations and lessons will be of use to the DBE, provincial departments and future District Profiling Teams.

9. Furthermore, the district profile reports may be used by system analysists and leaders in the DBE and provinces to find leverage points that could be used to improve service delivery capacity.

10. The important success conditions for district profiling are:
    i. Districts to be profiled believe in the value of the exercise, and therefore, participate willingly;
    ii. Interviewees have confidence in the process and consequently become open and honest in describing the work conditions, ethos and culture of the district;
    iii. A Profiling Team made up of people who are capable of extracting, from the extensive data, an analytic, strategic and system view of the district that points to the areas for improvement and further exploration.

A NOTE ON THE DBE-NECT DISTRICT PROFILING EXERCISE

Even with extensive experience in education policy and large-scale improvement initiatives, the three senior managers of the NECT who led the design of the profiling initiative had not carried out any assessment of districts, and neither had their counterparts.

The fact that the data collection was preceded by a letter from the DG and involved national department officials, the process unfolded smoothly and enjoyed enthusiasm and openness from the district officials. Within a period of five years after profiling (i.e., by 2018), five out of the eight District Directors had left the system, resulting in a loss of institutional memory. The new incumbents had to be briefed on the profiling process and outcomes.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

The demographic data (mainly quantitative) when triangulated and intersected with the qualitative evidence produces a fairly reliable report on district functionality and would serve as a basis to conceptualise, design, programme and develop a monitoring and feedback framework with clear outcomes and lead indicators.

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MINI-LESSON 16

Community mobilisation through District Steering Committees and their Contribution towards the provisioning of quality education - **Nimrod Mbele**

Prior to 1994, South Africa was characterised by the oppressive apartheid system which used violence against Black people as a control mechanism. Since violence breeds violence, the disenfranchised majority resorted to violence to register their outrage against political, economic and social injustices.

During this period, political turmoil erupted resulting in school buildings being burnt, furniture and equipment destroyed or stolen by the students and by the community as a whole. Post 1994 administrations have witnessed similar incidents of violence, albeit not at same scale as in the apartheid era.

Government introduced the the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 and numerous other measures aimed at promoting peaceful resolutions; key to these measures is the guarantee of freedom of expression and human rights, thus marking a sharp departure from apartheid. The South African Schools Act advocates for participatory democracy and the importance of co-operative governance, which means that all the parties involved in or concerned about the quality of education and school governance must work with each other in a supportive and collaborative way.

DISTRICT STEERING COMMITTEES

The NECT established the concept of District Steering Committees (DSCs) to strengthen government programmes such as the Quality Teaching and Learning Campaign (QLTC) and legislated structures such as the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) to mobilise parents, leaners, educators and community members to support the education system in dealing with social ills such as violence and destruction of property.

In order to achieve this, QLTC co-ordinating structures were established at national, provincial, district (circuit) and school levels. However, the performance of the QLTC varies from province to province, and its limitation are heightened by the fact that the QLTC is part of the departmental bureaucracy, which means its implementation is subject to government protocols and red tape.

This gap underscores the importance of the DSCs; as they operate outside the education system, their responsiveness and agility is invariably quicker than that of the government in mobilising the community against social ills such as teenage pregnancy, drug and substance abuse and vandalisation of school property.

In 2016, the NECT established DSCs in the following eight districts across five provinces: Libode and Mt Frere in the Eastern Cape; Pinetown and Uthungulu in KwaZulu-Natal; Waterberg and Vhembe in Limpopo; Bojanala in the North West; and Bohlabela in Mpumalanga.

Over the past eight years, the NECT has amassed a wealth of experience and insights, prompting it to establish an additional 14 DSCs, bringing the tally to date to 22 DSCs across six provinces. (See Annexure 1).

LESSONS FROM THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DSC

Given the strategic role of the DSCs in supporting the NECT programmes and the quality of education in general, the following are cited as key lessons:

1. Education districts played an important part in mobilising community members who could make a positive difference. To this end, education districts and the NECT adopted recruitment and selection processes based on the following principles:
    a. Positive role models – members of DSCs had to be known and respected by their communities. The NECT looked for community leaders with track records in serving their communities in matters such as education. The idea of positive role models in-

trinsically motivated to improve the quality of education made it easier for the NECT to secure support for its programmes. Positive role models were considered for their social capital, which is needed to mobilise community support for schools.

b. DSC leaders were nominated and elected to serve in various capacities – in the main, the delegates were elected for the following positions – Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer.

c. The NECT advocated for gender equality in all leadership positions – however, in practice, gender parity was not always achieved as more males were nominated for and elected to leadership positions.

In order to formalise the DSC membership, the NECT developed acceptance letters for every DSC member. This process not only legitimised the leadership but also affirmed their authority to liaise with education districts and senior school managers.

The success of DSCs hinges, among other things, on relevant and appropriate training for DSC members. To this end, the NECT organised DSC training covering the following areas: Governance, Stakeholder Management, and Conflict Resolution and Management.

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

In the quest to maintain the operational momentum of the DSCs, the NECT convened annual national Chairperson meetings.

The purpose of these meetings was to reflect on challenges faced by DSCs and to exchange ideas on how to manage these challenges. For example, one of the sessions dealt with how DSCs could better respond to the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by supporting government initiatives towards education recovery.

The overall intention was to harness all experiences and lessons to sharpen our focus in dealing with the aftermath of the pandemic as we dedicate our efforts to education recovery.

Other sessions reflected on progress and achievements, alignment of the work of DSCs with the parent and learner empowerment programmes, the evaluation report on DSCs and how the DSCs could play a role in driving a reading campaign.

SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES OF DSCS

The section outlines successes, challenges and lessons learned by the NECT during the implementation of DSCs. The lessons learned are based on the following critical milestones in DSCs' activities and operations, namely: recruitment and selection of DSC members; training of DSCs; and relations between DSCs and how to foster closer collaboration with QLTC dstructures. These issues are articulated below.

1. The identification of fit and proper community members: The NECT, various education districts and key community stakeholders, engaged in series of engagements to identify and recruit 'fit and proper' community members to be part of DSCs.

   District officials such as the district directors were instrumental in the identification of community members who had social capital and were respected by the community. Although the process was time consuming, it is nonetheless inextricably linked with the success of the DSCs as the individuals identified are passionate about education and therefore likely to stay on course.

2. The provision of support to DSC members: The DSC movement attracted individuals who fit the leadership profile; however, despite the intensity of issues and challenges facing schools, it was not practical for seasoned individuals to stay on the DSC for long as they were volunteering their time. Some of the DSC members were under the impression that they would be remunerated for their contributions, even though issues of compensation were addressed from the outset. In recognition of these issues, the NECT made a per diem allowance available for DSC members, which covered their travel costs.

   DSC Chairpersons were additionally provided with airtime as their workload included making phone calls to convene DSC meetings. The provision of an allowance lessened the burden of DSC members having to use their own resources to support schools.

3. The provision of capacity building to DSC members: As early as 2017, the NECT resolved to provide a capacity building programme for old and newly established DSCs to ensure effective operations. The conceptualisation of the training modules was based on the realities that confronted DSC members. The approach proved to be useful as some

DSC members had no background in education and/or community mobilisation skills. To this end, the NECT conceptualised and implemented a capacity building programme which included: Induction on roles and responsibilities of the DSC; Public governance; Stakeholder mobilisation and management; and Conflict resolution.

The DSC members were taken through these modules over two to three days. This intensive training played a pivotal role when DSC members were confronted with challenges such as community protests, which, in some instances, led to the destruction of property in places like Vuwani.

4. Collaboration with provincial officials: It is important to maintain a close relationship with the provincial officials in conceptualising and developing training material as they can make inputs to strengthen the content. The NECT relied on provincial officials to coordinate issues such as venues and catering, which are important when launching a DSC.

5. Variety of skills amongst DSC members: The profile of DSC members ranged from a Judge of the High Court to professionals, business leaders and ordinary community members. In motivating the latter, the NECT issued certificates of attendance to enhance the credibility of the training.

   Issuing certificates also helps community members who are looking for job opportunities as their certificates can be produced to demonstrate a willingness to learn. In future, the NECT should explore accreditation of its materials or secure the services of accredited service providers to improve this aspect. (See Annexure 2 for details).

6. Empowering DSC chairpersons: In a quest to share best practices across different DSCs, the NECT initiated the annual DSC Chairpersons' forum. The purpose of this forum was to share experiences between and among DSC Chairpersons and to draw further inspiration from the DBE and NECT leadership, where required.

   To date, the NECT has held three DSC Chairpersons' meetings which addressed a wide range of issues affecting schools such as vandalism, alcohol abuse, challenges of taverns located in proximity to schools, and the role of the South African Police Services (SAPS) in search and seizure campaigns.

7. The need to foster collaboration between DSCs and QLTC structures: The evolution of the DSC as an intervention programme cannot be separated from the QLTC, which is a nationwide initiative seeking to mobilise learners, parents, educators and the community at large to support improvement in education quality and teaching practices in the country's schools.

   Collaboration can be strengthened through coordinated planning and implementation of capacity building initiatives for Representative Council of Learners (RCL), QLCT and DSC members. In order to create evidence, a baseline assessment will be undertaken on the design and effective implementation of key programmes. This evidence will be used as a basis to engage other social partners to support the role of the QLTC and DSCs.

COEXISTENCE OF THE QLTC AND DSCS

The coexistence of the QLTC and DSCs has wider resource and programmatic implications, which serve as lessons that can be harnessed for the purpose of fostering closer collaboration or building a business case for developing a new stakeholder mobilisation model. Below are some of the pertinent lessons:

A. The QLTC and DSCs should not compete but collaborate as they have different strengths based on their different business models.

B. Duplication of work undermines optimum impact as it can create confusion and fatigue from end users (i.e. schools).

C. Sharing of resources would increase the overall capacity of both structures.

D. Coordinating and focusing their efforts and sharing expertise would increase capacity for carrying out tasks.

E. Effective advocacy could be achieved through coordinating efforts to reach the wide-ranging membership of both structures.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. Although DSCs were able to unblock barriers that are preventing effective support to schools, this model is not free from challenges. Some of these barriers relate to national and provincial policy and the way policy is implemented, while others relate to the actions of local

government and teacher unions or youth formations. Still others relate to a lack of technical skills to initiate and implement community led projects, and there are those that are specific to a particular local community and the schools themselves.

2. Cardinal to overcoming the barriers facing DSCs is access to financial resources to continue to mobilise communities. To ease this challenge, the NECT made data avail to and reimbursed telephone costs of DSC leadership. A more long-term view is to create sufficient capacity of DSCs to raise funds to address issues and challenges in their communities. The NECT should consider developing a Standard Operating Procedure manual to standardise the approach and associated controls. The NECT provides stipends to cater for transport and telecommunication costs; however, this is not enough to motivate DSC members to stay the course.

3. The other challenges facing DSCs are resisting the temptation to focus on issues that are not educational as well as the DSC leadership being tempted to serve sectional and partisan interests. For example, some of the members are active in political structures, which may compromise the integrity of the DSC as its primary goal is to support effective teaching and learning by organising community members, irrespective of their political affiliations.

4. A take-home lesson is that leadership, especially that of the DSC Chairperson, is critically important in ensuring sound relationships with education districts and community structures such as traditional and civic leaders.

5. In all instances where DSCs remain strong, the role of a Chairperson in stimulating support for schools engulfed by acts of violence, vandalism, drug infestations or other social ills proved to be essential. Conversely, in instances where DSCs were not fully operational, shortcomings in leadership were evident.

6. The COVID-19 pandemic dampened the spirits of many DSCs across the country. It is necessary to relaunch the non-functional DSCs as well as to launch new ones in crime-infested education districts.

7. During the municipal demarcations in the Vhembe district, community members were protesting the demarcation decision and expressed

their anger by burning down 50 schools, disrupting education in the district. All 50 schools' records and the annual marks of matric pupils were destroyed as residents went on the rampage after the Limpopo High Court in Polokwane on April 29 rejected the community's attempts to stop their area being incorporated into a new municipality. The Vhembe DSC, under the under leadership of High Court Judge Joseph Raulinga, swiftly reacted by convening a series of meetings with key stakeholders to defuse tensions and seek solutions to return schooling to normality. The NECT intervened by firstly, raising R10 million from funding partners, and secondly, engaging contractors to undertake renovations and repairs. Thirdly, the NECT provided learning and teching and support materials (LTSM) and developed and implemented catch-up programmes for learners. In addition, DSC's held community meetings with a view to creating awareness regarding vandalism and destruction of property and the impacts on education. To this end, the community members undertook to not burn or damage school property as a way of resolving their issues.

The Establishement of DSCs in Provinces and Districts

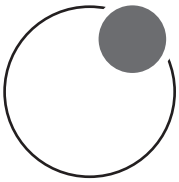
Province	**District with DSC established**
North West	Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati Bojanala
KwaZulu-Natal	King Cetshwayo Pinetown
Northern Cape	Pixley KaSeme ZF Mngcawu
Mpumalanga	Bohlabela Gert Sibande Ehlanzeni Nkangala
Limpopo	Waterberg Mogalakwena Capricorn South Capricorn North Vhembe East Vhembe West Mopani East & West Sekhukhune South Sekhukhune East
Eastern Cape	Alfred Nzo West Buffalo City Metro OR Tambo Coastal
TOTAL :	22 DSCS

Figure 16.1: The Establishement of DSCs in Provinces and Districts

Leadership Profiles Of DSC Members

District	NAME	Position	Constituency
Capricorn North	Moloto MM	Chairperson	Traditional Leader
Capricorn South	Thobejane S	Chairperson	Traditional Leader
Sekhukhune	Lebotsa NF (Mr)	Chairperson	Retired Educationist
Mopani West	Ntsanwisi Mlugisi (Hosi)	Chairperson	Traditional Leader
Waterberg	R J Dombo	Chairperson	Business
Vhembe	Joe Raulinga	Chairperson	Judiciary (Judge High Court)
DR RSM	Sydney Badise	Chairperson	Business
Mopani	Hosi Mlungisi Ntswanisi	Chairperson	Traditional Leader
Bohlabela	Dr Richard Ngomane	Chairperson	Business
Mount Frere	Chief Thandisizwe Diko	Chairperson	Traditional Leader
King Cetshwayo	Samuel Zungu	Chairperson	Academia
Pinetown	Mbusi Dlamini	Chairperson	Business
Bojanala	Mogotsi Gustaph Mompei	Chairperson	Business
Pixley Ka Seme	Nontobeko Mkhontwana	Chairperson	Local government (Coucilor)
Buffalo City	Noluthando	Chairperson	Retired Educationist
Alfred Nzo	Majova	Chairperson	former district Director
OR Tambo Coastal	Vakele Ndamase	Chairperson	Traditional Leader
Amathole East	To be appointed	TBC	Judiciary (Adv of High Court)
John Taolo Gaetsewe	Adv Dituku	Chairperson	Judiciary

Table 16.2: Leadership Profiles Of DSC Members



MINI-LESSON 17

What can we learn from the reading wars?

- Lorraine Marneweck

'Reading wars' may be an unpalatable way of putting across the challenges facing the teaching of reading in South Africa but is probably an accurate description. Over time, theories about how to improve reading have become increasingly polarised and politicised globally, and this has impacted on South African reading policy, instruction and materials (Castles, Rastle & Nation, 2018).

In 2018, when the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) began the process of developing Structured Learning Programmes (SLPs) for the Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP), decisions had to be made concerning which approach to take to the teaching of reading.

The decisions taken are located within the theories and debates that constitute the reading wars. Below, I probe the background to the reading wars, the impact this has had on reading policy and practice in South Africa, including the PSRIP, and the useful lessons that can be gleaned to better improve reading instruction in our schools.

The use of the military metaphor 'reading wars' first appeared in an article by Robert Rothman in a 1990 edition of the journal, Education Week, entitled From a "great debate" to a full-scale war: Dispute over teaching reading heats up

(Rothman, 1990). But these so-called reading wars have a much longer history within reading education.

Essentially, the wars began in the 1950s as a series of competing pedagogies, 'Method A' versus 'Method B'. The choice was essentially between two pedagogies, namely, the look-and-say/whole word pedagogy, based on the visual recognition of word shapes, and the phonics pedagogy, based on transforming the visual signs to speech sounds. The arguments, which were hotly defended and/or attacked by advocates and adversaries within the professional bodies representing reading education, were often fuelled by the relentless media campaign to polarise the debate.

The debate was re-ignited with the 1967 publication of Chall's Learning to Read: The great debate (Chall, 1967). Although Chall renamed the two approaches as 'code-based' versus 'meaning-based', reading pedagogy was still framed as an either/or choice between two theoretical options.

Chall captured the essence of the reading wars by distilling the many controversies about reading instruction into one question: 'Do children learn better with a beginning method that stresses meaning or with one that stresses learning the code?' (Chall, 1967, 75). After synthesising experimental studies conducted during the 20th Century, Chall found that an early code emphasis, in comparison to instructional practices where children were taught to read whole words and whole sentences, produced better outcomes in word recognition in the early grades and helped children to read with better comprehension up to the fourth grade.

By the 1970s and 1980s, the code-based versus meaning-based debate morphed into a series of variants of the same dichotomy, including literature-based versus skills-based (Froelich, 1992), implicit versus explicit (Reber, 1993), holistic versus fragmented (Cheek, 1989), and top-down versus bottom-up (Abraham, 1985). But despite being renamed, they were all essentially a continuation of the 'look-say' versus 'phonics' debate.

The term 'whole-language' as a variant of 'meaning-based' first appeared in the literature in 1992 in a Canadian publication, Whole language evaluation for classrooms by the Cochranes (Cochrane & Cochrane, 1992). This approach quickly spread to the United States of America (USA), where 'whole language' versus 'phonics' became the main way of describing the issue. Most recently, in Australia, the reading wars have been characterised as 'synthetic phonics' versus 'balanced literacy'.

The debates (or wars) have become increasingly political over time, as evidenced by the following quote.

> *It is important not to confuse the tactics of the far right with its goals. One of its tactics is to smear the whole language…The far right's love affair with phonics is a tactic, not a goal. They tout the benefits of phonics, but what they are really pushing is control of teachers, texts and readers in a universe of moral absolutes. (Edelsky, 1998, 39).*

By the late 1990s, there was a sufficiently large body of research findings to forge a scientific consensus over the process underlying skilful reading and the instructional practices that facilitate reading competence. For example, the 2001 National Reading Panel's review of nearly three decades of reading research indicated that children needed to apply letter/sound relationships to decode new words, develop fluency through guided oral reading activities and use multiple strategies to improve their reading comprehension.

In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) required schools in the USA to adopt scientifically based research practices in five areas, namely: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. It was meant that these five areas would replace the artificial dichotomy between phonics and whole language (McCardly & Chhabra, 2005). They argued that the best science in reading suggested that students need an integrated approach that includes instruction in all five key areas. As James Cunningham (2001, 334) said, the 'best science has the power to change the thinking of those who previously disagreed with its conclusions, but who are fair-minded enough to admit they were wrong once the case has been made'.

A consequence of these reading wars has been the demand that only pedagogies which are 'evidence-based' or 'scientifically derived' should be applied in literacy classrooms. However, invoking science and evidence-based research to reduce the theoretical confusion surrounding literacy education does not seem to have helped much, and is a position that needs to be guarded against.

There are quite distinct views of 'good science' and 'good evidence' held within the education research community. All that seems to have happened is that a new round of arguments and debates, about whose science and whose evidence should be considered, has begun.

In conclusion, while a cursory review of the more recent reading literature might suggest that the reading wars are alive and well in the 21st Century, Kim (2008, 372) has reached a much more optimistic conclusion that, 'a broad consensus about effective reading instruction has evolved slowly over decades'. Let's hope this continues to be the case.

THE IMPACT OF READING WARS ON SOUTH AFRICAN POLICY AND PRACTICE

The development of the South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Language was influenced by the reading wars and by more recent theoretical developments. CAPS is centred around the balanced language approach, which is a synthesis of a variety of approaches to teaching language literacy.

The balanced approach is an attempt to resolve the vigorous debates of how best to teach reading by integrating the phonics and the whole language approaches. However, there exist multiple interpretations of this policy and great divergences between the intended purpose of the CAPs Language Policy and its role as perceived by teachers, subject advisors and publishers. This impacts how children are taught to read in our primary schools; it also impacts the types of reading books published and how they are used by teachers to support reading improvement.Just as was the case internationally, historically, many literacy experts in South Africa fell into two camps: the whole language faction (constructivists) and the phonics faction (positivists). Organisations and individuals protected their factions passionately and were seldom open to considering what was believed to be the opposing point of view. However, more recently, the emergence of a body of research incorporating insights and research from disciplines that include developmental psychology, educational psychology, cognitive science and cognitive neuroscience has begun to find traction across South Africa. This body of research is the 'science of reading'.

The science of reading theory has demonstrated the methods that best help children to learn to read, from the earliest steps in spoken language to being able to successfully decode unfamiliar words. Learning to read includes the following five elements: comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, phonics, and phonemic awareness (*National Reading Panel, 2000*).

Given that the PSRIP is a national programme endorsed by the DBE, it was important to align the pedagogical approach taken in the SLPs to CAPS. This meant that the PSRIP and the development of the SLPs began by using a balanced approach to the teaching of reading.

Over time, the subject advisors' knowledge and understanding of the teaching of reading evolved, necessitating the inclusion of more relevant pedagogies in the SLPs, most notably, the five components of the science of reading. The NECT's PSRIP SLPs are an attempt to put the science of reading into practice, specifically for the South African context for all Home Languages as well as for English First Additional Language.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. The theoretical dichotomy embedded in the reading wars (whole language versus phonics) is unhelpful as it does not promote the best outcomes for learners' reading improvement. A less polarised position is needed that is not dependent on an 'either … or' point of view but rather one that is open to the findings produced by rigorous research studies from various perspectives.

2. Reading pedagogies in CAPS are open to a range of interpretations that shift over time as people grapple with their experiences in relation to the teaching of reading and as research into new reading approaches emerges. Programmes like the PSRIP need to be responsive to the ever-deepening knowledge and understanding of the sector. Strategies aimed at teaching reading should be seen as processes and not as products.

3. With training and support, teachers' and subject advisors' understanding of reading instruction solidifies. This results in the sector's conventional wisdom regarding reading becoming more concrete. Programmes like the PSRIP have an important role to play in this professional learning process.

4. Stakeholders deeply held theoretical positions regarding reading instruction need to be acknowledged, made explicit and dealt with sensitively. Decisions concerning reading pedagogies need to be made based on practice, research and evidence.

5. The theoretical position taken in programmes like the PSRIP must be made explicit. It is only through serious debate that the sector will have the confidence to grow and develop.

6. Visionary leadership is required from the DBE to take the lead in this complex arena. The department needs to set the scene for reading policies and practices that allow researchers, teachers and other practitioners the space needed to explore and try out new ideas for themselves. This is not possible in an overly bureaucratised system that views policy as a set of rules cast in stone.

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MINI-LESSON 18

Understanding reading in South Africa
- Lorraine Marneweck

Understanding reading in South Africa encompasses the multifaceted landscape of literacy within the nation. With a rich tapestry of languages and diverse cultural backgrounds, South Africa faces both challenges and opportunities in promoting a culture of reading. The significance of reading extends beyond individual development, fostering critical thinking, knowledge acquisition and social empowerment. From addressing the historical disparities in access to books and education to embracing the potential of digital platforms, understanding reading in South Africa is an ongoing endeavour aimed at unlocking the transformative power of literacy for all citizens. This mini-lesson reflects on what the NECT has learnt about these issues over the past decade.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POOR READING OUTCOMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

There are several factors that contribute to poor reading outcomes in South Africa. One of these is poverty, as learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to experience poor reading outcomes due to a lack of resources and support. This can include a lack of access to books, inadequate nutrition and poor health care, all of which can have an impact on learners' ability to learn and succeed academically (Pienaar, 2019).

According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021 report (Mullis et al., 2023), South African learners performed poorly in reading, achieving a score of 288 compared to the international average of 500. This is a decrease of 32 points from the 2016 PIRLS, when they achieved a score of 320 (Mullis et al., 2017). These results indicate that many learners in South Africa continue to struggle with basic reading skills such as decoding, comprehension and fluency. As reading is a foundational skill that is required for learning in all subjects, these low levels of literacy have significant implications for learners' academic and future success.

Access to reading materials is another challenge for many learners in South Africa, particularly those from disadvantaged communities (Chetty, 2019). Many schools do not have libraries or adequate resources to support reading, and many learners do not have access to books or other reading materials at home. This lack of access to reading materials can have a significant impact on learners' reading skills and motivation to read.

Inadequate reading instruction is another challenge in South Africa (Dagada, 2022). Many teachers have not been trained in effective reading instruction, especially in African languages, and there is a lack of alignment between the curriculum and the reading instruction provided in schools. This can result in a focus on rote learning and memorisation rather than on developing critical reading skills.

PROMISING INTERVENTIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING READING IN SOUTH AFRICA

Despite the challenges, there are several promising interventions and strategies to promote reading and improve literacy in South Africa.

To summarise official policy interventions, the government outlined a reading strategy in its National Reading Sector Plan in 2015, which is currently being reviewed and updated. In the same year, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) launched the Read to Lead Campaign, which aims to improve literacy rates and promote a culture of reading. And working with the DBE, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) established the National Reading Coalition (NRC) in 2019 to mobilise reading initiatives across the country[1].

The DBE has implemented two national reading intervention programmes. The first is the Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP), which began in 2017 and continues in various iterations. The PSRIP provides primary school teachers with Structured Learning Programmes to enhance the teaching

1 Details of these initiatives are in this publication in Mini-Lesson 19: Evolution of Reading Plans in South Africa.

of reading, along with resources, training and support for both English First Additional Language (EFAL) and Home Languages (HLs)[2]. Secondly, the DBE has conducted several research studies into mechanisms to support Setswana HL and EFAL teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase through the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS).

In addition, several non-profit organisations are working in various ways to promote reading in disadvantaged communities through a range of initiatives. The following are provided as examples of the contributions made by civil society and in no way should be read as an exhaustive list.

1. Comprehensive literacy programmes that focus on home-language classroom instruction in African languages;
2. Reading-for-enjoyment campaigns that seek to embed a culture of reading in children through cultivating enticing reading content in all South African languages;
3. Interventions that provide structured learning programmes to teachers to prioritise, think through and test interventions aimed at helping all children to learn to read for meaning by age 10 by 2030.
4. Materials development and resource provisioning projects that produce or provide a variety of readers in African languages.

DEVELOPMENTS IN READING INSTRUCTION

Teaching reading is a complex process, with a rich history of instructional approaches and strategies[3]. More recently, the science of reading has come to the foreground among strategies to improve reading instruction in South African classrooms.

The science of reading is a multidisciplinary field that brings together research from various areas such as cognitive psychology, linguistics, neuroscience and education to understand how children learn to read. Advancements in neuroscience, in particular, have contributed to our understanding of how the brain processes written language. Neuroimaging studies show that different areas of the brain are activated when reading different types of words, such as real words, pseudowords and irregular words. Research in this area has helped to inform effective reading instruction practices, such as the importance of teach-

2 Detailed information about the PSRIP is provided in this publication In Mini-Lesson 7: Large-Scale Teacher Professional Development.

3 See Mini-Lesson 17: What Can We Learn From The Reading Wars? in this publication for more information.

ing phonics explicitly and systematically – in contrast to the rote manner that dominated past pedagogical approaches.

Phonics is the understanding that letters represent sounds, and it involves teaching students to decode words by sounding out the individual sounds of each letter. According to the National Reading Panel report, commissioned by the United States Congress to review the research on reading instruction, phonics instruction is essential for developing reading skills (National Reading Panel, 2000). Research has also shown that phonics instruction improves reading skills, particularly for struggling readers (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2008; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Torgesen, 2004).

Furthermore, studies have shown that the brains of skilled readers differ from those of struggling readers, and interventions that target the neural mechanisms of reading can improve reading skills (Sadoski & Paivio, 2012). Another key finding of this research is that reading is not a natural or innate ability, but rather a learned skill that requires explicit instruction and practice. Effective reading instruction should thus be based on evidence-based practices such as phonics instruction approaches that have shown to be effective in improving reading skills (Dehaene, 2009; Henry, 2003; Kilpatrick, 2016; Scarborough, 2001).

Research is also clear about what should be taught in early literacy instruction, for example:

1. **Phonological awareness:** Phonological awareness is the ability to recognise and manipulate sounds (phonemes) that make up words in spoken language. It involves a range of skills, such as identifying and producing rhyming words, segmenting words into individual sounds, blending sounds together to form words, and manipulating sounds within words by adding, deleting, or substituting phonemes. Phonological awareness is a critical precursor to reading and writing as it enables children to understand how sounds relate to letters and words. Phonological awareness can be developed through a variety of activities, including rhyming games, sound blending and segmenting exercises and word play.

2. **Phonics and word recognition:** Phonics is the relationship between letters and sounds. Children need to learn the sounds associated with individual letters and how to blend those sounds together to form words. Phonics instruction is a critical component of early reading instruction. It involves teaching children the relationship between

sounds and letters, and how to use this knowledge to decode words. Explicit phonics instruction involves teaching children the rules and patterns of phonics systematically and explicitly. It is a highly structured approach that is often used in a whole class setting, and is most effective when used with struggling readers. Linked to this is synthetic phonics teaching, which is also a highly structured approach that teaches children to decode words by sounding out each individual sound in the word and then blending them together. This approach has been found to be highly effective in improving early reading skills.

3. **Building vocabulary:** A strong vocabulary is essential for reading comprehension. Teachers introduce new vocabulary words through read-alouds, word walls and vocabulary-building activities.

4. **Fluency:** Reading fluency is the ability to read text accurately, smoothly and with expression. Teachers build fluency by providing opportunities for repeated reading, using guided reading groups and providing regular opportunities for independent reading. This includes frequent chances for students to read and re-read orally from connected text - sentences, paragraphs and passages. The focus is on the development of both automatic word recognition and fluent expression, keeping understanding of the text as the central goal.

5. **Comprehension:** Reading comprehension is the ability to understand and make meaning from what is being read. Teachers help build comprehension by asking questions before, during and after reading, modelling good comprehension strategies and providing opportunities for discussion and reflection.

In summary, teaching reading requires a variety of instructional approaches and strategies, including phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, building vocabulary, practicing fluency and focusing on comprehension to enhance reading instruction. By using a combination of these methods, teachers can help ensure that all children have the foundation they need for success in reading and beyond.

ROLE OF CLASSROOM CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT IN READING SUCCESS

The culture and environment of the classroom also have a significant impact on children's reading development. Creating a culture that is supportive of reading

and makes reading engaging and enjoyable can help to promote a love of reading and to build reading skills in children.

One way to create such a reading culture is to provide a variety of reading materials that are available in the correct languages and are interesting and engaging for children. These materials can include books, magazines, newspapers and digital reading resources. Teachers can also model a love of reading by sharing their own reading experiences and encouraging children to read for pleasure. Giving children regular opportunities to read independently can also help to build reading skills and a love of reading.

The physical environment of the classroom can also have an impact on reading development. Creating a comfortable and welcoming reading space, with plenty of natural light and access to a variety of reading materials, can help to promote a love of reading and encourage children to read more often.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN READING INSTRUCTION

Technology has the potential to revolutionise reading instruction, especially in early grades. There are a variety of tools and resources that can be used to support and enhance traditional reading instruction, including digital books, reading apps and online reading programs.

Digital books can provide children with access to a wide variety of reading materials, including books that may not be available in print. Digital books can also have interactive features, such as audio narration and animation, that can help to engage children in the reading process.

Further, technology can be a powerful tool for providing personalised and interactive reading instruction. It can be used to adapt lessons to individual reading levels and provide feedback and support as needed.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

Lessons based directly on NECT experiences in relation to the PSRIP include:

1. Subject advisors' understanding of how to teach reading has been enhanced over the six-year duration of the PSRIP. In 2020, many subject advisors participated in a video discussion where they reflected on how much they had learnt about reading instruction from the PSRIP.

   In addition, an external analysis of subject advisor pre- and post-test scores after one PSRIP training cycle demonstrated a deepening understanding of reading. These are positive shifts in that the PSRIP has

capacitated primary school language subject advisors to better understand reading instruction; it has also positioned the subject advisors to be able to provide teachers with meaningful professional support around reading.

2. But the professional development model used in the PSRIP also has its limitations in terms of improving reading in schools. One of the limitations relates to challenges associated with cascade training.

   It is the subject advisors who receive training directly from the master trainers, and they in turn train teachers. This is not an ideal situation as content and approach strategies shift over the different cascade layers. While the practicalities and cost-effectiveness of cascade training are understood and acknowledged, it is not the best model for deep engagement and high-level skills transfer.

3. In addition, each grade in the targeted primary schools received one set of materials from the PSRIP; but many schools have more than one teacher per grade. The intention was that provinces would provide the additional resources to the balance of teachers, but this strategy did not always work.

   The shortage of materials impacted on the effectiveness of the PSRIP as a reading improvement strategy. The lesson here is that many provincial departments find it difficult to find the financial resources necessary to support national reading interventions.

General lessons include:

1. South Africa faces many challenges concerning reading. These challenges are manifested in schools where teachers struggle to teach reading and where there are insufficient engaging reading materials in the languages of the learners. They are also manifested in communities where a culture of reading has not taken root and where technical reading dominates.

2. Government and civil society have acknowledged the challenges of reading in South Africa and together have implemented several strategies and programmes to improve the situation. But this is a complex challenge that will take many years to resolve. We cannot expect great shifts to occur within one generation.

3. While the findings of international reading evaluation studies are useful and provide rigorous benchmarks against which the outcomes of initiatives can be measured, they do not always account for the unique contextual realities that South African schools and communities face.

4. By providing children with the knowledge and skills they need to decode words, promoting a love of reading and using technology to enhance instruction, we can help to ensure that all children have the foundation they need for success in reading and beyond.

5. Teaching reading in early grades is a complex and multifaceted process that requires a combination of instructional approaches, a supportive classroom culture and environment and the use of technology to enhance instruction.

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MINI-LESSON 19

Evolution of reading plans in South Africa
- Lorraine Marneweck

The article commences by outlining the reading difficulties confronted by our country, presenting an overview of the 2015 National Reading Sector Plan that was formulated to tackle these challenges. It highlights the Read to Lead Campaign and the National Reading Coalition (NRC) as initiatives supporting nationwide reading advancement. Furthermore, the article examines the measures implemented by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to address the repercussions of events such as the COVID pandemic and the release of the 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) results.

Additionally, it provides information about the collaborative process undertaken by the DBE, in conjunction with the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), to critically assess the National Reading Sector Strategy, with a specific emphasis on African home languages. Lastly, the article concludes by presenting valuable insights for the reading sector to consider as the revision of the national reading strategy and reading plans progress.

SOUTH AFRICA'S READING CHALLENGES

South Africa faces a range of reading challenges, particularly when it comes to developing strong literacy skills among children. Some of these challenges include:

1. **Language barriers:** Many South African children do not have access to reading materials in their home languages. This can make it challenging for them to develop strong literacy skills and a love for reading.

2. **Limited access to books and reading materials:** Many South African communities, especially in rural areas, have limited access to books and reading materials, which makes it difficult for children and adults to develop a love for reading.

3. **Poverty and social inequality:** Children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have access to the same opportunities and resources as their more affluent peers. This negatively impacts on the development of their literacy skills and limits their opportunities for success throughout life.

4. **Limited parental involvement:** Not all South African parents and caregivers have the necessary skills or resources to support their children's literacy development. This can result in low levels of reading at home, which can have a negative impact on children's literacy skills. (Save the Children Fund, 2014).

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) acknowledges and understands these challenges and, over the last decade, has implemented many strategies to address the reading imbalances across the country. Some of these are described below.

NATIONAL READING PLAN

The most notable of the DBE's strategies is the national Integrated Reading Sector Plan, also referred to as the National Reading Plan. The DBE developed the plan in 2015, with the goal of providing guidance on how to improve the reading skills of learners across the country.

The plan, approved by the Council of Education Ministers in 2019[1], is guided by a vision of a South Africa where every citizen is a reader, and it aimed to create a culture of reading by promoting reading for pleasure and making quality reading materials available to all learners.

The National Reading Plan was originally based on the following ten key pillars:

1 https://www.education.gov.za/ReadingInterventions2021.aspx

1. **Strengthening the capacity of the sector:** The plan recognised that the skills of educators teaching learners to read and those of educators supporting teachers in reading instruction needed to be enhanced and aimed to achieve this.

2. **Teacher development and support:** The plan recognised the importance of teacher development and support in promoting reading. It aimed to provide teachers with the necessary training and resources to deliver quality reading instruction in all classrooms, but especially in the early grades.

3. **Direct learner support:** The plan set out to provide learners with the direct support they needed to become proficient readers who read with comprehension. Thus activities aimed at learners, for example, psychosocial support and reading remediation, were included in the plan.

4. **Parental and community support and mobilisation:** The plan acknowledged that reading was a national priority, and that parents and communities were important stakeholders in reading improvement, especially in the early years.

5. **Provisioning and utilisation of learning and teaching support material (LTSM):** The plan aimed to improve access to reading materials, both in schools and in communities, to ensure that learners had access to a wide range of reading materials in all South African languages.

6. **Tracking learner performance in reading outcomes:** The plan included activities aimed at assisting teachers to track learners' reading performance so that gaps and areas needing improvement were made explicit.

7. **Research, monitoring, evaluation and reporting:** The plan recognised that broad-based research was required by relevant stakeholders to monitor and evaluate reading improvement initiatives and outcomes.

8. **Partnerships:** The plan recognised that to improve reading outcomes, a collaboration between various stakeholders, including government, civil society and the private sector, was imperative for success. Thus it aimed to build partnerships to support reading initiatives.

9. **Advocacy and communication:** The plan set out the advocacy and communication plans necessary to keep all informed about the plan, its activities and its implementation successes (and challenges).

10. **Reading across the curriculum:** The plan emphasised activities and strategies needed for all teachers to know how to support learners and promote literacy skills across content areas in later grades.

The National Reading Plan provided a framework for promoting reading and improving literacy levels in South Africa. It recognised that literacy is a fundamental human right and that reading is an essential skill for success in life. By promoting a culture of reading and by providing support for literacy development, the plan aimed to improve the lives of all South Africans.

READ TO LEAD CAMPAIGN

The Read to Lead Campaign is an initiative launched by the DBE in 2015 to promote a culture of reading and improve literacy levels in the country. Essentially, the campaign provides opportunities for the country to implement key elements of the National Reading Plan. The Read to Lead Campaign is based on the belief that reading is a foundational skill that is critical to the success of learners in all subjects, and that improving literacy levels is key to reducing inequality and promoting social and economic development in South Africa. The campaign focuses on several key initiatives, including:

1. **Reading clubs:** The campaign aims to establish reading clubs in schools and communities to promote reading for pleasure and to provide learners with access to quality reading materials.

2. **Reading ambassadors:** The campaign seeks to identify and promote reading ambassadors, including celebrities, authors and other influential figures, to inspire learners to read and to raise awareness about the importance of reading.

3. **Reading competitions:** The campaign encourages learners to participate in reading competitions such as spelling bees and reading marathons to improve their reading skills and to promote a love of reading.

4. **Reading events:** The campaign organises reading events such as book fairs and author visits to promote reading and to provide learners with access to quality reading materials.

The Read to Lead campaign has been widely supported by the government, civil society and the private sector and has had a significant impact on promoting reading and improving literacy levels in South Africa.

NATIONAL READING COALITION

In partnership with the DBE, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) launched the National Reading Coalition (NRC) in 2019 to assist the Read to Lead Campaign to realise its mandate. The NRC is a group of stakeholders from various sectors, including government, civil society, the private sector and academia, who have come together to promote a culture of reading and improve literacy levels in the country. The NRC's main goal is to develop and implement a national reading strategy that will improve reading outcomes for learners and promote a love of reading among all South Africans.

The NRC is not a programme or project but a collaborative initiative that seeks to change the reading status quo through a common national vision, coordination and resourcing. It is a coalition of the willing, a network of initiatives, organisations and individuals that have a shared interest in improving reading, particularly among learners, and the potential and commitment to do so. The coalition is a loose confederation, where organisations retain their integrity, approach and autonomy while working willingly and openly towards the common goal of reading improvement. The partners in the NRC share a common agenda, vie for complementarity and, together, build the public interest and trust necessary to initiate a self-sustaining ecology of reading improvement activities across the national landscape.

The NRC's efforts are aligned with the South African government's broader education goals, which aim to improve education outcomes and reduce inequalities in the education system. Guided by the National Reading Plan, the NRC sets out a range of strategies and initiatives to promote reading and improve literacy levels. It does this by advocating a national focus around six leverage points for reading improvement: initial teacher education, continuing professional teacher development, access to age and language-relevant materials, community support, policy research, and monitoring and evaluation. Activities clustered around these value chain areas are aimed at improving access to reading materials, supporting teachers to deliver quality reading instruction, promoting reading for enjoyment and encouraging parental involvement in reading. The NRC also works to build partnerships between the government, civil society and the private sector to ensure that all South Africans have access to quality reading materials, literacy instruction and the support they need to develop strong literacy skills.

The NRC aims to complement the National Reading Plan by generating energy through the mobilisation of broader society to address the reading challenge. It also aims to support the National Reading Plan by mobilising the resources and expertise needed to advance the national goal. To operationalise these aims, the NRC developed a Reading Improvement Plan to support the government's efforts as outlined above. The Reading Improvement Plan seeks to realise the following objectives:

1. To promote a comprehensive and integrated approach to attaining desired reading improvement targets;
2. To prioritise joint initiatives that can be undertaken nationally to improve reading in primary schools.;
3. To lay the basis for monitoring progress in the improvement of reading;
4. To mobilise the resources necessary to implement the plans;
5. To support the initiation and maintenance of a reading movement across the national landscape.

The plan lays out a ten-year trajectory towards the achievement of improved educational and life opportunities as well as learning outcomes envisaged in the 2030 vision of the National Development Plan (NDP).

By promoting a culture of reading and improving literacy levels, the NRC is helping to ensure that all learners have the skills they need to succeed in school and in life.

READING RETREAT

Representatives from government, labour, civil society, and academia convened in April 2023 for a two-day facilitated reading retreat. The aim of this retreat was to critically reflect on the original National Reading Plan, on its implementation successes and challenges, and on ways to bolster the strategy based on emerging reading literacy trends and realities. The NECT recognises the many important reading initiatives the DBE has championed since 2015, for example the Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP), the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS), the National Framework for African languages, and the development of reading benchmarks for African languages, to name but a few. The NECT also acknowledges the DBE's openness to reflect

on gaps in the original strategy and in its implementation. For example, the 10 strands included in the original strategy proved cumbersome; implementation was fragmented and lacking in coherence as well as coordination across provinces; issues related to teacher education were muted in the strategy; and non-negotiables concerning how reading should be taught and resourced were not made explicit.

Agreement was reached that priority needed to be given to improving the teaching of African languages on a large scale in the early and emerging phases (Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Foundation Phase). It was also agreed that issues relating to reading policy, teacher professional development, reading resources and community engagement should be foregrounded as the central strands in a revised strategy.

READING LITERACY DIALOGUES

After the reading retreat and the launch of the 2021 PIRLS results in May 2023, the NECT initiated a multi-layered Reading Literacy Dialogue series that included some 10 dialogues held at provincial and national levels. The NECT created opportunities for deliberations around the PIRLS findings and the implications for reading improvement in South Africa. The dialogues provided stakeholders at all levels with a platform to navigate challenges and solutions to improve reading. They fostered a deeper understanding of the complex factors that contribute to reading success, and how these factors vary across different contexts. The identification of promising practices and innovative approaches for improving reading instruction and promoting literacy was also foregrounded in the dialogues. The voices of teachers were strongly represented throughout the dialogues, with over 400 teachers sharing valuable insights and raising important issues concerning reading and literacy instruction from a practical perspective.

The series culminated in June 2023 with a national Reading and Literacy Dialogue convened in Pretoria in the presence of the Minister of Basic Education. Over 150 participants representing government, teachers, social partners, civil society and academia debated issues relating to improving reading literacy in South African schools and communities. Commissions were convened for in-depth discussion on the following: reading literacy policy and programming; assessment, monitoring and evaluation; learning and teaching support material (LTSM) provision; parent and community engagement; and teacher preparation, training and development. Agreement was reached on how commission discussions would filter through to the National Reading Sector Strategy review process.

The national dialogue ended with a declaration that recognised the role that international and local assessments play in highlighting gaps in reading literacy, especially in African home languages. It also acknowledged the centrality of reading literacy in knowledge acquisition and the importance of reading for meaning. The need for a dedicated commitment towards adopting innovative methods to enhance reading proficiency was also recognised. Concrete action steps were identified to be taken forward as the review process continues.

Dialogue participants welcomed the engagement opportunities created by the NECT and committed themselves to further participation and input in the review and finalisation of a strengthened strategy to improve reading and literacy outcomes.

REVISED READING STRATEGY

A three-day facilitated process was convened mid-June 2023 to unpack the vision of the reading strategy and to develop concrete reading plans. Agreement was reached on the vision for a Revised National Reading Sector Strategy (2024-2030), namely, that South African children can read for meaning at age 10. This vision is supported by the statement 'South African children accessing quality, culturally relevant and age-appropriate materials in classrooms, libraries and community through exposure to pedagogically sound reading practices, in all South African languages, that inculcate reading for pleasure, meaning and lifelong learning'.

Outcomes, actions, risks and mitigations were developed for the following strategic intents: South Africa has a national reading policy; teachers are highly skilled and equipped to teach reading; children read culturally relevant and age-appropriate materials; and parents and communities are fully engaging in supporting children's reading development. It was also agreed that for the Revised National Reading Sector Strategy to be fully comprehensive, the following cross-cutting enablers needed to be included: research, monitoring and evaluation to be conducted across all strands; partnerships to be expanded and encouraged on teacher training, materials development and community engagement; and ongoing communication and advocacy to take place in relation to reading for meaning, both inside and outside of classrooms.

It must be acknowledged that discussions that led to the development of the plans were not without contested areas. The NECT recommends that more debate takes place around the relevance to reading instruction in African home languages of phonic awareness and phonics instruction embedded in the science of reading,

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. While reading improvement needs high-level strategic guidance from the government (for example, in the form of the National Reading Plan), it also requires more practical, targeted initiatives to address the reading challenges.

   These more localised initiatives - like those set out in the Read to Lead Campaign and those implemented by literacy non-governmental organisations (NGOs) - need to be coordinated and resourced to maximise impact. This is the important, though not uncontested, role that the NRC plays in the sector.

2. A concerted effort from all reading stakeholders is required to ensure that learners have access to quality reading materials and literacy instruction and are provided with the support they need to develop strong literacy skills.

   This requires a national focus on improving access to books and reading materials, addressing language barriers, promoting parental involvement in reading and investing in the education system. This focus is not always easy to attain as there are many different agendas and financial imperatives at play amongst reading stakeholders.

3. The education system that is ultimately responsible for driving reading initiatives, namely, the DBE, faces many challenges that impact on its effectiveness to address reading in schools and in communities. These challenges include, for example, inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages and a lack of resources that impedes progress at all levels.

   The challenges make it difficult for the DBE to provide quality literacy instruction to all learners, and it requires support and capacity-building initiatives as it works towards achieving the objectives of the National Reading Sector Plan.

4. While digital technologies can offer new opportunities for promoting reading and literacy, many communities in South Africa do not have access to these technologies or the necessary skills to use them effectively. Much work is needed around the limited digital literacy skills and resources found across the country, especially in marginalised communities.

5. And finally, the collaborative process plays a crucial role in strategy development, in that it brings together diverse perspectives, knowledge and expertise to create a more effective and robust reading strategy fit for the South African context.

