CHAPTER 3
TEACHER DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS IN THE GET BAND
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1. INTRODUCTION
The implementation of teacher development work in the BSSIP started with Education Station, the service provider contracted by JET to deliver the component in the GET band in 2009 and 2010. Education Station worked in Foundation Phase Literacy and Numeracy and in Intermediate and Senior Phase English First Additional Language (EFAL), Mathematics and Natural Sciences. Its main focus was on the delivery of the curriculum in these subjects. The participating teachers were provided with detailed work schedules and common assessment tasks. Content training workshops were held in line with the work schedules.

The work done by Education Station played an important role in informing the design of the teacher development interventions that have been used beyond 2010. Among other things, most of the challenges facing teachers generally in the South African education system were confirmed to be evident in the project schools. Some of these challenges were that:

• Teachers lacked content knowledge;
• Teachers lacked knowledge and skills in teaching methodology;
• Teachers’ proficiency in English was inadequate to deliver the curriculum with English as the language of instruction;
• Teachers needed specialised training in multi-grade teaching;
• Teachers complained of poor learner discipline;
• Teachers lacked teaching resources, particularly in Mathematics and Natural Sciences; and
• Teachers had challenges with the implementation of common work schedules and common assessment tasks. Teachers were unable to keep up with the pace necessary to teach the curriculum in one year. This led to learners writing common assessment tasks on content that they had not been taught. In one term, the common assessment tasks were abandoned altogether because too little content had been covered.

From the observations reported above, it can be argued that the lack of content knowledge and sound teaching methodologies were at the root of the problem of low achievement of learning outcomes in the project schools. Until teachers are competent in terms of the content they are supposed to teach and ways of teaching it, common work schedules may serve only as a reminder of their own inadequacies. Teachers therefore need to be assisted in teaching the whole curriculum within one school year.

The conceptual model for teacher development presented in Chapter 2 came into full application following the work done by Education Station. After the 2010 end-of-year review of the component, the following recommendations were advanced with the aim of ensuring that the implementation of GET teacher development interventions in 2011 and beyond would run more smoothly.
• Workshops were to address both content training and teaching methodologies;
• English proficiency was to be developed;
• Existing work schedules were to be used as guidelines until CAPS was introduced in 2012;
• Specialised training was to be provided for multi-grade teachers; and
• The lack of LTSM was to be addressed in all subjects.

It was envisaged that an improvement in these aspects would not only increase teacher competence and improve teacher performance, but would also assist in improving learner discipline.

This chapter covers the implementation of teacher development interventions in the GET band in the BSSIP, focusing on content training workshops, self-directed learning, and professional learning clusters, and touching briefly on the other aspects of the intervention: classroom mentoring and support, and multi-grade teaching. The dosages used are outlined and progress registered against the planned activities and dosages is presented. The successes, challenges and lessons learnt from the implementation are incorporated in the discussion, highlighting those aspects of the teacher development model that have worked and those that have not.

2. DOSAGE OF GET TEACHER DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS

JET has developed a practice of preparing appropriate ‘dosages’ for interventions that are designed to respond to identified needs. The term dosage refers to the type, intensity and frequency of the activities that are implemented in a particular intervention.

Tables 1 and 2 below outline the dosages for each of the interventions in the GET teacher development component in the BSSIP for 2011 and 2012. There are different dosages for the Foundation Phase on the one hand and the Intermediate Phase and Senior Phase on the other, and different dosages for each year. The dosages are presented in terms of the total number of hours that each teacher is expected to spend on each of the interventions per term and in total per year. It was anticipated that if a teacher participated in the full planned dosage, the improvement in their

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<th>Table 1: Dosage for teacher development interventions, Foundation Phase (hours)</th>
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<td>Interventions</td>
<td>Term One</td>
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<td>Testing</td>
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<td>Professional learning clusters</td>
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<td>Self-directed learning</td>
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<td>TOTALS</td>
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<th>Table 2: Dosage for teacher development interventions, Intermediate and Senior Phases (hours)</th>
<th>Dosage for 2011</th>
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competence and performance would be higher, and the resulting impact on learning would be observed through improved learner performance.