Whilst the strategy revision is still unfolding, it is important for the DBE to acknowledge the ongoing nature of the process and communicate transparently about it to role-players and stakeholders. By openly acknowledging the strategy revision process, by seeking stakeholder input and by maintaining transparent communication, trust will be fostered. This will ensure that the final strategy reflects a comprehensive and well-informed approach that meets the needs of all parties involved. The NECT undertakes to support the DBE in this important endeavour.

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MINI-LESSON 20

Developing original African language phonics programmes - **Kaitlin Alsofrom**

DISCLAMER: *Considering recent discussions in the reading sector, questions have been raised regarding the significance of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction in teaching African languages. It is worth mentioning that the research presented in this paper predates the official emergence of these debates. Nevertheless, the paper maintains its relevance by emphasising the potential of collaboration in devising effective strategies to tackle the country's reading challenges. This does not, however, diminish the importance of continuing debates surrounding phonics instruction in African language teaching and learning.*

INTRODUCTION

South Africa's literacy crisis is well known. In 2023, The Department of Basic Education (DBE) released the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021 preliminary highlights report for South Africa (DBE, 2023). This showed that 81% of Grade 4 learners across the country were unable to meet the low international benchmark for reading comprehension.

This means that learners could not answer even the most basic questions about text. While the root cause of these results is debated, the very low level of the results suggests that 81% of learners do not have the foundational reading skills required to decode the words on the page with the fluency needed to focus on

comprehension. In other words, it is likely that the roots of low reading comprehension scores are significant and stark issues with decoding and oral reading fluency.

There is abundant evidence to show that the teaching of explicit and systematic phonics is critical for learning to read[1]. As Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998, 333) assert, 'There is converging research support for the proposition that getting started in reading depends critically on mapping the letters and the spellings of words onto the sounds and speech units that they represent.

Failure to master word recognition impedes text comprehension'. (Verhoeven and Perfetti, 2022, 161) provide a cross-linguistic perspective on the universals and particulars of reading across seventeen different orthographies and a variety of writing systems, showing that while the particulars of teaching the writing system change, 'writing maps onto language, no matter the details of the system, creating a common challenge in learning that mapping.'

Evidence convincingly shows that phonics instruction should not be incidental or done in bits and pieces but should be part of a synthetic programme that is both explicit and systematic. As the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) concluded after systematically reviewing a multitude of scientific studies, learners must systematically be taught all the letter-sound relationships that exist in their language – it is not enough for there to be just some teaching of letter-sound connections.

Further, according to the NRP's report, phonic knowledge not only increases learners' decoding abilities but is also positively correlated to reading comprehension skills. This has been demonstrated even in multilingual contexts. For example, Wawire et al. (2021) found that for young Kenyan Kiswahili learners, a majority of whom speak Kiswahili as a second or third language, accuracy and speed of nonword decoding was a stronger predictor of reading comprehension than listening comprehension.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read Report (2022), which draws on a vast and rigorous body of scientific research, 'With science-based approaches to reading instruction, early screening and intervention, we would expect to see only about 5% of students still below grade-level expectations on word-reading accuracy and fluency' (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2022, 15).

In summary, there is evidence that children must have proper instruction in phonics to become readers – and with proper instruction in the foundational

1 There are, however, philosophical disagreements about the most effective and desirable way to build literacy skills, mainly the whole language approach and 'balanced literacy' approach. The disagreements between advocates of these approaches and advocates of a phonics-based approach have been called 'The Reading Wars'. See Mini-Lesson 17: What can we learn from the reading wars?

skills of reading, around 95% of children should be meeting basic benchmarks for decoding texts. This sentiment is reflected by Helen Abadzi (2013), who argues, 'barring learning disabilities, nearly all students could be made basically literate in the first semester of grade 1 by using local languages' (Abadzi, 2013, 8). Of course, oral language comprehension skills are critical to becoming a skilled reader (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover and Gough, 1990), but phonics is a critical step for learners to become excellent readers of text.

Background: Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP)

The Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP) is an English First Additional Language (EFAL) national scale reading intervention. The PSRIP was initiated by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in 2016, based on the materials from the Early Grade Reading Studies II (EGRS II) and implemented through the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT).

The PSRIP includes Structured Learning Programmes (SLPs), comprising daily lesson plans and teaching core methodologies, classroom materials and resources, and aligned trainings to effectively enact the EFAL Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS) in their classrooms. The SLPS provide a framework for teachers to deliver the curriculum using routines and methodologies that package the curriculum into manageable parts.

Funding for the development of the Primary School Reading Improvement Programme for Home Language (PSRIP HL) followed the PSRIP, in large part due to the logistics involved in developing a programme across 10 languages. Like the PSRIP, the PSRIP HL includes SLPs, classroom materials and resources, and an aligned training to support successful implementation of the programme.

Despite the fact that the PSRIP HL was developed after the PSRIP, the HL materials are designed to be the foundational materials for developing literacy in classrooms. The design team tried to ensure that the EFAL programme feels like a build-on to the HL programme – and not the other way around.

The PSRIP HL materials were piloted in 2021 in 100 schools in eight provinces across 10 languages. Following this pilot phase of the project, the NECT conducted a review of the materials and made revisions in response to feedback from the pilot phase. As of June 2023, the revised programme is nearing completion, but has yet to be widely implemented.

The phonics programmes discussed here come from the PSRIP HL. The programmes were significantly altered and updated during the revision process. The process of developing these programmes is detailed below.

DEVELOPING A SCOPE

Connecting, consulting and compiling

With an understanding of the importance of explicit and systematic phonics for building critical foundational literacy skills in any language, and an understanding that phonics programmes must be language specific (not versioned), one of the most important aspects of the PSRIP HL materials revision process was to develop excellent, original phonic language programmes for all South Africa's official languages, except for English[2]. The NECT engaged in a rigorous and consultative process to develop exemplary, research-based phonics programmes.

The first step in this process was to survey existing phonics programmes in the African Languages that well known South African organisations have developed and use to teach phonics.

The NECT contacted and consulted with multiple non-profit organisations (NGOs) and engaged with CAPS, the National Frameworks for the teaching of Reading in African Languages, Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) documents, linguistic experts and even language-specific Wikipedia pages to compile the most comprehensive picture of the scope of phoneme-grapheme relationships taught in each language.

Each list of graphemes was entered into a language-specific database, separated by single-consonant graphemes, digraphs, trigraphs, quadgraphs, etc. At this stage in the process, we knew some of the sounds may be incorrect (they may be consonant blends that were categorised as digraphs, for example). However, the goal at this stage was to make lists inclusive of every grapheme from all lists gathered.

The idea here was that this type of comprehensive list would be the best place from which to begin consultations. This allowed for easy comparison of the sounds taught across various programmes.

Finally, the lists gathered were used to build one master, comprehensive list per language, which would include the full scope of sounds taught in various progammes, to be discussed and analysed at national, language-specific workshops.

2 An original phonics scope and sequence was developed for Afrikaans, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Siswati, Sepedi, Setswana, Sesotho, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga. Significant research and a wide variety of materials, including decodable texts, already exist for the explicit and systematic teaching of English language phonemes and graphemes.

Phonemes, graphemes, and blends

The lists gathered from different sources varied, in some instances quite drastically, from one another. A series of workshops was conducted for each language to review and refine the comprehensive lists. HL speakers from the DBE, phonic programme developers from various NGOs, linguistic experts and other key stakeholders were invited to these meetings. The main goals of each of the meetings were to:

A. Determine the phoneme-grapheme relationships that exist for each language and, importantly, are not versioned or transferred from English or any other language. (This meant that any superfluous graphemes were to be eliminated from the comprehensive lists. In addition, any missing graphemes were added to the lists).

B. Distinguish and categorise single consonant graphemes, digraphs, trigraphs (and beyond, if necessary) from consonant blends.

At the outset of each workshop, these goals were stated. In addition, the difference between distinct phonemes/graphemes and blends was clarified for participants. A grapheme is the written representation of a distinct sound: for example, 'sh' in English is a grapheme called a digraph, because these two letters together are used to represent one single sound or phoneme.

On the other hand, the 'tr' in tree is a consonant blend, as the consonant sounds /t/ and /r/ both make their own sounds within the word. Distinguishing and categorising the sounds of language in this way is often an unnatural activity – particularly for home speakers of a language.

Then, each group systematically went through the relevant comprehensive list, discussing, and debating whether each grapheme listed should be included in a phonic programme for the language at all, and then whether the written letters represented a grapheme (digraph, trigraph, etc.) or a consonant blend.

After establishing these initial categorised lists, and after significant research on the teaching of phonics, the PSRIP HL design team made the decision to omit blends from the list of distinct graphemes to be taught as part of any of the phonic programmes. Instead, it was decided that blending would be taught as a skill through the core methodologies[3] of the phonics programmes[4].

3 Core methodologies provide teachers with step-by-step strategies for teaching different components of the curriculum. The core methodologies are the 'how' of the SLPs, while the daily lesson plan is the 'what', providing the daily content.

4 For example, if a child has been taught the graphemes 's' and 't', 'st' does not need to be taught as a distinct grapheme or unit to be memorised. This sound sequence should be taught as a consonant blend, which is made of two consonant sounds that can both be heard. Learners must have ample practice segmenting and blending these sounds, but they do not need to be taught 'st' in the same way as the graphemes 's' and 't'.

Teaching blends as separate and distinct units to be memorised increases the cognitive load for children, making it more difficult for them to become skilled and fluent decoders of text. As children learn the distinct graphemes of their language, they should have ample practice blending these sounds together. However, the amount that learners are asked to memorise should be limited to what is necessary[5].

Draft lists were created using the categorisations from the initial set of stakeholder workshops. These included all distinct graphemes of the languages but excluded any blends. Then, a second round of language-specific workshops was conducted to check and finalise each of the refined phonic lists.

DEVELOPING A SEQUENCE

Once grapheme lists had been established for each language (the scope), the next step was to determine the sequence in which these letter-sound relationships should be taught. Best practice indicates that graphemes should generally be taught in order of frequency in written text. To determine a sequence of graphemes for each language, the design team created a corpus of simple texts per language that included all texts from the HL DBE Workbooks for Grades 1 – 6 and from the reading worksheets and Big Book texts from the PSRIP HL Pilot materials.

From this simple corpus, we extracted the 1 000 most frequent words for each language. Then, we entered the final phonics list into the database of 1 000 words to determine the order of frequency of each sound included. The frequency lists were used as a starting point for sequencing the phonic programmes. However, slight changes were made at the discretion of language experts to allow for fast word-building; teams of language experts refined the sequences to ensure that easy and early word-building would be possible.

SIGHT WORDS

One significant feature of the revised PSRIP HL phonics programmes is that they are absent of sight words – or any words that learners must memorise. Except for English[6], all of South Africa's languages are charaterised by transparent

5 In addition to eliminating consonant blends from the list of distinct sounds to be taught, vowel sequences were also largely eliminated from the African language phonic lists. For example, while vowel sequences like 'ua' or 'ai' appeared in some of the original documents gathered, consultation with linguistic experts and stakeholders during the workshops revealed that in the African languages reviewed, these vowel sequences are split with a syllable break (i.e: bua) – they do not represent vowel digraphs as in English. It would be both very confusing and unnecessary for learners to be taught these sequences as distinct sounds of language.

6 Indeed, even in English, sight words are often not taught in an optimal way. These words are often taught as 'look and say' words to be memorised 'like a picture'. However, evidence shows that irregular words in English should be taught as difficult words; learners should practice segmenting these words into sounds and be explicitly taught both the regular and irregular sounds in the word. This process helps learners map the letters and spelling of the difficult word onto the sounds and speech units that they represent, thereby

orthographies. This means that all words in the language can be easily decoded once learners have been taught the basic letter-sound relationships of the language. There is no need to teach difficult words separately.

DECODABLE TEXTS

A decodable text is a text that uses only sound-spelling patterns that learners have been explicitly taught. The aim of a decodable texts is for learners to put their phonic knowledge immediately into practice to read words. When reading a decodable text, beginning readers should reasonably be able to decode (sound out and read) every word that appears in the text. They may encounter words they have never seen before – but these words will only contain graphemes they have been taught to read already.

Reading these kinds of texts is critically important for building word reading skills and building the understanding that reading is a code that can be cracked with phonic knowledge. Of course, once learners have been taught and can read all the sound-spelling patterns of their language, all texts are decodable. However, there is a small but critical window in the process of learning to read where decodable texts are necessary.

Decodable texts must specifically be aligned to a phonics programme as they include words based on what learners have been explicitly taught; they do not make other assumptions about what learners know. These texts encourage learners to sound all words out, and they specifically avoid creating situations in which learners must guess the word on the page. These kinds of decodable texts were developed as part of each of the PSRIP HL programmes.

Decodable texts were developed to align to the phonic scope and sequence of the language. These reading texts form a critical component of the phonics programme as they allow learners to put their phonic knowledge immediately and easily into practice.

CORE METHODOLOGIES

The phonics scope and sequences were used to design programmes that will cover the full scope of necessary phoneme-grapheme teaching by some point in the middle of Grade 2. Because different languages include different sounds, the timelines vary slightly. The basic structure of phonics teaching is the same for all languages. While a deep discussion of the methodologies used for teaching

helping them to learn and remember the word. Through the process of revising the PSRIP HL phonics programmes, we realised the need to revise the methodology used for teaching sight words in the PSRIP EFAL programme. In the EFAL programme, sight words have now been renamed 'difficult words', and the methodology has been rewritten to focus on segmenting difficult words into sounds, identifying regular or easy to spell sounds in the word, and identifying and explicitly teaching the parts of the word that make it difficult.

is beyond the scope of this paper, a basic summary of the programme structure follows: In Grade 1 Term 1, learners are taught just one sound per week to give them sufficient time to grasp the concept of letter-sound relationships and to give ample time for learners to practice and remember these initial, key relationships. Then, from Grade 1 Term 2 until the middle of Grade 2, two graphemes are taught per week, with revision weeks built into each term. As learners are taught new graphemes, they immediately use these to build words, allowing them to also revise previously taught graphemes. Skills like blending and segmenting are explicitly taught and practiced; this is when learners practice consonant blends, for example. During this period of time, Handwriting is aligned to the phonics programme. At the end of Grade 2, all the letter-sound relationships are retaught and revised. Finally, Grade 3 is devoted to building fluency and includes lessons on morphology.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. For children to become skilled readers of text in their HLs, it is critical that they are taught the phonics of their HL with a programme that has been developed without versioning. The NECT has taken great care to ensure the PSRIP HL phonics programmes are original programmes – not influenced by the scope and sequences of other languages (especially English, as has been the case in CAPS, for example). The sounds included are ones that are part of each language, and they are taught in an order that makes sense given the frequency of the sounds in the specific language. The phonics programmes, including the decodable texts, are all original and not versioned.

2. The revised phonics scope, sequences and teaching methodologies for the PSRIP HL were designed to align to the scientific evidence on how the brain learns to read. They were designed to ensure explicit and systematic teaching of all graphemes of each language, while also lightening the cognitive load for young learners by eliminating blends as distinct units to be memorised. The programmes were designed to get through the full scope and sequence quickly (not drawn out over many years, for example) while also allowing ample time for revision.

3. In addition, these programmes were designed to ensure that phonics is both a practical and applied practice. Learners are not taught phonics in isolation or as detached units of sound, but as part of a code to crack word reading immediately. Phonics-aligned decodable texts are

included, critical for ensuring that learners have access to texts that they can reasonably decode as they learn to read. By Grade 3, once learners have learnt and revised all the sounds of their language, all texts should be decodable for learners; from there, texts are used to build both reading fluency and general knowledge. In the PSRIP HL, Grade 3 texts are theme-aligned, uncontrolled texts that are designed to expose learners to a wide variety of topics.

4. While the PSRIP HL phonics programmes are currently not the sole official phonics programmes of the DBE, the NECT's hope is that these programmes will become standardised. The standardisation of these streamlined phonics programmes would allow for more appropriate, decodable early reading texts to be developed for every language. In the absence of this standardisation, graded readers (also known as repetitive texts) – which may be useful for building fluency once learners have learnt all the sound-spelling relationships of their language but are insufficient for building basic decoding skills as learners learn to read – are the only readers widely developed and available. Because existing phonics programmes vary so widely, it is simply impossible for publishing companies to develop decodable reading texts; standard phonics scope and sequences could allow publishing companies to put their energy and time into developing sets of aligned decodable texts.

5. Ultimately, the NECT has made an important step forward in the development of the PSRIP HL phonics materials. It is our hope that these programmes can be utilised to improve learners' HL reading skills, ensuring all learners have access to original, language-specific phonics teaching that helps them to become skilled, lifelong readers in their HL.

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MINI-LESSON 21

A standardised, nationalised approach for school improvement - **John Thurlow**

The Foundations for Learning Campaign (2008) was a post-apartheid initiative of the Department of Education to address some of the gaps in curriculum delivery and learner attainment challenges. The campaign was an early attempt at providing all teachers with a standardised approach to curriculum delivery, with the aim of improving the quality of teaching and learning in the formative years of schooling. Foundation Phase (FP) teachers were provided with literacy and numeracy lesson plans to help them better navigate the curriculum. The lesson plans were accompanied by a pack of resources needed for effective teaching and assessment. The programme was well received by teachers.

The Foundations for Learning Campaign was somewhat interrupted by the introduction of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), which were introduced in 2010. The CAPS made subject advisors and teachers feel conflicted between using the resources provided by the campaign and the requirements of policy as set out in CAPS.

Almost concurrent with the introduction of CAPS was the launch of the Gauteng Primary Language and Maths Strategy (GPLMS) in 2011. This provincially-based project provided teachers in targeted schools with detailed and more structured lesson plans, quality learning materials and instructional coaching. The lesson plans provided to teachers were more extensive than those provided in the Foundations for Learning Campaign, and the programme cov-

ered several Home Languages (HLs), English First Additional Language (EFAL) and Mathematics from Grades 1 – 6. Initially, the programme relied heavily on published materials, but structured lesson plans that aligned with the policy were subsequently developed during the course of the programme. Following on from the successes of the GPLMS, several other organisations and projects (including, but not limited to, Molteno, Room-to-Read, Class Act, Funda Wanda and Jika iMfundo) have further built on its lesson plan initiative, often in more localised areas.

THE NECT'S CONTRIBUTION TO STRUCTURED PEDAGOGY

In 2015, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) began working at providing the system with teaching and learning resources that would improve the quality of teaching, improve time-on- task and improve learning outcomes. The NECT's Structured Learning Programmes (SLP) initiative also built on the successes of the GPLMS and was extended to include additional grades and subjects: EFAL, Grades 1 - 12; HLs: Grades 1 - 3; Second Additional Language, Grades 4 - 6; Mathematic, Grades 1 - 9; Natural Sciences and Technology, Grades 4 - 6; and Natural Sciences, Grade 7 - 9. These SLPs were introduced into the eight districts in which the NECT originally worked and were scaled up across supported provinces as demand increased over time.

THE USE OF SLPS TO IMPROVE READING

In 2017, the Director General (DG) of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) requested the NECT to design a reading improvement programme. Funding from the Education, Training and Development Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA) paved the way for the introduction of the Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP).

The PSRIP, a partnership between the ETDP SETA, the DBE and the NECT, provided EFAL training and SLPs to FP and Intermediate Phase (IP) teachers. Although the DG expected an African language reading improvement programme, the NECT, in partnership with the relevant directorates in the DBE decided to start with an EFAL version, which would be easier to design and quick to roll out compared to developing materials for nine African languages.

If African languages were the starting point, the design effort would have had to have been multiplied by nine, thus delaying the start of the rollout. The PSRIP capitalised on the success of earlier work in the area of structured pedagogy. The PSRIP initiative paved way for the shift of the NECT's district and school-level support to a national level.

The sections below discuss some successes and challenges of this national initiative and concludes with reflections on lessons learnt that could inform school improvement as the nation moves ever closer to the National Development Plan's (NDP) target year of 2030.

SUCCESSES OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL READING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Through its five iterations that were effected between 2017 and 2023, the PSRIP as a national programme can be regarded a success in several fronts, inter alia design, implementation and feedback into policies and programmes. This success can be attributed to a number of factors, including:

PSRIP's development and implementation have been driven from within the DBE and the provincial education departments (PEDs). The unit responsible for reading improvement at DBE worked collaboratively to guide the design of the programmme and the curriculum advisors from the provincial level played a quality assurance role on the design and led the rollout of the programme in their respective provinces. The location of the programme in the DBE has further complemented programme implementation with excellent championship and leadership from within the DBE which was critical for the successful implementation of the programme.

The PSRIP was set up as a national movement and presents an instructive case of the importance of bringing education officials together to drive a national initiative. The centralised national training of subject advisors and provincial training of teachers established a movement that drove and continue to drive the change nationally towards a common purpose. We also observed from the programme implementation that there is strength in numbers and unity of many voices and passions. These create massive energy that can present professional opportunity, robust dialogue on technical matters, drive largescale change and have higher sustainability potential.

The ownership and investment by the PSRIP's custodians and implementers saw it adopted in 2019 as the sector approach to the teaching of reading by the highest body responsible for the technical aspects relating to teaching and curriculum, the subcommittee of the national Heads of Department Committee: Teacher Development, Curriculum and Management. The PSRIP's design provides a platform for national cross-pollination of ideas, approaches and solutions. Professional platforms that were created across the levels of the education system which created opportunities for in-depth capacity building of the subject advisors who are the curriculum specialists and the guardians of policy.

The inter- and intra-provincial engagement appeared to contribute to the improvement and maintenance of education standards across the country. This was realised through a definition of a common agenda which brought relevant subject advisors together on an ongoing basis. It can be argued that it paved the way for sustainable education delivery that has the potential to improve learning experiences and learning outcomes.

PSRIP provides numerous opportunities to meaningfully drive critical needed professional conversations between policy makers, researchers and implementers who are located within and outside government. It involved subject experts, academics, literacy non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and departmental officials in a development process that has shaped policy debates and led to a revisitation of ideas about curriculum improvements. Furthermore, the PSRIP has proven that structured pedagogy is beneficial to the education system including providing the following benefits:

When schools across all provinces work to a common programme, with specific content and skills being addressed at the same time, curriculum delivery stays in sync nationally, the movement of learners and teachers within and across provinces is less problematic, and gaps in learning and instruction are reduced. This is true for changes within the academic year and for progression between years.

The phased approach of the PSRIP has shown how the inclusion of new and evolving theories of how to teach reading can be meaningfully integrated into the SLPs. In essence, the SLPs become living documents which evolve for the better as new research and strategies emerge. The SLPs' relevance and currency help to maintain beneficiary and user interest and contribute to the success of the national programme.

The PSRIP has upskilled in excess of 1 000 subject advisors more than 5 000 school management team (SMT) members and at least 37 000 teachers who are using their new skills and shared voice to support and improve the quality of the teaching of reading across the country. No other programme has reached these levels.

Internal monitoring and quality assurance processes have documented improved understanding of policy and reading methodologies by both subject advisors and teachers.

Table 21.1 summarises the findings from internal Monitoring and Quality Assurance (MQA) processes and shows the improvements made by subject advisors and teachers between pre- and post-testing that focused on understanding of policy and programme content and methodology.

Improvements in Subject Advisors' and Teachers' Understanding of Policy and Programme Content and Methodology.

	2018	2021
Subject advisors	Up 24%	Up 16.5%
Teachers	Up 14%	Up 8%

Table 21.1: Improvements in subject advisors' and teachers' understanding of policy and programme content and methodology.

External evaluation activities have noted that the gains made by subject advisors and teachers are demonstrated in their practice – most notably; improved time-on-task, increased confidence, and better management and execution of curriculum support/delivery (PSRIP external evaluation, 2019).

These actions have, in turn, resulted in improved learning outcomes. Evaluation activities have also shown that children who had experienced the structured approach of the PSRIP usually performed better in all the reading subtasks (letter sounds, familiar words, oral reading and comprehension) than those who had not (PSRIP external evaluation, 2020).

The 2019 external evaluation also found that the percentage of non-readers in Grade 3 reduced between endline and baseline by 11.3% in PSRIP schools and just 3.1% in non-PSRIP schools.

Percentage of Non-readers in Grade 3 in PSRIP and non-PSRIP schools

	Baseline	Endline	Reduction in non-readers
PSRIP schools	15,5%	17,5%	11,3%
Control schools	4,2%	14,4%	3,1%

Table 21.2: Percentage of non-readers in Grade 3 in PSRIP and non-PSRIP schools

CHALLENGES OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL READING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Although proven to be successful, there are also many challenges with implementing standardised national programmes. These challenges include, but are not limited to:

A. **Internal resistance form stakeholders and beneficiaries**: The PSRIP has experienced resistance to change and adoption. The experience of the PSRIP confirms that change is by its nature reiterative and messy, and resistance is to be expected. Some resistance is based on valid grounds, some teach new ways of understanding, and other might be

rhetoric rooted in history, ideologies or personal agendas. As part of the PSRIP implementation team, we learnt that it is important to always keep the mission in mind and to drive the higher shared agenda for the betterment of teaching and learning.

Early in its implementation, some provinces resisted aspects of the programme's methodology and content. Swift action and mediation through workshop engagements aided adoption and enabled deeper understanding of programme objectives. Another example of such tensions emerged in relation to the aims of the PSRIP versus those of the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS).

Consultation with concerned stakeholders cleared the way for a deeper understanding and averted the myth that the PSRIP was a programme encroaching into the research space. Opportunities were also identified for capturing lessons from the EGRS into the PSRIP.

B. **Literacy NGOs becoming anxious about their regional or localised work being replaced with a national programme:** It is important to build bridges with partners and to enhance the programme through working collaboratively. SLPs should be seen as mechanisms for partnership working and as vehicles to strengthen support to and within the system.

C. **The rhetoric around SLPs supposedly restricting the creativity of teachers carried had the potential to damage the programme implementation:** SLPs should instead be seen as a developmental process for teachers, where reliance on the SLPs is removed over time, allowing teachers to move from guidance, through a process of deepening their understanding, towards independence and then to framing a growth mindset.

D. **The sustainability of standardised national programmes, especially at scale, is often threatened by under-funding:** Given the ongoing developments in research, coupled with changes in policy (exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic) continuousn review of programme materials and the refreshment of teacher knowledge and skills is necessary. Funding for thorough development can be costly, and this is very much a double-edged sword, as the success of the project hinges very strongly on the quality, relevance and alignment of the programme materials to policy. Where the beneficiaries feel that any of these are out of sync with the development, adoption and sustenance get compromised.

Centralised subject advisor training is costly, but without it, the cascade model of training is weakened, and programme integrity compromised. Finally, it is worth noting that in the experience of the PSRIP, situating the implementation of a national programme across two divisions or branches of the DBE (in the case of the PSRIP, the Foundations for Learning for EFAL and Curriculum for Home Languages) could lead to a fractured implementation approach. Perhaps, where such a configuration is unavoidable, clearly spelt out memorandum and joint programmes of agreement should be laid out. Passionate and strategic leadership is key to successful implementation.

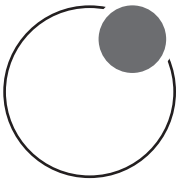
REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. In implementing the PSRIP, there have been several valuable lessons learnt. Overarchingly, standardising curriculum development and delivery are complex processes that require input, ownership and a will to participate from all beneficiaries and partners across all sectors.
2. Engagement activities that ensure buy-in, support, participation and resource engagement are critical to programme implementation success.
3. As a continuation of these engagement activities, ongoing intensive advocacy is required to make a national programme take root. This involves marketing, providing information, giving feedback and interacting with all stakeholders on an ongoing basis.
4. It is important that the engagement activities also include giving voice to partners, as this will allow the national initiative to take root and flourish across all provinces in the country.
5. The DBE's role in national programmes should never be underestimated. Beyond policy guidance and support, its role also extends to advocacy, trouble-shooting and engaging with provinces that may be struggling to adapt or adopt. It cannot be the role of an implementer or partner to convince PEDs to participate in national initiatives - this remains with the DBE.
6. The training and advocacy processes need to communicate clearly that structured programmes aimed at school improvement are not finished and absolute products. They cannot be. Every context, whether it be

a province, a circuit, a school or a classroom, is different, and as such, the programme needs to be able to adapt to changing environments (policy, teaching and learning theories).

7. The SLPs associated with standardised national programmes need to provide the for some flexibility in the expected implementation. A way to ensure that this is achievable is to use using the training components of the programme as a vehicle to enhance the capacity of departmental officials and teachers to fully understand and appreciate the strength of SLPs and how following the methodologies and routines in them does not impact teaching autonomy but is the opposite.

8. Structured pedagogy – particularly within standardised national-scale programmes – has its critics, but the evidence suggests that it can be powerful way of lifting up the baseline of teaching and learning. In the case of the PSRIP, which arose out of the experiences and lessons of many initiatives before it, it is demonstrated that with will, passion and follow through, a national programme can take root and make a difference towards positive learning outcomes. It is a complex process, but certainly one worthwhile pursuing.



MINI-LESSON 22

Structured learning programmes - **John Thurlow**

A Structured Learning Programmes (SLP) is an educational intervention aimed at changing the ways teaching and learning are conducted within a classroom setting. These programmes are born out of the contention that in order to improve education, change must happen at the 'instructional core' by impacting on 'how teachers understand the nature of knowledge and the students' role in learning, and how these ideas about knowledge and learning are manifested in teaching and classwork' (*Elmore 1996, 2*).

To this end, SLPs provide a framework for teachers to deliver the curriculum using routines and methodologies that package the curriculum into manageable parts.

SLPs have been used successfully in many projects and research studies implemented both internationally and across South Africa over the last decade, including: the Foundations for Learning Campaign, the Gauteng Primary Language and Maths Strategy (GPLMS), the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS), the Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP) and various learning programme interventions of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). The NECT's programmes have covered English First Additional Language (EFAL) in Grades 1 - 7 and Grades 10 - 12; Home Languages (HL) in Grades 1 - 3; Mathematics in Grades 1 - 6; Natural Sciences and Technology in Grades 4 - 6; and Natural Sciences in Grade 7 - 9.

THE CHANGE THEORY OF STRUCTURED LEARNING PROGRAMMES

The change theory underpinning SLP development includes several key considerations. These are summarised in Figure 22.1 diagram.

Factors to be Considered When Designing an SLP

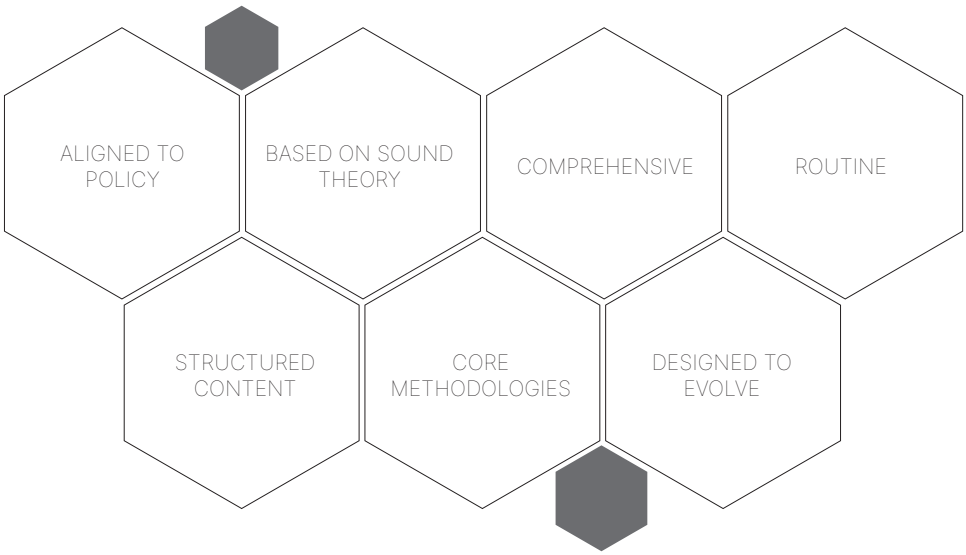


Figure 22.1: Factors to be considered when designing an SLP

While the starting point for SLPs is always policy alignment, their development also needs to be based on solid theory and proven international best practices. Importantly, the SLP needs to be a living package that evolves with the beneficiary/user experience and responds to new insights in the field of teaching and learning.

STRUCTURED LEARNING PROGRAMME CHANGE THEORY IN RELATION TO READING

The PSRIP is a national reading programme that supports teachers with the teaching of the curriculum in EFAL (Grades 1 – 7) and HL (Grades 1 -3). Teachers are provided with SLPs to support the delivery of the curriculum in their classrooms. The PSRIP's approach to reading is used as an example to explain the SLP change theory.

1. **Policy alignment:** In order for SLPs to be endorsed by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and to assist the teachers to deliver on the national language curriculum, they must be aligned to policy, namely the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) and to the resulting Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs).

2. **Sound theory:** The methodological approach is based on sound, evidence-based language learning theory.

3. **Comprehensive:** The SLPs are comprehensive in that they provide guidance and structure for all of the language learning components in CAPS, that is, they situate the learning to read process within the framework of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teachers are provided with lessons that cover the entire curriculum.

4. **Routine:** Another key element in the change theory is that of routine. Teachers are provided with weekly and daily routines that, if followed, provide all the necessary opportunities for successful language learning and the development of reading proficiency.

5. **Structured content:** The SLPs provide structured content that breaks lessons up into key teaching moments including teacher input, learner engagement and assessment.

6. **Core methodologies:** The core methodologies in the SLPs provide teachers with the pedagogical support and guidance required to teach the CAPS aligned content. Following these methodologies provides teachers with the skills they require to effectively teach reading and other language skills to their learners.

7. **Evolution:** And lastly, the SLPs are designed to evolve; they are able to accommodate a wide range of reading resources and can be augmented by teachers' own pedagogical practices or by new policy requirements.

PUTTING STRUCTURED LEARNING PROGRAMME CHANGE THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Operationalising the change theory into classroom practice is described here. The When, What, How and Why of putting the SLP change theory into practice is depicted in the Figure 22.2, followed by a description of each element.

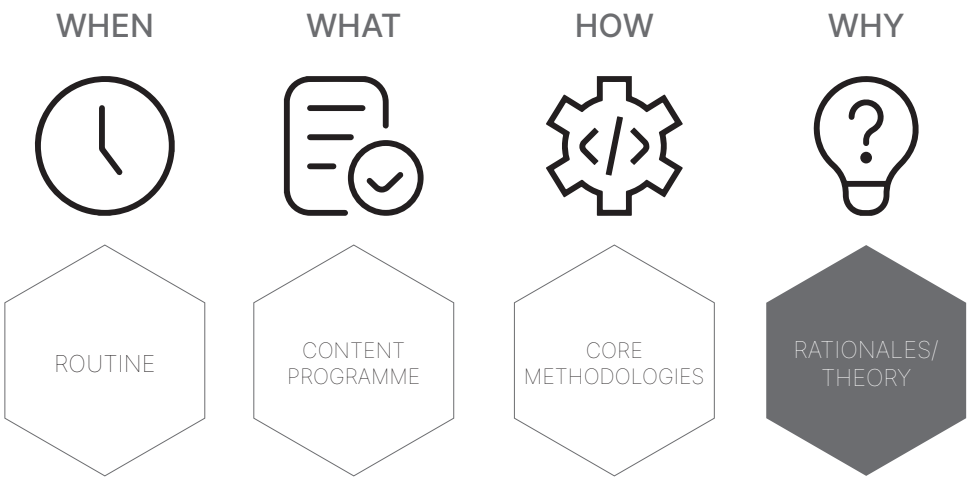


Figure 22.2: Operationalising the SLP change theory into classroom practice

A. **When:** Providing teachers with support and guidance on how to follow the weekly and daily routines. This helps teachers manage their teaching pace and provides them with guidance on how to cover the curriculum in the teaching time available.

B. **What:** Teachers are provided with detailed lesson plans that set out the programme content they are required to deliver to the learners.

C. **How:** Intensive training and support is provided to teachers on the core methodologies that demonstrate the pedagogical approach required to deliver on the national curriculum.

D. **Why:** As teachers become more proficient with pace, content and method, steps are taken to help them to engage with underpinning rationales and theories.

HOW TEACHERS BENEFIT FROM STRUCTURED LEARNING PROGRAMMES

There are several benefits to teachers using SLPs, including but not limited to the following:

1. **SLPS provide teachers with a clear framework for teaching and learning:** SLPs ensure that teachers cover all the necessary topics and skills, and that these are aligned with learning objectives and standards.

2. **SLPs save time by providing lesson plans, activities, resources and assessments:** The provision of these resources saves teachers time in planning and preparation. This has the potential to free up more time for teachers to focus on individual learners, provide feedback and offer additional support.

3. **SLPs include standardised assessments which help teachers to evaluate learner progress accurately and consistently:** This also helps teachers to identify areas where students need additional support.

4. **SLPs improve collaboration with colleagues by providing the opportunity for teachers to engage and share resources, ideas, and best practices:** This has the potential to build a supportive and collaborative learning community that can strengthen the quality of teaching and learning within school, across circuits and districts and beyond.

5. **SLPs upskill teachers by providing opportunities for professional development:** Training workshops and the provision of resources help teachers develop new skills, stay up-to-date with the current teaching practices and approaches, and improve their overall teaching effectiveness.

All these benefits considered; it is important to note that structured pedagogy has been criticised for what some suggest are limitations. In the experience of the PSRIP, critics have argued that SLPs adopt a one-size-fits-all approach which may not cater to individual learning styles and needs; that the rigid nature of structured pedagogy can stifle intrinsic motivation and limit incidental learning; and that teacher autonomy is stifled, limiting professional growth and creativity.

HOW LEARNERS BENEFIT FROM STRUCTURED LEARNING PROGRAMMES

There are several benefits to learners being taught through SLPs. These include but are not limited to:

1. Clear learning objectives inform the design of the learning programme. This provides learners with a roadmap of what they need to learn and achieve and keeps them focused and motivated throughout their learning journey.

2. Consistent pacing ensures that learners progress through the curriculum at a consistent pace, which helps to avoid gaps in knowledge or understanding.

3. More personalised learning is available as delivery can be tailored for individual learners.

4. Retention is improved because SLPs are designed so that they build on previous knowledge and skills. As content and skills are presented incrementally, learners retain, process and assimilate knowledge more effectively.

5. Higher levels of engagement make learning more interactive and enjoyable. This helps to foster a love of learning, which can lead to better outcomes and a lifelong love of learning.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. Within a particular SLP, it is important that learning outcomes, curriculum content and skills and assessments are aligned and fully policy compliant. Any degree of deviation creates resistance and works to the detriment of programme adoption. In the early stages of the PSRIP, to align with international research findings, we deviated from the order in which the phonics programme was presented in CAPs. This created resistance in certain provinces.

2. SLPs should be designed to be flexible enough to allow for individualisation and personalisation of learning experiences. Learners have different needs and abilities, and personalised approaches can help to support each child's unique learning journey. It is important to note that individualisation only becomes an effective possibility when the teacher is fully comfortable with using the SLP.

   The degree to which teachers lean on the SLP to deliver the curriculum will be decided by them and their needs. A myth exists that SLPs limit opportunities for creativity and innovation in the classroom. As noted in this mini-lesson, some suggest that a criticism of SLPs is that they reduce teacher autonomy. Our approach has always been that SLPs initially provide guidance and deepen understanding, after which teachers can move to independence in their own time.

This is achieved through training in methodologies and routines and also through modeling, practical engagements and peer learning.

3. The ongoing training of subject advisors and teachers is paramount for the success of SLPs. Robust training that covers methodology, content and assessment is required to ensure programme effectiveness and successful rollout. Training dry runs with peers have also been shown to improve the quality of training.

   In the early stages of the PSRIP, we introduced training dry runs to give subject advisors the opportunity to gain confidence, clear facts and details, and to learn from each other. The PSRIP subject advisor and teacher training is run twice a year. It ensures that officials are up to speed with the latest curriculum and assessment developments and that they are orientated on how these are incorporated into the SLPs. The frequency of this training provides a healthy rhythm and keeps beneficiaries actively involved in and commited to the programme.

4. SLPs require ongoing monitoring, research and feedback so that they are continuously improved to ensure that they are meeting the needs of teachers and learners. Methodologies and approaches should constantly be revisited to ensure that current lessons and international best practices inform the SLPs' design.

   Ongoing internal monitoring and quality assurance as well as external evaluation form part of the PSRIP's design. The data and findings from these activities, as well as those constantly learned from local and international research, are fed back into the programme's ongoing re-design. It is not easy to incorporate evolving reading theories into a static policy framework, but in the PSRIP this has been achieved by incorporating elements of the science of reading alongside the balanced approach around which CAPS was designed some 15 years ago.

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MINI-LESSON 23

Successes and failures of cascade and direct teacher training - **John Thurlow**

Since the establishment of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), one of the School and District Intervention Programme's themes has been teacher development and professionalisation. The change theory of this focus area has been premised on the notion that teachers who have the necessary content and pedagogical skills to deliver the curriculum effectively (supported by appropriate resources), and who participate in effective development and support interventions, have a strong chance of improving the learning outcomes of the children that they teach.

Teacher training and development is an ongoing, continuous process that encompasses a broad range of professional growth and improvement opportunities throughout a teacher's career. It involves activities and initiatives aimed at enhancing and deepening teachers' skills, knowledge and expertise over time.

Teacher development may include participation in workshops, conferences, seminars, mentoring programmes, collaborative learning communities, action research projects and self-reflection. The various activities encourage teachers to reflect on their practice, explore new ideas, experiment with innovative approaches and engage in lifelong learning to continually enhance their teaching skills.

The training of education officials and teachers is an essential component of any education support intervention, particularly in large-scale projects aimed at improving the quality of education.

Cascade training and direct training are two commonly used methods of teacher training in such projects, although cascade training is often a preferred method to achieve scale.

While cascade training involves training a group of professionals who then go on to train their peers, direct training involves the direct training of beneficiaries by experts in the field.

The early teacher professionalisation work of the NECT in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, the Eastern Cape and the North West Province often targeted teachers directly. Teachers were brought to central nodes in the provinces to participate in residential training over anything between two to four days.

The training was conducted by NECT master trainers (who were experts and experienced in content and methodology), and subject advisors usually also attended the training.

Table 23.1 summarises the beneficiaries in the above-mentioned provinces between 2015 and 2016.

NECT Direct Teacher Training 2015-2016

Year	Beneficiaries	Languages	Mathematics	Natural Sciences & Technology/ Natural Sciences	Total
2015	Subject advisors	136	18	-	154
	Teachers	1 218	348	-	1 566
2016	Subject advisors	78	29	31	138
	Teachers	911	128	141	1 180

Table 23.1: NECT Direct Teacher Training 2015-2016

LESSONS FROM THE EARLY INITIATIVES THAT INVOLVED DIRECT TRAINING

While the mode of direct training was relatively successful, and certainly went a long way in demonstrating quick wins and building subject advisors' and teachers' confidence, it also had several limitations.

The advantages and disadvantages of the NECT's experience of direct training are summarised in table 23.2.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Direct Training

Advantages	Disadvantages
1. High quality and responsive: The direct involvement of expert trainers ensured high-quality training that was focused and relevant to the needs of the subject advisors and teachers. Trainers could spontaneously adjust and tailor the programme to the specific context and needs of the teachers, ensuring that they received the most relevant and effective training possible.	**1. Costly:** Direct training proved to be incredibly resource intensive. The interface of expert trainers with subject advisors and teachers was expensive. Costs included trainers, travel, training venues and catering. In some instances, dry-run training sessions were also held in provinces, and this required additional resource costs relating to time, travel and accommodation.
2. Behaviour changing: Expert trainers were able to directly observe lesson demonstrations and provide feedback on teacher practice. This enabled the experienced trainers to run demonstration lessons, resulting in a high-level of engagement that proved to really improve pedagogical practices.	**2. Time intensive:** Direct training can take longer to deliver because there are a fewer number of experts who need to train many teachers over a wide geographic area. Direct training is more effective in smaller scale interventions, but as the PSRIP was a large-scale intervention, we needed to make the shift to the cascade model
	3. Logistical difficulties: The centralised delivery of direct training required additional planning, and the resource requirements could be logistically challenging: expert trainers needed to travel to centralised points across the country; participants needed to travel too, sometime for long distances; and physical resources needed to be delivered to provinces.

Table 23.2: Advantages and disadvantages of direct training

Despite the advantages, the downsides of direct training led to the NECT moving away from this approach. This shift was largely driven by a recognition that when subject advisors or other officials within the system deliver the training, it allows them to use localised context and content knowledge as well as to build local networks and establish professional trust.

THE MOVE TO CASCADE TRAINING

The Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP) is a partnership programme between the DBE, the NECT and the ETDPSETA. The PSRIP upskills subject advisors and teachers from Grades 1 to 7 in the teaching of reading. With the launch of the PSRIP late in 2016, there was a shift in the training approach from direct training to cascade training using subject advisors, and in some instances, lead teachers, to train teachers in districts, circuits and schools. The major driver for the move to cascade training was to support the NECT's scale-up in the provinces. It was also the agreed mode of training for the PSRIP, which upskilled 11 721 teachers in 2017.

Internationally, cascade training has been successfully used to improve teacher skills and knowledge as well as increase the adoption of new teaching methods and approaches (Rafi, 2010). Most notably, the lessons from other countries highlight that more than two levels of cascade can significantly reduce the quality of the training; and that the method of conducting the training must be experiential and reflective rather than transmissive. Using these international lessons, the NECT incorporated the training programme associated with each Structured Learning Programme (SLP) as a central component of each SLP. The mode of cascade training adopted capitalised on resources (human and physical) within the system. Subject advisors were trained centrally and prepared to be competent and confident enough to return to their provinces to train a cohort of teachers. In some instances, upskilled teachers also went on to train their peers. Through rigorous monitoring, some weaknesses were identified early in the delivery of the cascade training. It was evident that, in some instances, quality was lost in the process of cascading. To prevent loss of quality and content and to strengthen the cascade training, technical video clips were developed and incorporated into the training model.

The cascade training approach has proven to build regional relationships and professional confidence. While, in most instances, it proved to be successful, the quality of the training was always directly dependent on the trainer's knowledge, experience and commitment, and teachers' attendance at training sessions did, in some isolated cases, drop to as low as 50%. There appeared to be a correlation between attendance and three main factors relating to the subject advisor who delivered the training: 1) Poor communication and logistical arrangements leading up to the training; 2) Lack of commitment and passion to the programme; and 3) Poorly delivered training. In instances where teacher attendance at training was low, we met with Provincial Coordinators (and in some cases Teacher Development officials) to discuss how we might support the subject advisor and affected teachers to close any content and understanding gaps. We also used those sessions to put together what we called 'mop-up training plans' to ensure that all teachers received the training and that it was of a good quality.

CASCADE TRAINING IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL READING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

As a large-scale national intervention, the PSRIP continues to use the cascade training approach to upskill subject advisors and teachers. Master trainers train subject advisors centrally twice a year over a period of three days. Subject advisors then return to their districts to train cohorts of teachers, who also receive

Subject advisors and teachers trained using the cascade approach in the PSRIP 2017-2023

Year	Number of subject advisors		Number of teachers	
	Foundation Phase	Intermediate Phase	Foundation Phase	Intermediate Phase
2017	251	-	9 958	-
2019	128	140	4 475	4 465
2020	128	141	4 588	5 640
2021	100	138	4 913	3 798
2023	89	114	1 497	1 553
Total	696	533	25 431	15 456

Table 23.3: Subject advisors and teachers trained using the cascade approach in the PSRIP 2017-2023

the programme resources. The table below summarises the number of subject advisors and teachers trained using the cascade approach for the five iterations of the PSRIP. On average, each subject advisor has supported 33 teachers - as depicted on table 23.3.The cascade model, like the direct model of training has both pros and cons. Using the experiences of the PSRIP, these are reflected on in the next section.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CASCADE TRAINING

The PSRIP experience has demonstrated several advantages and disadvantages of cascade training for subject advisors, teachers and the system at large. Some of these are summarised in table 23.4.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Cascade Training in the PSRIP

Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Scalability: Cascade training was a lot more cost-effective and efficient as a method of training because a large number of teachers were trained in a relatively short period of time. A team of 20 master trainers trained between 150 and 300 subject advisors twice a year over a period of three days. On average, each subject advisor trained and supported 33 teachers, who in some instances went on to train other teachers in their schools. This allowed for many teachers to be trained quickly and efficiently, thus reducing not only time but also making it more cost effective than direct training.	**1. Quality control:** The quality of the individual training sessions was largely dependent on the quality of the specific trainer. Differences in the skills, knowledge and experience of the subject advisors impacted the quality and effectiveness of the training delivered to teachers.

Table 23.4: Advantages and disadvantages of cascade training in the PSRIP

Advantages and disadvantages of cascade training in the PSRIP (Cont)

Advantages	Disadvantages
2. Sustainability: The cascade training helped to build local capacity for literacy instruction by training subject advisors to become better trainers. It is important to note that subject advisors often only became fully comfortable with acting as master trainers some three years into the programme. Over time, subject advisors became able to provide ongoing support and training to teachers, even after the initial training ended.	**2. Dilution of content:** This negative aspect of cascade training is not limited to the NECT and the PSRIP experience. As knowledge and skills are passed from one level to another, there is always a risk of dilution or distortion of the original content. Misinterpretations or gaps in understanding can occur as the training message travels through layers of trainers and participants. To ease this problem, the NECT's approach was to provide clear training manuals and training handouts to support the navigation through the SLPs and the associated methodology. Additional support was extended through the provision of training videos that were used during the cascade.
3. Cost-effectiveness: As the cascade training approach used a train-the-trainer model, it proved to be more cost-effective than direct training. By training subject advisors centrally, and then by subject advisors training teachers in their districts, the overall cost of training was reduced because there were no costs associated with travel and accommodation for subject advisors or teachers.	**3. Work overload:** As much as the majority of Subject Advisors enjoy and are committed to the programme, the reality is that their participation in it (as both cascade trainers and administrators) is additional to their day-to-day work. They have other full-time responsibilities that span technical, administration and support functions. While it might be argued that the required support is central to their designated functions, the programme requires a higher-level of support and it also requires that they participate in and deliver training as well as complete administrative tasks associated with the programme.
4. Builds capacity of the system: By upskilling subject advisors who worked within the system, the capacity of the entire education system was strengthened because a pool of skilled trainers who could continue to provide developmental support over time was created. This enabled the universalisation of common approaches across the vertical and horizontal levels of the system.	

Table 23.4: Advantages and disadvantages of cascade training in the PSRIP

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. In general terms, direct training can be more expensive for training interventions on a national scale because it involves hiring external trainers to deliver the training to many participants. The costs associated with external trainers as well travel and accommodation are significant.

In addition, the planning and coordination of direct training requires a significant amount of time and resources. Furthermore, direct training may not be sustainable in the long term as it can be difficult to find and hire external trainers who are willing and able to provide ongoing training over an extended period.

2. In contrast, cascade training using subject advisors has lower upfront costs because it relies on existing personnel within the system to upskill others. Furthermore, for training on a national scale, existing resources within the system are leveraged to deliver cascade training, adding to its cost-effectiveness.

   Cascade training may, however, also require more ongoing support and monitoring to ensure that the training is being delivered effectively.

3. The PSRIP experience has shown that cascade training has the potential to create a culture of continuous learning as the subject advisors are well positioned to continue to upskill teachers and build capacity over time. This adds to the likelihood of cascade training being more sustainable than direct training. There is also the potential for a reduction in costs over the long term.

4. Whilst cascade training has proven to be more cost-effective in the case of NECT national-scale programmes, it is important to consider that overall cost effectiveness is influenced by a range of factors that should always be considered.

   These include: the size and reach of the initiative, the number of trainees, the complexity of the training programme, and the availability, competence and commitment of the trainers/subject advisors.

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MINI-LESSON 24

Upskilling subject advisors in their support roles to teachers - **Kaitlin Alsofrom**

Since the implementation of the Gauteng Primary Language and Mathematics Strategy (GPMLS) from 2011-2014, researchers across South Africa have conducted several significant studies to demonstrate that Structured Learning Programmes (SLPs) can be effective in impacting change in the South African context. Multiple studies in varying local contexts, subject areas and grade levels have shown that SLPs, consisting of a 'triple cocktail' of the aligned components of ongoing training, instructional coaching and structured teaching and learning resources can positively impact learning outcomes (*Ardington & Meiring, 2020; Cilliers et al., 2020; Fleisch, 2016; Fleisch & Alsofrom, 2022; Fleisch & Schoer, 2014; Fleisch, et al., 2016)*. Significantly, both the Early Grade Readings Studies I (EGRS I) and II (EGRS II), from 2015-2017 and 2017-2020 respectively, demonstrated the necessity of in-person coaching – not just training or WhatsApp virtual coaching support – for impacting change (*Cilliers et al., 2020; Cilliers et al., 2022*).

The Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP) is an innovative national scale reading intervention initiated by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in 2017 in response to the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) results and implemented through the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). The PSRIP is designed as a SLP, but unlike short-term, fully funded SLP projects, the PSRIP is meant to be both

sustainable and fully scalable at a national level. In terms of the components of the triple cocktail, the PSRIP consists of structured teaching and learning materials[1], which aim to help teachers enact the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) using evidence-based practices for the teaching of language and literacy. These materials aim to improve on the EGRS II Englihs First Additional Languagel (EFAL) materials, using the lessons learnt, additional ongoing research and feedback from implementers to continuously refine and revise the materials. In addition, the training and support necessary in a 'triple cocktail' framework is designed to be provided by subject advisors who are already part of the education system.

Since the start of the PSRIP in 2017, its goal has been to provide ongoing, meaningful trainings to subject advisors to equip them first with the practical knowledge of the PSRIP methodologies, and then to progressively build their knowledge of how children learn to read, best practices for supporting struggling readers and coaching competencies.

While coaching and support are necessary for change, the external coaching provided by smaller interventions like the GPLMS, EGRS I and EGRS II are too costly to implement at scale, the PSRIP represents a significant opportunity for innovation in and learning important lessons about developing support mechanisms at scale.

SUBJECT ADVISORS AND THE PSRIP: FROM BUY-IN TO OWNERSHIP

At the most recent PSRIP training in early 2023, the first in-person residential training since the COVID-19 pandemic, a mix of new and veteran-PSRIP subject advisors from across the country gathered for three days of learning. One of the Day 1 activities focused on revising how children learn to read; each subject advisor received a strip of paper with a definition of or fact about how children learn to read. They were asked to sort their strips of paper into the correct categories, such as phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, the alphabetic principal, etc. Like me, some of the subject advisors in the room had been involved with the PSRIP since the first training in 2017.

As subject advisors moved around the room, sticking their strips of paper onto the wall, and moving misplaced strips into their correct categories, I took a moment to reflect on the major differences in both knowledge and the energy in the room compared to that first training in 2017.

1 In the Foundation Phase, these materials consist of: daily scripted lesson plans, a teaching manual that provides methodologies for teaching each component of the curriculum, resource packs containing flashcards for phonics and vocabulary teaching, reading worksheets containing decodable texts that are aligned to the phonics programme, and Big Books for teachers to read to the class.

When the PSRIP began in 2017, many Foundation Phase subject advisors did not know what phonemic awareness was. While pre- and post-test scores demonstrate a positive gain in some subject advisors' knowledge (see Chetty et al, 2022), the testing data does not fully capture the positive shifts that the PSRIP design team has anecdotally observed over time. These shifts, and anecdotal evidence about their potential causes, are outlined below.

The power of witnessing change

The PSRIP training model was designed with the understanding that professional development is unlikely to be effective when it is disconnected from everyday teaching practice, not aligned directly to curriculum implementation, or is too theoretical or decontextualised (Darling-Hammond et al.,2017; Hayes, 2000). Guskey (1986) asserts that once teaching practices lead to visible changes in student learning, changes in teachers' beliefs and attitudes will follow.

The PSRIP training design is rooted in a practice-based approach; essentially, initial training is focused on learning the core methodologies[2] of the programme and encouraging both subject advisors and teachers to 'just do it!' In other words, the focus of early training is on encouraging participants to try it out and see for themselves – and giving them the basic tools needed to begin implementing. Only after subject advisors (and teachers) had time to practice the methodologies and witness some of the benefits of using the SLPs did trainings begin to layer-on some of the theoretical and pedagogical knowledge underpinning the SLP methodologies.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that for the PSRIP subject advisors, witnessing change in the classrooms they support has been key in changing thier attitudes towards the PSRIP, building buy-in and ultimately ownership of the programme. At a national review of the PSRIP, one subject advisor from the Western Cape stated, 'I think the programme is all about the methodologies, and it's really a recipe that works. If the teachers implement this recipe and follow it step by step, they have huge success in their classes, and I'm very passionate about it.' This quotation reflects the notion that implementation is a critical first step – and that passion for the programme is built through witnessing successes in PSRIP classrooms.

Similarly, at a recent nationwide conference on the teaching of reading, one PSRIP subject advisor –originally one of the PSRIP's biggest sceptics – delivered a presentation on the positive impact of the PSRIP on learners' written

2 The core methodologies are a central part of the PSRIP SLPs. The core methodologies provide teachers with step-by-step instructions of how to teach all the various components of the curriculum. The core methodologies help teachers understand how to teach, while the daily lesson plans tell teachers what to teach.

work. In front of various high-level stakeholders, this subject advisor asserted her belief in the PSRIP based on the changes she has witnessed in her PSRIP classrooms. This subject advisor's scepticism had not been alleviated through an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the programme or being told about the potential for change, but by actually training teachers on the methodologies and then observing the changes that occurred in classrooms where the methodologies were implemented.

Listening, relationships and trust

In addition to being practice-based, the approach taken in the PSRIP training programme has consistently been participatory and hence reliant on building an emotional connection to the programme. During the nationwide PSRIP review in August 2019, a provincial coordinator from the Northern Cape explained, 'I loved the way the trainers went off to find out any asked information and came back with feedback. I also felt like we were welcomed to talk and participate in the training – we felt heard'.

Each training – even virtual training sessions conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic – has been designed to not only build the technical skills needed for proper implementation, but to build relationships with and emotional investment in the programme so that participants feel meaningfully and emotionally supported enough to take the risks required to try something new. In addition, if subject advisors feel cared for and supported during the PSRIP trainings, the hope is that they will create the same safe and supportive spaces for their teachers.

When the PSRIP first began, many subject advisors expressed deep scepticism regarding the programme. Firstly, they had seen a variety of different school improvement programmes come and go. Secondly, they were critical and wary of some of the PSRIP teaching methodologies.

While the PSRIP is, of course, CAPs compliant, the PSRIP design team made decisions, based on the strong scientific evidence base – a rigorous body of research known as the 'science of reading' (SOR) (*Dehaene, 2009; Seidenberg, 2013*) - to modify some of the outdated practices suggested in CAPs. For example, while the Shared Reading guidelines in CAPS suggest using a 'simple enlarged text' so that learners may follow along with the words as the teacher reads the text aloud and points to the words, evidence shows that such practices are not actually useful to building learners' decoding (word reading) skills (Evans & Saint-Aubin, 2005; Kim, 2020). Instead, the Shared Reading 'Big Books' that teachers receive as part of the PSRIP resources are designed to expose learners

to rich texts with complex storylines, and to allow learners to gain positive experiences with books as the teacher reads aloud to them. The focus of the PSRIP Shared Reading methodology is on the development of oral language comprehension skills. Deep listening and dealing with early scepticism and criticism in a non-defensive, accommodating way were likely critical to achieving programme buy-in.

Indeed, particularly at the outset of the PSRIP, certain compromises were made to ensure subject advisors felt that their voices were heard. For example, whereas the lesson plans were initially labelled using the days of the week, they were re-labelled based on the day within the teaching cycle (Day 1, Day 2, etc.) – a request from subject advisors to accommodate teachers with varying timetables.

Usefully, the nature of SLPs (as opposed to, say, textbooks) is that they are easily inter-changeable, which has allowed for meaningful consideration of feedback given by PSRIP participants. The PSRIP SLPS are constantly evolving and improving as the design team conducts extensive research and as stakeholders' understanding of evidence-based practices shifts over time. When subject advisors see their collective feedback used to inform programme revisions, this helps them feel both heard and valued.

At early PSRIP trainings, subject advisors could be seen with their CAPS policy documents opened on their desks, carefully scrutinising the PSRIP materials for word-for-word alignment to policy. Now, however, among the many long-term PSRIP subject advisors, the methodologies of the PSRIP have become widely accepted. It is no longer standard practice – even among newly inducted subject advisors – to see CAPS policy documents in the PSRIP trainings (or to hear major criticism about how certain details of the PSRIP methodologies are not CAPS- aligned).

Over time, subject advisors have not only been trained in the methodologies of the programme – a long process of building knowledge around the theoretical underpinnings of the PSRIP methodologies has accompanied this practical learning. The level of theoretical knowledge has grown among the subject advisors – the theory is designed to be helpful and not overwhelming. During the 2023 Term 1 and Term 2 trainings, subject advisors were taken through a scaffolded process of considering the importance of critical thinking for young learners, reading academic articles summarising the scientific evidence on how children learn to read and analysing the alignment of the PSRIP (and by proxy, alignment of CAPS) with evidence on reading. In the training rooms, rich conversations ensued around problem areas in the curriculum. This kind of discussion marks a major shift (in multiple ways) from the conversations in the early days of the PSRIP.

CONCLUSION

Based on anecdotal observations and conversations, I would argue that the root of the PSRIP's growing acceptance is not blind compliance, but trust. I believe that through a process of building practical understanding of the programme materials, building relationships with the PSRIP training team and feeling supported and listened to, the PSRIP subject advisors have come to trust the programme design, content and training. While the induction process has not always been an easy one, many subject advisors have taken ownership of the PSRIP's core methodologies through the ongoing training and implementation cycle.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. As Chetty et al. (2022, 84) note, in terms of knowledge measured by pre-and post-test data, the PSRIP has demonstrated 'positive change over time and at a significant scale' in both subject advisor and teacher outcomes. While this is important, the positive impacts of the programme are not limited to improved test scores.

   Through the course of the programme, '[Subject] Advisors, teachers, and managers of the sector have demonstrated a positive appetite for changing teaching practices' (Chetty et al., 2022, 85). This supports the ample anecdotal evidence that suggests that the ongoing PSRIP training programme has been effective in helping subject advisors develop knowledge about how children learn to read, changing attitudes about structured learning materials, and building significant buy-in for the programme on a large scale.

2. In addition to providing high quality training to subject advisors, the PSRIP ensures that time is allocated towards subject advisors' professional growth. As Metcalfe (2023) notes, subject advisors need time (which is often unavailable, given their often unreasonable workloads) to focus on developing their professional skills and expertise; without this, '[Subject Advisors] often revert to relationships with teachers that are best characterised as being 'curriculum inspectors' whose authority is based on their position, rather than in professional confidence that is rooted in the constant growth of expert knowledge and understanding' (*Metcalfe, 2023*).

   In other words, the increased confidence that comes with consistent professional growth opportunities may help to shift the relationships

between teachers and subject advisors towards one that is less focused on compliance and more focused on support.

3. In addition to personal and professional learning, the sense of shared community – and comraderie – that the PSRIP seems to have built may be significant to its success. Metcalfe (2023, 21) notes, 'The "community" of Subject Advisors is essentially subject and phase specific. A subject specialist tends to see other specialists in their subject area as their "professional community" across districts, and phases, and it is the bonds of this shared sense of community that nurtures the professional development of the curriculum specialist – both in terms of subject-specific knowledge and of pedagogy'.

   The ongoing, often residential[3] PSRIP trainings have helped bring together subject and phase specific subject advisors, strengthening the sense of shared community and purpose. The PSRIP trainings have provided both the time and space for subject advisors from all across the country to focus on, discuss and problem-solve around issues of instructional practice.

4. Fullan (2015, 52) argues that 'change is a process, not an event'. In the case of the PSRIP, we have seen that the process of change is sometimes slower than we would like it to be and requires slowly chipping away at long-held beliefs through listening and compromise. However, over time, subject advisors have not only bought into the programme, but have taken ownership of it. Significantly, as subject advisors have witnessed the positive response of teachers to the programme and also observed differences in teaching and learning, their attitudes and beliefs about the programme have changed.

   This supports Guskey's (1986, 2002) assertion that practice precedes changes in attittudes and beliefs, and that witnessing change is key to sustaining it. This is a significant lesson for the system in terms of approaches to professional development and in terms of perseverance.

5. In its innovative approach to ongoing subject advisor capacity building, the PSRIP can offer important lessons to the system about effective professional development that builds key skills and knowledge for supporting teachers (even from a low base), addressing the challenges of scaling up one-on-one support (coaching) for all teachers.

3 Trainings were conducted online during the COVID-19 pandemic, but have otherwise been primarily residential, bringing subject advisors together in Johannesburg for the course of 3-day trainings.

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MINI-LESSON 25

Stepping into the Sandbox: Learning on behalf of a system - **Lebohang Mpakanyane and Cathryn Moodley**

The world is changing fast, and there is growing acknowledgement that education systems globally need to adapt to ensure that they are adequately preparing young people to thrive in contexts of complexity, uncertainty and rapid change *(Care, Kim, Anderson & Gustafsson-Wright, 2017)*. The COVID -19 pandemic is one recent example that illustrated the need for agility, not only in the education system, but in various spheres of life. In light of these challenges, the NECT's innovation unit, the Edhub, has been exploring how learners and teachers in South African public schools can be better equipped with the knowledge, skills, values and mindsets needed for success in the 21st Century and beyond. The aim of this exploration is to assist the education sector to make evidence-informed shifts towards more relevant teaching and learning for the future.

The exploration has been done primarily through trialling and researching interventions in public schools to gather evidence on practices that are well-suited to the South African schooling context. Given the exploratory nature of this topic and the relative lack of primary research on future-fit teaching and learning practices in South African schools, the Edhub decided to adopt an alternative approach to the design of this research project by trialling interventions in a 'sandbox' environment. This mini-lesson will discuss the sandbox design and approach and outline lessons learned through this process.

THE SANDBOX SCHOOLS PROJECT

The Sandbox Project emerged out of the NECT's decision in 2015 to create a dedicated innovation unit to explore the future of basic education in South Africa[1].

The Edhub initiated the Sandbox Schools Project, a multi-year, educational, design-based research project that aims to learn from the design and implementation of several interventions that enable teaching and learning for the demands of the changing world. The project was designed to be a laboratory for experimentation, where interventions are designed, trialled and researched in a sample of public schools, recognising that innovation requires flexibility and iteration *(Gravett & Eadie, 2021)*.

The term 'sandbox' has two meanings, both of which are relevant to the project design: First, in software development, a sandbox environment is a virtual space in which computer code is tested in isolation, without an effect on the surrounding network or its applications. Sandboxes are used in both web development and cybersecurity to safely test, monitor and experiment with software.

Similarly, in the eleven Sandbox Schools, alternative approaches to teaching and learning were tested in a small environment, with permission to hold training on weekends, develop a competency-infused Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) aligned Structured Learning Programme, and conduct deep research with teachers, learners and families. Classroom observations, photography and videography were used to garner insights that could inform the broader system. Secondly, a sandbox is a safe environment where children can learn through play, exploration and experimentation. The Sandbox Schools Project adopted the same exploratory spirit to trial approaches to teaching and learning that sought to understand how to prepare learners for a changing world.

FORMATION OF THE SANDBOX

Eleven primary schools formed part of the Sandbox Project. Given the intention to learn on behalf of the broader South African education system, the Sandbox Schools fell within Quintiles 1-3, which comprise approximately 79% of the national learner population (DBE, 2017). Ten of these schools were in rural and semi-rural areas (Waterberg District, Limpopo), with the eleventh school being in an urban settlement or township (Soweto, Gauteng).

The school selection process for the Limpopo schools involved two key steps: 1)

1 Mini-Lesson 29, A Formalised Innovation Structure Within The Basic Education Sector outlines the creation of the innovation unit, the Edhub, in more detail.

opting in, and 2) school selection. During the first step, a presentation was made to principals in the Waterberg District, and they were given a chance to opt into the project. The second step involved selecting ten schools from this shortlist, based on a set of criteria including appetite for change, proximity to one another, school and class size, quintile and basic functionality. The eleventh school, Funda UJabule Primary, is affiliated with the University of Johannesburg (UJ) Faculty of Education, and it was included as a 'lab school' that enabled deeper research on both teacher development and initial teacher education.

In creating the Sandbox, there was discussion and collaboration with district officials and principals in Waterberg to define the terms of agreement and permissions required regarding research interventions. In Soweto, the existence of a Memorandum of Understanding between UJ and the Gauteng Department of Education enabled Funda UJabule to function as a research school, with special permissions to experiment with teaching and learning for the benefit of the broader system.

AN EDUCATIONAL DESIGN-BASED RESEARCH APPROACH

The Edhub adopted a four-step innovation process to identify, design and trial innovations in basic education: Scan; Prototype; Pilot; and Scale. The Sandbox Project falls into the prototype phase of this process.

Following an initial scanning phase, whereby local and global trends, challenges, opportunities and risks were analysed and potential interventions were selected for further research and development, the prototype phase entailed iteratively designing, implementing, researching and refining interventions in schools to determine their feasibility in the South African context. As such, the research approach selected enabled highly iterative research into and development of interventions.

The term educational design-based research (EDBR) is used to describe the research approach followed by the Sandbox Project, highlighting the educational focus, where design and research are intertwined (Bakker, 2018). EDBR can be described as a genre of research committed to developing practical and theoretical insights in tandem in real-world educational contexts (McKenny & Reeves, 2019). A typical EDBR process involves designing an intervention, informed by theoretical insights and contextual knowledge, and iteratively implementing, researching and adapting this intervention in a learning environment, with the dual aim of strengthening the intervention itself and garnering further theoretical insights. The steps outlined below were followed to design the Sandbox EDBR process (Gravett & Eadie, 2021):

Analysis of the problems/issues:

1. Literature reviews: Topics included the purpose of education and schooling, the science of learning, 21st Century teaching and learning frameworks, curriculum frameworks of exemplary education systems, case studies of curriculum reforms for 21st Century competencies in the global North and global South, and indigenous knowledge systems in South Africa in relation to education.
2. Site visits at selected public and independent schools in South Africa.
3. Policy dialogues on 21st century education, involving key stakeholders.
4. Interviews with leading global and local researchers, innovators and educational practitioners.
5. Articulation of initial design principles to guide the project and intervention design, based on insights from research and practice.
6. Development of solutions based on existing knowledge:
   i. First iteration of each intervention designed, drawing on craft knowledge, theoretical insights and literature applicable to the specific intervention.
7. Evaluation research of the solution in practice:
   ii. Iterative cycles of formative evaluation research conducted over three years from 2020.
   iii. Mixed methods of data collection used, including observations, interviews, questionnaires and analysis of artefacts.
8. Reflection to produce design principles for dissemination:
   i. A post-intervention focused reflection planned for each intervention to refine design principles.

SANDBOX INTERVENTIONS

Over the course of three years, the following interventions were designed and trialled in the Sandbox Schools. Some interventions ran over the entire three years, while others were much shorter mini-interventions – some in response to the COVID-19 lockdown.

Sandbox Interventions 2020-2022

Intervention	Description	Target group	Years active
Competency-based Learning Programme (CLP)	A Structured Learning Programme in Home Language designed to support teachers to deliberately and systematically include skills and competencies in their daily teaching.	Grade 1 Home Language	2020-2022
School Culture	Participatory intervention with school principals to co-create an approach to school leadership in a fast-changing world.	School principals	2020-2022
Robotics & Coding	Various in-class or extra-curricular programmes to explore Robotics and Coding as a tool for developing competencies.	Intermediate and Senior Phase	2020-2022
Tinkering	Tinkering kits and training for teachers on how to incorporate tinkering and a culture of making in their classes.	Open to all grades and subjects	Mini-intervention in 2022
Mindfulness	Daily 5-10 minute mindfulness exercises and training for teachers to implement with learners.	Phase 1: Grade R-7 Phase 2: Grade 5	Mini-interventions in 2020 and 2021
Sandbox@Home	COVID-19 response mini-intervention designed to facilitate learning during school closures through stories and play.	Grade 1 Home Language	Mini-intervention in 2020

Table 25.1: Sandbox interventions 2020-2022

INTENTIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE SANDBOX APPROACH

The Sandbox Project was designed as an exploratory study that aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and processes at play in schools that adopted these interventions. As such, the sample of schools was small (11 schools in total), and schools were given the choice to opt into the project. Given these intentions, the EDBR approach was selected for its ability to provide rich insights into complex processes of teaching and learning, and to enable rapid iteration of intervention designs.

The project did not aim to achieve statistical generalisation to a larger population, but instead aimed to achieve analytical generalisation, that is, generalisation to a theory, model or concept by presenting the research findings as particular cases of a more general model or concept (Gravett & Eadie, 2021).

The EDBR approach, as used in the Sandbox Project, also cannot establish causality in the direct way of more controlled experimental approaches. However, the approach aims to produce 'plausible causal accounts' through linking processes to outcomes (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). This is often done through using mixed methods of data collection and presenting rich, 'thick' accounts that aim to understand the processes and mechanisms at work in an educational setting (Gravett & Eadie, 2021). This approach was taken in the Sandbox to explore when, why and how teachers were interacting with the interventions, and how they understood the interventions in relation to their classroom teaching. A different research design, like an impact evaluation, for instance, would be needed to gauge the impact of interventions more directly on academic outcomes and competency development.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

The conceptualisation, design and implementation of the Sandbox Project garnered a number of insights into the complexities and opportunities involved in conducting exploratory research with public schools. The following lessons emerged most prominently through this process:

1. Systemic impact requires deliberate design and collaboration: Making an impact on the broader education system requires strong relationships and participation by government at various levels. In the Sandbox Project, advocacy at the national and district levels complemented primary research at school level to build a case for systemic change. As one of several other influences, the primary and secondary research conducted as part of the Sandbox Project has since played a role in supporting the national curriculum strengthening process currently underway at the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to make the case for deliberate updates to teaching, learning and assessment in South African schools.

2. Iterative design can strengthen interventions and build trust: The iterative design of the research in the Sandbox Project enabled teachers and principals to provide direct feedback on intervention design and to have a voice in informing revisions. Teachers' feedback was regu-

larly sought as part of the EDBR process and was addressed directly by the Sandbox Project team. This iterative process built trust with teachers and principals, who felt that interventions addressed issues that they faced and that their input was valued.

3. Exploratory research can enable co-creation of localised terminology and resources: Through the Sandbox approach, the research team had an opportunity to trial new or unfamiliar terminology in local contexts and to test translations of some of the terms into indigenous languages. Teachers were also provided with opportunities to participate in the creation of 'competency explainer videos', which aim to define, explain and provide local exemplars of how competencies can be developed in South African classrooms. This work has provided rich local research to inform the national curriculum strengthening efforts underway at the DBE.

4. The value of creating ecosystems for innovation: As outlined in the mini-lesson on innovation, the NECT in 2015 identified the need for a dedicated unit to explore the future of education in South Africa and created the conditions under which the Edhub could operate with this mandate. These conditions included a dedicated future focus and relative freedom to explore bold, innovative ideas in public schools, drawing on a broad network of local and international experts. These enabling conditions created the environment in which the Sandbox Project could emerge and assist in generating local research and insights about possible futures in South African education.

CONCLUSION

The trialling of interventions in a sandbox environment enabled deep research to be conducted on behalf of a much broader system in a highly iterative and exploratory manner. The sandbox approach was particularly suited to the topic of study, given the relative lack of local research on 21st Century competencies, and it therefore enabled interventions to be prototyped and refined, based on feedback from teachers, for piloting in the larger system.

Throughout this process, the importance of building trust and creating links between various levels of the education system was highlighted; the work of the Sandbox Project could not have taken place if not for agreements with, and between, schools, districts, provincial education departments and the national DBE.

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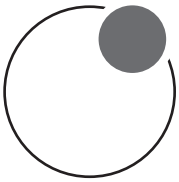


MINI-LESSON 26

Virtual learning spaces hold great opportunities for expanding classroom offerings and improving learning experiences and outcomes **- Godwin (G2) Nhauro**

Since the dawn of humanity, through the five stages of the industrial revolution, from mechanisation to the emerging Fifth Industrial Revolution (Industry 5.0), mankind has worked towards the achievement of the highest possible level of technological autonomy. Looking back on what has been accomplished, we can attest to great progress and success, especially given the extent of technological advancement in this era. Autonomous technology has indeed birthed radical technological breakthroughs that have disrupted, revolutionised, and transformed businesses and services across different industries, including education. Thus, digital technologies, as in other industries, have a pivotal role in the modernisation and transformation of the education system.

To this end, the application and impact of digital technologies in pedagogy through virtual learning spaces has attracted much research interest. Emerging from the research is the observation that virtual learning spaces, powered by emerging digital or technology-based innovations, have brought about a significant paradigm shift in instructional delivery. This shift, while providing learners with an excellent teaching and learning experience, has far-reaching value and benefits for improving learning outcomes. Empirical studies have attributed this to the fact that digital learning environments facilitate personalised, col-

laborative and interactive learning environments by affording learners exposure to interactive, mobile, blended, asynchronous, cooperative, adaptive and environmentally distributed learning opportunities (Nhauro, 2022; Shardlow, Sellar & Rousell, 2021). Figure 26.1 illustrates some of the benefits and value that can be derived from virtual learning spaces.

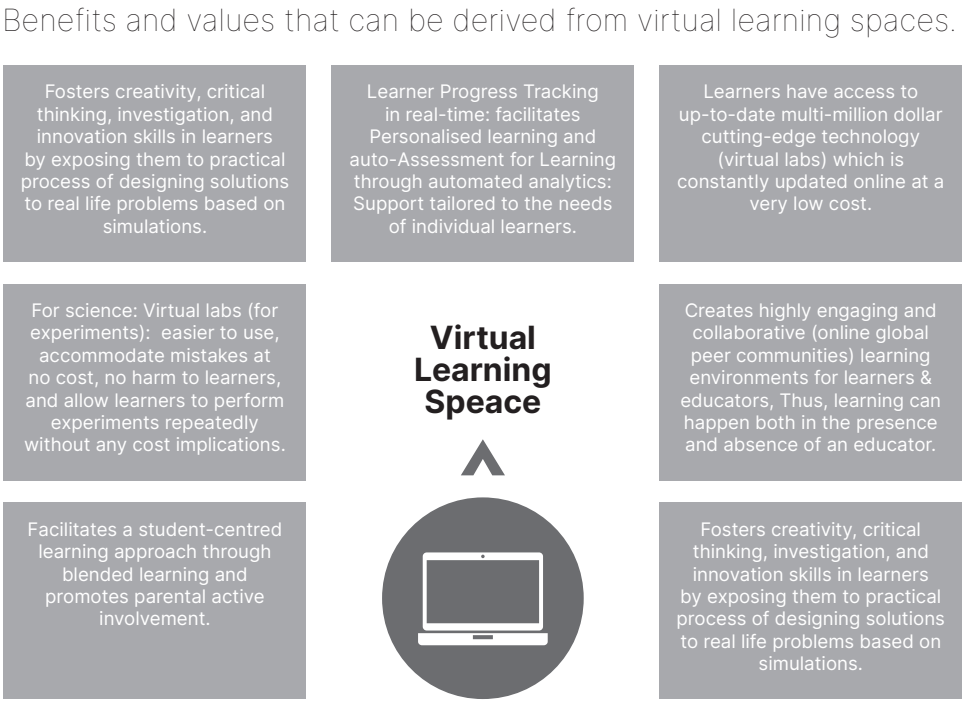
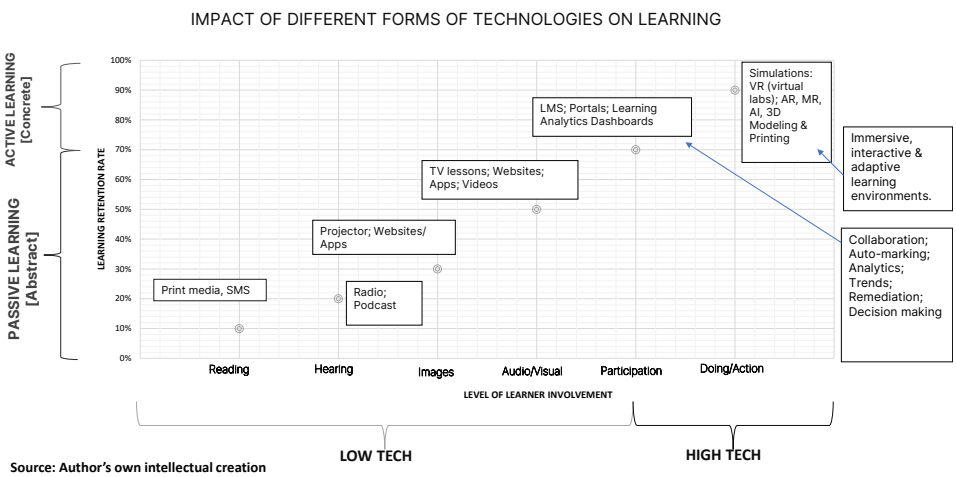


Figure 26.1: Benefits and values that can be derived from virtual learning spaces | Source: Adapted from Nhauro, 2022.

Despite the multitudinous benefits of virtual learning spaces for improving learning outcomes, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) has consistently maintained the position that technology is never meant to replace the teacher. In the words of George Couros, author of The innovator's mindset (Couros, 2015), 'Technology will never replace great teachers, but in the hands of great teachers, it's transformational.' Simply put, technology is a set of mediation tools used to create ubiquitous learning environments (learning in one's own environment) for better and improved forms of instructional delivery for the attainment of defined pedagogical goals. These virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), mixed reality (MR), and artificial intelligence (AI) powered tech-assistive tools include, among others, apps, simulations, portals, platforms, online discussion forums, and 3D modeling and printers, with television, radio, computers, mobile phones, interactive flat panels (smart boards) and whiteboards being the commonly used output devices.

The depth of learning (learner knowledge retention) varies with the nature and extent of learner engagement or involvement in the learning processes. In the context of virtual learning, the learner's level of involvement is dependent on the type of technology being used. Figure 2 is a diagrammatic representation of the impact of low-tech versus high-tech assistive technology on learning.

The Impact of different forms of technology on learning



Source: Author's own intellectual creation based on Dale's Cone of Learning.

Figure 26.2: Impact of different forms of technology on learning

As illustrated in Figure 26.2, other things being equal, relative to high-tech technologies, the use of low-tech assistive technologies, for example, radio, television and videos is characterised by lower levels of learner involvement and hence often associated with passive learning. In contrast, high-tech assistive technology, for instance, VR, AR, AI and 3D modeling and printing is known to facilitate a higher level of learner involvement, often characterised by active participation and learning by doing; hence, the use of high-tech assistive technology is associated with concrete learning, and the greater the extent of learner involvement, the greater the degree of learning retention.

With the emergence of digital learning-based technologies over the last three decades, the use of virtual spaces as platforms for supporting learning has been extensively advocated for as a complementary pedagogic approach to foster 21st Century skills and competencies in learners and enhance their understanding of concepts.

The key takeaway here is that learners learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process as opposed to being passive recipients of the information (Nhauro, 2022). Virtual learning spaces provide environments that promote learners' active involvement in and ownership of the learning process, thereby optimising learning outcomes.

A SYNOPSIS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT REGARDING THE UTILISATION OF VIRTUAL LEARNING MODALITIES

In the South African context, it is almost two decades since the Department of Education (DoE) began planning for the national implementation of tech-assistive learning modalities through the e-Education strategy (DoE, 2003). The strategy incorporates the integration of remote and digital learning approaches in pedagogy.

There are several policies on the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into education that have been passed since 2004, including, among others: White Paper 7 on e-Education: Transforming Learning and Teaching through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)[1] (DoE, 2005); the Department of Basic Education's (DBE's) Action Plan to 2024 (DBE, 2020)[2]; and the Presidency's Operation Phakisa: ICT in Education[3], launched in 2015, with a focus on devices, connectivity, teacher professional development and curation of digital content. The e-Education policy goal states that,

> *Every South African learner in the general and further education and training bands will be ICT capable (that is, use ICTs confidently and creatively to help develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve personal goals and to be full participants in the global community) by 2013. (DoE, 2005, 17).*

According to empirical evidence, this has not yet been realised.

Thus, the implementation of tech-assistive learning modalities proceeded at a slow pace until the advent of the Coronavirus. The Coronavirus pandemic and the resulting lockdowns brought about an exponential acceleration in the schooling system's adoption of and adaption to using digital technologies via multiple platforms, ensuring education continuity, even in isolation.

THE RATIONALE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NECT'S REMOTE AND DIGITAL LEARNING CAMPAIGN

In response to the COVID-19 disruptions, the NECT and the DBE embarked on a multi-pronged, emergency catch-up and education recovery initiative, guided by the principles 'Rebooting, Recovery, and Building Back Better'.

1 https://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Keu0_Bkee-M%3d&tabid=191&portalid=0&mid=484
2 https://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=5SUXQCJZo6k%3d&tabid=93&portalid=0&mid=9055
3 https://www.operationphakisa.gov.za/operations/Education%20Lab/Pages/default.aspx

The initial phase, the rebooting, was based on deliberate actions aimed at resuscitating operations to ensure education continuity. Among several initiatives undertaken was the Remote and Digital Learning (RDL) Campaign, consisting of the Tswelopele and Woza Matrics Learner Support Programmes. Over the past three years, the RDL Campaign has implemented a combination of carefully selected, low-tech modalities that take the context of the targeted beneficiaries (including the marginalised) into account to ensure education continuity, assist with curriculum catch-up, and support learners, teachers and parents amidst and post COVID-19 disruptions.

During the initial COVID emergency period, educational broadcasting was integral to the RDL Campaign's strategy. The strategy evolved over time as partnerships were forged with entities that had diverse technological offerings. From January 2021, the RDL Campaign expanded beyond television broadcasts to include multiple non-digital and digital platforms that provided learners with many ways of accessing educational resources. Figure 26.3 illustrates the historical context of the RDL Campaign since its inception.

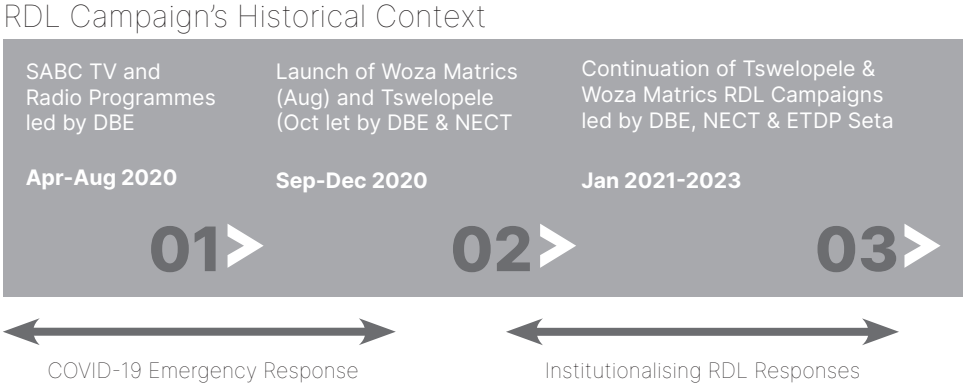


Figure 26.3: RDL Campaign's Historical Context

SUCCESS WORTH CELEBRATING

Over the three years of its existence, the RDL Campaign has had a significant impact on the education system by introducing virtual spaces as additional platforms for school improvement.

The Tswelopele Campaign provided greater access to curriculum and Care and Support for Learning and Teaching (CSTL) resources. The campaign targeted Grade R to 11 learners, teachers and parents/caregivers and provided access to resources across multiple platforms (television, YouTube, South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) radio stations, print media, mobile/digital platforms, and Tswelopele and partner websites).

At the same time, the Woza Matrics Catch-Up Campaign offered Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) aligned content to Grade 12 learners, including second-chance matric learners. The content was accessible via multiple digital and non-digital platforms. The former included digital platforms such as Matric Live and Virtual Educator-Led Learning Experiences (VELLE), while the latter included print media, free-to-air educational television broadcasts, SABC television lesson broadcasts and SABC radio lessons.

Since the lesson content was aligned to CAPS, only DBE-reviewed and quality-assured content was broadcast on the various television platforms (SABC, DBEtv), and where applicable, the YouTube Channel.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

From a broader perspective, the following lessons among many have come to light regarding the use of virtual platforms for learning.

The focus of the conversation has shifted from whether technology should be used in learning to a 'global dialogue' on how technology can be effectively integrated into education to improve and increase the quality of teaching and learning. Thus, technology has prompted educationists to rethink the design of physical learning spaces to accommodate emerging virtual learning modalities.

When properly designed and effectively integrated into instructional delivery, virtual platforms can be powerful tools to reimagine learning and simultaneously provide learners with a great learning experience. Virtual learning platforms allow education continuity amidst disasters that prohibit face-to-face teaching and learning.The use of a technology mix is an effective approach to facilitate and support learning at schools and in homes. Some of the key takeaway lessons from a programmatic standpoint are outlined below.

1. For the successful and smooth running of the virtual platform's offerings, building and maintaining functional strategic collaborative partnerships is key.

   In the RDL context, each partner plays a uniquely critical role, for instance, content providers make sure policy-aligned content is developed and made available in different formats for use by targeted beneficiaries; website developers ensure that different platforms hosting the content are up and running 24/7; the NECT manages partners and drives the implementation of the programme (over the past three years, the RDL has worked with an excess of 28 partners in implementing the programme); and the DBE has oversight of the programme.

2. Advocacy, marketing, and communications play an important role in ensuring awareness of all aspects of the remote and virtual learning space offerings. To realise the impact of the programme, the benefits of virtual learning spaces had to be advocated to all stakeholders (e.g., departmental officials, learners, parents, etc.). To that end, the services of a dedicated digital marketing company were crucial in supporting the programme.

3. Affordability is essential to ensure equitable access to learning resources. Zero-rating of platforms and/or low data platforms (mobile network operators) ensured that even learners, teachers, and parents from the most excluded communities were able to access learning resources from multiple access points.

4. Departmental officials' buy-in was crucial. Change management processes to secure the buy-in of education officials across all levels (national, provincial and district) were essential for the effective adoption and implementation of all elements of the virtual learning modalities.

5. Provincial and district absorptive capacity influenced the campaign's success. The successful implementation of virtual learning modalities depended on the availability of functional provincial and district support structures to offer programme implementation support to schools.

6. School officials should be capacitated with the relevant skills and knowledge. For the effective implementation of virtual platform modalities in learning, provincial and district officials should be capacitated to effectively track, monitor and support teachers implementing the programme. Hence, regular implementation feedback reports were imperative for continuous programme adjustments and improvements.

7. There is a need to mobilise and involve community-level stakeholders such as District Steering Committees (DSCs). When advocating for the adoption and adaption of virtual spaces as additional platforms for school improvement, community-level stakeholders should be involved since they understand the dynamics of the communities they serve.

8. Social partners such as teacher unions should be involved in advocacy, communication, training, and implementation of the programme. Their involvement yields better responses from and participation by teachers.

9. Resource sharing across organisations and institutions creates additional opportunities for the advancement and growth (in terms of reach) of the programme.

10. Application of new digital technologies (MTN online school, self-assessment, virtual tutoring, etc) in the classroom and at home have enabled new and effective ways of learning and exam preparation that have benefited learners.

In conclusion, Plato's comment, the great philosopher, and teacher to Aristotle, still resonates today when he said,

Do not train a child to learn by force or harshness; but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each.

Plato's sentiments echo with what his teacher, Socrates said:

I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think.

The aforementioned perceptions describe precisely what technology does - it creates conducive and stimulating environments for learners to think creatively and to be innovative. However, it goes without saying that technology can have a negative impact on learners.

Some of the negative impact include, but are not limited to, (i) learners becoming vulnerable to a potential breach of privacy, cyberbullying, and phishing attacks, and (ii) behavioral deficits in learners such as 'internet addiction, lack of confidence, academic difficulties, loneliness…' GÖK, (2015).

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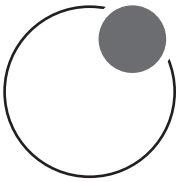
SECTION 3:

CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND MANAGING SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT



MINI-LESSON 27

Building a common identity among decentralised staff - **Cebisa Ncube**

Imagine being the conductor of a large choir tasked with performing a difficult piece of music from Mozart's Requiem. Or imagine being the director of a musical where the cast must sing and dance from different points of the stage. Your goal is to have all four voice groups and the accompanying orchestra singing in harmony and, more importantly, embodying the essence of the song. Now, consider this scenario. Approximately 120 people, with an age range of between 22 and 73 years, spread across eight units and six provinces (and one staff member in the United Kingdom) - but all belonging to one organisation. What does it mean to create a common identity and proverbially have everyone singing from the same hymnbook?

Creating a positive common identity within an organisation is an important part of strategy execution because, even with the most well-thought-out strategies and execution plans, the organisation's success is closely linked to the extent to which the staff understand and identify with its mission and possess the attitudes (and skills) necessary for achieving it. However, creating a common identity is a difficult thing to do.

In the case of an organisation such as the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), a non-profit with over 100 staff members, the complexities of building a common identity among the staff are two-fold. Firstly, you need to reconcile organisational identity with unit-specific dynamics and identity. Over

time, different units have crafted their own identities that are aligned to their way of working and, as such, while some staff embody a more laisezz-faire identity, others identify more strongly with structure, routine and hierarchy. Secondly, unit-specific identities also need to be reconciled with location-specific factors. The NECT operates in six provinces across South Africa to support education improvement in the respective provincial education departments (PEDs). All provinces have their own dynamics and contexts and, over time, the NECT provincial offices have developed their own identities that mirror the contexts they operate in. While these differences across units and provinces are not inherently bad, there is a risk of the organisation becoming disjointed if these differences are not managed.

Considering all the above, some of the lessons that have emerged in trying to create a common organisational identity include the following:

A. **Make sure that everyone has the same hymnbook:** For your "choir" to sing in unison, all members have to have the same sheet of music. In the case of an organisation, this sheet of music is a vision and mission statement which is clearly articulated through the organisation's strategy. The organisation's strategy, including the values and principles underpinning ways of working, should be easily accessible for all staff members.

B. **Find every opportunity to reinforce the identity:** Strategy planning sessions, staff meetings, staff braais and get togethers - these all provide opportunities to reiterate and reinforce the organisation's identity and, more importantly, to ensure that staff members relate to the identity and feel like they belong to a large group of people aiming to achieve the same goal. Regular staff meetings and daily 'stand-up' meetings were particularly important during the COVID-19 lockdown as they not only served as opportunities to check-in and update staff on changes to programming and ways of work, but also served as platforms to remind people of what it means to work for the NECT at a time when all were confined to their homes.

C. **Recognise contextual factors:** In organisations with different units that operate in multiple locations, contextual factors will have an impact on the way in which staff relate to the organisational identity and culture. These factors should not be dismissed: instead, an organisational identity that values responsiveness and agility should be championed to ensure that staff members work in a way that recognises these differences but does not drift from the organisation's overall identity.

MINI-LESSON 28

Leadership dialogues for education transformation - **Godwin Khosa**

The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) was founded on the basis of dialogue. In particular, the Leadership Dialogue that was held in December 2012, approximately three months after the adoption of the National Development Plan (NDP), served as the base from which the NECT grew. Even though the NECT would hold over 100 dialogues by 2022, only two were organised as Leadership Dialogues. These were classified as such because they targeted senior members of interest groups in education and were aimed at exploring conversations of a macro-development nature at critical points.

This lesson profiles the two Leadership Dialogues, it identifies and discusses lessons that emanated from them.