The dosages were increased sharply from 2011 to 2012 with the following changes made.

- The contact time for content training workshops was increased by 28 hours in the Foundation Phase and by 14 hours in the Intermediate and Senior Phases;
- Classroom mentoring and support was increased by 30 hours in the Foundation Phase, and by 3 hours in the Intermediate and Senior Phases; and
- A total of 48 hours of self-directed study and 16 hours of professional learning, which were not included in 2011, were introduced in 2012.

3. PROGRESS AGAINST PLANNED ACTIVITIES

3.1 Standardised teacher testing

The first standardised teacher test was conducted in 2010 and a follow-up test in 2011. Tests were successfully conducted in all the subjects of intervention. Following the release of the results of the tests, feedback was given to the teachers in their subject and phase groups and in individual sessions with each teacher on his or her own performance.

3.2 Content training workshops

All the workshops that were planned for 2011 and 2012 were conducted successfully, although a number of challenges were encountered in the process. Some of the major challenges and the remedies that were applied to mitigate the situation are presented below.

In 2011, each workshop ran for two days starting on a Friday at 11h00 and ending on a Saturday at 16h00. The workshops were held at various venues: at selected project schools, at the Mabeskraal Area Office, at Tvelaagte Teacher Centre, and at Tlhabane Resource Centre. The teachers were commuting from within a range of 10 to 80 kilometres from the venues so they received a stipend of R100 per day to cover their travel expenses.

In the implementation of the teacher development interventions through 2011, it was found that the contact time that the facilitators and mentors had with the teachers was inadequate and, similarly, that the contact time that the teachers had with the content delivered via the workshops was inadequate. This became especially evident in light of the fact that the teachers’ needs for development spanned the entire curriculum. The challenge of finding adequate time for the interventions was compounded by various factors, including the following.

- The content training workshops could only happen on Fridays and Saturdays because those were the days agreed upon with the relevant stakeholders. There are of course only a certain number of Fridays and Saturdays in a given period.
- Although the project had initially envisaged that holidays would be used for the content training workshops, it was later indicated that the workshops could not happen during holidays because holidays were the teachers’ free time.
- The content training workshops could not happen on or around payday because teachers do their monthly shopping at this time.
- In order to minimise the number of teachers being taken out of school at any point for the workshops, it was imperative to minimise the number of workshops taking place at the same time. This meant that:
  a) Content training workshops for different subjects in the same phase could not happen at the same time;
  b) Content training workshops for the same subject in different phases could not happen at the same time.
- In order to avoid clashes, the teacher development activities needed to
accommodate national, provincial and district activities. This required rigorous engagement between the project team and the relevant department officials and, in some cases, the process consumed a lot of time which impacted on the implementation of the activities.

Despite all these challenges, the project sought to maximise the number of teachers participating in the activities and to maximise the contact time that the teachers would have with facilitators and mentors and with the material covered in the workshops. In this regard, during the 2011 end-of-year review of the teacher development component the following changes were made:

- The number of workshops per subject was increased from two to three and the number of days per workshop was increased from two to three. Each workshop started at 16h00 on a Thursday and ended on a Saturday at 16h00. Thus the number of workshop contact hours increased from 28 in 2011 to 56 in 2012 for Foundation Phase teachers and from 28 to 42 for Intermediate and Senior Phase teachers.
- Residential workshops were adopted in 2012 in place of the non-residential workshops used in 2010 and 2011. Due to the switch to residential workshops, the travel stipends that teachers had received in 2011 were discontinued. Instead, teachers were transported to and from the workshops. The money that would have been paid in the form of stipends was used to pay for the accommodation and transport of the teachers.
- The first two series of 2012 workshops were conducted in residential mode but, as result of challenges encountered, there was a change back to the non-residential mode.
- Two additional interventions were introduced into the teacher development programme: self-directed learning, allocated 48 hours, and professional learning clusters, allocated 16 hours.