THE 2012 FOUNDING LEADERSHIP DIALOGUE

In the education sector, the adoption of the NDP coincided with serious concerns and conflicts about the quality of education. The public, whose positions were voiced through the media and civil rights organisations, was concerned about the quality of education. The level of concern could be compared with that experienced in the post-1980s, when the education system faced low teacher and learner attendance, mainly in township and black schools. At this time, the nation faced the challenge of bringing the teachers and learners back to

school following the long years of schools being used as institutions for waging resistance against apartheid. Concern regarding this situation led, in the early 1990s, to the adoption of several back-to-school campaigns and the establishment by government, of the Culture of Learning and Teaching (COLT) campaign.

The COLT initiative was introduced to rekindle interest in education among teachers and learners. The campaign was strongly supported by teacher and student organisations and was pitched as part of the government's broader post-apartheid Reconstruction and Development Programme. With all its challenges, the campaign made a successful contribution to securing the stability of the education system and increasing schools' time-on -task, that is the amount of time spent on actively teaching and learning.

Similar national level public concerns about the state of education simmered throughout the 2000s. This period was characterised by public media reports that lamented the poor reading and mathematics competency levels, poor working conditions and poor infrastructure.

While policy commentators were at the forefront of expressing these concerns, the teacher unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were at the forefront of the protestations. In the main, government and the teacher unions had to respectively put up defences for failing to provide infrastructure to schools and disrupting schooling.

The tensions resulted in more lost teaching time because of labour strikes and the extraordinary number of challenges the Department of Basic Education (DBE) had to defend in court. Hostilities between government and stakeholders distracted from service delivery and inhibited the benefits of a shared vision being enjoyed by all. The importance of common macro-development visioning is certainly an imperative that undergirded the four years' work of the National Planning Commission (NPC), culminating in the 2012 NDP (NPC, 2012).

The tensions in the education sector that intensified a decade-and-a-half after the introduction of democratic reform policies, and the opportunity that was created by the adoption of the NDP in August 2012, incentivised the Minister of Education, the then Group Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of FirstRand and the then CEO of JET Education Services (JET) to seek a new way of addressing the concerns. The trio agreed on a number of fundamentals: 1) the public concern was not the problem but rather an indication of a challenge to be addressed; 2) the NDP presented an opportunity for the nation to rally around the challenge; 3) there should be a methodical way of gathering the views about what to do; and 4) there should be a collaborative way of addressing the challenge.

Following these principles, the founding members commissioned JET to gather inputs from 40 interested stakeholders and experts on the following three questions:

1. What is going well in the education system?
2. What can be done in the short term?
3. What can be done in the long term?

The survey conducted among leaders drawn from academia, teacher unions, the private sector and development foundations elicited a set of 20 key issues, which comprised concerns about as well as proposed actions to address the quality improvement challenge. These are presented in figure 28.1.

RDL Campaign's historical context

Figure 28.1: Map of 20 Issues of concerns and proposals (source: Leadership dialogue, 2012)

The solution-oriented inputs from teacher unions, civil rights NGOs and the private sector representatives were unexpected, as much as they were vital to make any progress. Some comments from survey respondents were also pleasantly surprising.

For instance, some academics expressed an appreciation of the good quality of educators, especially the primary school educators who were largely hard-working, committed, middle-aged females. Others appreciated the potential role that teacher unions have in supporting education.

The Leadership Dialogue was convened on 6 December 2012 and led by the Minister of Basic Education. It included, among other government representatives, two Members of the Executive Council (MECs) for Education and the Director General of Education, as well as representatives from private sector organisations, NGOs, civil society, one political party and teacher union leadership.

The dialogue was designed to create an avenue for open, honest engagement among key stakeholders, to be apolitical and inclusive, to provide an opportunity for even politically inclined organisations to explore joint societal actions, to develop action plans for various stakeholders, and to look for 'quick wins', but with a long-term view.

Based on Chapter 9 of the NDP (the education chapter), the insights from the survey and the DBE's Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025 (DBE, 2010), the Leadership Dialogue reached three major decisions:

1. Six organising themes for collaboration for improvement in education were adopted. These included: professionalisation of the civil service, courageous leadership, government capacity to deliver, resourcing (teachers, books and infrastructure), community and parent involvement (the notion of state versus public schools), and the role of business and corporate social investment partnerships in education.
2. It was agreed that more work should be done to set up a vehicle for the implementation of the collaboration activities.
3. Additional members were added to the three founding members to oversee the work of setting up the implementing organisation[1] .

THE 2022 LEADERSHIP DIALOGUE

1 Details of the agreements and the structures that were set up can be found in the (South African) Education Collaboration Framework (NECT, 2013).

The second Leadership Dialogue took place on 14 February 2022, almost ten years after the founding Leadership Dialogue, and following the close to two years of sub-optimum schooling that resulted from the COVID-19 global health pandemic.

The dialogue also coincided with the independent strategic review of the NECT (*Human Sciences Research Council et al., 2021*)[2], conducted two years prior to its 10th anniversary.

The NECT requested this dialogue to facilitate reflections on and a consolidation of ideas around education recovery and a recalibration of the education transformation agenda.

The theme of the second Leadership Dialogue was Tweaking the education reform lens and reflections on the nearly 30 years journey and the trajectory following the two years of COVID disruptions.

It sought to assess the role of the NECT against the national education reform agenda and was preceded by a rapid survey to elicit views and ideas of ten representatives drawn from academia, civil society, education funding partners and teacher unions. The survey respondents were asked three questions:

1. What should the emphasis of the education reform agenda be?
2. What are the key issues to address as part of the education reform agenda?
3. What are the system gaps and levers for sustainable improvement?

Furthermore, the dialogue allowed a sample of leaders in the education sector to express their views about the state of education, especially after the COVID-19 disruption to education, and what should underpin the reform agenda.

The diagram in figure 28.2 presents a map of the issues that the experts and stakeholders suggested should be the points of emphasis in the reform agenda.

2 The evaluation was commissioned by the FirstRand Empowerment Foundation to a consortium led by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and managed by three evaluators.

POINTS OF EMPHASIS

Figure 28.1: Map of 20 Issues of concerns and proposals (source: Leadership dialogue, 2012)

As can be gleaned from the diagram, the issues raised present a bias towards longer-term elements versus shorter-term issues.

Most of the issues could be grouped under the categories of building a capable state (public service reform, addressing system constraints, system planning and alignment), drawing support from the non-state actors, and striking a balance between the immediate need for post-COVID recovery interventions and the long-term improvement agenda.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

A few lessons can be learned from the two Leadership Dialogues:

1. Dialogues among education leaders and leaders of organisations with an interest in education improvement are necessary for the national education reform and improvement agenda.

   Without these dialoguing avenues, decision-makers in and outside of government and intellectuals leave the mediation of their ideas and perceptions to the public media, tend to talk past each other or engage from uninformed positions, and miss the opportunity to influence education visioning and policy. It can also be argued that leadership networking and collegiality across sectors is good for education transformation.

2. From the two encounters, some common elements can be linked to the success of Leadership Dialogues.

   These are: the openness and commitment of the Minister of Education to the dialogues; exclusive participation by senior leaders of education interest groups who have influence among their groups; the rapid collection and processing of the interest group's views and available education evidence prior to the dialogue; and a distinction between macro and micro aspects of education improvement.

3. While the NECT took 10 years to organise a follow-up Leadership Dialogue, judging from the rapid rate at which policy and education quality debates unfold, Leadership Dialogues may be required every two or three years or when there is a recognisable national disaster. In the past 10 years, the NECT has served as a barometer to gauge the need for such national engagements.

   Various forms of engagements should be encouraged to ensure balanced policy conversations, and other organisations do initiate such engagements.

   The National Reading Panel is an example. However, a distinction should be made between seminars and policy lobbying meetings as opposed to pre-agreed Leadership Dialogues with a focus on macro-level policy and programming reflections.

4. National Leadership Dialogues are critical to the continual national policy analysis process and the drive for ongoing education reform. This form of dialogue needs to be part of the education governance calendar at both national and provincial levels. It should be aligned with the education reporting processes and cross-sectoral processes such as the Human Resources Development Council activities.

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MINI-LESSON 29

A formalised innovation structure within the basic education system - **Shirley Eadie**

In 2015, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), along with key partners, commissioned a study towards building an informed framework for innovation in education in South Africa. The motivation for this study stemmed from the concern that whilst commitments to transform education had been made by South Africa in the form of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 (NPC, 2012) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Declaration (see UNESCO, 2016), the growing consensus was that 'the state of the system presents an urgent case – a "burning platform" – for doing things differently'. The resulting report called for a means of supporting and coordinating innovation for 21st Century learning so that it has the potential to impact, at scale, the basic education system in South Africa. The report concluded with a recommendation to:

> *Establish a formal collaborative structure or centralized infrastructure with a structured process, for the basic education sector to promote, steer, coordinate and resource innovation and, critically, to ensure the translation of innovative practices in scaled-up systemic policy and programme changes.*

This recommendation emerged as the mandate for an Innovation Unit that would reside within the NECT. This article shares more about the structure that was established, along with the operating model and key lessons.

THE EDHUB

The Edhub was established within the NECT in 2017. It was the first time that an innovation unit of this nature had operated to serve the South African basic education sector, with its primary mandate being to guide local stakeholders to better prepare for the future. As such, the model, processes and approaches developed by the Edhub were in their infancy. The model deployed by the Edhub when it was founded was venture philanthropy, whereby education innovators and social entrepreneurs underwent a competitive application process to receive support from the Edhub. This support took the form of access to schools for piloting programmes, access to the NECT's sector influence, guidance on pathways to scale projects, funding and more. It soon became clear that this model had its shortfalls, and that improved outcomes might be achieved if an alternative model were considered.

In 2019, the Edhub pivoted to an in-house research and development model. This model resembles the 'portfolio approach' to innovation and shares characteristics with incubation models for the promotion of innovation. This pivot was a critical step in the evolution of the Edhub and was made possible by the enabling environment created by the NECT that prizes agility and responsiveness to the sector. This environment enabled a combination of procedural flexibility (for example, hiring smart problem-solvers at short notice) and access to schools, educators and credible influencers in the sector, all providing the much-needed ecosystem for innovation to thrive over time.

THE MODEL: IN-HOUSE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

From the outset, priority focal themes were identified by the Edhub via secondary research, inputs from government and guidance from NECT stakeholders. From a shortlist of identified themes, entrepreneurship education and 21st Century skills were prioritised. Over time, this focus was more tightly articulated as:

> *Deliberately and systematically developing skills and competencies for a changing world in all learners. The Edhub's vision … is to guide the South African basic education to prepare for the fast-changing world, so that all learners leave school with relevant social, emotional and cognitive competencies to thrive.*

Through a combination of the following two core strategic focus areas, the Edhub provides inputs on education for a fast-changing world at the level of programming and policy

Grow the local evidence base: There is a plethora of research addressing the future of education and how to prepare the sector for the demands of the fast-changing world. However, little local research exists that provides similar insight in the South African context. The Edhub aims to build the local evidence base via a two-pronged approach to research and development:

1. Secondary research is conducted to track and analyse relevant local and international trends on the future of education.

2. Primary research and development is conducted within the Sandbox Schools Project. The 'Sandbox' is a live learning laboratory established by the Edhub in 2019, where early-stage, context specific interventions are designed, prototyped and adapted based on participatory research approaches with design partners, experts, practitioners and academics. There are 11 public schools (Quintiles 1-3) within the Sandbox, based in Limpopo and Soweto.

By combining learnings emerging from hands-on experience in local classrooms via the Sandbox, with evidence gathered via secondary research, the Edhub team has been able to ground its sector inputs in the contextual reality faced by schools and educators.

Build advocacy: The Edhub builds the momentum of and buy-in to education innovation via quality evidence, dialogue and partnerships. It leverages its location within the NECT to convene local and global education stakeholders, experts, thought leaders and academics on topics of education innovation, driving a culture of innovation and generating advocacy. Evidence and emerging learnings from Edhub research are shared with a range of stakeholders in various formal and informal formats tailored to the audience (e.g. dialogues, academic articles, book chapters, research compendiums, policy briefs, media releases, etc.), with the hope of ultimately improving leadership and decision-making capability on policy and programming for the future of education.

THE INNOVATION PROCESS

The Edhub follows a four-phase innovation process, primarily influenced by design thinking, human centred design processes and agile innovation. The four phases in the innovation process are: Scan; Prototype; Pilot; Scale (as seen in Figure 29.1 and expanded upon below).

Edhub innovation process

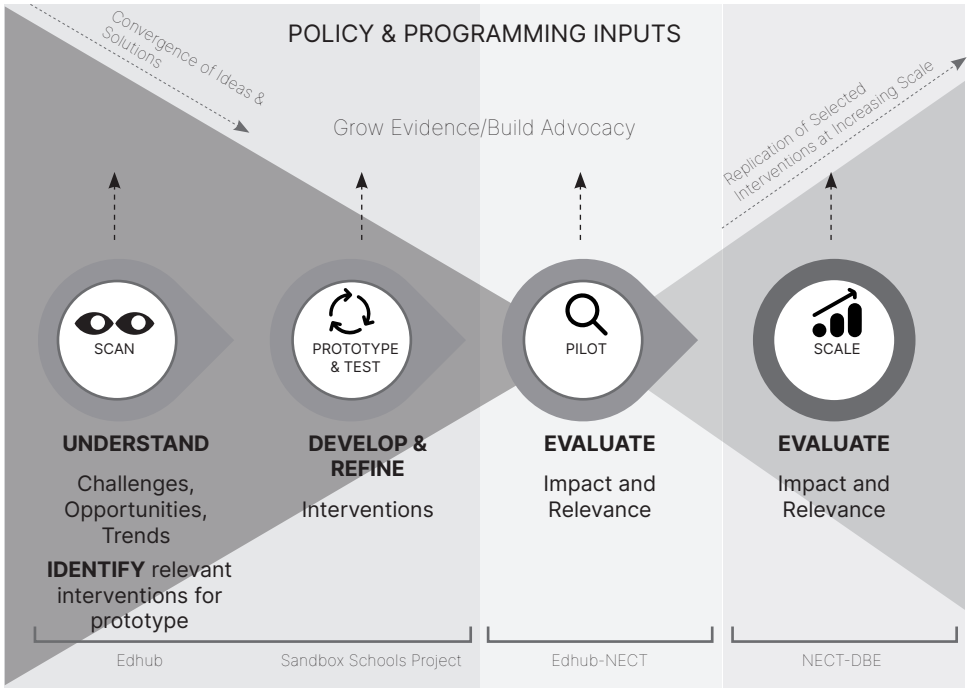

Figure 29.1: Edhub innovation process

A. **Scan:** Characterised primarily by secondary research, the scan phase focuses on understanding local and global education landscapes and the forces shaping the future of education. Trends, challenges, opportunities and risks are analysed. The outputs of this phase contribute to the body of available evidence and awareness on these topics. Selected ideas that indicate potential for impact at scale are transitioned into the prototype phase for further research and development within local South African schools.

B. **Prototype:** Ideas and interventions that fit pre-determined criteria transition into prototyping, where the concept is further developed, feasibility determined, and a prototype developed. These prototypes are implemented and further refined in an iterative manner within the 11 Sandbox Schools via a design-based research (DBR) process. Interventions may be active within the prototype phase for up to three years, depending on the nature of the intervention. In keeping with the principles of DBR, evidence collected in these interventions is used to both improve the design of the programme and to contribute to the underlying theory related to the intervention.

C. **Pilot:** Should an intervention demonstrate potential for scale during the prototype phase, it transitions into the pilot phase. Potential for scale is determined by 1) evidence collected during the prototype phase that indicates traction/clear value to the beneficiary; 2) demand by relevant stakeholders; and 3) feasibility to scale. It is expected that not all interventions in the prototype phase will transition into piloting. The structure, scope and scale of the pilot will be determined by the nature of the intervention and the need of the education system. Ownership of the pilot should commence with a dual Edhub/NECT team. After an appropriate passage of time, the Edhub steps back from pilot implementation, handing over ownership of the intervention to the NECT.

D. **Scale:** Should an intervention continue to demonstrate potential for scale, it is replicated with increasing scope over time. Ownership of the pilot should commence with a dual NECT/Department of Basic Education (DBE) team. After an appropriate passage of time, the NECT steps back from pilot implementation, leaving full ownership with the DBE.

Examples of innovations that were designed and prototyped using this methodology include[1]:

1. Competency-infused structured pedagogy;
2. School culture for a changing world;
3. Tinkering;
4. Mindfulness;
5. Coding & robotics;
6. @home learning.

IMPACT OF THE EDHUB'S WORK

At the policy level, the core impact of the Edhub's research and advocacy has been influencing the DBE to plan to strengthen the national curriculum, focusing on the deliberate and systematic infusion of skills and competencies for a changing world into curriculum, assessment, teacher development and materials.

1 For more details, see Mini-Lesson 25: Stepping Into The Sandbox: Learning On Behalf Of A System.

Core to this curriculum strengthening process is a South African Competency Framework, the design of which was coordinated by the Edhub, and which will provide an organising framework for curriculum strengthening and development going forward.

At the programming level, two feasible, scalable interventions that emerged from the Sandbox Schools Project are under consideration for piloting at scale:

The Competency-based Learning Programme (CLP) is a structured learning programme that supports teachers to infuse competencies into teaching Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) content daily.

The School Culture for a Changing World is an intervention that supports school leaders to transform their schools into spaces equipped to respond to the demands of the changing world and provide the context within which 21st Century teaching and learning may occur.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. Dedicated, future orientation: At its core, a dedicated innovation unit is preoccupied with the future and how best to prepare for it. By mandating a small team to make this their primary priority, the sector benefits from the resultant research, design, guidance and advocacy.

2. Innovation ecosystem: Establishing the conditions for innovation is crucial for impact. The creation of an enabling environment within the NECT allows the Edhub to operate in a manner characterised by agility, lack of bureaucracy, access to funding, and support and guidance from a range of stakeholders across government, civil society, labour unions and business.

3. Decision-making confidence: The Edhub provides decision makers at the highest national levels with exposure to the latest theory and practice in education innovation, equipping them with the tools and confidence to strengthen their decision making at policy and programming levels.

4. Defining the innovation scope: Determining the scope of focus for innovation within a large and complex system such as education comes with its complexities. The need for scope focus occurs at several levels, initially when determining the high-level themes or focal areas within which to foster innovation, followed by a narrower scoping of more

specific research and intervention designs. By combining research, key stakeholder and expert consultations, and direct engagements with the DBE, an iterative approach to defining the innovation scope is valuable.

5. Grounded perspective via primary research: The Edhub uses both primary and secondary research approaches in a complementary manner. Over time, it was observed that the hands-on nature of programme implementation, grounded by the Edhub's research and advisory capability and contextual reality, enhanced the Edhub's credibility in guiding local policy and programming.

6. Agility in convening and collaboration: The Edhub has a high level of autonomy and agility in seeking out and working with a broad range of academics, experts and thought leaders. The result is a relatively consistent and high level of exposure to new ideas, perspectives and approaches. This agility has enabled the Edhub to 1) continuously sense- check its position on key focal areas and 2) contract with appropriate local and international experts where necessary.

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MINI-LESSON 30

The value of dialogue in managing complex policy shifts: The case of the early childhood development (ECD) function shift - **Selaelo Lekoloane**

During the 2019 State of the Nation Address (SONA), President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the migration of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) function from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the Department of Basic Education (DBE). This major policy shift followed the resolutions of the 54th Conference of the ruling party, which was centered on improving access to quality early learning and enhancing the early childhood development (ECD) delivery system to better serve the children of South Africa.

In the commitments made to their respective parliamentary portfolio committees, the Minister of Basic Education and the Minister of Social Development acknowledged the important contribution made by role players in the ECD sector over the years. They pledged to continue to work with them and consult with all stakeholders through the journey of crafting the new vision for ECD in our country.

The DBE invited the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) to support the design and stakeholder engagement dialogues on ECD migration and on crafting the new vision. By this point, the NECT had a well-established dialogue platform and systems that were extensively used in the basic education sector. The same platform was made available to the DSD, the DBE, the ECD

role players and key stakeholders. Amid tensions from key stakeholder groups about the mandate and approach of the dialogues, the NECT coordinated multiple ECD dialogues which ended up being well- supported and widely sponsored. The dialogues presented a good opportunity for stakeholders to express their concerns and present their views and allowed the DSD and DBE to communicate the planned handover and receipt of relevant elements of the ECD function.

This mini-lesson reflects on the lessons learnt in conceptualising and implementing the plan that arose from the dialogues and that involved the two government departments cited above, private sector ECD supporters, researchers, non-government organisations (NGOs) and many ECD providers. The ECD dialogues differed from other DBE dialogues in that the ECD sector has almost twice the number of delivery points compared to the basic education sector. Moreover, the ECD sector is largely informal and weakly coordinated and has numerous sub-associations.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DIALOGUES FOR THE ECD FUNCTION SHIFT

It should be recognised that the ECD function shift is more complex than other policy shifts in government where stakeholders and role-players feel little impact of the change. In such cases, where minimal legal and administrative measures are required to give effect to the shift and when funding from the fiscus follows these functions, the public at large is not directly affected. However, in the case of the ECD function, billions are invested annually through government, private sector investments (CSI) and parental contributions to ECD providers (NECT, 2019). This substantial investment would be at risk if the function shift were not properly managed or if the policy shift were not conducive to continued private funding. Similarly, the ECD sector would be in a dire position if this additional income were to be lost. It was thus important to have constructive engagements with ECD stakeholders and to consider their perspectives during the migration process. Poor coordination of the consultation process or any form of misunderstanding between key role players would be a risk to the achievement of the NDP goal of improving access to quality early learning and enhancing the ECD delivery system to better serve the children of South Africa.

The dialogues that tookmplace significantly empowered participants and developed their capacity for engaging in policy issues and navigating the complexity of several key issues in the ECD sector. The actors in the ECD sector, whether researchers, NGOs or ECD providers and practitioners, had different views and

perceptions about the function shift and its effects. The dialogue interactions enhanced the clarity and coherence of the policy imperatives with regard to the purpose of the function shift.

BENEFITS OF THE DIALOGUES

The benefits of the NECT coordinated ECD dialogues included:

1. They provided a platform for emerging issues and recommendations from the workstreams to be presented to the stakeholders to keep them fully informed of the developments regarding the function shift and solicit their contributions.
2. The dialogue discussions afforded the ECD stakeholders opportunities for constructive engagements free of intimidation as the dialogues were facilitated by experienced external facilitators with insights into policy matters. This was crucial to enable the NECT to maintain a neutral, but supportive, role and allow all opinions to be heard and respected.
3. The opportunity was created for knowledge, perspectives, wisdom and visions of the sector to be considered during development of the ECD concept note and service delivery model, as well as planning for ECD improvement.
4. The sector gained an in-depth appreciation of the complexity of ECD, while the DBE proved was important for the DBE and DSD willing to listen to the stakeholders' views and concerns.

It was important for the DBE and DSD to provide transparent and realistic descriptions of what the change would entail and why it is was necessary to allow the different stakeholders to develop a mutual understanding of the function shift and its intended benefits.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DIALOGUES

The NECT provided a platform through a series of nine monthly dialogues that were attended by over 300 participants per dialogue. This allowed for the DBE and DSD to communicate with the ECD sector players and encourage them to contribute towards crafting the new vision for ECD in the country. The DBE and DSD jointly led conversations with the ECD sector players, individually and through their structures. The platform enabled participants to share knowl-

edge and experience, showcase successes and highlight the challenges facing ECD. They also shared actionable recommendations for the improvement of ECD services and programmes informed by the wealth of available ECD research and knowledge.

The following section illustrates how the nine dialogues each targeted a key strategic area to ensure focused discussions that would lead to sound recommendations.

The selection of topics for the dialogues was based on a wide range of issues raised by more than 1,000 stakeholders who attended preliminary engagements that were coordinated by the NECT nationally and in provinces between 2019 and 2020. The nine complex dialogue topics, key issues raised and recommendations for consideration by the DBE are detailed in Table 30.1.

ECD Dialogue Topics and Recommendations

	Topic	Key Issues and Stakeholder Recommendations
Dialogue 1	ECD migration update and stakeholder engagement plan.	"The knowledge and experience of the current role-players in the ECD sector should not be overlooked. The involvement of the ECD sector in crafting the new vision for ECD should be continuous."
Dialogue 2	Draft concept paper and service delivery model 'The Vision for Early Childhood Development in South Africa'.	The concept note should clearly outline how the ECD services and programmes will be accessible to all children from different socio-economic backgrounds, children in rural areas and children with disabilities.
Dialogue 3	ECD policy, legislation and governance.	"Integrated coordination and role clarification for different spheres of government should be covered in the new vision. Capacity and functionality of ECD governance structures should be addressed. Enforce municipality byelaws on suitable locations and proximity of ECD centres."
Dialogue 4	ECD funding model.	"Adequate funds are required to ensure equitable access to comprehensive and quality ECD programmes and services. ECD benefits must be streamlined to address disparities that exist across provinces."
Dialogue 5	Human resource provision and development.	"Conduct an audit of quality and qualifications offered to ECD practitioners. Improve conditions of employment to ensure job security for the ECD workforce. Allow South African Council for Educators (SACE) registration for ECD practitioners."

Table 30.1. ECD Dialogue Topics and Recommendations

ECD Dialogue Topics and Recommendations (Cont.)

Dialogue 6	ECD systems and registration procedures.	"A comprehensive audit of private and public learning facilities is required. Develop a quality assurance system for ECD programmes and services. Improved ECD registration systems and procedures are required. Address uneven quality of information systems and data leading to poor planning."
Dialogue 7	ECD curriculum and programmes.	Establish appropriate quality assurance and improvement systems to secure equitable provision of quality ECD services and outcomes for all young children of South Africa.
Dialogue 8	Infrastructure and facilities.	Establish a national grant for ECD to support infrastructure development, refurbishment and maintenance; ensure compliance with infrastructure and facilities norms and standards.
Dialogue 9	Monitoring and evaluation framework.	Monitoring and evaluation must ensure provision of a cost-effective ECD system and quality, accessible and timely programmes and services to infants and young children.

LESSONS FOR MANAGING COMPLEX POLICY SHIFTS

Working towards system change cannot be done in isolation but requires engagement and collaboration with different role-players with different perspectives across the system: Only through the inclusion of diverse perspectives can the true depth and complexity of the system be understood, and this understanding is necessary to find a way to change the system (*Davidson & Morgan, 2018*).

With the ECD migration dialogues, the right expertise and diverse perspectives resided in the participating NGOs supporting the ECD sector, ECD associations, ECD funders, owners of ECD centres and ECD practitioners. Their perspectives enabled the DBE to gain insight into the true depth and complexity of the ECD system and what is required to improve the provision of ECD in South Africa.

Timely communication with key stakeholders and role players is essential: This was one of the major contributing factors to the success of ECD migration dialogues. The topics described in Table 30.1 above incited robust debates and questions and similarly allowed for a learning process that enabled a deeper understanding of the ECD sector.

The DBE officials had the opportunity to listen, reflect and interrogate what the next steps should be for each of the key focus areas. When questions could

not be responded to during the dialogues due to time constraints, the DBE and DSD officials would diligently prepare responses to present after the dialogues and the NECT would distribute these responses to the dialogue participants.

This level of commitment helped to close the knowledge gaps and sustain the high level of participation and enabled a conducive environment for building trust between government and the key actor groups in the ECD sector.

The complexity of the ECD function shift is compounded by the realities of 5 694 522 million children from birth to four years old who, according to the 2022 Mid-Year Population Estimates, are affected differently by the burdens of inequality and poverty in South Africa (*Statistics South Aafrica, 2022*): Arguably, the function shifts that have a high level of impact on people's lives attract a high level of interest and participation in the debates.

The engagement with stakeholders in this regard becomes very useful as they gain clarity and develop a deeper understanding of what is driving the change, how others understand the change and what the effects will be.

The ECD migration is such a function and shift and it required that all the affected parties had to be informed and involved.

CHALLENGES

The dialogues were not without challenges. Below are some worth noting:

1. Despite initial reluctance, the DBE and DSD gradually became confident with the NECT dialogue process and the opportunity it afforded them to identify expert inputs for further consultations with specific stakeholder groupings beyond the dialogues.

2. There were high levels of anxiety and calls for the ECD function shift proclamations to be promulgated urgently so that clarity and certainty could be assured.

   Given the regulatory issues that needed to be addressed before the proclamations could be published, government was unable to respond to the pressure and could not rush this complex process.

   However, the NECT dialogues provided a platform for the DBE and DSD to update the stakeholders on the legal processes, thus minimising the anxieties.

CONCLUSION

The ECD dialogues process demonstrated the importance of creating an avenue for open and honest engagements with key stakeholders when managing complex policy shifts. The ECD sector welcomed the opportunity for engagements, and this appreciation was expressed in the agreement to continue discussions and work together beyond the dialogue sessions towards the common goal of improving access to and quality ECD provision. The high level of participation in all dialogue sessions was evidence of the stakeholders' appreciation and the trust built.

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MINI-LESSON 31

Towards diversified learner choices and improved opportunities for success and acquisition of skills for employability through the Three Stream Model curriculum - **Selaelo Lekoloane**

Over the years, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has focused academic learning in the school curriculum, with limited vocationally oriented subjects and, consequently, limited choices for learners. The school curriculum thus has not adequately supported technological advancement, emerging industries and new occupations aligned to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), and this led to the public outcry that the school curriculum does not respond to the skills needs of our country. The National Development Plan (NDP) envisages a South African education system that provides knowledge and skills in Mathematics, Science and Technology as well as life-long learning and work experience that will improve productivity and enable economic growth (National Planning Commission, 2012). In response to the public outcry, and guided by the NDP, the DBE conceptualised the Three Stream Model (TSM) curriculum in order to provide multiple learning pathways to learners through academic, vocational and occupational subject offerings (DBE, 2020).

In support of the NDP mandate, the NECT worked with the DBE through the Education Technical Assistance Office (ETAO), whose critical role is to mobilise technical expertise to increase the capacity of the state in the conceptualisation and implementation of major policy shifts in education. The introduction of the

TSM curriculum is one of the major policy shifts that will enable the education system preparing learners for life-long learning and the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to live economically gainful lives.

This mini-lesson reflects on the NECT's support to the DBE to strengthen implementation of the TSM curriculum and the provision of diverse choices for learners. The NECT provided research-based inputs and mobilised resources and stakeholder engagements. The mini-lesson looks at the technical support provided to strengthen the conceptualisation of the TSM, the strategic project management provided for the development of the curriculum and the training of teachers in vocational and occupational subjects, and the inception of the three pilot studies on implementation of the TSM el vision.

THE THREE STREAM MODEL CONCEPT

The TSM is a concept used by the DBE to refer to the multiple learning pathways - academic, vocational and occupational - that lead towards the National Senior Certificate (NSC) in the South African schooling system. The TSM curriculum aims to focus on and strengthen basic education as part of a single, integrated education and training system, as outlined in the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 (*DBE, 2020*).

Moreover, the TSM is aligned to the South Africa's National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which, in terms of the National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008, provides for 'a comprehensive system for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications' within the three qualifications sub-frameworks: academic, vocational and occupational. According to the NQF Act, the NQF is designed to 'contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large', and this goal also guides the design of the TSM curriculum. The objectives of the NQF are to:

A. Create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements;

B. Facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths;

C. Enhance the quality of education and training;

D. Accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.

These objectives informed the principles underpinning the design of the TSM, in line with the recommendations of the Technical Working Group that were

adopted by the Ministerial Committee on the Three Stream Model. These principles can be summarised as follows:

1. The TSM curriculum should be learner-focused and learners should be allowed to make subject choices, rather than be forced to take certain subjects;
2. The subjects developed must be aligned to the labour market needs,
3. Early streaming should be avoided: vocational- and occupational-oriented subjects should be offered in the General Education and Training (GET) Phase and streaming should only start in the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase.
4. Articulation from schooling to post-school education and training (PSET) and the world of work should be by design and not incidental;
5. Parity of esteem should be maintained across the curriculum for all three streams and the qualifications linked to all three streams should be designed with articulation options in mind to ensure that learners do not reach a dead-end at the end of any qualification (Three Stream Model Technical Working Group, 2020).

The ETAO performed a critical role in coordinating the work of a Technical Working Group (TWG) of experts to develop a Framework for Articulation in the Three Stream Model.

The Articulation Framework provides guidance on learning pathways for learners who complete Grade 9 (to be the General Education Certificate (GEC) in future) and Grade 12 (NSC) with vocational or occupational subjects. The framework was accepted by stakeholders including the Ministerial Task Team, and it constitutes an important component of the strengthened TSM concept note.

THE THREE STREAM MODEL CURRICULUM

At the core of the TSM is a diversified and responsive curriculum that is aligned to the provision of current and future skills in the schooling sector. The introduction of the TSM revealed the need for new approaches and new sets of skills and competencies in the DBE for the development of the TSM Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS).

The practical nature of vocational and occupational subjects, the 4IR and artificial intelligence (AI) trends require contemporary curriculum development designs, which should be informed by the labour market's demand for skills. Thus specialised expertise and approaches are required to develop CAPS for vocational and occupational subjects. The curriculum content and curriculum delivery should ensure that learners are equipped with knowledge required to do certain tasks, appropriate skills through practical work and attitudes needed to perform the tasks well (*Nienhuys, 2011, 5*).

The changes to the school curriculum started in 2016, when the DBE introduced technical subjects in Technical High Schools across the country to give learners the option of taking up subjects linked to the skills needs of South Africa's economy. This was followed by the introduction of occupational subjects in the Schools of Skills in Grades 8 and 9 in 2017. When these cohorts of learners completed Grade 12 with vocational subjects and Grade 9 with occupational subjects in 2019, it emerged that the system was not adequately prepared for their articulation into diversified learning and career choices. The Framework for Articulation was developed to close the gaps and provide guidance for learners on their learning pathways.

The current process of developing a competencies framework and the infusion of competencies into the CAPS for all subjects across the basic education system constitutes another important part of strengthening the school curriculum, along with the modernisation of subject content, enhancement of classroom teaching, learning and assessment and improving learner attainment. The commendable progress made with strengthening the design and implementation of the TSM prompted the stakeholders who attended the recent Think Tank on 24-26 May 2023 to recommend the adoption of ONE TSM for the South African education system.

There is a view that for the schooling curriculum to adequately respond to the skills needs and demands of the South African economy, it would have to be revised every three years and subject content be aligned to labour market trends. This requires careful consideration and review of the current curriculum development processes and intensified capacity building within the DBE.

PILOTING THE THREE STREAM MODEL CURRICULUM

The conceptual framing of the TSM pilots followed a reiterative process that promotes research to inform evidence-based planning. This includes the clarification of assumptions, definition of objectives and expected outcomes, identification of resources required for successful implementation, policy alignment and curriculum development, human resource development and coordination,

monitoring, evaluation and feedback. The technical inputs provided through the ETAO strengthened the DBE's internal capacity for planning and implementation of the pilot projects, mobilisation of resources and coordination of stakeholder engagements.

Figure 31.1 illustrates the reiterative process that guided the setting up the TSM pilots.

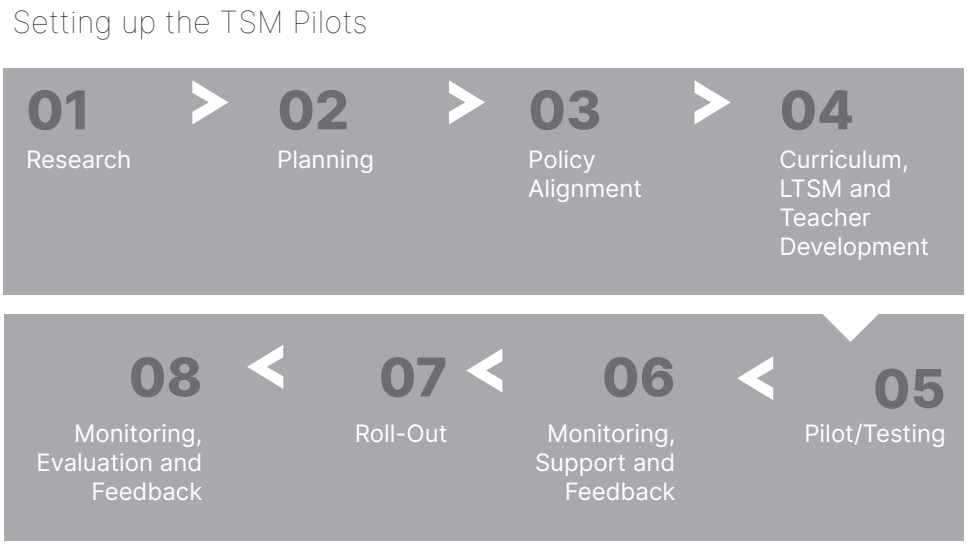

Figure 31.1: Setting up the TSM pilots

The implementation of the pilots, that is, the introduction of 13 vocational subjects in the GET Phase in Grades 8 and 9, introduction of occupational subjects in the FET Phase in Grades 10 – 12, and introduction of the GEC, remains the responsibility of the DBE, with the ETAO providing technical inputs and strategic project management where required.

According to Ron Ashkenas and Nadim Matta (2021), the purpose of constructing a pilot project is to 'reduce the risk of failure across the entire organization by testing the idea in a small, controlled setting so that you can further refine your solution before you roll out'.

Similarly, the lessons from the TSM pilots are key to inform the DBE on how to further strengthen the different aspects of the conceptualisation, policy provisions and areas of implementation of the TSM and identify gaps before national roll-out. The diversified learner choices and improved opportunities for success and the acquisition of skills for employability depend on the effective implementation of the TSM curriculum.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. The diversification of learner choice through the introduction of the TSM was met with some resistance, which was expressed in a variety of ways, including statements such as '3 streams model will never happen' and '3 streams is an ill-conceived idea'. The resistance posed a challenge, with some experts being reluctant to participate when approached to provide technical inputs. As a result of this observation, the ETAO supported the DBE to set up a Think Tank that brought together experts and stakeholders with different backgrounds and experiences but who were able to work together effectively to build consensus around complex issues regarding implementation of the TSM. This led to a common understanding of the TSM's purpose.

2. As Ashkenas and Matta (2023) assert, the benefit of testing or piloting an idea, no matter how small or ill-conceived it is perceived to be, reduces the risk of failure across the system. The TSM pilots, with relevant technical inputs, have indeed increased capacity in the DBE to trial and test the '3-stream model idea', which is now perceived in a positive light by many stakeholders and beneficiaries. Some stakeholders have suggested that the TSM curriculum is 'just what our country needed to secure the future of millions of young people'.

3. Swift planning and resource mobilisation for the TSM pilots, supported by experienced technical assistants, continue to guide implementation. The substantial allocation of R85 million worth of funding over three years was secured by the DBE from the European Union Education for Employability (E4E) as a result of an excellent business plan developed with ETAO technical support. The funding assisted the DBE to close the gaps that existed in areas such as curriculum, learning and teaching support material (LTSM) development and teacher training, which are the cornerstones of the introduction of new curriculum.

4. The readiness assessment coordinated by the ETAO and conducted by a consortium of researchers and civil society organisations with monitoring and evaluation expertise assisted the pilot provinces to assess their readiness to pilot the vocational subjects and enabled a deeper understanding of what is needed to implement the TSM, which has proven to be extremely resource intensive.

5. It should be noted that while curriculum diversification is needed to respond to the country's skills needs, it comes with increased costs. Through collaboration with the Government Technical Advisory Centre (GTAC), the ETAO assisted the DBE to develop a Funding Framework that is aimed to answer questions such as 'How does government fund the new occupational and vocational streams effectively within the basic education system to adequately provide Human Resources (provision and training of existing and new teachers and subject advisors), infrastructure (Capex) and Operational Costs?' The funding framework takes cognisance of the funding sources that exist within the government system. For example, the implementation of occupational and vocational streams could benefit from funding for vocational and occupational education from the National Skills Fund (NSF) and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) through appropriations similar to those for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges.

6. Constant communication on the TSM curriculum and what it means in terms of the quality and responsiveness of the vocational and occupational streams to our country's economy is required to change the public mindset. While our country has a critical need for technical and artisanal skills, vocational education is stigmatised due to apartheid's legacy. The apartheid education system led learners to believe that educational success meant gaining entrance to and attending university, to the exclusion of other post-school learning opportunities in the technical, vocational and occupational fields. The success of the TSM diversified curriculum requires de-stigmatisation of the vocational and occupational streams and making them, along with entrepreneurial skills, attractive to learners and parents as pathways that can lead to employability.

EMERGING INSIGHTS FROM THE THINK TANK

Participants in the first Think Tank session, held on 24-26 May 2023, engaged in robust reflection on implementation of the TSM curriculum. There is agreement among role players that implementation of the TSM is a major policy shift that attracts public interest as it affects the future of many young people in South Africa.

The high level of unemployment among the youth due to the lack of skills required for employment negatively affects the country's economy. Finding solu-

tions to youth unemployment and the unresponsive curriculum resides in all role players working together and not in silos.

Role of the Think Tank: It is envisaged that the Think Tank will continue to make recommendations to the DBE on how best to strengthen the TSM curriculum to realise the vision of:

a. Diversified subject choices aligned to the skills demands of our country;

b. Improved opportunities for success for all learners, including those who would potentially drop out of school due to a lack of interest in theoretical academic subject offerings;

c. The provision of skills for employability in the current and future economy.

Research: During Think Tank engagements, the importance of research that provides data about occupations in high demand and the demand for current and future skills, disaggregated by locality and context to assist in identifying relevant subjects to pursue, as well as the need for an audit of the human resource capacity and the availability of workshop or simulation infrastructure was emphasised.

Legislation and policy: The need to consider the entire ecosystem in planning and implementation is regarded as key for education improvement. Policies that have an impact on implementation of the TSM need to be identified and developed or reviewed to accelerate and strengthen implementation. This includes the articulation policy as, according to the DBE, the TSM is premised on the articulation principle. Articulation is defined as the process of forming systemic, specific, and individual possibilities of connection between qualifications and/or part-qualifications to allow for vertical, lateral, and diagonal movement of learners through the formal education and training system and its linkages with the world of work (DBE, 2020).

General Education Certificate (GEC): The strengthening of curriculum development and assessment practices for Grades 8 and 9 in the vocational and occupational streams is aligned to the imminent introduction of the GEC. The GEC, which is currently being piloted, will enable learners to receive the certificate after successful completion of Grade 9. While the introduction of the GEC caused public uproar as many people believed it provided a premature exit from school for learners, the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, hastened to dispel the media reports and clarified that the GEC is a transition certificate that recognises the learner's completion of the first nine years of schooling. She added that it will 'enable to learner to elect various pathways and continue their

education at institutions of their choices where they will be exposed to further professional training and skills training in available trades (Motshekga, 2019). The Minister emphasised that the GEC is an important component of diversifying learner choices.

Curriculum development process: The creation of a multi-stakeholder structure that will drive curriculum development and oversee implementation of the TSM is perceived as urgent. The Think Tank recommends a coordinating structure consisting of the DBE, Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and all three Quality Council officials to drive the review of the NSC qualification design and curriculum to ensure that the design is fit-for-purpose and there is parity of esteem across the streams. The involvement of industry and the business sector in the design of the curriculum and the infusion of competencies and skills relevant to the labour market, including entrepreneurship skills, can no longer be overlooked if the school curriculum is to be relevant and aligned to the current and future demands of our country.

CONCLUSION

The DBE, through the TSM curriculum, has made significant strides towards providing a curriculum offering diversified learner choices and improved opportunities for success and the acquisition of skills for employability. However, it should be acknowledged that there is still a lot of work to be done. The commitment and collaboration of role players in government and the business sector is vital to help the millions of our young people out of poverty and despondency and to boost the country's economy.

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MINI-LESSON 32

Fast-tracking infrastructure delivery
- Caswell Mthombeni

The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) has been involved in the infrastructure delivery space for less than five years, starting from 2018. This involvement was prompted by President Ramaphosa's national call to action to eradicate pit latrines in schools. Besides the tragedy of losing young lives to drowning in pit toilets, the eradication of pit latrines is also seen as a project to bring dignity to teachers and learners who have to use these facilities. The initiative was called the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) Project. SAFE is a collaboration between government, the private sector and civil society launched in August 2018.

The goal of the collaboration is to develop sanitation appropriate for schools with the objective of eradicating unsafe and age-inappropriate pit latrines in schools and to give dignity to learners and teachers (DBE & NECT, n.d.). The NECT plays a key role in the provision of school sanitation solutions along the value chain, having been appointed by the national Department of Basic Education (DBE) as one of the implementing agents (IAs) (DBE, 2019) for the rollout of the SAFE Programme in the various provinces. Valuable lessons have been learnt during the implementation, and this mini-lesson documents the lessons relating to fast-tracking infrastructure delivery.

INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

The negative effects of outdated school infrastructure needs data

The National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) was introduced way back in 2007. NEIMS is an excellent platform for strategic and operational decision-making. However, if this database is not updated on a regular basis, there is a high possibility that the information contained in the system will lead to poor-decision making since it will be based on outdated information. Ideally the information should be updated on a five-yearly basis to ensure accurate data for the use of key decision-makers.

The challenge with the NEIMS is that it is dependent on the capacity of the provincial departments of education (PEDS) to update the data it contains. This has proved to be difficult to do for several of the PEDs.

Another drawback of this platform is that it could not be used to capture the information on the floods and storm damage when this occurred in Kwazulu-Natal in 2022, and a new cost model had to be developed to enable the costing of the damage to educational infrastructure due to floods and other adverse weather-related phenomena.

Consequences of varying provincial infrastructure planning capacity

The PED infrastructure plans are critical instruments that are used for strategic decision-making regarding geographic targeting of education infrastructure investment in each province.

The locational decisions for educational infrastructure provision are critical for minimising the incidents of cancelled projects. The responsibility for the identification and prioritisation of schools for inclusion in the education infrastructure plan rests with the PEDs. The institutional capacities of the various PEDs differ from one province to another, and this leads to delays in the formulation of education infrastructure plans.

In the implementation of the SAFE Programme, more than 100 projects were cancelled across the three provinces of Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape as a result of poor planning and targeting decisions by the respective provincial authorities. The projects in question were cancelled at varying stages of implementation and this resulted in fruitless expenditure.

Site development planning approval as a delivery bottleneck

Once a school had been selected for inclusion in the SAFE Programme, a site development plan (SDP) had to be prepared for the school. Each SDP had to be approved by the education authorities before implementation could begin. However, due to the capacity constraints of the PEDs as mentioned above and, in some cases, poor SDPS prepared by NECT-appointed professional service providers (PSPs), the approval processes took longer than expected.

It was found that for the development of sound SDPs, it was important that the NECT ensured that the assessment reports for the schools were accurate in terms of confirming and validating the need for the intended scope of work. This would assist in avoiding the cancellation of planned work as well as issuing addenda to the contracts of appointed PSPs and contractors alike.

Furthermore, it was found that to avoid cancellation and scope change after a project is allocated for implementation, the following need to be reported correctly in the assessment reports:

1. Water sources;
2. Existing toilet facilities; and
3. School enrolment figures.

Managing the efficiency of the delivery against compliance requirements: the case of SDP approvals

Ideally, it would have made sense for the SDPs to be approved before the tender documents were prepared. The delivery pressure was such that the SDPs were approved long after the contractors were on the ground, thereby contributing to scope changes and endless variation orders for the contractors. The scope changes emanating from the client (the DBE) also made it difficult for the NECT because these changes had to be managed as contractors implemented the projects.

Resolving the restrictions of private land ownership

A sizeable number of projects were to be implemented on land that belonged to private landowners, especially farm schools in farming areas. In some cases, there were arrangements between the provincial authorities and the private

landowners, and in other cases there were no such arrangements. In these cases, state investment of public funds in infrastructure on private land could be deemed to be fruitless expenditure. There is thus a need for a policy position regarding the implementation of educational infrastructure projects on private land, especially when public funds are used for that purpose.

Efficiency, relevance and sustainability of Alternative Building Technologies (ABT)

Alternative Building Technologies (ABTs) utilise building systems, components or materials which are not fully covered by conventional building standards or codes of practice. The NECT adopted the ABT option because of several benefits it offers, as summarised in Figure 32.1.

Benefits of ABTs for the SAFE Programme

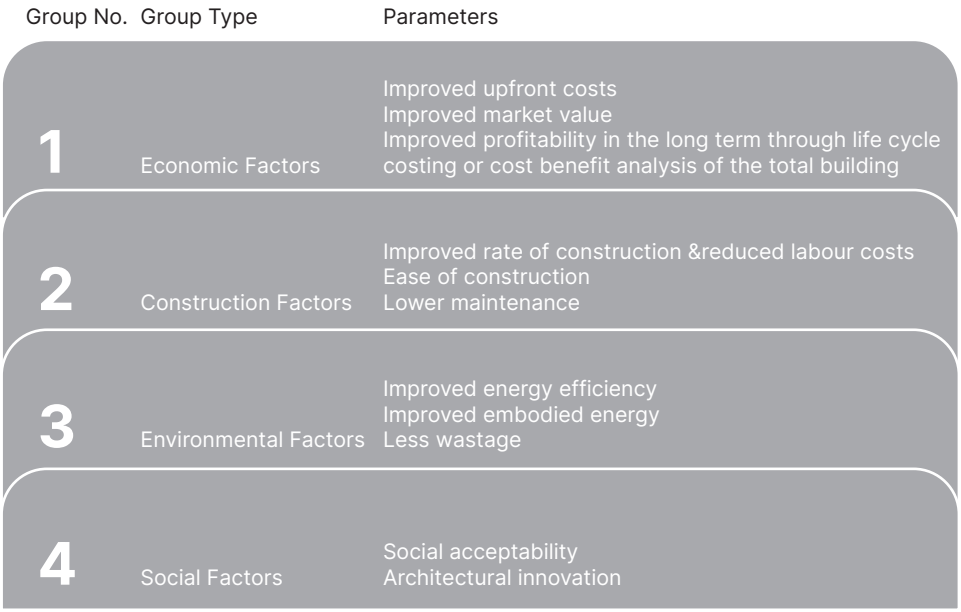

Figure 31.1: Benefits of ABTs for the SAFE Programme

Appropriateness of the ABTs to the school environment

An issue that was not addressed satisfactorily was the appropriateness of ABT for the school environment and for certain geographical areas. This led to a serious challenge for the NECT. For instance, it was found that ABT is not a good solution for schools with very high enrolments. In addition, the bulk of the school toilets were constructed in coastal areas where there are high water tables.

The application of ABT is not appropriate in such areas given the incidences of water ingress from the underground water sources and the potential for pollution and contamination of the ground water. The appointed PSPs also adopted a 'plug and play' approach and did not do thorough technical assessments of the geographic areas where the technology was to be applied. The important lesson from this experience is that we need to apply our minds when it comes to the introduction of a new technology in areas where such technology has not been used before.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. **Ensure Proper and adequate needs assessments:** The lack of proper planning proved to have been a major contributing factor to the current challenges of variation orders and the cancellation of projects that were initially earmarked for implementation. Proper planning was hampered by the limitations of the NEIMS platform.

2. **Invest more in planning ahead of implementation:** NEIMS has the potential to be a useful planning tool, but the platform could not be fully relied upon since most of its data was not updated. It is very important to have adequate technical and administrative capacity to maintain the integrity of any data that is eventually used for operational or strategic decision-making purposes.

3. **Weak technical capabilities result in delays:** It is essential to engage PSPS with the requisite capacity and experience to implement infrastructure projects to prevent the serious delays in the preparation of SDPs. Similarly, provincial authorities should also have the capacity needed to review and approve the SDPs submitted by PSPs.

4. **The future of sanitation: ABT or brick and mortar:** The NECT learnt valuable lessons in the choice of sanitation technology for the SAFE programme. The NECT learnt that some of the technology choices that were considered were inappropriate for some schools. The NECT has in the meantime introduced some technical solutions, including, but not limited to, the re-design of the ABT sub-structures to address the water ingress issues. The NECT has also engaged with the various ABT manufacturers, requesting them to adapt their ABT designs to the NECT sub-structure technical re-design.

5. **Constraints of the law in choosing the best performing contractors:** Procurement processes require the NECT, as an implementing agent, to appoint the contractors with the lowest price offer. Given the fact that there are very few procurement opportunities in the construction environment, contractors tend to submit suicidal prices, that is, prices that would allow the contractors to stay afloat without making any meaningful profits.

   The result is that the contractors end up not being able to implement the projects successfully and either abandon them or fail to complete them within the allocated time-frame. This raises doubts about the capability of contractors to implement construction projects. Another lesson learnt relates to the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) grading designations for contractors.

   While most contractors engaged by the NECT had the appropriate grading, this did not necessarily mean they were able to implement the sanitation projects successfully. The key lesson is that a contractor's grading designation does not indicate the contractor's capacity, but rather the capability that a contractor had at a particular point in time to handle a specific project of a given monetary value, and this might no longer be the case. Thus the CIDB grading could not be relied on to indicate the capacity of the contractor. Capacity assessment is a factor that should be subject to risk analysis by the client, in this case, the NECT, as part of the tender evaluation process.

6. **Working with PSPs as your foot soldiers:** The NECT's implementation model was designed in such a manner that PSPs were to be engaged to plan, design and monitor the implementation of SAFE projects on the ground.

   An assumption was that these projects were to be implemented over a period of between one-and-a-half to three months. However, because of the limited capability of construction contractors on the one hand and the lack of commitment of the various PSPs on the other, the reality proved to be quite different, and a wake-up call for the NECT. Another issue was that the limited disbursement budgets allocated per project contributed to the poor running of project sites by the PSPs. The assumption made was that the PSPs were going to work with suitably qualified contractors on the ground. In reality, the exact opposite was the case, and the PSPs could not be relied upon as foot soldiers for the implementation of the SAFE projects.

7. **The importance of technical field staff:** The NECT embarked on a strategy of engaging technical field staff as an alternative due to the PSPs' failure to control the project sites. The recruitment of additional staff had a serious impact on the project's budget for programme management. In most cases where the PSPs had either withdrawn or were terminated due to poor performance, the technical field staff were able to take over and proceed with the implementation. Despite the budget implications, the engagement of technical field staff proved to have been a worthwhile investment for the NECT.

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MINI-LESSON 33

Construction procurement: the procurement processes in the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) Programme - **Caswell Mthombeni**

This mini-lesson presents insights into the challenges experienced by the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) in the procurement processes undertaken for implementation of the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) Programme.

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION COLLABORATION TRUST'S PROCUREMENT POLICY

The need for a construction procurement policy

The implementation of construction procurement projects required the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) to have an infrastructure procurement policy framework in place. Unfortunately, the NECT implemented the SAFE Programme using the organisation's generic procurement policy. Due to misalignment with the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) Number 1 of 1999, the internal audit of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) queried the NECT's procurement approach, and queries were also raised by the Auditor General upon completion of its audit process.

It is understandable that the delivery of education infrastructure was a new area of focus for the NECT; hence it had not developed a policy specifically for the SAFE Programme. The NECT has since crafted its own infrastructure delivery policy and procedures framework to be used for procurement in SAFE infrastructure projects.

The NECT's procurement framework

To fast-track the implementation of infrastructure projects, a decision was taken to establish a framework for the procurement of professional service providers (PSPs) and contractors. The framework allows for the prequalification of PSPs based on their credentials and functionality criteria. Then, when the specific services they offer are required, the NECT requests them to submit quotations and tender proposals for consideration. This framework was put in place for a period of three years and will expire at the end of December 2023. The advantage of the framework is that it reduces the time taken for the procurement process because the NECT does not have to go through an open tender process every time it issues a request for quotations or tenders for infrastructure projects.

The disadvantage of this approach is that the NECT ended up with a limited number of service providers who could offer competitive tender bids since most of the available service providers are already engaged in NECT infrastructure projects. Moreover, several service providers (both contractors and consultants) had already been terminated by the NECT due to poor performance.

PROCUREMENT PROCESS CHALLENGES

Concurrence approvals by the Department of Basic Education

One of the conditions of the SAFE Programme is that the DBE requires the programme implementing agents (PIAs) like the NECT to submit procurement documents for concurrence approval. This means that no procurement can be completed by the NECT without the DBE having processed and approved the procurement documents. Apart from duplicating work already done, the DBE's concurrence approval requirement creates the perception that the DBE does not trust the PIAs to manage the procurement processes in a manner that fully complies with the PFMA regulations and practice notes.

The need for DBE approvals has delayed the implementation of SAFE projects. Moreover, even though concurrence approvals were given, there were still a

number of audit queries raised by the DBE's internal audit, implying that there was no value-add from this process audit issues should have been eliminated by the concurrence approvals.

Timing of the procurement of professional service providers and contractors

At the start of the bidding process for service providers, the NECT called for a turnkey project proposal, which meant that the appointed service provider would provide both professional and construction services to accelerate implementation. This did not prove to be feasible, and the first advertisement had to be cancelled and the process restarted.

The delays experienced in procuring the services of PSPs and contractors was one of the biggest challenges experienced in the NECT supply chain management. Ordinarily, PSP services must be procured before the procurement of contractors to allow for completion of all planning before contractors start construction. The PSPs should be appointed first in order to prepare the tender documents for the contractors based on the approved site development plan (SDPs)[1] .

However, due to the number of schools allocated to the SAFE Programmme and the urgency to complete the construction, the scenario that played out was the concurrent procurement of PSPs and contractors. The limited time available for PSPs to complete planning and design made the scoping exercise very difficult, and contractors were expected to implement projects while PSPs were still preparing and refining contract documents. For example, the Bills of Quantities (BOQs) supplied for projects were sometimes incomplete. The limited time frame also led to contractors not establishing sites on time.

Need to strengthen the NECT SAFE tender evaluation processes

The procurement processes within the NECT were impacted by a lack of in-house Built Environment capacity. This problem was partly addressed by the procurement of external Built Environment Capacity. Another issue that arose were instances where the tender evaluation processes were not as thorough as they should have been. This was evidenced by the number of projects that were assigned to contractors who did not have the capacity to implement the allocated projects. It is important that the NECT engages in thorough evaluation processes to avoid allocating contractors to projects that are above their CIDB grading – this would avoid the issuing of contract addenda and cancellations.

1 See mini-lesson 32 Fast-tracking infrastructure delivery for more on the importance of SDPs.

During the tender evaluation processes, judging bidders only on pricing is not advisable. A bidder's previous experience and how well they have executed past projects of a similar nature (even ascertaining this by asking other PIAs) must be considered. It is also very important to check on the bidder's capacity and whether they have the capital to kick-start the project/s without delays.

Furthermore, PSPs and contractors should not be given more than they can chew (meaning they should not be allocated too many projects at the same time). This carries the risk of them not having enough resources to deploy to all sites concurrently, and this would likely lead to contracts being implemented outside or beyond the contractual period.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. The NECT had to develop a specific construction procurement policy to comply with PFMA requirements.
2. The DBE's concurrent approval processes cause delays in approval decisions.
3. Appropriate timing of procurement of PSPs and contractors is necessary to avoid variation orders and cancellation of contracts. In addition, the client (the DBE) must issue the scope of work on time to allow the NECT or other PIAs to plan accordingly.
4. There is a need to strengthen the NECT's SAFE tender evaluation processes.

MINI-LESSON 34

Technical Assistance in ETAO - **Selaelo Lekoloane**

The Education Collaboration Framework (ECF) was established as a response to the National Development Plan (NDP) proposal for a national initiative involving government and social partners aimed at increasing cooperation among stakeholders involved in education improvement with a view to improving education reform in South Africa (National Planning Commission, 2013).

The ECF seeks to influence and support the implementation of the reform agenda and does that through the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), which was established to operationalise the framework (NECT, 2013).

Neither the ECF nor the NECT were established to replace civil society and business projects and initiatives aimed at improving education quality; rather, the ECF seeks to improve coordination of these projects and initiatives to ensure integration with the government reform agenda and increase their effectiveness and value (NECT, 2013).

To achieve sustainable systemic improvements in education, the ECF proposed focusing its support on the six thematic areas linked to the NDP and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025 (DBE, 2010).

These thematic areas constitute the pillars of the NECT's strategy, programming and collaboration interventions. They are: 1) Professionalisation of the teaching service, 2) A call for courageous and effective leadership, 3) Improving

government capacity to deliver, 4) Improving resourcing to create conducive and safe learning environments, 5) Community and parent involvement and 6) Learner support and well-being.

This mini-lesson focuses on the Education Technical Assistance Office (ETAO), which is one of the NECT programmes linked to 'Improving government capacity to deliver' (Theme 3).

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EDUCATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OFFICE

Under the guidance of relevant policy prescripts, namely the NDP and the Education Action Plan, the DBE adopted a five-year strategic plan, the first being for 2015/16 -2019/2020, and a rolling Annual Performance Plan. These planning documents take into account the United Nations Millennium Development Goals[1] to which the South African government has subscribed.

Both the NDP and the Education Action Plan set out clear improvement targets that require the national and provincial departments to introduce policy, structural and programmatic changes. Among these changes are the introduction of the Three Stream Model (TSM), the inception of the National Institute for Curriculum and Professional Development (NICPD), and the migration of the function of Early Childhood Development (ECD) from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the DBE (NECT, 2019).

The introduction of policy, structural and programmatic changes requires additional and specialised technical capacity in the DBE to ensure successful implementation. For this reason, the DBE proposed that an ETAO should be established, in partnership with the NECT, to manage the implementation of the first three change initiatives mentioned above. This decision is aligned to the NDP imperative of improving the capacity of government to deliver education improvements and the purpose of the NECT in terms of the ECF.

THE DEFINITIONS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Technical assistance is said to be widely considered as an effective approach in the establishment and inception of new policies or programmes. The World Bank defines technical assistance as 'a key instrument for improving policies and project design, enhancing skills and strengthening implementation capacity and for institutional development in general' (World Bank, 1996 1).

According to Alexandra Nastase et al., technical assistance is provided to country governments as part of international development programmes to support

1 https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

policymaking or strengthen state capability. The authors describe the conceptual evolution of technical assistance linked to capacity development as starting with programmes in the 1950s to 1970s that aimed exclusively to enhance individual capacity, progressing to more complex systems approaches in later years.

Technical assistance has also been described as 'a collaborative and coordinated approach to facilitating change, building the capacity of both organisations and individuals, developing improved ways of doing things, and ultimately, achieving agreed-upon outcomes' (*Trohanis TA Projects, 2014, 1*).

The NECT adopted the concept of technical assistance for the programming of the ETAO and integrated it into the ETAO's strategy, having drawn lessons from a technical assistance partnership delivered by UK Aid, the Global Partnership for Education and the British Council. A further observation is that operating a technical assistance facility is achievable through responsive, flexible relationships among all concerned, which may be considered to be features of the ETAO.

THE ROLE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN ETAO

In its commitment to support the acceleration, adoption and implementation of critical transformational initiatives that are the strategic pillars for the DBE, the NECT, through the ETAO, carries out its mandate of improving the DBE's capacity to deliver on the goals and objectives of the NDP and the Education Action Plan.

The ETAO has become a critical component of the NECT's strategy to contribute to building the capacity of state as envisaged in the NDP. It is envisaged that eventually the ETAO initiatives will be integrated into the organisational structure and operational processes of the DBE and governed by the DBE's policy structures (DBE, 2019).

Since its inception, the ETAO has focused on providing technical inputs and strategic project management support to some of the DBE's key transformational initiatives. Despite the successes recorded and acknowledged by various stakeholders in the basic education sector, there have been challenges that provide significant lessons to improve the design and application of technical assistance.

It should be noted that the challenges are not exclusive to the ETAO but have been acknowledged by different countries where technical assistance is utilised, as observed in the literature reviewed for this reflective paper. The challenges relevant to the ETAO are reflected on below for the purpose of drawing lessons for improving state capacity through the provision of technical assistance.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND LESSONS LEARNED

The principles identified by the international community to guide effective technical assistance can be found in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. They include: i) country ownership; ii) alignment; iii) harmonisation; iv) managing the results; and v) mutual accountability (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008, 4). In 2008, during the Accra Climate Change Conference, an alliance including governments, civil society and international partners reinforced their commitment to three principles: i) ownership, ii) inclusive partnerships, and iii) delivering results (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008, 14-15). Later, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation was set up to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and their work is built on the principles agreed to in 2011 in the Busan Partnership Agreement: i) country ownership, ii) focus on results, iii) inclusive partnerships, iv) transparency, and v) accountability are seen as critical in providing effective technical assistance (Nastase et al., 2020, 5).

Trohanis TA Projects at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute provides the following guiding principles for effective technical assistance (Trohanis TA Projects, 2014):

1. When determining the appropriate type and level of support to provide, it is essential to assess the strengths and needs of the client, the desired outcomes, the context, available resources, and any existing time constraints.

2. Active participation in the learning process is required on the part of those who receive the support, in addition to multiple and varied opportunities to apply what has been learned, coaching/mentoring over time, regular self-assessment activities, evaluation of how effectively new knowledge is being used, and ongoing feedback in a supportive environment.

3. Clients must have confidence that their TA providers understand the context of their work; have the expertise needed to address their needs; will be reliable, timely and thoughtful in their responses; and will provide resources that are high quality, evidence-based, current and relevant to their needs. In addition, clients must feel respected and trust that their privacy will be protected.

4. TA providers and clients must work together to clearly articulate and come to a joint understanding of what is currently working, what needs to change, the vision for change, and the feasibly of implementing specific change strategies. Effective improvement initiatives must support work that is already being done, build on existing strengths, and help clients to better leverage and integrate current resources and efforts.

5. Developing partnerships, integrating and leveraging resources, reducing duplication of effort, and sharing expertise are critical to the work of effectively and efficiently implementing sustainable improvement initiatives.

6. TA providers need to be skilled at promoting meaningful participation among a variety of stakeholders who often have diverse perspectives and varying levels of agreement about the innovation being proposed. They must be able to create conditions in people with very different backgrounds and experiences are able to work together effectively and build consensus around complex issues.

7. Both TA providers and clients must have reliable and consistent ways to provide input, clarify ambiguities, and quickly identify and address problems that come up. Maintaining open lines of communication can also help develop "readiness for change" in individuals who may need more information to fully embrace the innovation that is being introduced.

8. State service systems are complex, multilevel and highly interactive. A change introduced at one level of the system inevitably impacts other levels and is likely to be forced back to the status quo if not accompanied by purposeful, planned support at all related levels.

9. Effective TA should be based on a logic model that incorporates both formative and summative evaluation activities into all aspects of its work. It is critical to gather regular feedback on what is working, what is not working, and where adjustments need to be made in order to ensure that intended outcomes are being achieved. Evaluation data is critical for improving the effectiveness of the TA being provided and determining its impacts on state systems, practices, and desired results.

The aims and objectives of the technical assistance provided through the ETAO are clearly aligned with the above principles. Also in line with these principles, it is important that technical assistance providers are able to offer a broad range of technical assistance approaches and levels of intensity in order to effectively respond to the diverse and unique needs of their clients. In the NECT's experience, among the over 25 technical assistants engaged through the ETAO, some adhered to the principles above, whereas others deviated from them.

In the context of the ETAO, the DBE maintained an active role in decision-making, guided by other key actors in the education sector. For instance, the DBE played a decisive role in the Three Stream Model Think Tank and the Language Policy Conference, where lack of support from some technical assistants for the work already being done was observed.

The ETAO created these platforms where people with diverse perspectives, backgrounds and experiences could have conversations and build consensus around complex issues, in the best interest of education improvement.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

Some of the challenges worth noting include:

1. There was a lack of change management to ensure buy-in as well as a lack of a shared vision and goals among stakeholders within the DBE. Moreover, they did not actively participate in the in the learning process or in mentoring and coaching. Readiness for change in the DBE is important for individuals to fully embrace the innovation that is being introduced.

2. The potential for delayed institutionalisation of policy implementation and functions has been observed in instances where initiatives such as the Three Stream Model (TSM) and the establishment of the National Language Unit (NLU) in the DBE are being located in DBE divisions that have limited dedicated personnel to ensure the sustainable transfer of skills.

3. In some instances, more technical assistants with varied expertise are required; however certain skills and competencies are in short supply. Going forward, technical assistants will be sought nationally and internationally.

CONCLUSION

Technical assistance remains the most appropriate approach to build the capacity of the state to improve the education system and education outcomes. There is, in particular, a need to build a pool of experts with relevant technical expertise and strategic project management competencies to support government and the education system in particular. Technical assistance is also the best approach to empowering government to deliver emergency interventions that match the right skills and solutions to the particular problem. More research is required to guide the role players on how technical assistance could be utilised collaboratively to maximally benefit the DBE.

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MINI-LESSON 35

The implementation of an education management information system – The case of the NECT delivering the EMIS solution for the modernisation of the South African School Administration and Management System - **Mamello Khuto, Riante Narayanan and Shiloh Naiken**

According to organisational structure of the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Education Management Information System (EMIS) Directorate is currently a function and unit within the DBE with the responsibility for developing and maintaining an integrated education management information system (EMIS) for the management of education. This is achieved through the acquisition, processing, dissemination and reporting of quality education data that is linked to the strategic goals and objectives as identified by the DBE[1].

The DBE owns and supports the South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS), an application that captures and collects this education data. SA-SAMS is a standalone application, with a local database held at each school.

The database supports all aspects of school administration and management operations in all public schools in South Africa. Given its rather outdated technology, a lengthy, labour-intensive process is needed to extract all the schools'

1 https://www.education.gov.za/Programmes/EMIS.aspx

data held in SA-SAMS for management information used at circuit, district, provincial and national levels (DBE, 2016).

Currently, the DBE is engaged in a project to modernise SA-SAMS. The project started in 2018 and the DBE has since appointed the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) to implement this project on its behalf.

This mini-lesson outlines how the NECT went about the design and planning process for a new EMIS architecture for the DBE. The paper seeks to (a) reflect on the design and planning processes for delivery of the initiative; and (b) draw useful lessons from this to guide similar future education management information system architecture initiatives.

EXPLAINING EMIS

According to the United Nations Education, Social, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), EMIS is defined as 'a system for the collection, integration, processing, maintenance and dissemination of data and information to support decision-making, policy-analysis and formulation, planning, monitoring and management at all levels of an education system' (UNESCO, 2008, 101).

Based on the above definition, it can be deduced that the primary objective of an EMIS is to support the education sector to arrive at sound decision-making and policy formulation by providing accurate and real-time data. This data, in turn, plays a critical role in supporting education authorities, policymakers and administrators in planning monitoring, and evaluating educational programmes and policies for schools.

ISSUES WITH THE DBE EMIS APPLICATION

Following what was outlined at the start of the paper, the stand-alone SA-SAMS application resulted in key challenges that make the end-to-end process highly inefficient and prone to errors. This has led to significant inefficiencies in providing data that is dependable and timely.

Some of these key challenges include:

1. Data is not validated during capturing into SA-SAMS, leading to further quality assurance (QA) issues that need checking at various levels within the DBE and the sector. Once the QA process is completed, the schools are expected once more to recapture data that was incorrect or missing, which can be a laborious exercise.

2. There are a lot of manual processes used to collect data that is already in SA-SAMS (e.g., templates that are distributed to be completed by schools) and the data is not always available in a timeous manner.

3. There is duplication of capture between SA-SAMS and other systems (e.g., the Personnel and Salaries management system [PERSAL]), which results in misalignment of information in the various systems; and

4. Different primary sources are used for learner data, resulting in the duplication of this data (e.g., the Learner Unit Record Information Tracking System (LURITS) number, the National Senior Certificate (NSC) number).

In consideration of all the above, there was a need for the EMIS application to be overhauled. Being given the assignment by the DBE, how did the NECT go about planning and designing the new EMIS architecture for the modernisation of SA-SAMS?

HOW THE NECT PLANNED AND DESIGNED THE EMIS IMPLEMENTATION

Although the current SA-SAMS is rich in functionality and features eighteen school management and administration modules, the user experience is compromised as the functionality lacks integration, systemic flow and intuitiveness.

To resolve the shortfalls of the current SA-SAMS, the NECT project team surveyed the market for a school solution that has as rich functionality as the current SA-SAMS combined with an enterprise resource planning (ERP) design (a software solution designed to streamline and automate processes within an organisation).

In short, through desktop research and discussions with the UNESCO EMIS team, the project team concluded that there is no other school administration system anywhere in the world that matches the functionality requirement for the modernised SA-SAMS and provides a holistic solution.

Based on the above dilemma, the approach that the team adopted was to come to a full understanding of the User Requirement Specification developed by the DBE. This was done through analysing both the end-users and the current system to identify the strategic needs of the sector and the EMIS required to meet those needs.

HOW DID THE NECT PROJECT TEAM ACHIEVE THAT?

Clear articulation of the EMIS design and scope

In defining the scope and design of the MEIS project, the NECT project team first aligned the planned delivery of the modernised EMIS to the basic education sector goals as conceptualised in Chapter 9 of the National Development Plan (National Planning Commission, 2013). The principal idea was how to innovate a future-proof system that would cover the full value chain of managing a school. This was done through assessing the current SA-SAMS and benchmarking it against gold-star systems to ascertain the defined end-user and system requirements for the envisioned transformation. This process, in return, allowed for time to research potential vendors and their solutions. The benchmarking also gave an idea of timelines for estimating how long it would take to deliver the new EMIS solution.

Establishing guiding principles for finding best fit EMIS

Given the fact that the project team did not have a full grasp of the envisaged EMIS architecture, they proactively defined the guiding principles for the search for an off-the-shelf solution to modernise SA-SAMS. The EMIS architecture guiding principles served as a set of fundamental criteria or values to guide decision-making and shape the overall direction and approach to designing, implementing and managing information technology systems and infrastructure. These principles help ensure consistency, alignment with business goals and the achievement of desired outcomes.

Modelling an EMIS application

The project team developed a model of the holistic picture of an EMIS with its administration components that would be enabled through an enterprise solution management system which shows the sector value chain (see Figure 1 below). By showing the links or integration between these components, the model provides a comprehensive overview of how the modernised solution would support the education sector. It also shows how sector stakeholders would be able to understand the dynamics between the different elements and make evidence-based decisions to improve educational outcomes. The DBE accepted this model and it was subsequently used in the bidding document for the development and implementation of a new EMIS model.

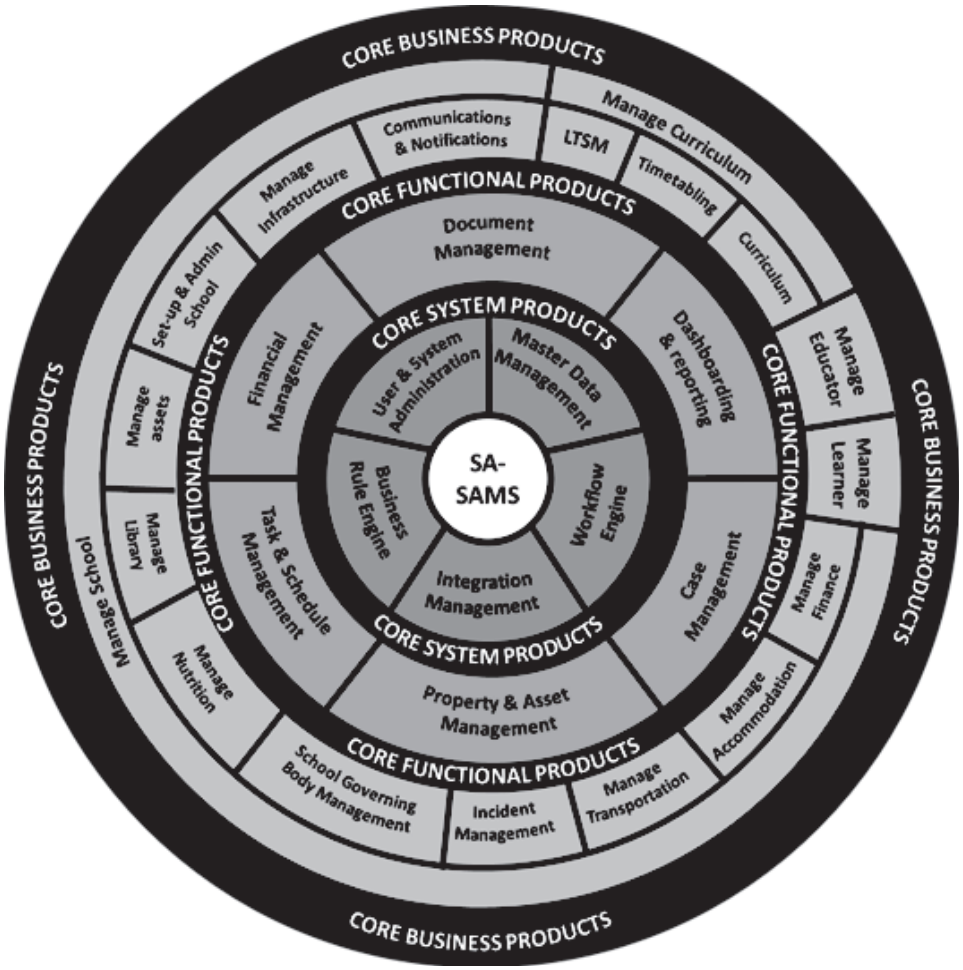

Figure 35.1: Education Management Information System

Conducting an enterprise-level Benefit Realisation Assessment on the impact of a modernised EMIS on the education sector

A Benefit Realisation Assessment was conducted and documented the benefits that would be realised for the education sector in implementing the modernised EMIS: schools, educators, school administrators, principals, school governing bodies, provincial departments and the national department would be able to manage and administrate the education sector effectively and efficiently.

Department of Basic Education

Monitoring and planning for basic education needs in South Africa.

Provincial Education Departments

Monitoring and planning for basic education needs within the province.

District Managers

Improve educational access and retention, give management and professional support to schools.

Inter-governmental Departments and Regulatory bodies

Input into planning and monitoring in other government departments (e.g. DHA, SASSA, SACE).

School Governing Body

Effectively govern and monitor school incidents and strategize to meet set goals and targets.

School principals and HODs

Make informed decisions. Monitor school performance, curriculum coverage, effectively report and manage daily running of school.

School administrator

Action school administrative tasks and activities to effectively and efficiently manage the school.

Educators

Action educator administrative tasks (curriculum progress, learner result management, learner attendance, etc.)

Figure 352: Benefits Realisation Assessment

The assessment, as shown in Figure 2 above, also identified who needs SA-SAMS data, what they would use data for and how they would use the data.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

In closing, what are some of the lessons learnt in this EMIS implementation for the modernisation of SA-SAMS that can be applied in similar initiatives?

1. The team must have a full understanding of the education sector value chain.
2. Implementation teams need a solid in-depth understanding of the education sector and its components as well as the dependencies between the components to achieve seamless management of the sector.
3. All end-user and system requirements must be covered in the design and planning of the EMIS solution.
4. End-user commitment and buy-in is necessary for its success.

When developing any system, including an EMIS, it is imperative to have total buy-in and commitment from the stakeholders for successful product delivery, implementation and adoption. This desired end-state might pose a challenge if there is lack of capacity (people), processes and systems in place to support this (which was the case with the DBE and the provincial departments). To ensure a smooth transition and implementation, the NECT ushered in an inclusive process to elicit user commitment and buy-in through adopting:

1. A multiple stakeholder approach implemented in the form of monthly engagements to apprise the DBE and the provincial education departments of progress in implementing the new EMIS system.
2. A detailed change management approach that entailed user acceptance testing as well as training the DBE and the provincial education end-users on the new EMIS in the sandpit environment to familiarise them with the new functionality.
3. Lastly, creating superuser communities in all the provinces to test the new functionality to ensure that the system performs all the management and administration functions that the end-users such as the schools require.

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MINI-LESSON 36

Crisis as an opportunity for policy change
- Lorraine Marneweck and Shirley Eadie

This paper reflects on how COVID-19 provided the South African Education system with an opportunity for reimagining education in general and the curriculum specifically. The paper begins by reflecting on the educational policy process during periods of stability. The issue of how the global COVID pandemic provided a catalyst for intensive education policy change is then probed before the paper ends with a summary of the lessons learnt.

POLICY CHANGE DURING PERIOD OF STABILITY

To grasp the significance of the educational policy changes that occurred in South Africa during the COVID-19 period, it is crucial to consider the historical path and timing of policy developments before this timeframe. This highlights the exceptional nature of the policy development trajectory in South Africa from 2019 to 2021.

Significant education policy developments in South Africa emerged out of the Constitution, adopted in 1996, which enshrined the right to education for all citizens, and Education White Paper 1 (1995) which aimed to redress the imbalances of the past and introduce inclusive education policies. Another significant development that has framed education policy over the past 25 years was the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 1995.

It was introduced as a comprehensive framework to standardise and regulate qualifications across different education and training sectors in the country. The NQF aimed to facilitate the recognition of prior learning, promote lifelong learning, and ensure quality assurance in the education and training system. And lastly, the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 was a significant piece of legislation that, to this day, governs the operation and management of schools in South Africa. SASA aims to provide a framework for the democratisation and decentralisation of education, promoting equal access to quality education for all learners.

Within this framework, several notable curriculum policies emerged. For example, the introduction of Curriculum 2005 in 1997 was a significant reform effort that aimed to transform the education system and align it with the principles of outcomes-based education (OBE). Curriculum 2005 emphasised learner-centred approaches, the development of critical thinking skills, and the integration of knowledge across subject areas. It aimed to move away from rote memorisation and encourage active engagement and application of knowledge by learners. The implementation of Curriculum 2005 marked a significant shift in the approach to curriculum development and teaching in South Africa.

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) was introduced in 2002 as a refinement of the initial Curriculum 2005 framework. The RNCS aimed to provide a more focused and streamlined curriculum that emphasised essential knowledge, skills and values across different learning areas. It incorporated feedback and lessons learned from the implementation of Curriculum 2005 and sought to address some of the challenges encountered. The RNCS aimed to ensure that learners acquired relevant and meaningful knowledge and skills to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Another crucial development was the establishment of the national Department of Basic Education (DBE) in 2009, which served to centralised basic education policymaking and monitoring. One of the first curriculum policies emanating from the DBE was the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) in 2012. This policy serves as the national curriculum for grades R (Reception year) to 12. CAPS is designed to guide teaching and learning in schools across the country, providing a comprehensive framework for curriculum content, teaching methodologies, assessment practices, and learner support. CAPS retains a strong emphasis on learner-cantered education, critical thinking, problem-solving, and the acquisition of 21st Century skills. It aims to provide a balanced and inclusive education that equips learners with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for their personal development and active participation in society.

It is important to note that the period from 1995 to 2012 was characterised by a significant number of policy changes in South Africa's education system. However, the pace of policy revision was about to accelerate even further, leading to more rapid and frequent changes, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 AS A CATALYST FOR POLICY CHANGE

Times of crisis can be viewed as education change opportunities, both for policy and practices. Crises present a chance to address longstanding challenges in education systems and create innovative solutions to adapt to changing circumstances. Opportunities that the global COVID-19 crisis created in South Africa included:

1. Addressing equity: The pandemic highlighted disparities in access to education and resources such as books at home and access to individualised web-based resources, particularly for learners in marginalised communities.

   The Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) Policy Framework gained renewed impetus during COVID-19 and continues due to the increased need for psychosocial support because of the pandemic. Although not yet brought to a conclusive end, this situation led to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and partners such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) investigating a Telehealth platform to make psychosocial services (PSS) services more accessible to schools and communities.

2. Emphasising digital literacy: The shift to remote learning made it clear that digital literacy is essential for success in the 21st Century. This imperative manifested itself in South Africa through the proliferation of projects that provides teachers with devices and schools with Wi-Fi to take advantage of 21st Century technologies, in even the most rural schools and classrooms.

3. Streamlining the curriculum: With fewer hours for teaching and learning, teachers had to prioritise key concepts and essential content to maintain students' learning momentum. The pandemic also created an opportunity for the teaching community to amplify their view about the heavily loaded curriculum. Policy makers gave this plea a hearing during the crisis as opposed to the period of normal policy making. This led to the development of curriculum policies that trun-

cated the teaching and learning process by focusing on foundational skills and concepts necessary for learning. In South Africa, rotational teaching became the norm for two years, leading to a reconceptualisation of teaching times through revised annual teaching plans (ATPs). ATPs outline the intended teaching and learning activities for a specific grade and subject over the course of a school year.

ATPs typically include details such as: curriculum objectives and content for the subject and grade level; learning outcomes and assessments for each topic or unit of study; teaching methods, strategies and resources to be used; timetables for each lesson and assessment; and differentiated teaching and learning strategies to cater for diverse learners.

Original ATPs were updated and developed into recovery ATPs during COVID to address the immediate teaching and learning challenges facing the country because of the global pandemic. The recovery ATPs remain in place even after COVID and are being used by the DBE as the basis for an overall revision of the CAPS curriculum.

4. Rethinking assessment: The pandemic disrupted standardised testing and informal and formal assessment, providing us with an opportunity to rethink how learner achievement can be measured.

   In line with the recovery ATPs in the General Education and Training (GET) band for mainstream schools, the DBE's National Assessment Circular 02 of 2022 provided guidelines on the implementation and administration of the assessment programme related to each subject and phase.

   In addition, the shift to assessment for learning (AfL) has begun to find traction in schools and classrooms as teachers assess learners' comprehension and understanding during the learning and teaching process instead of at the end, as traditionally had been the case pre-COVID.

5. Supporting teacher professional development: Teachers had to adapt quickly to new teaching methods during the pandemic, highlighting the need for ongoing professional development. Virtual platforms for teacher professional development was pursued for both the subject advisors and teachers. A particularly successful initiative was the online Comprehension Across the Curriculum (CATC) course which reached nearly 10 000 teachers.

6. Health and safety protocols: Education policies adapted to the changing health and safety requirements of the pandemic. In South Africa, this included policies on school closures, physical distancing and hygiene protocols as well as policies on the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other resources.

   While these measures related directly to the specificities of the COVID crisis, they demonstrated that South Africa could introduce new policies quickly and agilely.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, education policies were supported by additional policies developed to protect learners, teachers and communities. In particular, the learners and teachers in the South African schools were protected by the following pieces of legislation, to name but a few:

A. Alert Level Adjusted Lockdown Regulations (from April 2020 to March 2022); Disaster Management Act: Code of Practice:

B. Managing exposure to SARS-CoV-2 in the workplace (15 March 2022); and

C. Full time return of learners to schools and measures to address, prevent and combat the spread of Coronavirus COVID-19 in the Education Sector (4 April 2022)

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on education policy in South Africa, leading to significant changes in the way education is delivered and supported. These changes are likely to continue to shape education policy in the years to come as we adapt to the ongoing effects of the pandemic.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

Globally, all countries have a curriculum that is prescribed by government agencies or bodies of authoritative individuals. Schools are typically viewed as the entities that implement an existing curriculum, make sure that learners are exposed to and master the curriculum, and report that their learners have done so to parents, the country and to the system at large.

Historically, schools have very little say in the content and pedagogies in the curriculum itself. But the inclusion of differentiation in the revised ATPs suggests that a change in the role of schools and teachers in relation to curriculum policy development is emerging. For many years, schools and teachers have challenged the practice of applying the same content for all learners - they know

that the same content does not meet the needs of all learners. But the national curriculum typically assigns the same content to learners based on their age, even though age does not determine their abilities.

As a result, the content may be perfect for some but too hard or too easy for others. This is strongly suggestive of the need to involve schools and teachers more meaningfully in the upcoming curriculum review process.

In most schools, and supported by the curriculum policy, learning is typically directed by the teacher. The standard approach is that a teacher is assigned a group of learners and is responsible for ensuring that they master the content as set out in the curriculum.

The learners are the recipients of what the teacher teaches, and they do whatever the teacher asks them to do, both inside and outside the classroom. But COVID-19 provided us with the opportunity for all schools and teachers to try to change the way we teach, as more project-based learning and less traditional teaching approaches were used, and used successfully. This suggests that learner-centred pedagogies should be explicitly entrenched in the new curriculum to strengthen the purpose of learning from the learners' perspective.

Ultimately, to accelerate and sustain the change required to achieve sustainable, inclusive development, the education sector must strengthen the quality of education for developing the agency of every learner to be an agent of change – social, economic, civic and political.

Linked to this is an interesting development arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw the 16 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Ministers of Education adopt the Child and Youth Agency Framework (SADC, 2022) in 2022 (as an addendum to the SADC CSTL Regional Policy Framework). The DBE is embarking on its operationalisation by applying an agency lens to the various aspects of learning.

The 'where' of learning has always been defined as a classroom in a school. By and large, learning is defined by what happens in a classroom and/or a special space at home. Schools have defined where learning can and should happen.

Learners have generally accepted that activities they participate in in school-defined places is 'learning', while whatever happens elsewhere is play or something else. But COVID-19 changed this perspective, and it is now understood and acknowledged that learning can and does take place in multiple situations.

When schools were closed and learners were at home, learning still took place. Many learners took online courses and interacted with others online, while others used paper-based activities to continue the learning process at home. A new

curriculum needs to capitalise on this understanding and to include opportunities for learners to join programmes offered by other schools or organisations.

It is important to remember that the changes to what, how and where of learning are not new. But they are necessary - not just because of COVID-19, but to create a whole new world - the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Changes are needed because we understand our learners and learning better. They are needed because we have drastically different ways to access knowledge and expertise. Any new curriculum policy needs to build on these learnings.

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MINI-LESSON 37

The value of dialogue in times of crisis
- Duncan Hindle

The Covid_19 pandemic impacted on society on many levels. Some of these were very direct – physical lockdowns, work and school closures, the wearing of masks and the use of ever-present sanitisers. Although they were necessary and understandable measures, these were uncomfortable and confusing to many people. They required more communication and dialogue.

Even much less tangible or visible was the psycho-social impact on individuals, homes and families. Besides health concerns, people had significant anxiety about their futures, including their financial security. Social isolation and irresponsible social media post compounded these fears and raised the general levels of uncertainty about how to survive the pandemic.

Children were not exempted from any of these effects. The insecurities of parents were felt by children; where they expect adults to be certain about matters, suddenly they saw their parents were themselves afraid, doubtful and unsure. New ways of doing things, like wearing masks, avoiding contact with others and constant sanitising, must have confused children and muddled their ideas of security and predictability.

Soon after the advent of the pandemic in 2020, Minister Motshekga recognised the need to continue to communicate to the education stakeholders who she regularly engaged with through the NECT dialogue programme. The NECT

was approached to facilitate such communication using an online platform. The first online meeting of civil society stakeholders was thus convened within weeks of the President announcing the lock down in March 2021.

In this first meeting, which was addressed by the Minister and senior officials of the Department, more than 400 participants participated in the virtual meeting. The meeting was used first and foremost to inform the public about the state of affairs in education and what the actions that the DBE was taking or planning to take.

The meeting was also used to solicit wide inputs that helped to assess the impact of the pandemic and to suggest what should be done in regard to schools. Some were in favour of school closures; others believed this was not required at that stage. The meetings presented a broad church where all views were expressed and debated, arguably used to continually form a nationally calibrated stance on the respond to the COVID-19 shock.

As the pandemic worsened, schools were closed, but the Forum continued, now with a focus on the management of education under conditions of total or partial school closures. Recognising the importance of continuity, especially for younger learners, the primary goal was to try and ensure some continuity in learning, by whatever means, and despite the circumstances. Contributions from various role-players included the use of rotational timetables, to allow for social distancing, and the use of online platforms and social media.

These online interactions received positive feedback from both the Department, which welcomed the contributions of civil society, and from stakeholders, who welcomed the sharing of information and the opportunity to engage on it. As a result, the Forum continued to meet every two to four weeks, with updates on the pandemic, and discussions about what schools were doing.

In many cases, schools had taken responsibility for their learners, and made whatever arrangements they could to keep learners engaged in some way. Their efforts are to be commended; they managed to protect their learners from the worst effects of the school closures.

These school-led interventions were highly uneven; some schools had them, and others did not. Of those that did, the patterns were quite different (such as whether to use a daily or weekly rotation). Discussions in the Forum showed the need for the DBE to give greater direction on what was to be done, and the DBE responded with a National Plan for the Management of Covid_19 in Schools, to be followed by a National Recovery Plan once the pandemic had passed. Both of these were first discussed in the Civil Society Forum, for comment and advice.

The Civil Society Forum was not the only platform used by the Department to engage with stakeholders. The Department has well established consultative mechanisms to engage with teacher unions, as well as a Consultative Forum for SGB Associations, both of which were used to pursue formal consultations around relevant issues.

Teachers had specific labour-related matters to address, mostly arising from safety concerns, and these needed specific forums. SGBs likewise had governance issues to deal with, and these structures were used for such discussions. The aim of the Consultative Forum was to address issues on a wider scale, and to include those who would otherwise not have been part of any consultative processes. Parents were a major target constituency of the forum, and communities were also well represented by various NGOs and CBOs. Some academics contributed or took a close interest in the proceedings, and a number of other government departments, including the Department of Health, played a role in informing participants.

The approach of the Civil Society Forums was qualitatively different from the role previously played by the Dialogue Programme, where contentious issues had been tackled and differing views expressed. The Consultative Forums did include different views and opinions (on the opening of schools for example, where parents were quite resistant in returning children), but the imperatives of the Covid pandemic compelled firm decisions and swift action rather than debate, so these were limited. While this has been a deviation from its original purpose, the Dialogue Programme (and the Ministry) have recognised this as a parallel avenue that should be pursued. An exchange of information is a starting point for any serious exchange of views.

The Covid Response Management Plan that emerged from the various consultative processes was not a complex one, despite the extraordinarily complex environment it was addressing. The Plan recognised the potential impact of school closures, and the likely loss of learning, and introduced various provisions for dealing with these.

A trimmed curriculum was approved and distributed, to enable to best use of the limited time for teaching, together with support materials for this. Increased access to digital resources for remote learning were also provided through public and private channels. Underlying these measures was the need to ensure learner and teacher safety, and strict directions were given on these. Additional human resources were also provided to schools in the form of "Education Assistants" - 200 000 youths appointed under the disaster driven Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI) and the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI).

Given the varying circumstances in schools across the country, it was not possible for the Management Plan to be highly prescriptive, and schools (together with Districts) were largely encouraged to make their own assessments of the situation and respond accordingly. Co-operation with parents and the community was strongly encouraged in determining the best approach, with the single message that learning should continue, by whatever means possible.

Inevitably, some schools responded better than others. Wealthier schools could rely on digital and remote learning, as well as extensive resources with the homes, which largely enabled uninterrupted learning. Poorer schools were required to put in extensive efforts to try for continuity: rotational timetables, double sessions in a day, WhatsApp participation and the like. All of this took a great strain on teachers (and parents), and in some instances they were not able to sustain the additional effort. Children in these schools will have suffered the most, with long absences from school, and little or no support from media.

The Plan was exceptionally well received in the sector, and schools and communities felt a great sense of relief. There was a Plan, which gave direction and support to schools, whatever the circumstances. For some teachers, the opportunity to exercise their own professional autonomy about teaching and learning was a new challenge, which many took on with extraordinary enthusiasm and commitment. Those learners who did not suffer serious learning losses may attribute this to these teachers.

The Recovery Plan followed a similar route. Once it was clear that the pandemic was receding, the Minister opened the discussions in the Forum to questions of recovery. Once again there were many views, but the discussions soon culminated in the need for a comprehensive National Recovery Plan. This was urgently prepared and shared with the Forum, to once again give direction and confidence to a sector that had been badly affected. Like the Management Plan, with the effects being highly varied, the Recovery Plan had to build on what prevailed at each school, in each classroom, and with each learner. Psycho-social effects had to be factored in, as well as the economic impact of the pandemic.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. The primary lesson must be that structured and regular conversations are critical to demystifying issues, especially during times of crisis. The regular exchange of information, ideas and proposals is essential in ensuring social solidarity during any kind of crisis. Facts are often obscured as social media provides contradictory advice on how to respond, and the result can be social confusion, uncertainty and anxiety.