Some of the practical difficulties encountered in the process of delivering the content training workshops are outlined below.

3.2.1 The venue for the residential workshops
Teachers did not like the venue that was used for the residential workshops. It was reported to be far from their homes, even though transport to and from the workshops was provided. The venue was also reported to be not easily accessible, either electronically in terms of cell phone connectivity or physically in terms of public transport. In addition, the teachers did not like the arrangement of sharing rooms, which had been settled for in order to minimise costs.

3.2.2 Unavailability of subject advisors
Subject advisors were unable to attend some of the workshops due to other commitments. For instance, in the first series of 2012 workshops, they were reported to be attending a CAPS orientation workshop. It should be noted, however, that when the subject advisors did attend the workshops, their presence made a big difference: teachers appeared to be inspired to participate with confidence and to attend the next series of workshops. Furthermore, there was immediate transfer of skills from the workshop facilitators to the subject advisors, which is a necessary condition for the sustainability of the project interventions.

3.2.3 Attendance
Teachers’ attendance at the content training workshops has not met the project team’s expectations, even when various mechanisms have been put in place to maximise attendance. For instance, communication channels were changed from, initially, going through principals, to communicating directly with individual teachers as well. The low levels of attendance saw some teachers miss an entire workshop while others would attend on one day and miss another. In some cases, teachers left a workshop early, and in others they attended intermittently. The most common
reasons given for absence from workshops were other official commitments, sickness, leave and other personal reasons. There are, however, a lot of nuances around the reasons for teachers’ absence from workshops and a lot of caution is required in dealing with this topic – it is one to be ‘handled with care’.

3.2.4 Saturdays
Saturdays presented a particular challenge in relation to teachers’ attendance at the content training workshops. While it was agreed in the project steering committee (PSC) and area working group (AWG) meetings that the project should make use of Saturdays for the workshops, this proved to be problematic in implementation. For some teachers, Saturday is the Sabbath and, for many, it is traditionally the day when funerals, weddings and other traditional ceremonies take place. Hence, teachers’ attendance on Saturdays was often poor. However, it has been reported that some government-initiated workshops are held on Saturdays and even Sundays and they register good attendance. Strategies used by the government officials to ensure maximum attendance have not been established as yet, but the information may be helpful.

3.2.5 Loss of time in term 1
Looking at the number of ‘standing’ activities in the school calendar, the first term appears to be the least crowded. During this term the schools are more amenable to accommodating the project activities, whereas in the other terms the school schedules are much tighter. Unfortunately, the project has not been able to take advantage of the relative flexibility of the first term. This can be attributed to two main reasons. In 2011, the first term was lost due to teachers’ strike action and in 2012, due to threats of teachers’ strike action. In addition, project activities start only after the budgets are approved and this happens only in March. Furthermore, the months of April and May are committed to circuit, district, provincial and national music competitions, which affect a large number of teachers.

3.3 Classroom mentoring and support
In the GET teacher development programme, classroom mentoring and support took place only in 2011. The intervention started with a briefing session for the mentors to standardise the approach to be used and for quality assurance purposes. Subsequently, two mentoring sessions per subject were conducted with the teachers. In 2012, only one mentoring session was conducted in the Foundation Phase, but mentoring did not continue in the Intermediate and Senior Phases because there was no funding available for this aspect of the intervention.

A number of challenges were encountered in the implementation of classroom mentoring and support in 2011.

3.3.1 Shortage of time
One of the major challenges was that there was not sufficient time for the mentors to visit all the teachers the required number of times. In addition, the time that the mentors spent with the teachers was not enough for the mentors to address adequately the problems that were observed and to monitor the progress or lack of progress after the visits. The two mentoring sessions that were conducted add up to a possible maximum of only 18 hours a year per teacher, since each session lasted for a minimum of three and a maximum of nine hours.