A regular consultative forum, involving senior leadership, is the best corrective measure for this.

Even though government had put together a comprehensive public communication system on Covid, the education sector demanded and benefitted from dedicated regular engagements.

The convening of a social dialogue with civil society was a master stroke by the Minister in combatting and countering this confusion in education and building confidence among role-players. The mere opportunity to listen to the Minister and senior officials on a regular basis, to get updates, to ask questions and make recommendations, helped to significantly reduce tension in the sector. Leadership was required, and the Civil Society Forum was a platform for this.

A related sub-lesson is that we need to clear about the purpose of such Dialogues. We may have become somewhat legalistic in our approach, where "consultations" are seen as a prelude to negative outcomes. SGBs and unions were reluctant to join the forums, in case their views were taken to be an endorsement of some or other proposal. A clear separation needs to be drawn between the formal consultative processes that may be engaged in, and an open dialogue, without prejudice to any party.

Teachers and SGB leaders should be the lead participants in these Forums, and their absence was regrettable. This also requires the Department to be sensitive to these concerns; placing the BELA Bill on the agenda of one such forum was a red flag to constituencies who were opposed to some clauses in it, and concerned that their participation may be cited in Parliament as part of the consultations held on the Bill.

2. Structured and regular communication has potential to mobilise additional resources to respond to the crisis. The emergence of a Plan through these discussions was aimed primarily at supporting teaching and learning, but also allowed for the mobilisation of additional resources from civil society around the plan. Technical and other forms of support were provided by civil society (including the Joint Education Trust and the NECT) to support and enrich the Plan, including extensive real-time research to track the impact of the school closures.

3. Dialogue galvanises common programme of action. The other major benefit of the Plan was to ensure that the focus was on key identified aspects. There were many issues that could have been a distraction; the debates about vaccinations for example. The Management and

Recovery Plans, reinforced by the Forum discussions, enabled attention to be given to the most critical elements: continued learning and teaching, care and support for teachers and learners, and eventual curriculum recovery.

4. Participants in the education improvement community appreciate opportunities for briefings and to share their views during times of crisis. Provision of information during crisis period help to consolidate the information basis on which partners such as private sector funders and NGOs use to change their investment plans and resources allocation.

In summary, the lessons we may draw for education systems in times of crisis are the following:

A. That communication and consultation with all stakeholders is critical;

B. That building upon the reservoirs of knowledge and experience that reside in and outside the system (including internationally) is key to survival;

C. That Dialogues and discussions with stakeholders can improve public confidence in the system;

D. That the conceptualisation and development of a "National Plan" is key to giving direction to participants

E. That such a plan can be used to mobilise additional capacity, and

F. That open and bold leadership is central to managing and recovering from any crisis.

MINI-LESSON 38

No-one emerges from a crisis alone: Partner coordination during crisis - **Cebisa Ncube and Godwin Khosa**

Throughout history, it has been evident that no person (or system) emerges from a crisis, natural disaster or any other emergency alone. The South African education system's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 – 2022, the July 2021 civil unrest in the country and the floods in April 2022 which primarily affected the KwaZulu-Natal province added validity to this observation.

The swift establishment and coordination of partnerships across stakeholder groups were central to the system's ability to respond to and emerge from these crises. Establishing these collaborations is associated with Nguni cultural practices and philosophies such as Letsema and Ubuntu. Letsema is an approach where 'families or communities faced with burning challenges get together, lend a hand and address the challenge quickly'. Ubuntu is simply humanity, the belief in a universal bond sharing and a view that 'I am because we are' (see Khosa, 2023 & Volmink, 2010).

Established to promote collaboration, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) took on the responsibility of creating a platform through which non-state actors could contribute financial and non-financial resources towards varied emergency response projects aimed at limiting the impact of cri-

ses on teaching and learning. Within a week of the national lockdown being announced in March 2020, the NECT had convened the COVID-19 Interim Steering Committee (ISC) comprising seven organisations from the government, the private sector and civil society. The ISC met weekly to provide oversight, mobilise financial resources and support the implementation of the DBE's Education COVID-19 Response Plan.

A similar collaborative approach was used to respond to the July 2021 unrest and April 2022 floods in Kwazulu-Natal, which saw a partnership between the NECT, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Proctor & Gamble, Momentum Metropolitan Holdings and the LEGO Foundation to implement the Kwazulu-Natal Emergency Response projects, which have benefited 11 272 children and 12 727 learners across 382 ECD centres and 20 schools, respectively in the province.

The burden is always lighter if it is shared.

Between 2020-2022, the NECT mobilised just under R90 million from over 30 partners to implement initiatives for the COVID-19 Education Response Project, the Kwazulu-Natal Emergency Response Project in 2021 and the Kwazulu-Natal Disaster Response Project in 2022, all of which have benefited millions of teachers and learners in South Africa.

When considering additional non-monetary contributions such as people's time and donated resources, the value of these response projects is much higher.

This mini-lesson documents some lessons learnt in coordinating partners and resources during the two years of disrupted teaching and learning in South Africa.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

Trust goes a long way: The NECT's ability to organise the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and other like-minded partners within a week of disaster striking was due to its track-record as a reliable and responsive implementing partner since its establishment in 2013. This track-record has created high levels of trust in the NECT and ultimately legitimised its efforts to mobilise financial and non-financial resources for the crises and to advise the DBE and Cabinet on how best to respond to these disruptions.

Communication and consultation are key: Panic and mistrust can arise quickly when there is uncertainty and, as such, establishing and maintaining open lines of reliable communication between state and non-state actors is essential.

Given the NECT's role as a recognised convening authority, it swiftly facilitated strategic consultations to keep education stakeholders abreast of the DBE's response to the pandemic. Such consultations included meetings between the NECT's patrons, the education department and teacher unions, and the Ministerial Civil Society Consultative Forums.

The monthly forums were not only a platform for updating partners on emerging information on the impact of the lockdown on teaching and learning but were also a call to action to support critical areas of education improvement that would limit the impact of the pandemic and prepare the education system for recovery post-COVID-19.

Following the first consultative forum in April 2020, it was resolved that the National Association of Social Change Entities in Education (NASCEE) and the NECT would establish six technical working groups to conceptualise Education Investment Portfolios for the following areas:

1. Reading Improvement
2. Early Childhood Development (ECD)
3. Community Involvement
4. Education Recovery
5. Remote and Digital Learning (RDL)
6. Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL)

The Investment Portfolios aimed to fast-track the implementation of initiatives in the six focus areas and provide a platform for expanding and better-coordinating partner networks and resources for implementing the initiatives (NECT, 2020). Since 2020, the RDL and CSTL Investment Portfolios have gained the most traction and mobilised more than R60 million from 30 partners, while the other portfolios have continued to be implemented through the NECT's core programmes.

Be clear on your place in the response: The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a health crisis but a socio-economic crisis that had severe implications for the livelihoods of many people. Similarly, in the education system, the impact of the pandemic went beyond what happens in the classroom, affecting the operations at all levels of the system and the welfare and safety of teachers and learners. When there are multiple interconnected challenges, it may be tempting to try

and address all of them. However, it is not always efficient to do so or even your responsibility to address some of the identified challenges. Considering this, the NECT selected four areas to support during the pandemic:

1. Contributing to Learning Continuity
2. Stakeholder Engagement and Communication
3. Research and Evidence-gathering
4. Learner and Teacher Welfare

The decision to support these areas was informed by the NECT's mandate and core focus areas[1] , its recognised role as a coordinator of stakeholder contributions to education improvement, and its capacity to roll out the response projects quickly. Focusing on a few areas allowed for more targeted and comprehensive support to the education system and made it easier to identify other partners to collaborate with.

Leverage what you already have: When responding to a crisis, it is easier to garner support when you can leverage what you already have. The support for online learning during the height of the COVID-19 lockdown is a case in point. When teachers and learners were confined to their homes in 2020, the quick introduction of remote and digital learning programmes, like the Woza Matrics and Tswelopele campaigns, was possible by leveraging platforms already available in most households – television channels and radio stations.

Furthermore, existing digital learning content previously deployed via other platforms was repurposed for broadcasting purposes. Through a partnership with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), MultiChoice, OpenView, and 20 other providers, teachers, learners and parents had access to 24 hours of curriculum content across various grades and subjects to ensure learning continuity and limit the impact of the pandemic on learning outcomes. Since 2020, over 6.2 million people have been reached through these partnerships (NECT, 2021).

During the same period, the ability to zero-rate websites and platforms was extended to hundreds of educational websites, including the national and provincial education department websites and the NECT's website, so that teachers, learners and parents could access curriculum support material without worrying about high mobile data costs.

1 The NECT's programming is centred around six thematic areas: 1) Professionalising the teaching service, 2) Effective and courageous leadership, 3) Improving state capacity to deliver, 4) Resourcing, 5) Community involvement, and 6) learner well-being and support.

Use evidence to guide decision-making: In responding to the crises faced by the education sector, it became clear that research and evidence-gathering were vital in making sense of the challenges at hand, particularly a challenge as unprecedented as the COVID pandemic, and brining legitimacy to how the challenges would be addressed. In the education system, the biggest challenge was finding the best way to get teachers and learners back to school as soon as possible without compromising their health and safety. The NECT's contribution in this regard was varied:

A. In partnership with JET Education Services and NASCEE, the NECT co-funded the COVID-19 Research Response Project[2], which saw several research papers published on the impact of the pandemic on the education system and global trends in mitigating the effects on learning outcomes.

B. The DBE commissioned the NECT to conduct an independent assessment of the country's readiness to reopen schools safely. The School Readiness Assessment was conducted in four cycles between 2020 and 2021, and considered, amongst other things, the availability of necessary resources such as water, sanitisers, masks and compliance with social distance regulations.

   Through this, the NECT provided reliable data trusted by all education stakeholders and that was critical in assisting the DBE to make informed recommendations to the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC) and Cabinet on reopening schools.

Since 2020, the NECT has also conducted a series of rapid school assessments in partnership with teacher unions and other partners to understand better the extent to which teaching and learning had resumed after schools were reopened, the impact of rotational timetabling on curriculum coverage, and the extent to which the DBE's Recovery Annual Teaching Plans were assisting teachers with curriculum recovery.

This data has contributed to a growing body of knowledge in the country, including that found in the NIDS-CRAM study (see Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021) and other studies by the DBE and Zenex Foundation (Christie, 2022). The key takeaway from these studies is that, while curriculum coverage has increased, it is not a definite indication of effective learning recovery, and further research is needed to determine this.

Similarly, in 2022 the NECT conducted an independent infrastructure assessment in 623 schools in Kwazulu-Natal that were affected by the April floods

2 See the 12 thematic reports available on the JET Education Services website. https://www.jet.org.za/work/covid-19-research-response/south-african-bootcamp/themes

disaster. The information collected clarified the extent of the flood damage and existing maintenance backlogs that needed to be addressed to ensure the swift resumption of schooling. Through this assessment, the NECT was also able to mobilise almost R5 million to support 15 schools that were affected by the floods.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

There are three key takeaways from the NECT's experience in responding to crises in the education sector.

1. Trust goes a long way in managing anxiety and misinformation and mobilising like-minded organisations to partner with you towards responding to a crisis.
2. A well-coordinated partner network is crucial to weathering the storm in times of crisis and in the recovery and rebuilding following it.
3. Remain focused, do not reinvent the wheel, and, where possible, use evidence to inform your response to the crisis.

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MINI-LESSON 39

Management of the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Nonkosi Mangxangaza

The dramatic outbreak of COVID-19 disrupted lives, livelihoods, communities and businesses world-wide, and its manifestation around March 2020 in South Africa resulted in a massive shock to the country's human resources systems.

Managing COVID-19 in organisations required a comprehensive and flexible approach to ensure the health and safety of employees while maintaining essential operations. Like other businesses and organisations, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) sought ways to minimise the impact of the pandemic on its employees and to limit disruptions to its work and support to the basic education sector. This mini lesson presents a number of measures that were introduced to safeguard the NECT's human resources.

SAFEGUARDING THE NECT

When the pandemic befell the world, the NECT took a decision to systematically research what other organisations were doing to maintain operations and to limit infections. Managing COVID-19 in the workplace required an ongoing effort that necessitated adaptability and collaboration among employees and management. Health and health and safety of the NECT's workforce needed to be prioritised while maintaining essential business functions to protect both employees and the organisation during the pandemic.

The NECT implemented a range of measures to protect the health and safety of employees while ensuring the continuity of essential business operations. The first challenge was the mental well-being of the anxiety that captured staff and their families. In this regard the first call was to reorganise ourselves to meet the government's efforts of reducing infections and saving lives.

The purpose of the NECT'S plan was to guide the organisation on how to:

1. Implement and comply with the requirements of the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act (85 of 1993) as well as the Regulations with regard to the safety of staff in the workplace in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

2. Put measures in place, as informed by the Department of Health guidelines, to protect all staff from being infected with COVID-19 and to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus amongst the NECT's employees and their families.

In ensuring our staff's well-being, the NECT's Human Resources (HR) unit kept staff up-to-date with COVID-19 information. Staff worked from home in accordance with emergency legislations and information was distributed to them on a weekly basis to ensure that everyone had access to useful safety information, knew what was happening at the NECT and understood what was expected of them.

Deliberate efforts were made to assist staff to manage the stresses that came with the pandemic, which included uncertainty, the burden of dealing with sick family members and also bereavements.

Staff members were introduced to tools and guidelines on how to take care of their mental, physical and emotional well-being. These included hygiene practices, physical distancing, mask wearing, disinfection of workspaces, and remote work and flexible schedules.

As many organisations did, posters and/or notices regarding COVID-19 were posted in key areas of the NECT's offices, for example, entrances, meeting places and other relevant spaces, to maintain safety awareness. The NECT bought and made masks available once staff were allowed back into the office. Both cloth and disposable masks were provided to staff. The NECT did so, not just to comply with the law, but to assist staff to access masks which were undersupplied and often over-priced, especially at the beginning of the pandemic.

To guard against overcrowding, the office floor maps were redrawn, and rosters

drawn to advise staff on the days they were expected to come to work. Programme managers were allocated the space and days on which they could bring in their staff. In this way, the planning was decentralised to the programmes to ensure that the development of the rosters was informed by the work plans and projects.

VACCINATIONS

When South Africa started its national vaccination programme against COVID-19, the NECT also took the initiative to encourage its employees to vaccinate. The NECT management encouraged employees to get vaccinated against COVID-19 by providing information. This was crucial for ensuring a safe and healthy workplace, not to only protect individual employees but also to contribute to the overall well-being of the organisation. Management was also encouraged to lead by example, by vaccinating openly and sharing their experiences to demonstrate their commitment to vaccination.

The NECT deemed it important to establish an open-door policy where employees could discuss their concerns about vaccination with HR or management. Management was cognisant of the fact that the decision to get vaccinated was ultimately personal, and it was essential to respect individual choices and privacy. Management encouraged open dialogue, provided information and fostered a supportive environment to ensure that employees made informed decisions about their health.

In September 2021, a survey was conducted to establish how many employees had been vaccinated. The aim of this survey was to gain valuable insights and information that would help in effectively managing the impact of COVID-19 and its associated vaccination efforts, as well as informing the development or modification of workplace policies related to vaccination, remote work, mask-wearing and other safety measures.

The questionnaire was issued and completed by 80 employees (out of 124). The results revealed the following:

September 2021: COVID-19 Survey on Employee Vaccination

The survey revealed that 40% of the respondents had not yet been vaccinated against COVID-19. Ten (10) employees who had cited medical reasons for not vaccinating, and who had requested to continue working from home, were requested to provide letters from their medical doctors.

By November 2021, the number of staff who had been vaccinated had increased by 21%. The small number of staff who were reluctant to vaccinate cited personal, health and religious reasons for this.

Management, through HR, met one-on-one with these employees to try and encourage them to consider vaccinating so that they could feel safe as well as keep their colleagues safe.

November 2021: COVID-19 Survey on Employee Vaccination

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. **Being agile and forward-thinking:** Being agile and forward-thinking when managing COVID-19 was crucial and the NECT needed to respond effectively to the evolving challenges posed by the pandemic.

   Workable arrangements were promptly made as a result of the agility and forward-thinking capacity that the NECT is known for. These actions were implemented to ensure that our staff were kept safe from infection and continued to be productive, both at home and during the time that they were allowed back into the office on a rotational basis.

   As our knowledge of the COVID-19 disease increased, we devised several strategies that were sensitive to the age, vulnerability and transport needs of our staff. The three Centurion offices were management's major concern due to the high density of staff per square meter. Management was also concerned about the several high-risk individuals identified on the basis of age and/or underlying health conditions as well as those exposed to public transport.

The NECT embraced flexible work arrangements to reduce the risk of transmission while ensuring operational continuity. Management invested in remote work infrastructure and support to enable employees to work effectively from home, employees were provided with 3Gs dongles, data and the use of MS Teams.

The NECT regularly evaluated the effectiveness of its COVID-19 response and learned from successes and failures. This knowledge was used to refine the strategies in conducting operations. It was essential to be proactive, prepared and responsive to protect the health and well-being of employees while maintaining essential operations.

2. **Creating virtual families:** Efforts were directed to ensure that the organisation, as well as individual staff members, supported each other to manage the effects of the illness and the fear and the high levels of anxiety that resulted from the pandemic, and particularly from deaths. The offices were closed whenever the infection rates were high. When the government moved to lower lockdown levels, staff were immediately brought back to the office.

Managers encouraged employees to check on each other regularly, especially checking in on those who had contracted COVID-19. The aim was to offer them mental health support, to keep their minds off the illness, and to promote work-life balance during those challenging times.

The HR unit coordinated COVID-19 training, which was carried out to ensure that NECT employees were empowered to deal with and respond to the pandemic. Employees were encouraged to communicate directly with their immediate managers in the event that they suspected that they had contracted COVID-19, had developed symptoms, tested positive, or been in contact with a confirmed case.

The NECT family also experienced the loss of two employees. Supporting the families of employees who tragically lost their lives to COVID-19 was a crucial aspect for NECT in this difficult time. Families were informed and assisted with information of how to access the life insurance available to its employees when tragedies like this happen while in the employment of the NECT. The HR department, together with the relevant managers, ensured that emotional and grief support was provided to the families and the employees.
Memorial services were organised in honour of the deceased employees. This was a time for colleagues, friends and family members to come together and remember their loved ones.

3. **The importance of communication:** Regular communication was among the most critical contributions the NECT could make to support its employees during the lockdown. Keeping in touch digitally, not only to check on the progress of work, but to also find out how employees were managing, made a significant difference to employee morale and mental well-being.

   The NECT encouraged a culture that valued agility, innovation and adaptability, and employees were encouraged to contribute ideas and solutions to navigate through the pandemic. Learning and development sessions were introduced, and teams were encouraged to share learnings and topics of interest with other teams, for example, the monitoring and evaluation team shared their findings on rapid assessments they conducted in schools during the pandemic.

   The NECT leveraged technology to enable virtual collaboration, online meetings and digital communication. The use of digital tools like MS Teams was emphasised to minimise physical interactions. Stand-up regular meetings were introduced to ensure that programmes/teams were productive and that staff and managers were always in touch and able to track deliverables.

   Some programmes in the NECT have continued to use these stand-up sessions to promote regular communication and collaboration, information sharing and constantly updating other colleagues on the work of the programme.

4. **Dealing with the HR planning according to regional dynamics:** When Lockdown Level 3 was introduced, as expected, the number of cases of infected people across the country increased. COVID-19 cases in Gauteng rose at an alarming rate, and the NECT was not immune to this. With several staff members testing positive, management decided to encourage staff to work from home and only come to the office when needed.

   During Lockdown level 2, when the restrictions were partially relaxed, staff over the age of 65 in the regions were encouraged to continuously work from home and not go to schools or attend physical meetings. They were assigned tasks that would allow them to communicate telephonically and on MS Teams.

5. **Policies are blunt instruments during pandemics:** Workplace COVID-19 vaccination policies involve several legal considerations.

There is a need to balance various competing rights and interests. It therefore became advisable for employers who were contemplating the implementation of a compulsory vaccination programme to seek legal advice on whether it would be permissible to do so. NECT management secured a legal opinion to guide its decision on how to manage vaccinations. The legal opinion advised the NECT to conduct a risk assessment exercise among all employees and consider the development of a mandatory vaccination policy (MVP) in the workplace to balance the rights of both employees and the employer. The MVP was drafted, reviewed by legal experts and then shared with the NECT Board. The decision to implement an MVP, as well as the obligations related thereto, presented various challenges for the organisation because of its interest in ensuring that its employment practices are considered fair and in line with legislation.

6. **Making informed decisions:** When the country moved to Adjusted Alert Level 2 from September 2021, management took the decision that all employees would be required to return to the office, except for those over 65 years of age and those with comorbidities.

Following the President's announcement on the move to Lockdown Alert Level 1 on 01 October 2021, steps were taken to gather data that would assist the NECT to make informed decisions. These included conducting a survey to:

i. Get the views of staff on the decision to return to the office;

ii. Gather information on the number of employees who had been vaccinated;

iii. Discover the reasons why some staff had not been vaccinated;

A legal opinion pertaining to mandatory vaccinations was sought. Obliging employees to be vaccinated may limit one or more fundamental rights contained in the Constitution, particularly section 12 (freedom and security of the person) and section 15 (freedom of religion, belief and opinion).

Apart from the Constitutional rights of employees, the NECT as an employer needed to also bear in mind certain sections of relevant employment-related legislation such as:

iv. section 187(1)(f) of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, which deals with automatically unfair dismissals on account of discrimination (including on religious, conscience, belief, political opinion, cultural or arbitrary grounds);

v. sections 5 and 6 of the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1995, which offer similar protection to employees against unfair discrimination by employers.

7. **The challenges and opportunities of working from home:** With the introduction of Lockdown Level 2, it was found that the younger staff members (generation Z) did not want to return to the office as they enjoyed working from home. During lockdown, staff had learnt how to use MS Teams to conduct meetings and general work. The staff located in the provinces had to shift their way of working as well. The staff members over 65 years of age were allocated work that would enable them to work from home and not go out to the field.

   Some challenges were encountered in relation to resuming coming to the office. While all NECT staff members had been requested to come back to the office, two project employees preferred to work from home and refused to adhere to the NECT's policies which do not include a work-from-home option. Hearings were held with charges of misconduct and being absent from the office, and the two employees were subsequently dismissed.

OVERARCHING TAKE-HOME LESSONS

From the lockdowns, the NECT learnt new ways of working and drew many lessons on how the organisation can effectively operate in the new future the world. The pandemic highlighted the importance of flexibility in work arrangements. The NECT quickly adapted to remote work, proving that it is possible to maintain productivity while allowing employees to work from home. The crisis prompted discussions about hybrid work models, which combine in-person and remote work. This approach allowed for flexibility while maintaining some level of in-person collaboration and connection.

The pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital tools and technology for communication and collaboration. The NECT learned the importance of having robust technological infrastructure to support both working from the office, remotely and streamlining operations.

In managing human resources remotely and effectively managing the well-being of staff, the pandemic brought attention to the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of employees. The NECT realised the significance of providing resources and support to help employees cope with the challenges posed by remote work, isolation and uncertainty.

Clear and regular communication became essential during the pandemic. The NECT learned the value of transparent communication with employees, sharing updates about company policies, changes and safety measures.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped our understanding of work and the workplace. It is important for organisations to reflect on these lessons and integrate them into their long-term strategies to create more adaptable, resilient and employee-centred workplaces.

MINI-LESSON 40

How bureaucracy stifles emergency responses - **Nimrod Mbele**

The South African education system experienced unprecedented activation of force majeure, which followed the global spread of COVID-19 across the globe. Although we saw good leadership characterised by resilience, bureaucracy as an approach to service delivery displayed limitations during the emergency situation.

For the purpose of this discussion, bureaucracy refers to a type of organisation designed to accomplish large-scale administrative tasks by systematically coordinating the work of many individuals. The basic characteristics of bureaucratic organisations are specialisation, a hierarchy of authority, a system of rules and impersonality (Blau, 1956). Typically, governments and other larger organisations fall into this category and decisions made in these organisations are invariably subject to hierarchical approval processes that are codified to overcome random decision making on policy prioritisation and allocation of resources.

MANAGING EDUCATION DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

The Department of Basic Education (DBE), the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC), and the Cabinet needed to validate data that was presented by the provincial education departments (PEDs) during the COVID emergency situation to determine how to manage schools during the crisis.

When all nine PEDs presented wholesale data on the readiness of schools to deal with the pandemic, teacher unions expressed concerns. The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) was thus called in by the DBE to collect valid and reliable data that would enable the NCCC and Cabinet to make critical life-saving decisions based on reliable data. On the back of the DBE's request, the NECT assembled a technical team comprised of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), Plus 94 Research, New Leaders Foundation (NLF) and Entsika Consulting to undertake school readiness assessments.

The assignment was divided into the following critical components: analytics, population surveys and tracking and verification; and tracking and verification of supplies to assess the efficiency of the supply chain for making personal protective equipment (PPE) available to schools. For ease of reference, the division of labour between the consortium members is outlined below:

1. HRSC and NLF: Co-developed the design of the methodology and the necessary instrumentation and set up the structures and platforms for data analysis and reporting in a timely manner.

2. Plus 94 Research: Collected relevant data on a continuous basis from principals, circuit managers and schools, and from learners, teachers and parents. They also collected online data through telephone surveys from the population of 25 000 schools in respect to their readiness to receive learners.

3. Entsika Consulting: Tracked and verified the supply and delivery of the relevant supplies needed by schools.

As the project manager, the NECT had to provide a detailed briefing to the consortium, deploy resources to support the consortium, participate in steering committee activities and coordinate reporting to DBE structures. The work of the consortium was overseen by the DBE COVID- 19 Steering Committee chaired by a DBE senior official. Below are observations on the failures of bureaucracy and how the NECT was able to mitigate them.

THE NECT'S RESPONSE

The urgency of the assignment left no room for errors as the system had to respond to the life-threatening impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

A. The Steering Committee not only provide oversight but also played a critical role in unblocking challenges such as access to schools and provincial officials.

B. The pace at which the NECT succeeded in securing, briefing and deploying consortium members to provinces to collect data and to report within a short space of time could not have happened if this assignment was carried out through the normal government administration processes.

C. The process of readiness assessment was time sensitive, and as a result, the assessment methodology had to respond to this and the timeframe adjusted so that progress in readiness could be assessed over time.

D. The results of the assessment were critical for making proper policy decisions. As a result, the data collection process had to accommodate policy-relevant variables, and the process of planning, developing instrumentation and data verification had to involve policy makers as sources of reference and legitimacy.

E. The consortium had to exercise diligence and sensitivity in collecting data during the period of COVID-19 as there was an increased monitoring of activities of the state combined with an increase in independent research activities by the media and other organisations. This resulted in schools being overwhelmed with data collection requests. In anticipation of this challenge, the NECT consortium secured a written permission from DBE to collect data from provinces and schools. On the back of the authorisation letters, the NECT used its network to fast-track data collection.

F. In terms of profiling, the selection of sample schools was critical since it was anticipated the poorer schools (Quintiles 1 and 2) and rural schools were less likely to be ready, while schools in higher quintiles and private schools were more likely to adapt quickly to the pandemic and receive learners. In addition, the consortium understood that a quick response was required to adapt to a new set of circumstances, and the adaptation and the level of readiness changed daily. At some point in the process, schools were sampled daily to assess progress in attaining the desired state of readiness.

G. COVID affected teachers, learners and parents, and therefore it was important to ensure that the state of readiness assessment considered the entire school community. The assessment also had to be consistent with policy guidelines and requirements for managing the impact of COVID. Such guidelines were provided by the World Health Organization and by the DBE, and additional evidence was available

from local and international research. The body of information and guidelines related to the pandemic was used in developing standards for the DBE's COVID response, and, consequently, was applied in the development of questionnaires to determine the level of schools' compliance with these standards.

LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE READINESS ASSESSMENT

The NECT recognised that schools had to reopen to successive cohorts of learners in a gradual manner in order to observe COVID protocols. Thus, the readiness assessment was conducted and reported in an incremental manner to provide ongoing decision-making data to enable the DBE to make timely decisions as the state of readiness of schools progressed.

Given the urgency of data collection across different provinces and to ensure timeous reporting with accurate data, it was necessary to use multiple data sources in order to confirm the findings generated through the survey data. In this regard, multiple sources of data were used to corroborate the conclusions reached.

Due to the vastness of the schooling system and limited time available to conduct research, the consortium had to use different sampling frameworks to ensure representivity of the population of schools and to support the generalisation of findings. The Steering Committee comprised of DBE officials validated all major milestones to ensure high levels of acceptability.

The consistency and fidelity of data across provinces and schools were critical for reaching valid and reliable conclusions. To ensure consistency and data fidelity, much effort was taken to align the different forms of instrumentation and to standardise the data collection protocols so that similar information was collected from different groups of respondents. Through this approach, the quality and reliability of data were optimally reached.

In addition, the data presented was able to highlight provincial contextual peculiarities that could have affected the nature of the data collected and the manner in which the data was analysed and interpreted. The assessment process, therefore, sought to establish and capture qualitative insights that captured the uniqueness of the specific context - particularly in cases where there were blockages, and in cases where good practices were clear.

The feedback to the DBE indicated that since successive cohorts of learners were returning to school it was necessary to structure the reporting cycle so that intermittent reporting was available to keep the DBE updated, and so that ongoing reporting could be aligned with the various dates that were scheduled

for learners to return to school. Against this backdrop, the NECT reported daily and weekly on the supply and availability of PPEs.

The accuracy of information was regarded as paramount as it informed the quality of decisions which, in the absence of accurate and credible data, could have compromised the health and welfare of teachers, learners and other personnel at schools. As a result, the consortium placed a high premium on the accuracy of the information in order to minimise the adverse effect upon schools.

Information shared by the Minister with the Cabinet, the NCCC and different media platforms had to be audited, verified and substantiated prior to analysis and reporting. This approach gave the NECT confidence that Minister and other authorities made life-saving decisions based on validated empirical data.

ASSISTING SCHOOLS AFFECTED BY THE FLOODS

The NECT was once again requested by the DBE to facilitate the mobilisation of private sector resources following the flood disaster that affected KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. As part of the brief from DBE, the NECT was required to conduct educational assessments that would ensure the DBE was able to plan and prioritise affected schools. To this end, the NECT conducted the assessment in two phases.

Phase 1 was conducted from 2 June 2022 to 15 June 2022 and Phase 2 was conducted from 19 July 2022 and 19 August 2022. The information gathered by the NECT was compared to that gathered by the PEDs to address issues relating to the validity and reliability of the data.

To assess infrastructure needs, the NECT conducted a rapid assessment of both the Eastern Cape and the KwaZulu-Natal schools. A total of 630 schools were identified and a team of professional resources was also mobilised to conduct the school condition assessments over a period of two months, with the third month allocated for mopping up and close-out reports. For schools that were assessed, the cost implications of fixing the damaged schools amounted to R416 million. This translates to 0.6% of the total replacement cost of educational facilities.

For the educational assessments in the two provinces, the NECT collected data in two phases. In Phase 1, the NECT targeted 337 schools in nine Kwazulu-Natal districts and data was successfully collected and captured for 329 of these schools. Phase 2 targeted 27 schools from the Amathole East district of the Eastern Cape and 295 KZN schools from seven Kwazulu-Natal districts. A total of 298 schools were visited in Phase II of data collection. The total number of schools where the educational assessments were conducted numbered 643.

The following section outlines lessons learned from the damage and education assessments.

The NECT's agility enabled it to mobilise professional resource teams to perform school assessments. The teams comprised 50 infrastructure professionals, including civil structural engineers, electrical engineers, architects, health and safety professionals and quantity surveyors. In a similar vein, the NECT was equal to task of mobilising a technical team to undertake learning and teaching support material (LTSM) needs assessments.

The DBE requested the NECT to utilise the National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) for the assessments. One of the most important requirements of the assessment was the determination of the cost implications of flood damage. Unfortunately, the NEIMS platform did not allow for the capturing of flood damage costs in its current format. The NECT had to develop a special cost model to be used for the capturing of this information. The cost model also incorporated a prioritisation criterion to be used by the DBE for the allocation of funding. The three cost elements that were isolated included replacement costs of educational assets, maintenance backlogs, and flood-storm damage. The DBE accepted the NECT's approach as it was able to provide the data that would inform the system on how best to intervene.

During an emergency period, time is of a critical nature as the system needs to make decisions based on evidence. In circumventing any delays resulting from poor planning, the NECT conducted induction and orientation to NEIMS assessment. The onboarding workshop dealt not only with instrument adoption, but also project scope, expected deliverables, and the use of NEIMS system to conduct needs assessments. The onboarding and quality assurance process ensured that NECT was able to report timeously and accurately to authorities.

The infrastructure and LTSM assessments were subjected to a rigorous research methodology which thrashed out and approved project scope and project-related activities such as requirements from technical resource teams, development and approval of data collections instruments, mapping of projects sites, pilot assessments, sites visits and data collection. Through this process, the NECT was able to guarantee quality as the DBE made inputs throughout every planning stage.

The team assembled by the NECT was able to conduct distance analysis to ensure that the most cost-effective routes were determined, thereby saving the assessment team's valuable time. This also enabled the teams to plan the accommodation and travel logistics so that less time was spent on the roads travelling and more time spent on sites conducting assessments. This level of

planning and using cutting-edge technology enabled the NECT to gather and validate data for the system to make the necessary decisions on infrastructure and LTSM requirements.

In terms of teaching and learning, 91%-95% of principals who reported shortages of LTSM had not yet received replacements when the NECT began the assessments. Schools reported more shortages of stationery packs (+50%) than textbooks (+25%). For Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects, between 27%-36% of learners reported that they had lost equipment. Between 12-22% of schools visited had STEM laboratories which were affected by the floods. The NECT was able to provide real-time data, which was then used to compare and validate data provided by provincial departments. The data informed the evidence-based prioritisation strategy.

Concerning school infrastructure, the research discovered a large number of schools in KwaZulu-Natal that still had asbestos roofs. The asbestos roofs are a cause for concern, especially regarding the potential health hazards for both learners and educators. The DBE now has a clear picture of the quantity of schools with asbestos, and this information will ensure that strategic decisions are made regarding the replacement of the asbestos roofs.

The NECT was able to make a distinction between infrastructure backlog and flood-damaged school infrastructure. The value of maintenance backlogs was R7.4 billion, which translates to 10.3% of the replacement value. The revelation provided the authorities with a clear prioritisation strategy that was used to channel the resources to where they were most needed. The information enabled the authorities to prioritise the funding allocations for each of the schools affected and the implementation of the repairs.

Given the urgency for decision making, reporting was done on a weekly basis to the DBE's Ministerial Task Team. It was on this basis that the Minister was able to brief the Council of Education Ministers (CEM), Heads of Education Departments Committee (HEDCOM) and media on the status of schools following the disaster.

In terms of the NECT's original plan and the proposal to DBE, the teams were required to cover an average of four schools per day to complete the assessments within a period of four weeks. The NECT encountered several challenges that hindered the teams from sticking to this timeframe. The NECT had to navigate challenges such as locations and sizes of schools, the average duration of the assessment, concurrent multiple users not being allowed to use the system, outdated contact details, incorrect coordinates and refusal of entry into some schools.

There was a need for a thoroughly detailed engagement with stakeholders to ensure buy-in and commitment of the various stakeholders, especially the school principals who ended up turning the assessment teams away when they visited the schools. There is also a need for improved communication between the provincial authorities and the school management teams.

The NECT highlighted the need for periodic condition assessments of educational facilities; these should be conducted every five years to determine the condition profiles of the facilities. The lack of planned maintenance for educational facilities implies that the lifespan of the facilities is drastically reduced, and the state will have to spend more money on the replacement of the same assets, instead of spending a fraction of the cost to maintain them.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the declaration of a national state of disaster and associated regulations, as well as the crisis of the damage to education caused by the floods, subjected the education system bureaucracy to an unprecedented need for urgency. The limitations of the bureaucracy to deal with such situations became apparent. It was evident that only agile organisations such as the NECT are in a position to provide the emergency responses needed. It is on this basis that DBE reached out to the NECT as it was capable of mobilising the necessary resources to respond to the crises.

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MINI-LESSON 41

Lessons on coping in times of uncertainty: a community psychosocial support model - **Lebogang Maphelela**

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic which brought about disruption to teaching and learning and instability in communities also brought about some valuable lessons that the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) considered when it developed a care and support programme linking education and health. What emerged strongly during the pandemic was that health and education are interdependent and it is essential to prioritise health and well-being to promote education continuity in times of uncertainty.

While the education sector is focused on ensuring inclusive and equitable education as prescribed by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, the COVID-19 pandemic raised a greater need to link SDG 4 and SDG 3, which aspires to ensure health and well-being for teachers and learners. Through the community-based psychosocial support (PSS) model, the NECT managed to respond quickly to psychosocial issues in the community at a time of uncertainty. This paper outlines some of the lessons learned by the NECT in undertaking this work.

RESPONSE TO DISTRESS IN THE COMMUNITY

Amid the COVID-19 disruptions to education, the NECT drew lessons from a literature review it conducted on how education systems coped during crises.

The purpose was to learn strategies for education continuity from other countries that had experienced crises such as natural and health disasters.

From the literature review, it was evident that community stakeholder engagement played an essential role in education continuity during crises and disasters, and thus it was recommended that communities be more involved in providing PSS (*NECT, 2020*).

As per the recommendation, the NECT developed a community-based PSS model to address the trauma experienced by community members. At the time that the community-based PSS model was developed and implemented, communities were in distress and experiencing trauma from the loss of family members and the uncertainty of what would happen next.

The community-based PSS model had five components aimed at increasing the reach of PSS in communities. The model targeted municipal wards and schools through the district-based support teams and provided support through telephone, social media and radio campaigns.

The municipal ward component of the model endeavoured to capacitate community members with layman's counselling skills to respond to psychosocial needs in the community.

The Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Reference Group of United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) developed Basic psychosocial skills: A COVID-19 responders guide (IASC, 2020). The guide was adapted by the NECT and used by the NECT and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) as the main document to train a total of 4 625 community members in Limpopo, the North West, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape.

Furthermore, the NECT partnered with the DBE's Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) to roll out the community PSS model to 50 pastors in the Bojanala District in the North West, and also partnered with the Moral Regeneration Movement in Mpumalanga to roll out the model to 105 religious' leaders from different religious affinities.

The impact was positive in that the religious leaders were able to implement the strategies they learnt to support their church members to deal with the anxiety and fears surrounding the pandemic.

SETTING UP THE COMMUNITY PSS MODEL FOR SUCCESS

The community PSS model was a quick response in a time of uncertainty, and a few lessons can be drawn on what is needed for a community PSS model to succeed:

Core material

A basic skills guide needed to be developed as quickly as possible. Within a month of its release by the IASC, Basic psychosocial skills: a guide for COVID-19 responders, was adapted by the NECT using the IASC's adaptation guidelines to be context specific.

Additionally, core training materials were developed in the form of a facilitator's presentation comprising six modules based on summarised content from the guide.

Human capacity

A team of NECT district change agents (DCAs) was trained on the six modules using the facilitator's presentation. As this was during the peak of the pandemic, the training took place on Microsoft Teams.

The older DCAs who were unable to travel to districts to train community members were involved in non-contact support activities of the community PSS model such as conducting community radio interviews for educating parents, teachers and learners about the importance of PSS and addressing mental health and other social ills in the community.

Mobilisation of community stakeholders to form part of the PSS ward committees

The DCAs were also actively involved in the formation of the PSS ward committees through mobilisation of key community stakeholders, in this way leveraging the social capital within the municipal wards in four provinces.

Use of technology for communication

The use of digital tools was central to the success of the community-based PSS model. The NECT's Monitoring and Quality Assurance (MQA) team developed a digital pre- and post-test on Google Forms and trialled it internally with the DCAs before the tools were used externally.

Furthermore, messages on PSS were shared on social media platforms. It was important to spread the word on the importance of mental health, care and support at home and in the community for learners. The social media component of the community PSS model assisted in transmitting this message and reached about 64 928 users.

REFLECTIVEINSIGHTS

The lessons on coping in times of uncertainty that can be learned from the development and implementation of the community PSS are as follows:

1. It is important to inculcate the notion of 'education as a societal issue' within the community. This notion garners the support and involvement of essential community stakeholders such as traditional leaders, municipal ward councillors and parents and broadens the understanding of and need for PSS in the community.

2. Various avenues such as social media platforms and community radio stations can be used to boost the reach of education improvement initiatives, and the COVID lockdown provided an opportunity to test their efficacy for this purpose.

   During the pandemic lockdowns, these communication platforms proved indispensable for connecting people from different parts of the country and all over world. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp were helpful in disseminating information on how people could take care of themselves and support others in times of crises.

   Social media became the main means of communication, with the public able to instantly react and share their views. WhatsApp continues to be the most accessible and widely used means of communication among community stakeholders as most people have a smartphone and use WhatsApp as their main messaging application.

   The use of community radio stations was especially effective in information sharing to rural communities, and the use of home languages to conduct the radio interviews made the information more accessible to these communities.

3. The use of digital platforms helped to maintain communication and to ensure the continuation of programming even during the pandemic. At the peak of the pandemic, the NECT leveraged the use of digital platforms such as Microsoft Teams and ZOOM to cascade the community PSS training to the PSS ward committees.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY-BASED PSS MODEL GOING FORWARD

The success of the community-based PSS model was rooted in its ability to provide quick relief to communities in a time of uncertainty. Although by design the initiative was a response to COVID-19, the lessons drawn could be applied across various programmes in future crises.

It is recommended that the community-based PSS model be continued, but with a shift in focus. The focus going forward should be on addressing social ills such as teenage pregnancy, child headed households, drug and alcohol abuse and bullying. This programme could be rolled out as one of the interventions by the QLTC leveraging the existing PSS ward committees.

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MINI-LESSON 42

Education in emergencies: remote and digital learning - **Dhianaraj Chetty**

In early 2020, education systems across the globe were confronted by the global COVID-19 pandemic. As that memory recedes, it is worth taking stock of the lessons learnt from the experience in South Africa. As pointed out by the International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE),

> *Education in emergencies provides physical, psychosocial, and cognitive protection that can sustain and save lives. Common situations of crisis in which education in emergencies is essential include conflicts, situations of violence, forced displacement, disasters, and public health emergencies. (INEE, 2018, 4).*

The National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) worked on the response to the pandemic from a particular vantage point: supporting the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to manage and mitigate the pandemic, and to prepare the school system to reopen under new emergency conditions.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Face masks, sanitiser stations, social distancing, personal protective equipment (PPE) - a whole new vocabulary of pandemic management in social and economic life also landed in education, with major consequences. In the first in-

stance, a month-long shut-down of the school system in South Africa from 18 March to 30 April 2020 meant that no normal schooling took place[1]. As in all other sectors of society and the economy, education managers and staff were confronted with new public health norms; added to this was the need to adapt teaching and learning to a constantly changing set of risk factors[2]. The impacts of the pandemic on teaching and learning have been well documented elsewhere by research that has tried to quantify the loss of teaching time, loss of learning opportunities and learning losses (see, for example, Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021)[3].

THE NECT'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The NECT's emergency response was multifold and included the following:

1. Convening a series of dialogues in which the Minister of Basic Education and her department engaged with civil society stakeholders regularly on the management of the pandemic in the sector;
2. Supporting the implementation of a wide-ranging programme of learner support using remote and digital learning (RDL);
3. Developing and distributing teacher support materials adapted to the trimmed curriculum; and
4. Conducting school- and district-level readiness surveys to inform decisions on the re-opening of schools.

While all these interventions yielded important lessons on the education response to an unprecedented emergency, this mini-lesson focuses particularly on lessons learnt from Remote and Digital Learning (RDL) support to schools in 2020 and 2021[4]. Important changes also took place in higher education; however, those were based on somewhat different institutional arrangements. In line with national disaster management measures to manage the pandemic, which went from full to partial lockdowns, support to the school system went through different phases in 2020 and 2021, using differing platforms and modalities.

1 President Ramaphosa closed schools on 18 March 2020. https://www.gov.za/speeches/statement-president-cyril-ramaphosa-measures-combat-covid-19-epidemic-15-mar-2020-0000. Level 5 lockdown was effective from 2 March to 30 April (see https://www.gov.za/covid-19/about/about-alert-system).
2 For the Proclamation of National State of Disaster, see: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202003/43096gon313.pdf

3 See also Mini-Lesson 8: Leveraging and Sustaining Multiple Partnerships to Support Matric Learners.
4 Findings in this paper are based on work done by the NECT Monitoring and Quality Assurance team, as well as insights from the RDL team including Prof Shafika Isaacs of the University of Johannesburg, Tukisang Senne and Brian Williams.

IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EMERGENCY RDL RESPONSE

The closure of schools and the prolonged disruption of schooling highlighted the need to protect learning continuity and mitigate learning losses. In the worst-case scenario, learners were at home or in their community for long periods of time, unsupervised (by a carer, parent or guardian) and unsupported by any resources to maintain learning continuity. By March 2020, most learners had completed barely one term of instructional time (Stats SA, 2022, 16). When schools re-opened fully from July 2020 onwards, Grades 1 - 11 were required to follow rotational timetabling (daily or weekly). The net effect of these measures was that instructional time was cut by as much as 50% to 60% (DBE, 2020). The challenge in this environment was about how to mount a rapid, appropriately designed and sufficiently large-scale response.

The RDL response included the use of radio, television, print media and online platforms branded as two campaigns – Woza Matrics (for Grade 12 learners)[5] and Tswelopele (for Grade 1 - 11 learners)[6]. Phase 1, from March to June/July 2020, involved broadcasts mainly by the national broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) on its SABC 3 channel. Phase 2 ran from August to September 2020, with the SABC offering four hours of broadcast time. Broadcasts were also available on DBE TV via OpenView[7] and also on Multichoice's DSTV[8] , which was available on demand. Interactive live broadcasts were aired during the October 2020 school holidays. Phase 3, from March 2021 to December 2021, saw broadcasts on SABC 2 and DBE TV. Subjects covered by the broadcasts included:

1. Grade 12 - Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, English First Additional Language (EFAL), Geography, History, Life Sciences, Mathematics, Maths Literacy and Physical Sciences
2. Grades 10 and 11 - English, Mathematics, Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, Economics
3. Grades 4, 6 and 9 - English, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences Mathematics, Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, Economics
4. Grade 3 – English, Maths in English, isiXhosa, isiZulu, SeSotho, Introduction to African languages

5 See https://www.wozamatrics.co.za/
6 See https://www.tswelopele.org.za/
7 OpenView is a free-to-view direct broadcast satellite television provider in South Africa which carries channels including the DBE's own DBE TV. OpenView is available to roughly 2.5 million households. See https://www.openview.co.za/.
8 DSTV is a private subscription-based service. See https://www.dstv.com/en-za.

The initial work involved a rush to update existing available curriculum content appropriate for broadcasting. Gaps in available content were a hindrance as well as the time lag to develop new content. Furthermore, any new initiative was required to go through a DBE application process. More content was available for Grade 12 than the lower grades.

Two data free web portals were established for the Woza Matrics and Tswelopele campaigns to create an online presence. One of the challenges was that prior to the pandemic, websites with educational content were limited in number. Importantly, content developed for these campaigns included psycho-social support materials on stress management, studying techniques and coping strategies.

In implementing the RDL response, it was found that some schools already had information and communication technology (ICT) resources that could be mobilised, including television sets, internet connectivity and devices.

It must also be noted that some provincial education departments and schools made the effort to develop and distribute learner support packs on a weekly basis, although the practice was not universal. Assessments still had to be marked by teachers, who may have been reluctant to work on materials that had circulated at home. Many independent and urban schools took advantage of the opportunity presented by the pandemic to implement remote learning.

KEY POINTS OF LEARNING

To develop an evidence base on the learner level experience of the intervention, a group of learners was provided with a small quantity of data and asked to provide feedback on a range of indicators. This was designed as an implementation monitoring exercise with a focus on learner responses.