The challenge of time was aggravated by other related factors, such as distances between schools, the poor condition of the roads and the cars used; individual teachers’ timetables and the availability of teachers; a shortage of funding; and the number of schools and teachers in relation to the number of mentors. With the long distances between schools and the short school day (roughly from 08h00 to 14h00), it was difficult to conduct more than two mentoring sessions in one day. In terms of availability of teachers, despite all the measures that were put in place to ensure that every teacher participated fully in the mentoring programme, some
teachers missed some of the planned mentoring sessions. In some cases, teachers simply thwarted the mentoring process. In order to maximise the contact time between mentors and teachers, a plan was made to employ full-time mentors to ensure that more mentoring could take place in 2012. However, that did not materialise due to lack of funding.

The project has demonstrated that face-to-face mentoring is a very expensive exercise. It is important, therefore, that other means of conducting mentoring and support should be explored. Perhaps ‘remote mentoring’ through lesson plans and video recorded lessons could be an alternative but this possibility has not yet been explored further.

3.3.2 Teachers’ discomfort with mentoring
Another major challenge is teachers’ discomfort with the mentoring process. Some teachers, generally those who require the most support, tended to feel uncomfortable about being observed teaching. In some instances, these teachers appeared to feel ‘comfortable’ only when they taught lessons for which they considered they had prepared thoroughly. In other instances, the teachers simply recycled lessons: they taught lessons that they had already taught before.

It may be argued that this strategy was adopted to create the impression that teaching was taking place effectively. However, in such instances, the real challenges faced by the teachers remained hidden from the mentors. This may be referred to as the observer paradox – when the presence of the mentor destabilises the ‘normal life’ of the classroom. It may in part be connected to the legacy of the apartheid era. Some teachers have not forgotten the discriminatory inspectorate system of the South African education system during the apartheid years, so mentoring brings about uncertainties that cause the teachers to feel uncomfortable.

Further, teachers’ uncertainty around mentoring emanates from its perceived likeness to performance monitoring and appraisal. As much as these are accepted as some of the necessary tools for improving education in the country, they invoke bitter reaction among some stakeholders. When mentoring is perceived in a similar light, it may not be received as well as it should be in order for it to have a positive effect. It seems that teachers need to be assured and reassured about mentoring to make them feel at ease with the process. This would allow for the real challenges of the teachers to be brought to the surface and appropriate support mechanisms could then be identified and implemented.

3.3.3 Lesson plans
A third major challenge that was experienced in classroom mentoring and support is that in some instances, teachers did not have lesson plans. The lesson plan is one of the main tools that mentors would use in supporting the teachers, at both theoretical and practical levels and in the workshops as well as the classroom mentoring and support sessions.

By definition, a lesson plan is a detailed but concise description of the various teaching, learning and assessment activities (including an outline of resources) that a teacher wishes to employ in the course of mediating a selected collection of knowledge, skills and values in a particular lesson. The lesson plan benefits the teacher and the learners by acting as a clear guide to teaching and learning, and it provides the mentor with significant insights into the teacher’s competence and performance. Such insights make it easier for the mentor to provide appropriate support to the teacher.

Whatever format a lesson plan takes, it answers specific questions about a lesson, regardless of the subject being taught. The answers to these questions enable the mentor to get a glimpse of a teacher’s thought processes in designing a lesson for his or her learners and of how a lesson is likely to unfold. This in turn assists the mentor to work out appropriate ways through which to support the teacher.
One important observation made during mentors’ interactions with teachers in both the workshops and mentoring sessions is that teachers find the structuring of lessons challenging, even though this is such an important skill for a teacher to have.

Generally, while the need for teachers to prepare lesson plans appears to be clear, there are different schools of thought regarding the concepts lesson plan and lesson planning among teachers and other education practitioners, including government officials, curriculum advisors and others. These different schools of thought interpret the practical realities of the lesson plan and lesson planning in various ways, some of which are complete misconceptions, such as the belief that according to CAPS, teachers are not expected to prepare lesson plans. It is important that one common understanding of the lesson plan and lesson planning is agreed, so that the teachers, government officials and mentors are on the same page in this regard.

### 3.4 Multi-grade teaching

In the multi-grade teaching intervention, two workshops and one classroom mentoring and support visit were conducted. A final assessment was done at the end of the programme. All the teachers who participated in this programme performed well. No major challenges were reported regarding the workshops, but the initial mentoring trip was not successful because of logistical problems as a result of a break-down in the communication process. During the follow-up trip, teachers were brought together at one venue instead of two, to reduce time loss.

### 3.5 Self-directed learning

Self-directed learning is one of the additional activities that were introduced in the teacher development intervention from the start of 2012. While it was envisaged that the activity would increase teachers’ contact time with the material covered during workshops, the experience in the GET intervention showed this to be unattainable. Out of the 48 hours that were planned per teacher per subject, only two hours were achieved in each subject. When progress was checked after the activity had been introduced, the teachers reported that they did not have time to complete these tasks. Workloads were cited as the major hindrance.

In a bid to circumvent this problem, a decision was taken to incorporate the self-directed learning tasks into workshops. However, this took up time from the workshops. It was then decided that the activity should be suspended until it could be implemented effectively, and that has not happened yet. Plans were made to adopt the approach that was taken in the FET teacher development component — to incorporate self-directed learning into teachers’ day-to-day work. However, this was not possible because mentoring, which would have been used as a platform for reinforcing the intervention, did not take place. Nonetheless, teachers were urged to complete the SDL tasks that were drawn up as the initiative was intended to assist them in their professional growth. One conclusion that may be drawn from this experience is that teachers’ personal motivation for professional development would seem not to have reached the threshold point to propel self-directed learning.

### 3.6 Professional learning clusters

Professional learning clusters were the other additional activity introduced to the teacher development intervention from the start of 2012. It was envisaged that this initiative would provide an opportunity for teachers to meet in small subject clusters to share their experiences in the teaching of their subjects. These meetings were intended to create a forum for teachers to discuss curriculum, methodology and other issues pertaining to their work so that the observed good practices could be spread across the project schools and beyond.

No progress was registered in this initiative. When it was introduced to the teachers, they reported that they were not going to be able to meet in the suggested clusters because of transport and time challenges. An attempt was made to incorporate the professional learning meetings into the residential workshops, but this also meant...
taking up time from the workshops. The PLCs were therefore set aside until there is an opportunity to implement them effectively.

4. LESSONS LEARNT AND STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS
Some of the major lessons that have been learnt through the implementation of the GET teacher development intervention in the BSSIP are outlined below, together with some strategic considerations that could contribute to facilitating the implementation and effectiveness of systemic school improvement projects.

4.1 Systemic issues
A number of systemic issues stand in the way of improving learners’ educational achievements, even when strategic and well-planned interventions like the teacher development model or, indeed, the Systemic School Improvement Model employed in this project are put in place. These include:

- The post provisioning model, especially for small schools – the ratio used in the post provisioning model does not work well for small schools like those in this project;
- Heavy teacher workloads – which are caused largely by the need to cater for all the subjects across the curriculum;
- ‘Lack of respect’ for teachers’ specialisations – also caused largely by the need to cater for all the subjects across the curriculum; and
- Instability of teachers in schools – that is, the movement of teachers across subjects or their redeployment to other schools, either within or outside the project, during the course of its implementation.

Challenges such as these have destabilised the project. In some cases, it has been difficult to measure progress between one point of the project and another due to the changes in the cohort of teachers. In order for a project of this nature to run smoothly, there is a need to negotiate a commitment from the department to ensure that systemic issues that affect teacher development, such as those cited, do not impact on its implementation.

4.2 Time
The activities of the teacher development component of the project require sufficient time to register effective progress. There are a number of circumstances that work against the project in terms of time and, overall, the time available for the intervention is extremely limited in relation to the amount of content that is to be mediated.