From baselines of 582 learners in 2020 and 26 in 2021, the highest number of respondents was 1 052 (2020) and 590 (2021). These learners were contacted and surveyed on a regular basis from September to November in 2020 and from August to November in 2021 (over a total of seven months), and the analysis below is based on their responses.

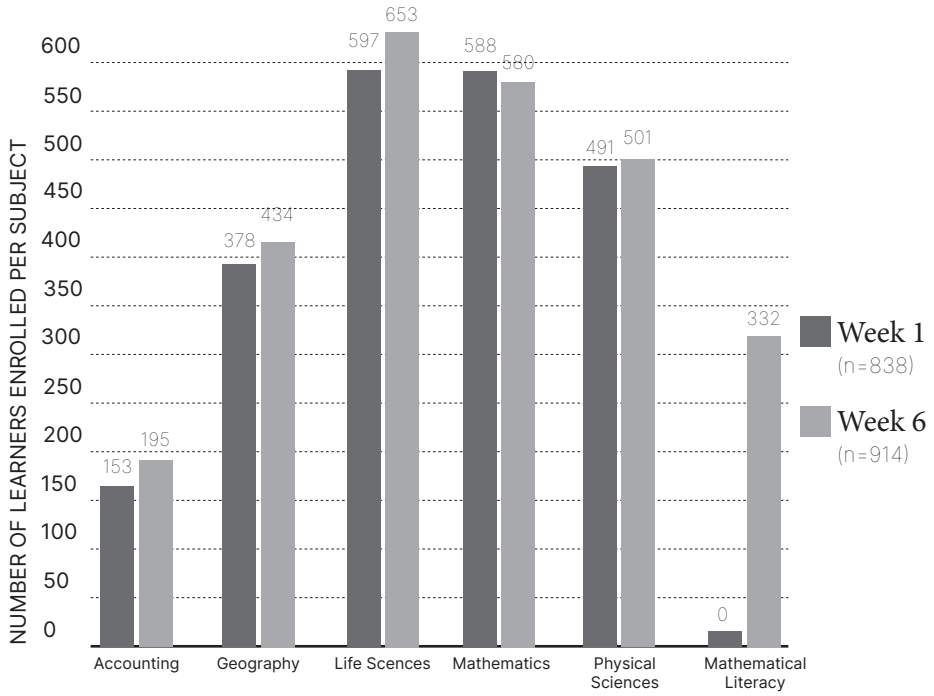
THE NEED FOR A STRATEGY

The DBE did not have a ready-made RDL strategy to implement in the context of an emergency. Despite the existence of some well-developed, project-based interventions using digital learning, little local or national evidence or guidance was available on how to support education in an emergency or disaster situation. It is important to put such a strategy in place for the future.

RDL PROGRAMMING

Rapid response RDL programming is needed to reach all learners at multiple levels, in varying home/school contexts and on a range of platforms. However, the evidence base on the most impactful approaches and resources was very limited in 2020. For the future, more evidence is needed on learner and teacher needs and responses as well as how best to coordinate and maximise reaching them effectively through multiple channels in and out of school. Regular engagement with learners informed programming content and provided valuable insights into the areas in which learners had the greatest needs; developing programming content adopted a demand-driven approach. The data below reflects the enrolment per subject by learners and shows clearly which subjects were in highest demand.

Woza Matrics subject enrolment, weeks 1 and 2, 2020



Mathematical Literacy was introduced in WOZA MATRICS schedule in week 4. 332 (36%) learners in the sample are taking Mathematical Literacy. 339 learner respondents were taking Mathematical Literacy in week 5.

Highest number of learners in the sample are enrolled for Life Sciences (653/71%), Mathematics (580/63%) and Physical Sciences (501/ 55%).

Proportion of enrolment similar in week 1, with **Accounting having lowest enrolment**, 18% (153) in week 1 and 21% (195) in week 6.

Figure 42.1: Woza Matrics subject enrolment, weeks 1 and 2, 2020. Source: NECT presentation to DBE, Week 6 Learner Survey, 2020.

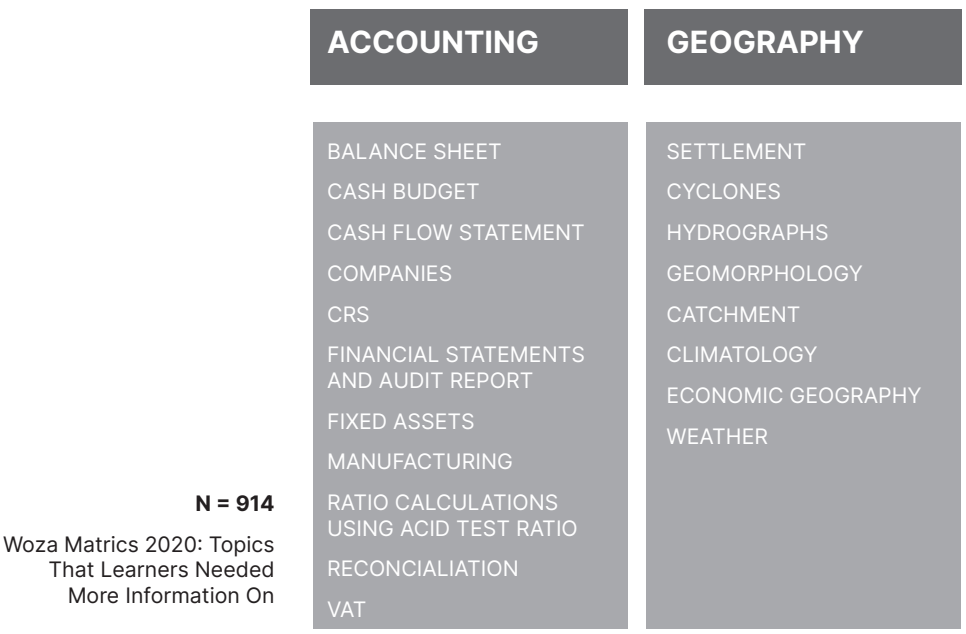


Figure 42.2: Areas where learners needed more support. Source: NECT presentation to DBE, Week 6 Learner Survey, 2020.

Learners were also asked to provide feedback on the specific topics where they needed support. These results are shown in Figure 42.2.

THE USE OF ICT

The rapid expansion of smartphone technology and high levels of usage amongst younger people make smartphones the most effective communication tools for reaching learners (Kemp, 2023). The lesson here is that programme content must (where possible) be designed and developed for delivery through mobile technology. In particular, content needs to be easily usable on mobile phones, with data usage kept as low as possible.

Mobile phone applications create new opportunities which can be further exploited, regardless of the emergency context. The NECT-hosted web portals were therefore aimed at driving traffic to partner apps – particularly Velle[9] and Matric Live[10] – because of the ease of accessing them on smartphones, the learner support they made available and the lower data usage costs they attracted. Furthermore, apps reduce the need for browsing the net and provide a user-friendly experience for learners.

9 https://www.velle.co.za/
10 See https://matriclive.com/home

Supplying content by itself is not sufficient for learning. The data below indicates learners' survey responses to how they used the resources available through the Woza Matrics portal. The responses demonstrate that remote learning programming must serve multiple functions that align with the pedagogical needs of learners, with support for revision being the priority for Grade 12 learners about to attempt the national school leaving exams.

Revision on Woza Matrics platform

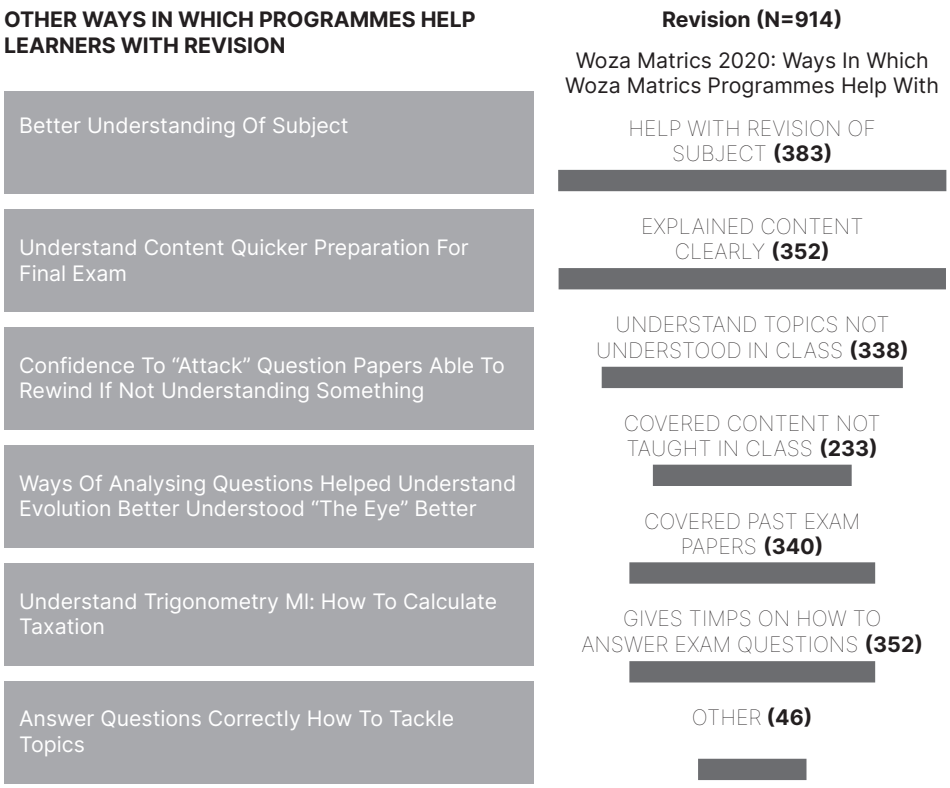


Figure 42.3: Revision on Woza Matrics platform - as presented by the NECT to the DBE, Week 6 Learner Survey, 2020

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The digital divide is a major obstacle to creating learning opportunities for learners in poorer and rural communities, where internet connectivity is still limited. The high cost of data remains a barrier to change in the use of remote and digital learning within and outside of school settings (Bottomley, 2020). Research evidence post-pandemic confirmed that poorer learners suffered greater learning losses (World Bank, 2022). To make RDL a fully effective strategy, the cost of data must be reduced as an urgent priority, and school age learners should have access to data-friendly or data-free education resources.

Learners in urban and wealthier schools made a quicker transition to schooling online, which enabled greater learning continuity, created access to new learning methodologies and resulted in potentially lower learning losses. Signing in to Google Classroom or Zoom became the new normal for many in these schools (Jantjies, 2020).

WhatsApp is a great leveler and was used widely by learners and teachers alike as the cheapest and most effective means of communication, including for sharing resources (especially past exam papers) and information and connecting to support groups.

UTILISATION OF EXISTING PLATFORMS

Existing online education content platforms such as Mindset, Facebook and YouTube became much more popular and widely used in addition to the web portals hosted by Woza Matrics, the DBE and Siyavula[11]. The graph below indicates data usage of learners, with a high proportion accessing programme content through television.

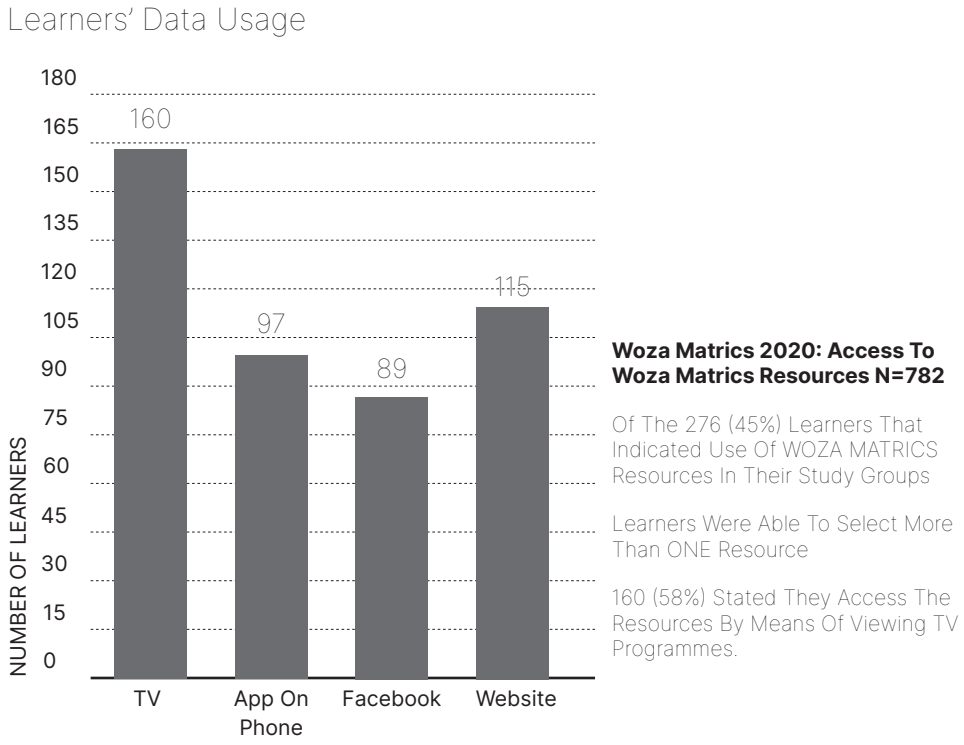


Figure 42.4: Learners' data usage

11 See https://www.siyavula.com.

LEARNER BEHAVIOURS

Secondary school learners still depended heavily on traditional, print-based learner support materials, particularly past exam papers. The DBE's Mind the Gap series also had an established, strong user base, as shown in the figure below. In an RDL context, this is important because it illustrates the need to continue supporting the traditional, print-based resources that most learners rely on, alongside or integrated with newer modalities.

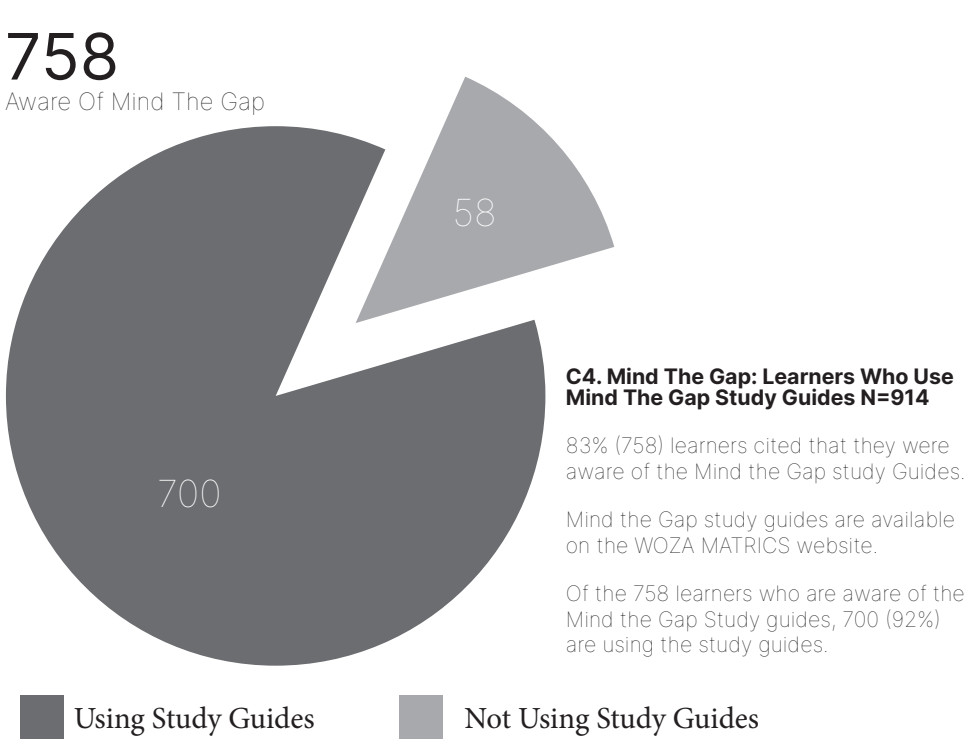


Figure 42.5: Learners' use of the Mind the Gap series. Source: NECT presentation to DBE, Week 6 Learner Survey, 2020

Offline modalities such as DSTV Catch-up meant that there was no need for data, and learners made good use of these offline portals.

Research evidence suggests that to achieve greater impact, remote learning programming needs to be linked to curriculum delivery. However, this was not possible in the context of an emergency and the need to programme for multiple grades and asynchronous scheduling. Despite having ICT resources at schools, integration with teaching was limited.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

To succeed, RDL requires support from parents or households (Sosa Díaz, 2021). Psycho-social issues such as stress and anxiety are common during exam preparation, but these were coupled with widespread job losses, food insecurity and health risks in the context of the pandemic (World Health Organization, 2022).

Woza Matrics took cognisance of this, and integrated psycho-social support aimed at building confidence into its television programming. The lesson here is that regardless of the pandemic, learners always need more than just academic support.

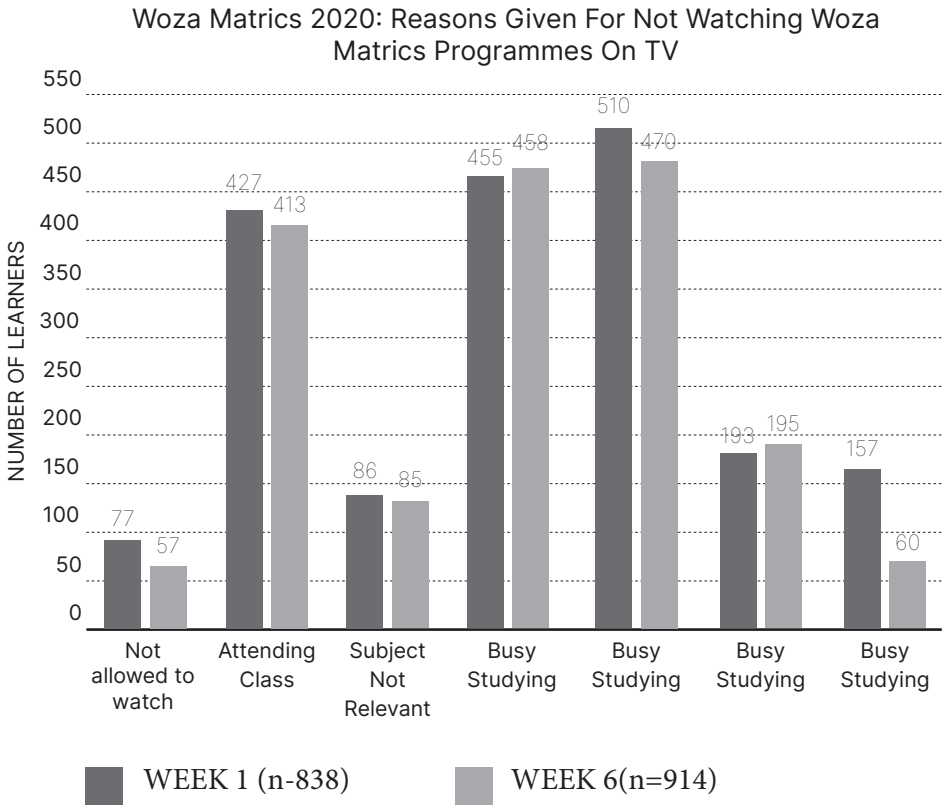
Woza Matrics Building Confidence

Figure 42.6: Woza Matrics building confidence

PARENTAL ATTITUDES TO RDL

Parental attitudes to exam preparation did not always support or include the use of remote and digital learning. Watching broadcasts was not considered necessary or useful, likewise the practice of using cellphones to access content or support networks. These attitudes will only change if remote and digital learning become more integrated into conventional educational practices and if schools and teachers actively support the behaviour change. The data below indicates some of the reasons learners were unable to engage with remote learning programmes, either due to timing (broadcast scheduling constraints) or lack of access to television at home or school.

Woza Matrics building confidence



The most prevalent reason given for not watching WOZA MATRICS in weeks 1 and 6 is learners being busy attending classes at school or studying.

- "Busy Studying" remains the highest being mentioned by 470 learners in week 6, but has decreased from week 1 by 40
- "At school" and "Attending classes" was cited as reasons for not watching WOZA MATRICS by 458 and 413 respectively.
- "No access to TV" and "At school" were mentioned as a reasons by more learners in week 6 than in week 1.

Figure 42.6: Woza Matrics building confidence

RESOURCING

The emergency response in South Africa was notable for the speed with which a wide range of partners (often industry competitors) came together with a common purpose. This was a lesson in the ability of actors in the sector to collaborate effectively when needed.

Resources were also rapidly mobilised and used to maximum impact. However, this was stretched by the high costs of broadcast time on television.

Relying on a public broadcaster which operates on commercial principles is costly. Furthermore, reaching an audience which is only available before and after school hours creates scheduling difficulties.

Current and curriculum compliant content for broadcast needs continued investment and development – not for use only in emergencies – but as a part of a longer term remote learning strategy. This, in turn, requires longer term resource planning and allocations.

The current regime of data free access to education content sites is heavily dependent on the discretion of commercial telecoms operators. Not-for-profit, locally developed education content and support sites must remain data-free to make remote learning a reality for learners in more rural and poorer communities.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

The key actors in the sector need to reflect on the lessons learnt from the experience of the COVID-19 emergency so that they are prepared for any disastrous event in the future. The widespread flood damage to communities and schools in Kwa-Zulu Natal and the Eastern Cape in 2022 provided another lesson in emergency response planning for education.

Longer term planning is needed at national, provincial and school levels as part of an approach to maximise the potential of remote and digital learning, particularly for those learners currently marginalised by the digital divide.

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MINI-LESSON 43

Extending the reach of reading materials through digitisation - **John Thurlow**

The digital era has provided significant opportunities to extend the reach of reading materials in ways that were previously unimaginable.

This mini-lesson considers reading resource digitisation in relation to recent digital efforts in South Africa including the digitisation activities of the NECT. It concludes by reflecting on benefits and challenges of digitisation in the South African context.

Reading resource digitisation refers to the process of converting traditional reading into digital formats. It involves transforming these analogue resources into digital files that can be accessed, stored and distributed electronically, offering greater accessibility, flexibility and interactivity.

Historically, the cost of digital learning in South Africa has been prohibitive. However, over the past 10 years, the growth of mobile technology has opened not only economic and social development opportunities, but also education enhancement opportunities (Agence Française de Développement, Agence universitaire de la Francophonie, Orange & UNESCO, 2015).

BACKGROUND TO READING RESOURCE DIGITISATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

From as early as the turn of the century, there had been a move towards digitisa-

tion and the use of virtual platforms in the South African education ecosystem. These shifts included digital content development, where an effort was made to provide digital educational content aligned with the curriculum. Resources provided included digital textbooks, readers, multimedia materials and interactive learning modules that were made available via the Department of Basic Education (DBE) Cloud and other online platforms and portals, including the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) website[1] and those of other education-focused non-governmental organisations. In the reading space, examples of these include the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) African Storybook Project[2], the South African Council for Educators (SACE) digital library[3] and FunDza's online library[4].

The DBE also established virtual training centres that provided online professional development and support to teachers. These centres offered resources, training modules and platforms for collaboration and knowledge sharing among educators. Alongside this, the DBE also promoted the use of e-platforms, such as the Thutong Portal[5] and the South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS)[6]. These platforms aided in facilitating the sharing of educational resources, curriculum materials and assessment tools.

NECT READING RESOURCE DIGITISATION ACTIVITIES

Although initial work had commenced before 2020, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic fast-tracked the NECT's digital reading resourcing efforts. With the sudden closure of South African schools in March 2020, Quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools were the hardest hit in relation to COVID-related learning losses. This necessitated an urgent shift towards remote and digital support to training, teaching and the provision of learning resources.

Despite causing major disruptions, the pandemic enhanced collaboration and engagement within the South African education sector. government departments and civil society organisations shared resources and experiences and worked together to pool resources that supported reading and the teaching of reading amongst each other.

In 2020, the National Reading Coalition (NRC) under its Reading Resourcing value chain area, was actively working to make reading resources available to 4 459 primary schools in the 222 circuits it was supporting and new ways of doing this needed to be fast-tracked. (As of August 2023, this number has now grown

1 https://nect.org.za/materials/for-teachers
2 https://www.saide.org.za/project.php?id=4#about
3 https://www.sace.org.za/pages/announcement--join-the-sace-virtual-library
4 https://www.fundza.co.za/resources/
5 https://www.thutong.doe.gov.za/
6 https://www.thutong.doe.gov.za/ResourceDownload.aspx?id=49101&userid=8913

to 8 884 primary schools in 444 circuits). Since the inception of the NRC, the reading resourcing provisioning activities had been in hardcopy, but efforts to produce digital reading materials were expedited.

The first major project was to develop a series of Foundation Phase (FP) African Language storybooks for digital distribution. One hundred and eighty-nine stories in the nine indigenous languages (excluding English and Afrikaans) were developed by NECT reading coaches and quality assured by subject specific subject advisors.

Twenty-one stories in each of the languages were produced with full-colour drawings. The stories were compressed in into pdf format and were made available on the National Reading Coalition (NRC) website[7] as well as distributed via social media platforms to teachers, parents and learners. Reading support guides were also developed for school management teams (SMTs), teachers and parents, and these were also made available by the same means.

Alongside the process of developing and disseminating the 189 stories, an additional 1 188 FP stories in all 11 official languages were extracted from the FP home language Big Book anthologies. These stories were packaged as standalone stories and included instructions for parents and a set of comprehension questions and answers. Not only did these stories provide an opportunity for reading at home, but they also complemented what was being taught in schools. The stories were all well received, but it must be acknowledged that they did not reach all homes and schools, and in some cases, even if they did, parents and children were unable to navigate them effectively without support.

Together the stories produced total 1 377, with 1 161 of these titles being in the nine indigenous home languages. This presents a substantial contribution to home language reading development where access to reading resources, particularly in digital format, has been very limited. The NECT is currently exploring how Artificial Intelligence, might be used to speed-up the development of reading titles in African languages.

THE CHALLENGES OF READING RESOURCE DIGITISATION

The NECT's materials are open source and free to use for educational purposes as long as without profit. Thus issues relating to copyright and piracy are less of a challenge to the work that we do. Some might argue that the tactile experience of holding a physical book is irreplaceable, but we believe that physical books are central to the teaching of reading, but that the availability of additional digital titles enhances the learning experience and encourages a culture of reading.

7 https://nrc.org.za/

Whilst these stories are shared via digital platforms there are still a number of challenges that exist that hinder access and utilisation. These are summarised below:

1. **Lack of Internet access:** The lack of Internet access in many rural and poor areas in South Africa severely limits the ability of users in schools and homes to adopt and fully benefit from digital and online resources. Subject advisors in rural districts and circuits had warned of the challenges associated with sharing stories with parents and learners via WhatsApp groups as many rural circuits have limited cell phone coverage.

   Even in areas where there is some internet access, the quality and reliability of the connectivity can be slow and inconsistent making it challenging to download or stream digital content reliably.

2. **Limited access to devices:** Even with internet access, many children from rural and poor backgrounds do not have access to devices such as computers, tablets or smartphones to access digital resources. We learned that while there is usually at least one smartphone available in each home, children do not always have access to these. This presents an opportunity to promote the idea of family reading time, which could encourage parents/caregivers and learners to sit together with the device and enjoy reading the text together.

3. **Affordability:** The cost of internet-enabled devices and data plans relative to income levels in South Africa poses a significant barrier. A substantial portion of the population cannot afford the necessary technology and data services required to access digital reading materials, limiting their participation in the digital learning experiences.

   Even where children have access to the internet and devices at schools and in homes, the cost of data to access digital content can be a barrier for families living in poverty. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the NECT was able to secure a zero-rating for resources from some providers, but this was a lengthy and difficult process that has now expired. Zero-rating is difficult to obtain from South Africa's major service providers who need to make more of a concerted effort to support teaching and learning activities.

4. **Technical challenges:** Some children and their parents may not be familiar with using technology or may not have the necessary skills

to navigate digital resources. This makes it challenging for them to use the resources effectively and hinders the potential that reading resources offer. There is an opportunity here to use community and school-based programmes to upskill parents and learners on the basic use of mobile technology.

THE BENEFITS OF READING RESOURCE DIGITISATION

The challenges of reading resource digitisation considered, the NECT's experiences have highlighted several benefits of this process. The digitisation of reading resources offers a wide array of benefits that positively impact learning and the experience of learning. Below are some key advantages of reading resource digitisation:

1. **Increased accessibility:** Digital resources can be accessed anytime and anywhere with internet connectivity. They can also be stored on local devices. Subject advisors and teachers expressed that they liked having the stories on their phones and that they could easily share them via WhatsApp groups and on their social media accounts.

   Where connectivity is not problematic, they can also be easily downloaded on demand. The stories were made available via the NECT's website and Facebook pages.

2. **Easy distribution and sharing:** Digitised resources can be easily shared, replicated and distributed without the physical limitations of printing and logistics, thus enabling wider access. Notwithstanding the limitations of data and connectivity, sharing the digitised stories via various social media platforms was relatively straightforward, but what did emerge through the process of dissemination of our digitised stories, was the need to index the books and make them available on a platform that was easy to access and navigate. Rising out of this learning, an app to house the books by language, grade and level is currently under development.

3. **Cost and space efficiency:** Digital resources eliminate the need for physical storage and reduce printing costs, making them more cost-effective and environmentally friendly. As much as this is the case, it is worthwhile noting that between 2022 and 2023, we decided to print two million copies of these digitised books and made them available to more than 8 000 Quintile 1 – 3 primary schools.

Until the issues associated with connectivity and data are better resolved, we will still need to make print copies available to supplement reading activities at school and at home.

4. **Customisation:** Digital materials can be tailored to contextual needs, allowing for more personalised learning experiences. In our development process, we were able to easily adapt stories to make them contextually relevant to specific home languages. For example, in some instances, we could change the names of characters and edit drawings to make them culturally and geographically more relatable. It was also relatively easy to make minor edits where necessary.

CONCLUSION

The challenges of providing digital reading resources in South Africa are complex and are rooted in Internet access, infrastructure limitations and socio-economic disparities.

Overcoming these obstacles requires a concerted effort from government, the private sector, civil society and other education stakeholders. By prioritising digital literacy, improving Internet connectivity, promoting local content creation, and addressing the affordability of data, South Africa can unlock the transformative potential of digital reading resources for learners and their parents, thus, fostering greater inclusivity and promoting learning and empowerment.

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MINI-LESSON 44

Rebooting Teaching and Learning Post-crisis

- Godwin (G2) Nhauro

The devastating effects of COVID-19 on the schooling system and the corresponding repercussions thereof cannot be overemphasised. It is apparent that COVID -19 left us with huge matters to be dealt with. In South Africa, approximately 17 million learners, from pre-schools to secondary schools, lost 54% of learning time, resulting in learners being between 75% and a full year behind in curriculum coverage (*Stats SA, 2022; UNICEF, 2021*). The pandemic-induced hiatus in teaching and learning has exacerbated the systemic challenges that already existed in the South African schooling system, including, but not limited to, education inequality, the digital divide and learner dropout. By July 2021, UNICEF (2021), reported that up to 750 000 school children had dropped out of school.

It is against this background that the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) has been supporting the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to reboot teaching and learning in the endeavour to address some of the challenges and imbalances aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis.

Outlined below are some of the key contributions of the NECT regarding the rebooting of the teaching and learning agenda. In the context of this mini-lesson, rebooting refers to deliberate actions being taken to resuscitate optimum teaching and learning.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP CAPACITY BUILDING

The NECT recognises the critical role of school leadership in teaching and learning initiatives at the school level to meet the ultimate aim of the attainment of educational improvement. To that end, in the pre-COVID period as well as during the pandemic, the NECT had been implementing leadership improvement programmes that support school managers in aspects of curriculum management (including coverage), self-assessment for planning, and data utilisation, among others.

Since the COVID crisis, the NECT has expanded its offerings to include interventions that build the capacity of circuit managers on how to manage curriculum recovery. Most of this work has been focused in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, North West and Mpumalanga Provinces, where an excess of 283 (89.3%) circuit managers have been trained in this intervention.

As a matter of principle, to ensure the sustainability of programmes, the training of school-level officials is always done in collaboration with the respective provincial and district-level officials to facilitate skills and knowledge transfer. Thus, subsequently, 6 281 (97.2%) of the targeted school managers from Limpopo, the North West and Mpumalanga were trained by circuit managers with co-facilitation by the NECT. The training was extended to include aspects of monitoring and support of curriculum coverage in their schools.

The management and leadership rebooting programmes of the NECT are practice-based and activity-focused and confront the real issues faced by school managers in the broader, post-crisis school context. These issues include learning recovery, time on task, school functionality, and curriculum management in support of curriculum coverage and enhanced learner performance.

TEACHER PROFESSIONALISATION

In response to the disruptions to education due to COVID-19, the DBE released three iterations of the adjusted curriculum, in 2020, 2021 and 2022, with each being based on the prevailing context (schooling disruptions) at the time. (See Figure 44.1).

During each iteration, the NECT worked closely with the DBE to develop support materials to assist teachers in interpreting and implementing new versions of the adjusted curriculum, also referred to as Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs).

As illustrated in the diagram (Figure 44.1), in response to the disruptions to schooling, the DBE first published the trimmed curriculum (2020), which focused on critical skills that learners needed for the next grade or phase.

Three iterations of the adjusted curriculum and the corresponding support given by the NECT

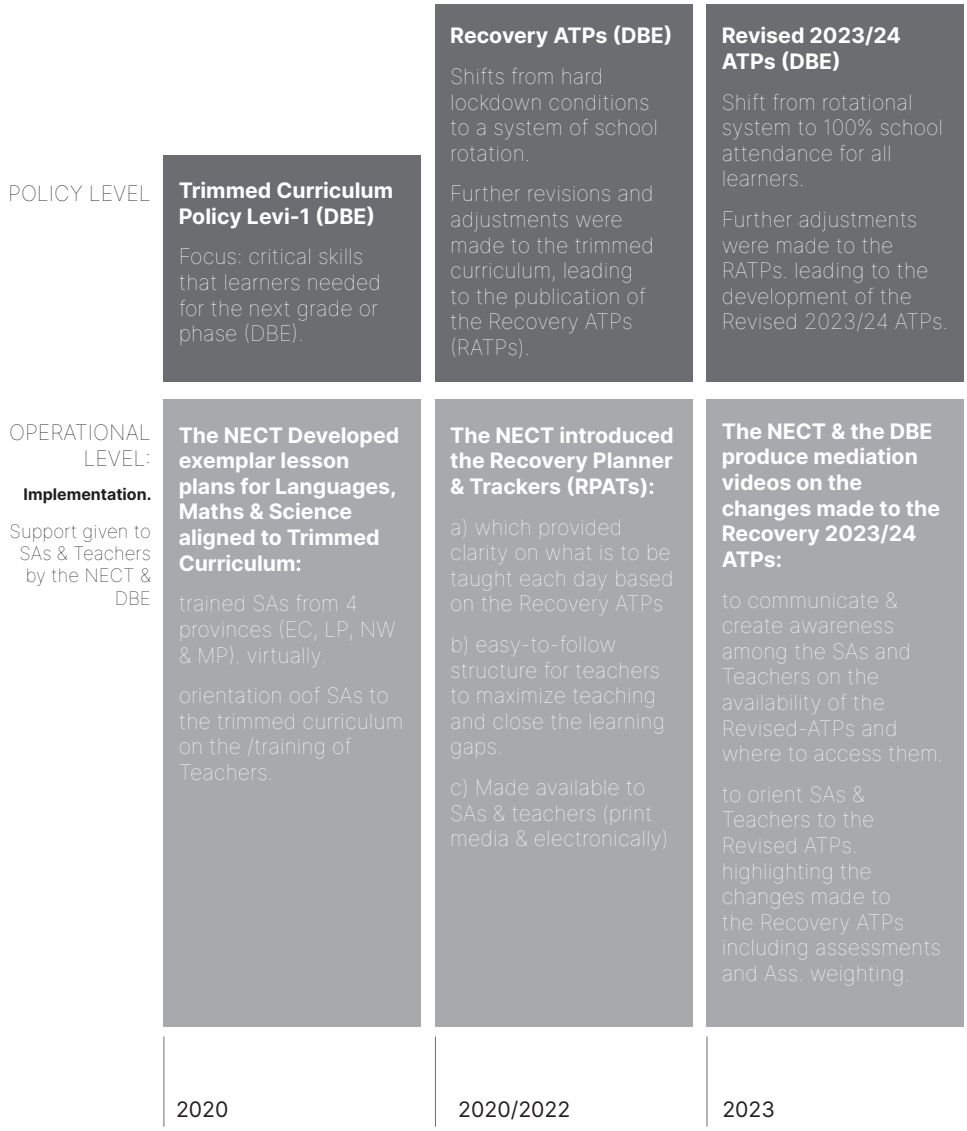


Figure 44.1: Three iterations of the adjusted curriculum and the corresponding support given by the NECT to ensure effective implementation at the classroom level.

The NECT developed example lessons plans aligned to the trimmed curriculum to assist teachers in implementing it. In 2021, the disruption to the education system continued despite shifts from hard lockdown conditions to a system of timetable rotation.

With the introduction of the rotational system, the DBE made further revisions and adjustments to the trimmed curriculum, leading to the publication of the Adjusted Curriculum Policy, also referred to as the Recovery Plan Curriculum or Recovery ATPs (RATPs). The year 2022 was met with a different schooling context: the Cabinet decided to ease COVID-19 restrictions, allowing the schooling system to return to 100% school attendance for all learners. To assist teachers in interpreting and implementing the RATPs, the NECT, in collaboration with the DBE, introduced Recovery Planner and Trackers (RPATs), which were implemented in 2021 and 2022. The RPATs broke down the RATPs into teachable units, providing clarity on what is to be taught each day based on the Recovery ATPs (**NECT, 2022**).

Following the release of the RPATs, the NECT made the materials available to the system and conducted orientation sessions with Languages, Maths, and Science subject advisors across the nine provinces on the use of these materials. In total, 997 (98.7%) of the targeted General Education and Training Phase Languages, Science, and Maths subject advisors were reached with the Recovery Trackers through orientation sessions across nine provinces. The subject advisors subsequently trained teachers and provided follow-up support on the implementation of the RPATs (NECT, 2022). After the COVID-19 crisis, as a rebooting initiative seeking to increase the quantity and quality of learning, the DBE, in collaboration with the NECT, produced and is broadcasting a series of ATP mediation videos on the 2023/24 revised ATPs for Grades 1 – 9.

The videos communicate the changes contained in the 2023/24 ATPs, the revised School Based Assessment (SBA) and examination weightings and requirements to be implemented in the 2023/24 academic year. The videos are being aired on DBE TV. In addition, for easy access to the recordings, the videos are made available on various digital platforms including the DBE YouTube channel[1].

Furthermore, the videos constitute a digital repository available to subject advisors and teachers for timeous reference whenever the need arises.

USE OF REMOTE AND DIGITAL LEARNING PLATFORMS TO REBOOT TEACHING AND LEARNING

Born of collaboration between the DBE and the NECT in 2020 as an emergency response initiative to COVID-19 schooling disruptions, the Remote and Digital Learning (RDL) programme sought to ensure education continuity, curriculum catch-up, revision, exam preparations, and to support learners, teachers, and parents amidst the disruptions.

1 https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLaAVFI1ziDW5kc63RcIYt1osQxF9dobDv

Post-crisis, the programme continues to offer supplementary learning support programmes aimed at rebooting teaching and learning through multiple platforms (television, YouTube, SABC radio stations, print, mobile/ digital platforms, and websites). It is irrefutable that the programme is one of the critical pillars at the system's disposal to contribute to meaningful rebooting of teaching and learning while providing far-reaching value and benefits to the users/beneficiaries[2].

Overall, technology creates several opportunities to support learning in the classroom as well as beyond the classroom. By incorporating multiple platforms, learners gain access to a vast array of resources beyond traditional textbooks and lessons. Television, radio, online platforms, educational websites, interactive mobile applications and the use of multimedia content provide diverse learning materials that cater to different learning styles and preferences. This abundance of resources allows learners to explore topics deeply, reinforces their understanding and fosters a more holistic approach to learning.

REBOOTING TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGH THE PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Meeting the emotional, social, mental and spiritual well-being needs of learners and providing support services is considered a crucial element in creating a conducive learning environment for children (NECT, 2020). Thus, among other aspects, rebooting education should address the social and emotional needs of learners, promote positive mental health and provide access to counselling, guidance and support systems within the education ecosystem.

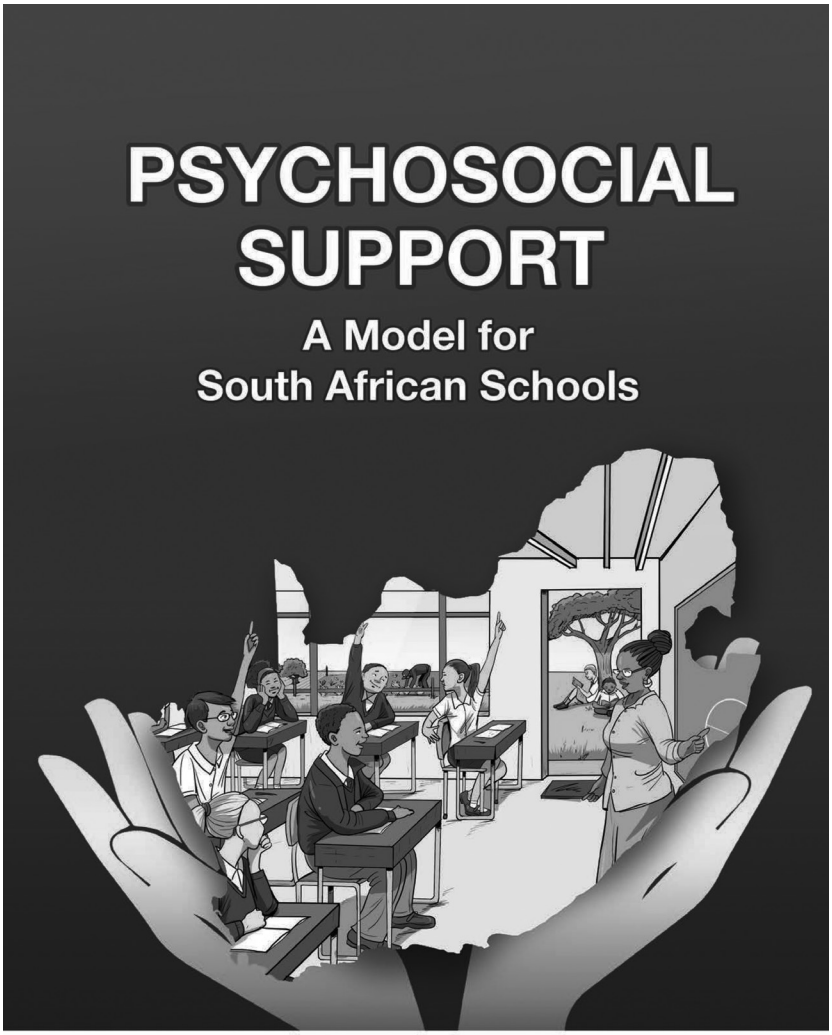
Without functional support structures in place, vulnerable learners such as orphans, learners from child-headed households, learners living in poverty and learners exposed to violence are more likely to drop out of school.

To substantiate this, as reported by the University of the Western Cape (UWC, 2022), a study by UNESCO indicated that Sub-Saharan Africa had the 'highest rate of education exclusion, with more than a fifth of children between six and 11 not attending school' and approximately 60% of teenagers between 15 and 17 being out of school. In response to this challenge, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) came up with the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) initiative which is being implemented by the Ministries of Education of the respective member states of the Southern African Development Community, to which South Africa also belongs.

2 For detailed descriptions of the programme offerings see mini lessons 8, 45, 26, 42 respectively: Leveraging and sustaining multiple partnerships to support matric learners; Effectiveness of the DBE-NECT Tswelopele RDL campaign during the covid-19 pandemic and implications for the future; Virtual learning spaces hold great opportunities for expanding classroom offerings and improving learning experiences and outcomes; and Education in emergencies: remote and digital learning.

According to the DBE (n.d.), the goal of the CSTL programme is 'to realise the educational rights of all children, including those who are most vulnerable, through schools becoming inclusive centres of learning, care, and support'.

The initiative comprises nine pillars: nutritional support, health promotion, infrastructure, water, and sanitation; safety and protection, social welfare services, psychosocial support, material support, curriculum support, co-curricular activities. Furthermore, the National Development Plan (NDP), the Education Collaboration Framework (ECF) and the DBE's Action Plan to 2024 recognise



the importance of learner wellbeing to achieve quality learning and teaching (NECT, 2020)[3].

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the education exclusion margin (problem). In response, a decision was taken by the DBE's Education Enrichment Services Branch and the NECT to focus specifically on addressing psychosocial barriers to learning (NECT, 2020) .

To reboot the system, the NECT is working closely with the DBE and provinces to capacitate the districts to support schools to effectively implement psychosocial support (PSS) programmes. The NECT developed the Psychosocial Support Model for South African Schools for the district-based support teams (DBSTs).

The guidebook equips district officials with skills to effectively support schools by reviving and activating the functionality of DBSTs. Post-crisis, an additional 182 DBST team members across two provinces (the North West and Eastern Cape) were trained (in addition to the 880 members from the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, North West and Mpumalanga trained during the COVID pandemic on the District and School Psychosocial Support Guide).

To further support and strengthen the provision of PSS and the learning recovery programme, a total of 160 curriculum and psychosocial support messages were developed and distributed to the targeted beneficiaries (subject advisors, educators and parents), mainly through WhatsApp and social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. The messages resulted in 64 928 overall impressions.

To further augment the work done through the DBSTs, the NECT, through the RDL programme, collaborated with reputable organisations that specialise in the provision of psychosocial support to learners, teachers and parents. These included LoveLife NPC, the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), and Media in Education Trust (MIET). Through the collaboration, lessons and messages to learners, teachers and parents/ guardians/caregivers were broadcast through DBE TV and six community radio stations. The CSTL lessons and messages were also made available daily on multiple social media platforms and lessons were uploaded onto a YouTube channel for off-air access.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the NECT's contributions in fostering collaboration among the key stakeholders in the education sector have significantly contributed to the rebooting of teaching and learning in post-crisis South Africa. Thus, through its various departments, programmes and interventions, the NECT did not merely

3 For more details, see Mini-lesson 41: Responses to Learning Disruptions; Lessons on Coping in Time of Uncertainty: a community psychosocial model.

play a vital role in ensuring education continuity in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, it also meaningfully contributed to the rebooting of teaching and learning while promoting equitable access to quality education for all learners across the different socioeconomic levels in the country – no learner left behind.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

For the effective post-crisis rebooting of teaching and learning, a holistic approach that addresses critical success conditions for meaningful learning should be considered. Such elements may include among others, the digital divide, the well-being of learners, sustainable funding, resource provisioning, context-based learning recovery approaches, continuous teacher professional development, inclusivity, and adoption of emerging EdTech pedagogical approaches. By fully embracing these elements, among others, education systems can effectively reboot teaching and learning and ultimately emerge stronger from the crisis and, most importantly, more prepared and resilient for future crises.

Outlined below are some of the lessons learned from implementing programmes and interventions that seek to reboot teaching and learning.

1. Agility and Adaptability: The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the need for the education system to be agile and adaptable in responding to changing schooling contexts with changing pandemic circumstances/levels. Since the advent of COVID-19, there have been three curriculum adjustments over three years, which demanded prompt, yet well-structured teacher support programmes/interventions to ensure effective implementation at the school level. The NECT played a critical role in providing these. Where possible, the education system should accommodate different learning environments including technology-aided learning modalities to drive effective rebooting of teaching and learning in and beyond the classroom.

2. Collaboration and Partnerships: As learned during the pandemic, building and maintaining functional strategic collaborative partnerships is key, and so is finding innovative solutions for rebooting teaching and learning. During the pandemic, through its various programmes, the NECT played a significant role in fostering collaboration with government agencies, civil society organisations, businesses, donors, schools and communities to collectively address the aftermath of COVID-19 schooling disruptions.

The same needs to happen to effectively drive rebooting teaching and learning. Closely interrelated with collaboration and partnerships is sustainable funding and resource allocation. It goes without saying that driving initiatives focused on rebooting teaching and learning requires sustainable funding mechanisms. Hence there is a need for securing long-term funding to support these initiatives and ensure their continuity and sustainability. Overall, collaboration fosters shared responsibility and ownership of projects/interventions among stakeholders, facilitates effective resource allocation and ensures that multiple perspectives are considered in decision-making, that is, that multiple stakeholder groups are represented, and their voices are heard.

3. Learner Well-being and Support Services: The devastating effect of the pandemic left many people, including learners, with deep emotional scars. Thus, for effective and successful rebooting of learning post-crisis, the provisioning of social and emotional learner support services is critical.

4. Dialogues and Sharing of Best Practices: As learned during the pandemic, knowledge (lessons) gained through research on how countries responded in times of crisis in the past and conversations with other countries on how they were dealing with COVID-19 schooling disruptions assisted in our prompt response to schooling disruptions. The NECT played a crucial role in this space by participating in the research and sharing and disseminating knowledge. During several dialogues held with various stakeholders representing various sectors, the NECT promoted sharing of best practices, active stakeholder participation, and provided a basis for informed decision-making by the relevant office bearers. The same approach could be very useful in rebooting teaching and learning.

5. Technology Adaption, Digital Literacy, and Teacher Professional Development: One of the key lessons that emerged during the pandemic period is the importance of technology integration and digital literacy in education. Among the three levels of the digital divide, namely access, use, and empowerment, some provinces (for instance, the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Limpopo) made some progress in dealing with the first level, access. However, access alone does not guarantee effective tech-supported teaching and learning. For effective rebooting of teaching and learning, there is a need to deal with the second and third levels, use and empowerment. The DBE, with a

focus on continuous professional development for educators, could build educators' digital literacy skills and capacitate them on how to effectively integrate technology into teaching practices. Such training should also focus on equipping educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to changing educational landscapes, which may include aspects such as online teaching methodologies, digital pedagogy, blended learning approaches, how to leverage technology to enhance learner engagement, collaboration, personalised learning and assessment (including auto- and self-assessment) practices. Such skills and knowledge are envisaged to assist educators in navigating post-crisis teaching and learning environments.

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MINI-LESSON 45

Effectiveness of the DBE-NECT Tswelopele RDL campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic and implications for the future - **Brian Williams**

The Department of Basic Education (DBE)-National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) Tswelopele Campaign was established in July 2020 after the South African government had instituted a state of disaster and closed schools in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The decision to close schools saw about 13 million learners, many of whom were in rural provinces, left without any form of adequate schooling (Public Service Commission, 2020). This development shocked the education system, and measures were required to ensure learning continuity. While Grade 12 learners were exempted from school closures, Grade R - 11 learners were faced with the challenge of continuing their learning at home. The Tswelopele Campaign[1], therefore, sought to provide learners with access to learning resources, opportunities to catch up on missed learning, revise work done, prepare for assessments, and importantly, provide care and support for teaching and learning. The situation, therefore, required a national response.

RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS

Initially, in July 2020, a concept note was developed which provided a basis for responding to the crisis and the establishment of the Tswelopele Learner Support Campaign. Thereafter, in 2021, a logical framework for a Remote and

1 See: https://www.tswelopele.org.za/

Digital Learning (RDL) Campaign was developed. The logical framework was informed by the campaign objectives and problem statement and outlined the design features of the response. Figure 45.1 outlines the 2021 RDL Campaign problem statement, objectives and design.

Figure 45.1: RDL 2021 Campaign problem statement, objectives and design Source: Isaacs, Senne & Williams, 2021, 7

The RDL Logical Framework on Figure 45.2, identified activities with measurable outputs, intermediate outcomes and an impact statement, was used as a basis for implementing the Tswelopele Campaign.

RDL 2021 Campaign Theory of Change and Logical Framework

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	IMPACT
Current Budget **R45m** Donor Partners **EDTP SETA DBE** Service Providers **Technical Support, Content & Platform Providers, Project Management, Communications & M&E** Operational Management Team **DBE & NECT** Governance Steering Committee **Political Principals & Partners**	Establish a National Remote & Digital Learning Network **Host 3 national RDL dialogues** Develop a plan to source and create curriculum & CSTL content in multiple formats **Promote learning continuity, curriculum catch up, revision & exam preparation via multiple digital and non digital platforms** Embark on a bold advocacy & communications campaign **Integrate implementation monitoring, evaluation, reflect & learn on RDL experience 2021**	**Establish a National Remote & Digital Learning** Host 3 national RDL dialogues **Develop a plan to source and create curriculum & CSTL content in multiple formats** Promote learning continuity, curriculum catch up, revision & exam preparation via multiple digital and non digital platforms **Embark on a bold advocacy & communications campaign** Integrate implementation monitoring, evaluation, reflect & learn on RDL experience 2021	A national network of 20 strategic partners, content and platform providers 3 RDL national dialogue concept notes,3 recordings & national RDL dialogue briefs A total of 300 participants involved in 3 national dialogues A content plan including 2 content audits, sourcing and creating 500 content assets, and a content library Partnerships with 20 learning platforms to reach 600 000 matrics and 600 000 GET learners, 50 000 teachers and parents An advocacy and marketing plan to enable widespread reach among learners, teachers and parents Monthly implementation monitoring reports 2 independent evaluation reports	**Equitable learning continuity has been enabled with an estimated 1.2 million learners and their learning communities**

REMOTE & DIGITAL LEARNING 2021 LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 45.2: RDL 2021 Campaign Theory of Change and Logical Framework Source: Isaacs, Senne & Williams 2021, 8

The Tswelopele Campaign problem statement, objectives, design and logical framework remained consistent throughout the subsequent years (2021-2023). Six activities were outlined for the Tswelopele Campaign and provide a basis for reflecting on the campaign's effectiveness over the period. The activities are:

1. Establishing a National RDL Network;
2. Developing an RDL Content Plan;
3. Establishing Multiple Digital & Non-Digital Platforms;
4. Delivering Curriculum Learning & Care and Support For Learning And Teaching (CSTL) Support;
5. RDL Advocacy, Communications & Marketing;
6. RDL Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning.
7. Reflecting on implementation

ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL RDL NETWORK

The RDL Campaign's purpose was to provide supplementary RDL support resources to learners, teachers and parents. Due to the insufficiency of curriculum-aligned content for a wide range of subjects, grades, broadcast and digital platforms, there was a need to forge partnerships to address content shortages.

While in 2020, when the campaign started, the network was loosely defined and not quantified, in subsequent years a minimum of 20 partnerships were targeted. In 2020, a virtual meeting of potential RDL partners was held, during which content providers committed to sharing content for the campaign at no cost. However, curriculum-aligned content had to be evaluated by the DBE and provincial subject specialists prior to its use, and numerous deficiencies (policy, accuracy, etc.) were exposed, which limited broadcast resources, most notably for the General Education and Training (GET) and Further Education and Training (FET) bands (Grade R - 9 and Grades 10 - 11).

In comparison, however, print resources, such as reading resources in multiple languages, subject workbooks, etc. were more readily available, and digital access to such resources was made accessible via the DBE, NECT and partner websites. Over the period 2020-2023, the Tswelopele RDL Campaign signed agreements with various partners via the NECT in its attempts to establish a na-

tional RDL network. This included bilateral agreements between the DBE and a range of organisations (e.g., the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the British Council, READ, Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB), Bambanani, etc.).

By December 2022, the RDL Campaign had signed agreements with 28 different organisations in support of the campaign (2022 RDL Close-out Report, 15-17). The campaign intended to host national RDL dialogues annually (2021-2023) although this did not materialise.

RDL CONTENT PLAN

Based on the logical framework, the RDL campaign sought to produce curriculum content (lessons) for broadcasting as well as source content assets for multiple platforms to extend the existing content library. However, a large proportion of the Tswelopele RDL Campaign was focused on sourcing and aggregating content for broadcast on DBE TV (Channel 122 on OpenView), as the content creation process was time-consuming and required huge resources and subject experts across numerous subject areas.

The Tswelopele content strategy for DBE TV was shaped by continuous engagement with the DBE. The outcome of these engagements included key decisions relating to the identification of priority grades, subjects and subject progressions and the evaluation and selection of sourced content for the Tswelopele Television Broadcast Campaign.

The partners who supported the Tswelopele RDL Campaign in 2020, for the large part, continued to provide their support from 2021 to 2023, while a limited number of new partners were brought on board in 2022 and 2023. These included Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation, Age of Learning Foundation (AOLF) and AMAZE.

Existing partners such as UNICEF, The British Council, N-Gen and Akili & Me also provided new resources, and, Thuma Mina Teaching submitted new Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Economic and Management Sciences content for review.

By March 2023, the RDL partnership network had shared more than 1 649 educational assets (videos) as well as 12 parent guides (see more below).

While content creation processes started to increase towards the end of 2022, the process proved to be slow, with several challenges. The dependency on third party resources will, therefore, remain for some time while the DBE builds on its limited curriculum-aligned resources.

ESTABLISHING MULTIPLE DIGITAL AND NON-DIGITAL PLATFORMS

While the 2020 Tswelopele Campaign focused almost exclusively on television broadcasting, from 2021 to 2023, the RDL Campaign sought to support learners, teachers and parents across multiple digital and non-digital platforms. The idea was to ensure access points that included analogue and traditional channels such as print media, radio and television as wells low-end technology platforms such as mobile chat, both at home and at school. E-learning platforms were also included in the RDL 2021-2023 strategy.

In 2020, the Tswelopele Campaign established a dedicated WhatsApp group and YouTube Channel and collaborated with MTN to include the MTN Online School as an offering. The Tswelopele website served as a gateway to the various platforms. More recently, the DBE, in collaboration with SABC Education (SABC Plus) agreed to broadcast Tswelopele content on the SABC's Education DTT[2] channel. Content broadcast on this channel mirrored the broadcasts on DBE TV. The Tswelopele Campaign also leveraged the chat platform Telegram Messenger in partnership with Lefa Co-operatives Ltd, whose Virtual Educator-Led Learning Experience (Velle) platform offered learners a virtual tutoring service.

Based on a DBE-NECT Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the SABC, a Learner Radio Support Programme saw 12 (originally 13) regional radio stations offer weekly lessons from mid-February 2022 to March 2023. A total of 624 radio lessons were coordinated by the NECT and delivered by provincial radio coordinators in the nine provincial education departments (PEDs). The SABC provided 624 podcasts of the broadcast radio lessons, and these are being incrementally hosted on a podcast hosting platform, iono.fm[3], for access by learners, teachers and parents. This radio programme was a huge step-up from the 45 broadcasts that were delivered on a limited number of community radio stations in 2021.

The Tswelopele television and radio programmes have been the flagship hosting platforms to date, with an average of 1.1 million television viewers accessing Tswelopele lessons monthly, culminating in 2.3 million viewers who accessed the Tswelopele Summer School Programme on DBE TV in December 2022 and 1,5 million who accessed the programme in January 2023 (Herandien, Senne, & Williams, 20022; 2023).

In this regard, the Tswelopele RDL Campaign target of supporting 600 000 GET and FET learners had been surpassed.

2 Digital Terrestrial Television
3 See https://iono.fm/

TEACHER AND PARENT SUPPORT

Tswelopele offered a dedicated teacher and parent support slot on DBE TV on Channel 122 on OpenView. While teacher support programmes focused on pedagogical matters, parent support slots focused on providing information on how parents and caregivers could support their children at home. Parent support lessons also focused on the use of reading resources with the intention of encouraging parents to read to their children. The lessons were broadcast thrice weekly (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) in 30-minute slots between 18h00 and 18h30. In 2022, parent support programmes amounted to 60 hours of lessons.

In collaboration with the DBE, UNICEF created 12 parent guides for Grade R - 3 teachers and parents in Mathematics, English First Additional Language (EFAL), and Life Skills, while additional teacher support resources were made available by UNICEF and the British Council.

In addition, DBE TV broadcasts to support teacher development focused on support to Foundation Phase (FP) teachers, and were delivered daily, in dedicated slots between 18h00 and 19h00 on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday, and from 18h30 to 19h00 on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. A total of 80 hours of support, five and a half hours a week, was provided from February to December 2022. The teacher support programmes on DBE TV focused on providing teachers with pedagogical content covering the revised annual teaching plans (ATPs), reading strategies, English across the curriculum, Incremental Introduction to African Languages, creating learning resources/aides from easily accessible materials and issues of gender.

Information resources covered topics and interviews/conversations relating to issues in education, health and psychosocial support, including messaging and guidance from the DBE to all education practitioners.

Despite limited resources, support to parents and teachers was consistently provided on DBE TV in a dedicated slot between 18h00 and 19h00 daily, and by the end of 2022, the teacher and parent support television programmes had an average monthly viewership of 88 100. While the target of supporting 50 000 teachers and parents was surpassed, there is still a need to create a greater library of digital and non-digital teacher and parent support resources.

ADVOCACY, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

During the period 2020 to 2023, the RDL management team developed an advocacy, marketing and communications strategy which included the use of a

wide range of media platforms. The objective of the strategy was to implement a bold campaign to raise awareness of the RDL resource offerings and services, and targeted learners, teachers, parents/caregivers and the broader South African community.

While the intention was to have a Public Relations (PR) agency working with the RDL team to develop and implement a national strategy, the RDL team only had the services of a PR agency during 2020/21, and for one month in 2022. For the greater part of 2022 to date, the RDL campaign had to implement its strategy without additional expertise and support. Despite the above-mentioned limitation, advocacy, marketing and communications for the Tswelopele Campaign focused on the following aspects over the 2020-2023 period:

1. Designing and developing a host of communications and marketing materials, including RDL campaign posters, social media posts and artworks, as well as the distribution of 2021 RDL collateral;
2. Developing monthly Advocacy and Marketing Content Plans with assets, and the distribution of social media posts and assets on multiple platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter);
3. Enlisting the support of partners to raise awareness of the campaign on their social media networks and to sponsor prizes for RDL campaign competitions;
4. Distributing monthly television and radio broadcast schedules to the DBE, PEDs and partner networks;
5. Successfully developing and implementing RDL advocacy and communications campaigns on social media (Summer School, Autumn School, Winter School, Exam Countdown, Exam School, etc.). Despite low engagement figures, the RDL social media posts received a large numbers of reactions, which showed that the public was aware of and knew about the Tswelopele and Woza Matrics RDL Campaigns.
6. Presenting on and advocating for the campaigns at Head of Education Departments Committee (HEDCOM) e-Education, Teacher Development & Curriculum Management sub-committee meetings;
7. Distributing the 2021 RDL Tswelopele and Woza Matrics advocacy, marketing and communications tools to the DBE and PEDs.

Despite the lack of a dedicated web manager and limited support to maintain the websites, the Tswelopele and Woza Matrics programme managers successfully ensured that the website was updated and was the centre of communications.

IMPLEMENTATION MONITORING

The development of a clearly stated theory of change and logical framework facilitated the development of a dedicated implementation monitoring, reflection and learning framework for 2020 to 2022.

The framework provided clarity on the approach to implementation monitoring and clarified the methodology and appropriate research methods to be adopted.

Guided by the framework, the RDL Campaign collected data using platform analytics on a regular basis and, at the same time, trained a team of young NECT colleagues to assist with this process.

The support provided by the RDL broadcast management and project support service provider in collecting relevant platform data from various platform providers via the Broadcast Research Council made a significant difference in gaining insights into the extent of the RDL Campaign's progress over time.

The NECT's Monitoring and Quality Assurance (MQA) team was able to secure small samples of learners, teachers and parents over the three-year period who were willing to participate in interviews and surveys, under difficult circumstances, to track the RDL Campaign's progress. The team documented several challenges, most notably:

1. Difficulty in securing larger samples of learners, teachers, and parents to participate in the research work on implementation monitoring;
2. Challenges with connectivity, reaching schools on time, etc. This militated against active participation of many learners, teachers and parents across the country;
3. Lack of awareness about the RDL Campaign and lack of access to the various platforms, including DBE TV;
4. The timing of data collection towards the latter part of the year was a problem as respondents were engaged in assessments.

Lesson Learned	Campaign Recommendations
Social capital	The campaign needs to broaden its network of strategic partners to include curriculum content as well as CSTL content providers. Greater collaboration with organisations in support of specialist areas that include Languages, Mathematics and the Sciences as well as psycho-social support is required. As remote and digital learning is dependent on financial resources, it is crucial that corporate sector funding be secured to support the development of RDL into the future.
Content sourcing and creation	Content sourcing had been a tedious process due to the need to evaluate sourced content to ensure policy compliance. For this reason, it is imperative that the DBE-NECT collaboration develops its own content across a wide spectrum of subjects and grades. It is important that a content sourcing and development strategy be developed to guide sourcing and development processes. Licensing of third-party content has also proven to be costly. It is also vital that curriculum content includes technical and vocational subjects. Currently, very little or no content is being broadcast on television in these subjects, while some audio content for radio exists.
Multiple digital and non-digital platforms	"It is important not to overwhelm learners, teachers and parents with a host of platforms. Both high-end (e.g., mobile applications) as well as low-end (TV, radio, and print) platforms should be accessible to teachers, learners and parents. RDL websites should act as a gateway to various platforms and provide access to a host of resources for teaching, learning and assessment. The provision of devices to teachers and learners is crucial for access to multiple platforms. Furthermore, teachers and parents should provide support for digital learning. The value of educational television and radio programmes should be exploited more diligently by education authorities and parents. A campaign in this regard should be developed and advocated. While digital learning can enhance learning outcomes, print resources are still crucial and should not be neglected. In this regard, study guides, parent guides and reading resources should be made more accessible."
Teacher and parent support	Ongoing teacher professional development and parent support are crucial for the improvement of learning outcomes. Television has proved to be a useful platform in this regard. However, the limited content to support parents and the development of teachers is evident by the limited programme content on DBE TV, for example. Greater investment in this regard will go a long way toward turning the situation around. The relevant Chief Directorate and Directorates in the DBE and provinces can play a vital role in this regard.
Advocacy, marketing, and communications	While remote and digital learning is still in its infancy in South Africa, greater awareness of the value of RDL needs to be created. This requires the development of a national strategy to promote the value of RDL. A constant presence on various social media platforms should be created, with messaging that raises awareness amongst the broader public. The DBE Communications Chief Directorate should therefore integrate the promotion of RDL into its daily activities.

Table 45.1: Lessons from Tswelopele RDL Campaign Key Focus Areas

Implementation monitoring and evaluation (M&E)	One of the key observations about the 2020 to 2022 implementation monitoring processes was the limited sample sizes due to the capacity constraints of a small MQA team. A solution could be the integration of this function into the DBE and PEDs, who could shoulder some of the responsibility for this vital function. Furthermore, the monitoring of the RDL Campaigns was restricted to the latter half of the year, resulting in challenges due to the unavailability of respondents (teachers, learners and parents) as they were busy with examinations and assessments. Ideally, monitoring should take place consistently during the year. Also, during school visits by MQA team members, many teachers, learners and parents indicated that they were unaware of the RDL Campaigns. In such instances, the MQA team members advocated for the campaign, which resulted in increased awareness of and more positive attitudes towards it. Ongoing advocacy is therefore crucial to raise awareness about Tswelopele.

Table 45.1: Lessons from Tswelopele RDL Campaign Key Focus Areas (Cont)

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS: 2020 TO 2023

The Tswelopele RDL Campaign focused on several crucial aspects over the 2020 to 2023 period, including social networks, content sourcing and creation, multiple digital and non-digital platforms, teacher and parent support, advocacy, marketing and communications, and implementation monitoring.

Over the period, several lessons were learnt, most notably in the key areas noted in Table 45.1.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. Remote learning during the time of lockdown revealed that access to technology and connectivity is a necessity (Hughes, 2020, 12). In this regard, the RDL campaign was beneficial to learners and parents who had access to electricity, television sets, radios, cellular phones and the necessary devices to obtain information.

2. However, not all students have the same access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), and in South Africa, as in many countries across the world, such access varies greatly (OECD, 2020). While the remote learning campaign benefitted and empowered some learners and parents, it was not accessible to poorer learners, parents and communities, who have no access to the required devices, thus creating or perpetuating a digital divide and disrupting their education (Duby, 2022). This has also been demonstrated by NECT's recent implementation monitoring surveys (2022). The most vulnerable students, parents and communities are thus being left behind.

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MINI-LESSON 46

The potential of digital platforms to enhance and redress inequality in the South African schooling system: the contribution of the NECT - **Tukisang Senne**

This mini-lesson is an attempt to outline the potential of digital platforms to enhance the achievement of education goals, redress inequality and create new opportunities for all learners in South Africa.

WHAT ARE DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN EDUCATION?

Digital platforms are defined in various ways and have different uses. Essentially, they are any electronic tools for communication, and include desktop, mobile, social and email software as well as websites and social media[1]. Digital platforms are called by several names, the most important of which (for education) are learning management systems, content management systems, distributed learning systems and course management systems. Digital platforms in education are also described as 'educational networks that represent a means of teaching and learning for both teachers and learners and provide an interactive environment and a set of technologies that support the learning process efficiently without restrictions of time and place (Alshammary & Alhalafawy, 2022, 2281).

1 See: IG Global. InfoScipedia https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/beusin/55829.

The spread of COVID-19 led to the closure of educational institutions, including schools in South Africa, and this catalysed a shift towards distance and remote learning and teaching using a variety of digital platforms.

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION COLLABORATION TRUST'S REMOTE AND DIGITAL LEARNING (RDL) CAMPAIGN

In response to the COVID-19 induced school closures in 2020 and the quest to close the resulting learning gaps and mitigate against significant learning losses among the 12 million learners in the basic education sector, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) catalysed the Remote and Digital Learning (RDL) Campaign. It was presented as a way to supplement the learning support offered to learners, their teachers and parents in order to catch up on curriculum learning and revision. It was also intended to offer learner care and support as well as exam preparation[2]. One of the RDL design principles was enabling learning continuity. Through this principle, the campaign sought to promote learning continuity, curriculum catch-up, care and support, revision and exam preparation via multiple digital and non-digital platforms.

The idea was to ensure that learners, teachers and parents, particularly from the most excluded communities, could access learning resources from multiple access points that included analogue and traditional channels such as print media, radio and television as well as low-end technology platforms such as mobile chat. At the digital end of the spectrum were platforms run via mobile learning applications or e-learning platforms.

With this approach, the RDL secured access to television channels (South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) Channels 1 and 3, DBE TV Channel 122 on Openview, and DSTV Catch-Up), radio (community radio and SABC regional stations), online learning platforms (DBE Cloud, Siyavula), mobile learning platforms (Matric Live, Velle, MTN's' Online School, 2Enable App), podcast platforms (iono.fm and Spotify) and set up two YouTube channels for Grades R - 11 and matrics respectively. Learners could thus choose their preferred platform(s), at any time of day or night, as they worked either in class or at home. The aim was to ensure that learners, individually or with others, could cope with assignments received from their educators. Furthermore, this programme design offered learners an opportunity to experience and benefit from a hybrid learning mode.

2 See also MINI-LESSON 42: EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES: REMOTE AND DIGITAL LEARNING by Dhianaraj Chetty and MINI-LESSON 8: LEVERAGING AND SUSTAINING MULTIPLE PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT MATRIC LEARNERS by Tukisang Senne.

PROGRAMME WINS

The target set within the RDL Logical Framework was that at least 600 000 learners in Grades R - 11 and another 600 000 matric learners would be reached through different platforms. In order to track performance towards these targets, monthly platform analytics and broadcast audience numbers were collated. As can be seen in Figure 46.1 below, at its peak, the RDL campaign was able to surpass the overall targets.

RDL reach by platform type (2020 - 2022)

TELEVISION

SABC 1: Woza Matrics had an average 5 890 666 viewers monthly

DBE TV: Tswelopele had an average of 1 230 928 viewers monthly and Woza Matrics had an average of 493 531 viewers monthly

Average 88 140 teachers and parents watched teacher-and-parent support shows monthly

MOBILE & ONLINE

290 379 Learners registered to use Online School in partnership with MTN

105 637 learners supported on Matric Live

7184 learners given on-going virtual tutoring on Velle Continued use of WhatsApp for information and resource sharing

RADIO

624 Lessons presented on 12 SABC regional radio stations

(247 GET; 176 FET: 201 Matric)

YOUTUBE & OTHER VIDEO CHANNELS

Tswelopele YouTube Channel: 8 640 subscribers accessing average 3 130 content hours monthly

Waza Matrics YouTube Channel: 28 400 subscribers accessing average 7 429 content hours monthly

Figure 46.1: RDL reach by platform type (2020 - 2022)

These figures suggest that the RDL Campaign achieved its modest targets in terms of reaching large numbers of learners, teachers and parents as viewers of its programmes. However, the figures do not translate into measures of the extent to which learning was realised through accessing these platforms. More in-depth study and analysis are needed to ascertain learning through the resources provided on the various platforms.

PROGRAMME LIMITATIONS

While digital platforms offer numerous benefits for school learning, it is important to acknowledge their limitations. Some of the key limitations include:

1. Access: While the reach numbers above show that a significant number of learners, parents and teacher accessed the educational resources through the various digital educational platforms, there were clear disparities regarding the provincial reach of the 24-hour DBE TV Channel, with Gauteng (28%), the Western Cape (17%), Kwazulu-Natal and Limpopo (13% each) having the majority of the audience (total 71%). This is due to the distribution of households with access to the Openview satellite broadcast services (Williams & Senne, 2022).

2. Connectivity: Not all learners have equal access to digital devices and reliable internet connectivity. This digital divide can create disparities in educational opportunities, as learners from disadvantaged communities may face challenges in accessing online resources and participating in digital learning activities (Williams & Senne, 2022).

3. Learning style compatibility: Digital platforms may not cater to the learning preferences and styles of all learners. Some individuals may thrive in traditional classroom environments or benefit from hands-on, kinaesthetic (tactile) learning experiences that digital platforms cannot fully replicate (Daud et al., 2022).

4. Lack of personal interaction: Digital platforms can limit face-to-face interactions and human connections, which are important for social and emotional development. The absence of physical presence and real-time interaction with teachers and peers may result in a sense of isolation and reduced opportunities for collaborative learning (Geladi, 2018).

5. Digital distractions: The presence of digital devices can create distractions, tempting learners to engage in non-educational activities or multi-tasking during learning sessions. This can negatively impact concentration, focus and overall learning outcomes (Dontre, 2021).

6. Privacy and security concerns: The use of digital platforms raises concerns regarding the privacy and security of learner data. Schools must take precautions to ensure learners' personal information is protected

and that online interactions are conducted in a safe and secure manner (Williams & Senne, 2022).

7. Digital literacy requirements: Effectively utilising digital platforms for learning requires learners to possess a certain level of digital literacy skills. Learners who lack these skills may face difficulties navigating and utilising the platform, hindering their learning experience (Williams & Senne, 2022).

It is important for educators and policy makers to be aware of these limitations and work towards addressing them to ensure equitable access to quality education and optimising the benefits of digital platforms while mitigating their drawbacks. It is noteworthy that, regardless of which digital platforms are integrated into the classroom, the educator remains a central cog around which learning and teaching is mediated. 'Technology will not replace great teachers, but technology in the hands of great teachers can be transformational' (George Couros, cited in Barker, 2022).

KEY LESSONS

Diversity of platforms: By incorporating multiple platforms, learners gain access to a vast array of resources beyond traditional textbooks and lessons. Online platforms, educational websites, interactive mobile applications and multimedia content provide diverse learning materials that cater to different learning styles and preferences. This abundance of resources allows learners to explore topics deeply, reinforcing their understanding and fostering a more holistic approach to learning.

Personalised learning: The integration of multiple platforms enables personalised learning experiences. Learners can focus on areas where they require additional support or challenge themselves with more advanced materials. Personalised learning promotes individual growth, increases motivation and maximises learning outcomes.

Collaborative learning opportunities: Multiple platforms facilitate collaboration among learners, transcending geographical limitations. Virtual classrooms, discussion opportunities and social media platforms create opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction, idea sharing and collective problem-solving. Collaborative learning not only enhances social skills but also promotes a deeper understanding of concepts through active engagement and diverse perspectives.

Blended learning approaches: Integrating multiple platforms allows for blended learning approaches that combine face-to-face teaching with online resourc-

es. This flexibility enables learners to engage with content at their own pace and revisit materials for reinforcement. Additionally, virtual classrooms and chat tools enable remote learning, extending educational opportunities to individuals who may face geographical or time constraints.

Gamification: By leveraging gamification elements and interactive platforms, learning becomes more immersive and engaging. Gamified platforms (Matric Live, Velle) employ elements such as badges, leader boards and rewards to enhance motivation and create a sense of achievement. Interactivity and exam simulations on platforms provide hands-on learning opportunities, enabling learners to explore complex concepts and practical application and test themselves with real-time results in a safe and controlled environment.

Inequality and access: The significant socioeconomic disparities among provinces and districts result in unequal access to digital devices and reliable internet connectivity. Many learners, particularly those in rural areas, may lack access to the necessary technology infrastructure, hindering their ability to fully participate in digital learning. South Africa therefore needs to expand the roll-out of Internet connectivity to all schools and the distribution of tablets to learners, especially in poor areas (Baloyi & Khosa, 2022).

Infrastructure challenges: Limited or inadequate technology infrastructure, such as computer labs, and insufficient internet bandwidth can hinder the effective implementation of digital platforms. Schools in remote areas may face particular challenges in terms of infrastructure development and maintenance.

Cost implications: Affordability is a key concern, as digital devices and internet access can be expensive. The cost of acquiring and maintaining devices, along with mobile data charges, may be prohibitive for some schools and families, exacerbating the digital divide. These costs need to be addressed with technology hardware providers and the mobile network operators.

Localised content and language diversity: Some digital platforms may rely on content that is not wholly tailored to the South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) content or does not adequately represent local languages and cultural nuances. Addressing this issue is crucial to ensure digital resources align with the curriculum and cater to the linguistic and cultural diversity of South African learners.

Teacher development and capacity building: Effective integration of digital platforms requires teachers who are trained in utilising technology for instructional purposes. However, many teachers may lack the necessary digital literacy skills and professional development opportunities to effectively leverage digital platforms in their teaching practice.

Content quality and applicability: Ensuring the availability of high-quality educational content that is CAPS-aligned and addresses the specific needs of learners is essential. The relevance, accuracy, and appropriateness of digital resources must be carefully considered to enhance their utility for school learners.

Data privacy and security: Safeguarding learner data and ensuring compliance with data protection regulations is crucial. Schools and education officials need to establish robust data privacy and security protocols to protect learners' personal information when using digital platforms.

REFLECTIVE INSIGHTS

1. The utility of digital platforms in enhancing learning experiences is undeniable. By leveraging diverse resources, personalisation, collaboration, blended learning approaches, and gamification, educators (and the school system) can create dynamic and interactive learning environments that cater to individual needs.

2. Embracing the power of multiple platforms equips learners with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in the digital era, preparing them for success in an ever-evolving world.

3. Standards relating to the use and management of the available multiple platforms are required to ensure that they optimally supplement rather than distract from the learning and teaching environment.

4. Addressing systemic challenges raised in this paper requires concerted efforts and collaboration from the DBE, Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), higher education institutions, and other stakeholders (corporates and civil society) to bridge the digital divide, invest in infrastructure development, provide affordable access to digital resources, offer comprehensive teacher training and development programmes, and promote the development of localised, high-quality content that caters to the diverse needs of South African schools.

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MINI-LESSON 47

Recovery, Rebooting and Building Better Plan following the COVID -19 lockdown **- Godwin Khosa**

Since its founding in July 2013, the NECT supported the programming of the National Development Plan working with the DBE, the nine provincial education departments, foundations and private sector, NGOs, quasi-governmental organisations, universities, teacher unions, and over 110 000 teachers to improve education quality.

A wide range of achievements relating to systems and organizational behavioral aspects impacting teachers and officials; and competency gains among learners were registered from the work of the NECT with its partners over nine years of operation. As it was the case elsewhere in the world, these achievements were reversed or undermined by the unprecedented COVID-19 global pandemic.

As a result, the NECT adopted an Aide Memoire[1], at the end of 2021, that frames the post-pandemic support of the NECT to the South African education system. The Aide Memoire took the national development goals and the government's national recovery intentions as the starting point. It sought to contribute in unhinging macro development in education thinking post-Covid 19. Over and above contribution to post-covid-19 planning, the Aid Memoire aimed to support the planning and implementation of critical interventions that would restart the operations of the education system. In this regard, the Aide memoire:

1 See Michale Fullan, Michael Barber, David Hargreaves, Whelan

1. Drew from international literature and practices to propose a comprehensive response to the impact of the pandemic on the South African education. A response that would network and focus government and non-governmental efforts on key education aspects that would take South Africa forward.

2. Aimed to optimize the long-standing social capital in the education sector which was galvanized by the NECT in the past nine years of its existence.

3. Assumed that the post Covid 19 response entailed more than just curriculum recovery to ensure that all the critical sub-systems in education operations are back on track and humming.

4. Assumed that the most effective and sustainable responses should be systemic and comprehensive in approach; and should take bold, agile and collaborative outlook.

5. Was based on the similar design principles that undergirded the founding of the NECT in 2013:
   i. Focus on a small number of ambitious goals
   ii. Make capacity building linked to results the centerpiece of the strategy
   iii. Pursue education reform through partnerships among the school and the community, the local authority and the state
   iv. Set high standards and measure if they are achieved
   v. Relentlessly work towards 'deep pedagogic' change with systemness
   vi. Drawing from strong political and cultural commitment to education
   vii. Setting high aspirations, strong leadership, quality teaching and longer school hours.

FRAMING THE POST COVID-19 RESPONSE IN EDUCATION

The aide memoire used a simplified version of the Haddon matrix disaster management approach which employs two perspectives to disaster management (Cole et al, 2021).

A. The first perspective is temporal perspective that sees disaster in phases and the second perspective fosters a consideration of the factors that contribute to the disaster. In the temporal perspective, three phases are used to manage the disaster: pre-event, event, and post-event phases.

B. The second perspective, which focuses on 'the factors' contributing to the disaster, the Haddon's approach causes disaster planning to consider the host, agent/vehicle, physical environment, social environment.

The importance of the matrix is in enforcing structure and comprehensiveness in how systems manage disasters. Simply put, the thought processes for disaster management, should thus base post disaster plans on an understanding of the historic state of affairs and the impact of the disaster. Whilst the Haddon matrix is not fully applicable to education because of the externality of the disaster factors, Haddon's two dimensions to disaster planning remain relevant to the public education function. Figure 47.1 presents an application of the two dimensions to frame NECT support to the response to the COVid-19 disaster in education in South Africa.

NECT's proposed education recovery framework.

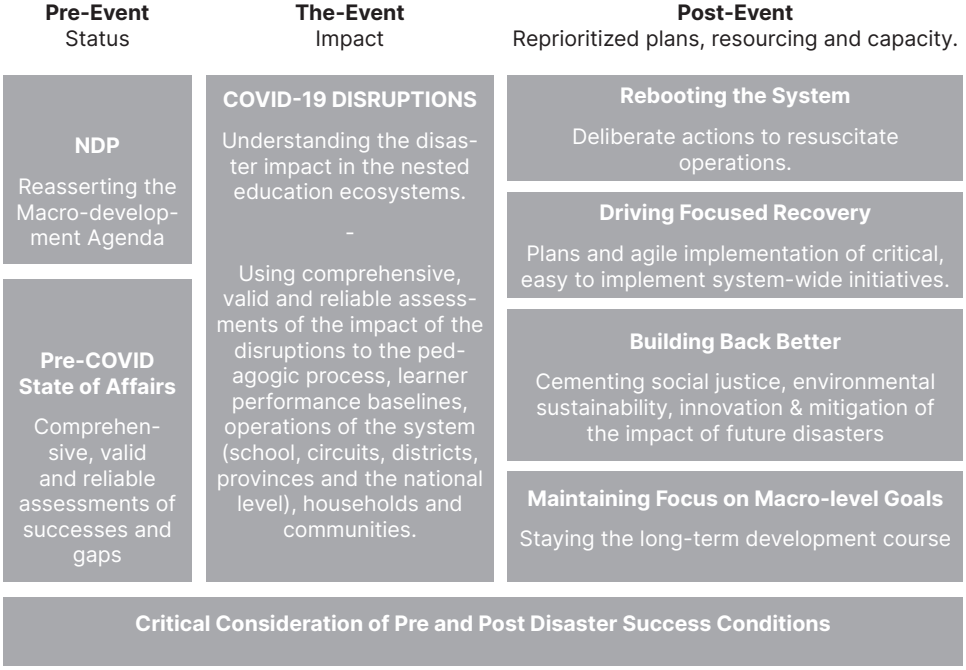

Figure 46.1: NECT's proposed education recovery framework.

The framework takes as its starting point the views that macro development plans should be the basis of the planning, where improvements pursued on the bases of the gaps that prevailed before the pandemic and using valid and reliable sets of evidence. The proposed approach also promoted striking a balance between short-, medium- and long-term commitments; as well identifying the success conditions so that the planned activities are realistic and achievable.

In its application of the framework, the NECT assessed the pre-disaster state of affairs across its founding six thematic areas to arrive at a record of the achievements that needed to be sustained to ensure the continuity of improvements, and the gaps that emerged. Therefore, a range of proposals were made in relation to each thematic area.

Regarding the impact of the Covid-19 disaster, the NECT identified four categories of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic of the South African education system. These included the following:

1. The time lost for teaching and learning. Figure 47.2 outlines the schooling days realized and days lost during the school terms that were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

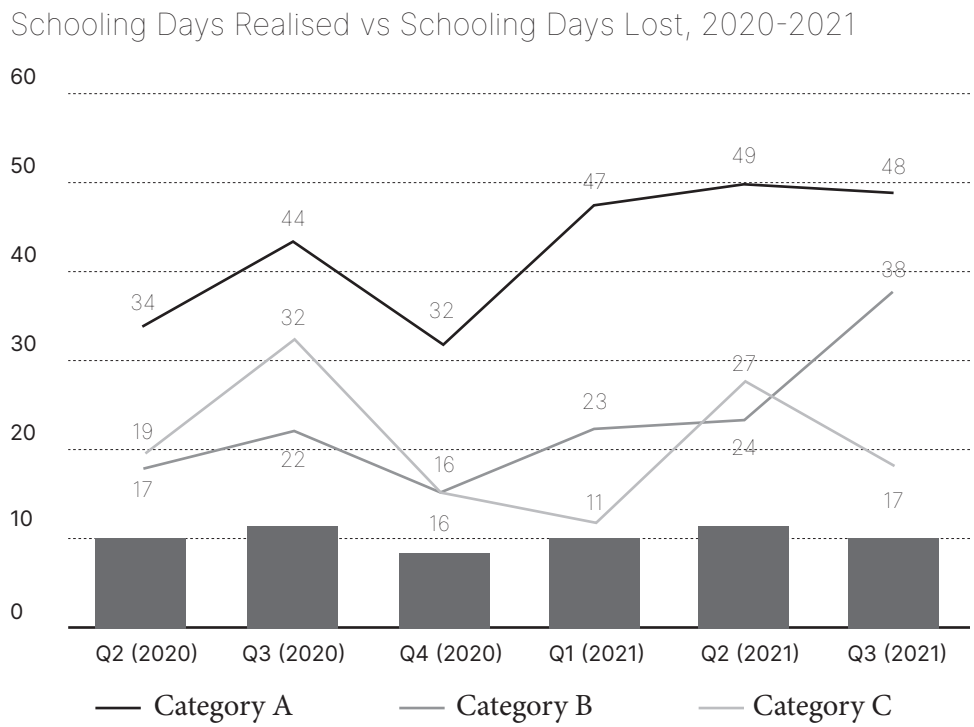

Figure 47.2: Schooling Days Realised vs Schooling Days Lost, 2020-2021

The following three categories of schools were identified from the data that was collected by the NECT:

i. **Category A** schools were the least impacted as they closed only during the hard lock down period. These schools had sufficient resources and infrastructure to adhere to the social distancing requirements. It was estimated from the data that these schools lost 30 days (11,8%) out of the 254 potential teaching days during the most disruptive period of the pandemic.

ii. **Category B** schools had to adopt rotational attendance system until July 2021 after which they brought back all the learners. These are primary schools which benefitted from the relaxed regulations, and would have lost 114 days (45%).

iii. **Category C** schools were the hardest hit schools since they continued with rotational system. Category C would have lost 128 days (50%). Data collected by the NECT in August 2021 from 100 schools showed that 23% of the primary schools were still on rotation.

2. The second impact of the pandemic is on learning - learning losses. Whilst it was too early to determine the precise loss of learning, a number of proxies were found useful in profiling the extents of the impact on learning. A review of exercise books from 214 schools undertaken by the NECT in November 2020, it was established that majority of the schools (60%) covered only about 30% of the written work. Another review of written work in the exercise books and DBE workbooks carried out from 114 schools in August 2021 showed that slightly more than half of the DBE workbook exercises that were recommended for completion – as part of the trimmed curriculum – were not completed.

3. The third impact of COVID-19 was on the loss of learning opportunity. The concept of learning opportunity exposed the fact that learners have lost the opportunity to learn curricula content that is geared for their ages, and that those opportunities have been lost. Also, learners affected by school closures were experiencing an absolute reduction in learning levels or slower progress than expected in a typical year. Such impacts were expected to affect more disadvantaged children, given the unequal distribution of opportunities to access remote learning. Added to these impacts are the psychosocial wellness of the learners

and the teachers. In the foundational years of education, the impact might be the strongest.

4. The fourth form of the impact on education was the diminished levels of operations and organizational performance. This was the most undocumented part of the impact. Although, the education system had quickly moved to virtual platforms to enable employees to continue with work from home, the workflows, systems, staff wellness and organizational cultures had been impacted on.

   One thing to be celebrated from the pandemic was the discovery of the possibility of working remotely. The downside was that the change of working arrangements were predicted to have long-lasting changes on organizational behaviors, levels of operations, cultures, stability and output levels.

   These changes created challenges as much as they created opportunities for reimagining the public service – from classroom and school management level through to the policy level of the system.

RESPONSE INITIATIVES PROPOSED PER AREAS OF THE DISASTER MODEL

Model Area 1: Rebooting the System

Rebooting the system is conceived herein as the first and the shortest of the four phases of driving continuity of the education services after the pandemic. It is meant to bring the system back to functionality by promoting conscious efforts of ensuring the return to offices and the re-initiation of critical organizational processes at circuit, district, provincial and national levels which are responsible for supporting the school and classroom-level operations. Secondly it entailed the remobilizing of schools to reopen and start teaching starting from accessing schools on a rotational basis.

Following the assessment of the disruptions at these multiple levels, the NECT proposed to support the education system to develop and implement education rebooting frameworks that provide for the schooling relaunch mapping, development of baseline reopening scenario based on the levels of regress in learning, teaching and other key operations, reassurance of all partners about reopening plans, safety and operational plans that are dependable, fast-tracked digital transformation targeting learners, teachers, officials and the communities, and monitoring and feedback of the reopening of schools.

Model Area 2: Focused Education Recovery

The NECT conceived education recovery as the programming aimed at assisting learners and teachers to recover lost learning time, missed learning opportunities and the learning losses.

a. **Recovering the lost time:** A study conducted by Stellenbosch University on the impact of COVID 19 on education had estimated that grade 1-6 learners from resource constrained schools lost 50-75% of the school year in 2020 and 2021.

More efficient utilization of the increased learning time was considered key to recovering the time lost or indeed to avoid losing more time due to widespread challenges of poor time-on-task. In this regard management teams and circuit managers were to play critical roles in ensuring that schools and classroom optimally take advantage of the learning time, and where possible in create additional learning opportunities in school and at home.

b. **Reversing the effects of lost learning opportunities:** Reversing lost learning was viewed as complex since learners would have missed age-specific opportunities to learn certain skills in the lockdown extending up to some two years. Learners would have lagged between one and two years in relation to what they should have learnt at specific ages.

Some of these skills are sensitive age-specific life skills and closing the gap is not straightforward. Curriculum and psychosocial experts were thus advised to think more deeply about how this gap could be bridged. Teachers were to be more conscious about addressing critical elements such as speech and language, and physical and emotional development, particularly relevant in the foundation phase.

c. **Closing the learning gaps:** It was acknowledged that it would take some time to close the learning gaps which would affect all cohorts of learners in the education system.

According to Angrist et. al (2021) it was likely that learning deficits for a child in grade 3 could lead to 2.8 years of lost learning by grade 10. New, whole scale remediation strategies were to be developed and implemented across phases and schools.

Model Area 3: Building Back Better (BBB)

The concept of BBB was understood as essentially being about taking advantage of the development opportunities that emerge from disasters. Building back better strived to not only restore education systems to pre-pandemic conditions, but to rebuild towards better functioning systems, characterized by deeper learning, greater quality, equity and human flourishing.

Central to the concept was to prioritise and deepen existing aspects of the system that serve our envisaged future, to shed off technical and social designs that do not work, and to take advantage of hindsight, new technologies, knowledge and energies. The NECT identified four constructs that make up the concept of BBB. These and their related elements are presented in Table 47.1:

Building Back Better Contruct Concepts

Constructs	**Elements from the literature**
A. Fast-track of social- justice	Commitment to addressing humanitarian challenges, promoting inclusivity and maximizing the capacity to protect the vulnerable.
B. Global sustainability Agenda	Heightened consideration of climatic concerns which are urgent and critical minimizing or avoiding natural disasters.
C. Taking advantage of Innovation potential ('liminal opportunity')	Opportunities for positive transformation and establishing firm foundations and taking advantage of the transitional spaces that the world systems find themselves (the 'liminal space where leaps are made between the past and the new realities).
D. Building capacity to mitigate the effects of future disasters	"Attending to existing national administrative and delivery structures (; Opportunity to redesign systems and refocus institutional, financial, political and human resources to optimum effect); improving administrative capacity and accountability. Systems that scale and flex to respond to any new emerging challenges in the future, crafting quick response systems solutions to long-term."

Table 47.1: Building Back Better Contruct Concepts

The challenge with the implementation of the BBB agenda was that it is in competition with the 'post-disaster rebooting' and '-recovery' initiatives wherein the latter two aspects present more urgent, more pressing and more obvious needs. The danger with the competition was that it would lead to the education systems missing the window of opportunity to address long standing challenges in a sustainable way.

SUPPORT FROM THE NECT

From these proposals and the plans discussed above, the NECT proposed results frameworks outlining key proposed initiatives, resource requirements and targets.

Most of the proposed initiatives were implemented by the NECT. In hindsight, it is regrettable that the energy and the 'singular cross-province pace' that the education system enjoyed during the disaster dissipated to a level where the BBB initiatives were deprioritized, the recovery process lost momentum and received wide ranging priority levels in across the provincial education systems.

On the positive side, some of the major initiatives made as part of the recovery, was the adjustment of the revised Assessment and Teaching Plans released by the DBE and the Structured Learning Programmes that were developed and distributed by the NECT to over 90% of the schools in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

The importance of the matrix is in enforcing structure and comprehensiveness in how systems manage disasters. The Haddon matrix disaster as adopted by the NECT ensured that there is a structured approach to responding to the effects of the disaster, encouraging the alignment of the post disaster planning to the historic state of affairs and the specific impact of the disaster.

Whilst the South African education system proved more agile and resilient than many systems in the continent and the globe, more can be achieved in limiting the effects of the pandemic if the initiatives and programmes from the structured approaches were followed through more judiciously.

The greatest challenge is how difficult it is to quickly change government programmes and resourcing plans in order to increase its responsiveness to the disaster. On the other hand, less drastic changes are good for maintaining the integrity of the government systems without which it would be chaotic.

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