4.3 Generalisation
There is a need for some caution in interpreting the results of the interventions in teacher development, taking account of factors surrounding the interventions. The results cannot be generalised solely on the basis of the prescribed dosage being completed, but should rather be interpreted in terms of individual cases. Teachers should be encouraged to participate in the complete programme of interventions for them to gain maximum benefit.

4.4 Unravelling teachers’ challenges in teaching
Some of the challenges experienced by teachers in the classroom may remain hidden even from appointed mentors because some teachers tend to feel uncomfortable being observed in their teaching practice, unless this takes place in lessons for which they consider themselves to have prepared thoroughly. In this way, teachers expose only their strong sides. There is a need for intensive mentoring and support in order to unravel the hidden realities in teachers’ classroom practices. In addition, there should be, ideally, a systemic mechanism to encourage teachers to participate freely in the classroom mentoring and support initiative and one which ensures that the teachers prepare and provide to mentors fresh and authentic lesson plans.
4.5 The lesson plan and lesson planning
Various understandings of the lesson plan and lesson planning are in circulation among different stakeholders. For instance, one school of thought holds the opinion that lesson plans are provided by the department, while another holds that the department only provides guidelines for lesson preparation. There are a lot of nuances that need to be unpacked regarding the lesson plan and lesson planning so that a common understanding can be reached among the teachers, government officials and mentors. This means, for example, that there should be one common lesson plan template to be used by all stakeholders.

4.6 The cost of face-to-face mentoring
Face-to-face mentoring is a costly exercise. This calls for an exploration of alternative means of conducting mentoring and support. ‘Remote mentoring’ through lesson plans and audio and video recordings of lessons could offer an alternative. This has the potential to address many of the challenges that are experienced in face-to-face mentoring as well as the problem of funding. However, face-to-face mentoring remains important and necessary. If remote mentoring were to be adopted, an advocacy campaign could be instituted to ensure that all stakeholders, including government officials, the schools, teachers and the unions buy into this new idea.

4.7 Measuring the impact of interventions
While increased achievement in learning and educational outcomes is the ultimate objective of this project, measuring successes in teacher development interventions against learners’ performance in examinations can be a challenge. The correlation between the two is not as obvious as might be thought. There appears to be a ‘gestation period’ that needs to be allowed to run its course before the fruits of teacher development are seen at the level of learner performance. More accurate measures of correlating learner performance and teacher development activities need to be formulated.

4.8 Project fatigue
In a relatively long-term project of this nature, there is a need to factor in initiatives to deal with project fatigue. While stakeholder commitment is essential for any project to run (smoothly), it remains one of the most difficult aspects to maintain. The levels of commitment that people hold at the start of a project tend to dwindle as the project moves forward.

One way of ensuring that teachers’ commitment to teacher development initiatives is maintained is to employ a process of screening the participants and selecting only those who are really committed to participate. Screening could be conducted continually, at progressive intervals throughout the project. The participating teachers’ commitment could be reinforced by periodic incentives linked to performance. Accreditation is also a key factor in this regard.

5. CONCLUSION
A lot of work has been carried out in the GET teacher development component since the inception of the BSSIP. Important strides have been made towards the success indicators of the logical framework, within the parameters of the priority to improve teachers’ content knowledge and to improve their performance in the classroom. The standardised tests clearly pointed out the areas in which the teachers in the project need strengthening in terms of their content knowledge and the interventions were formulated to address those specific areas. In respect of the interventions in GET, the teachers have developed substantially in both their competence and their performance.

Although the teacher development component has experienced some challenges, most of these have been dealt with during the course of the intervention. Those that have not been addressed are not insurmountable but present new opportunities and further potentially valuable lessons for future teacher development interventions.

There appears to be a ‘gestation period’ that needs to be allowed to run its course before the fruits of teacher development are seen at the level of learner performance.
Teacher testing provides projects with indications of teacher-specific needs so that training can be customised to the needs of the teachers, as opposed to following the one-size-fits-all approach. It is on this premise that the Bojanala Systemic School Improvement Project (BSSIP) undertook to test all General Education and Training (GET) teachers in the project schools in English and Numeracy/Mathematics.