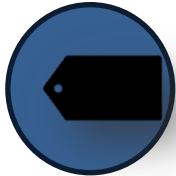# Lesson Learned: School-based Teacher Development Interventions

These lessons were drawn from a BRIDGE research project into several Gauteng Education Development Trust project, as well as from inputs and discussions in BRIDGE Community of Practice meetings.

PLANNING AND STAKHOLDER MANAGEMENT

Take time to plan and consult:

The planning and pre-implementation stages of a project should not be rushed. It is crucial that enough time is spent on (i) gathering all the relevant information to inform project design; and (ii) communicating with all relevant stakeholders in different and appropriate ways, so that everyone is prepared for implementation. A significant amount of time should be allocated to start-up and buy-in rather than rushing into delivery.

SELECTION

Include teachers and principals of participating schools in the initial stages of designing the project.

- Beneficiaries can give input on their expectations of realistic commitment.
- Project managers can be made aware of the demands of other district-led training which the teachers may have to attend, and of the influence of any other projects which may be operating in the school during the same period.
- The process helps beneficiaries see value in the project, which is important for commitment and participation.

Three possible approaches:

1. Select all teachers in a particular phase and subject area in a school.

- This approach is generally considered preferable as there should be a 'critical mass' of shared learning that could lead to school change rather than individual change.
- The intervention can build in some post-training collegial support frameworks for each participating school.

2. Select one teacher per school in a circuit or district.

- This may have to be the approach because of resource constraints.
- Teachers from different schools with geographical proximity can be linked to share learnings.
- Do not assume that teachers will go back and share learnings with colleagues in their own schools: time constraints and lack of confidence generally undermine this goal.

3. Ask for voluntary participation in an intervention.

- This has benefits in that it helps with commitment and buy-in.
- This has limitations in that those who really need the support or training offered don't participate.

Be aware that It is not always possible to predetermine selection criteria for teachers on a project, as the department may select teachers for the project. In this case, plan to (i) understand your target audience; and (ii) put some effort into 'selling' the intervention to the beneficiaries.

PROFILING / BASELINE ASSESSMENTS

Get a profile of teacher beneficiaries, including information such as qualifications, years of experience and whether they are teaching in the area for which they were trained. This is important for research and evaluation purposes.

Conduct a baseline assessment of teacher competence as required by the intervention; for example,

- Language proficiency in English as the LOLT
- Specific areas of numeracy, mathematics or science
- ICT skills if relevant

Conduct an induction process so that teachers understand the nature and scope of their commitment before the project begins.

NATURE OF TRAINING OR SUPPORT

Ensure that the type of training or support meets the requirements and features of the target phase of the intervention.

Offer accredited training for continuing professional development points.

- Sometimes works as an incentive for improved motivation.
- Usually associated with higher unit costs.
- There is no hard evidence that accredited training has more impact than non-accredited training.

Offer subject-specific training in content or methodology, linked to core teaching practices, e.g.

- Changes in knowledge (e.g. specific content areas; specific pedagogies such as error analysis)
- Changes in classroom management (e.g. planning, time management, pace, interaction)
- Changes in assessment practice
- Changes in dealing with ability levels
- Changes in the ways in which materials are mediated
- Changes in attitude.

Offer highly structured and tightly scripted programmes which emphasize curriculum coverage and are supported by good materials and resources.

Offer human resources support in the form of additional teachers (either to reduce class size or for team teaching) or in the form of a mentoring programme.

- The team teaching relationship has to be negotiated sensitively with teachers in schools, so that it is not perceived as a threat.
- Where a key project input is the provision of additional teachers to the school, the quality (knowledge, skills and attitudes) of these teachers needs to meet certain criteria.
- Team teaching can offer the following benefits, especially pertinent to large classes:
    - Sharing of work load, leading to faster feedback on assessment task.
    - Easier identification of problem areas and struggling learners.
    - Flexibility in terms of being able to relieve each other when necessary.
    - Ability to maintain the pace of teaching, in that one teacher can go back to basics with a group of learners while the other can maintain the specified teaching schedule.
- Programmes that design good mentoring programmes by on-site colleagues or 'change agents' are effective and sustainable.

Factor in ICT logistics: ICT-based projects are especially sensitive to hard-to-control logistical or practical factors such as connectivity or access to equipment. Even well-designed projects will not achieve their objectives if the beneficiaries can't get the exposure required by an e-learning intervention. ICT projects need to make sure the delivery site is suitable before implementation, and have technical resources or a back-up plan in place during implementation.

Set up Professional Learning Communities.

- Use PLCs as a mechanism for sharing practice and setting up teacher networks.
- You need to provide both administrative and developmental support for PLCs to be successful.
- Link PLCs to existing subject associations.

DURATION AND LOGISTICS

Teachers need sustained and regular engagement over a period of time in order to internalise new knowledge and practices. An intervention should be sufficiently long to allow for meaningful change in behaviour and in application to take place.

- Most teacher development projects should last a minimum of three years.
- Dosage is also important. Most projects appear to offer between 6 and 8 full days of training over the course of a year, usually holding either full or half-day workshops for teachers, roughly equivalent to 48 hours of professional development.
- Training interventions should also include school-based support visits with feedback on classroom practice assumed to be approximately 2 hours per visit, an additional 8 hours of support for four visits per year. The estimated average intervention would be around 56 hours of additional professional development for a teacher over a year.

Where possible, hold training workshops on site or in the area.

Don't overload individual training sessions with too much content.

Always record attendance.

Build in some kind of accountability, reflection process and record keeping for participating teachers.
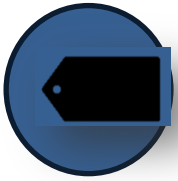
SUPPORTING TEACHERS

Ensure that the Principal and School Management Team are supportive and involved with the intervention before the project begins.

- Time off from some extra-curricular duties may need to be negotiated for teachers if their commitment is to be ensured.
- Recognition of effort from the Principal or HOD has been identified as a success factor.

Ensure that principals, SMTs and teacher beneficiaries get regular communication about the progress of the project.

Build in some form of on-site support after the project has finished for sustainability.

Build in some form of feedback loop to teachers on the outcomes of the project for sustainability.

Teacher incentives should be used with care, and within any professional regulatory framework. While these can be effective, they can also be abused, in that teachers may focus on the additional project work at the expense of day-to-day teaching.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Use appropriate expertise in designing and implementing an evaluation approach that will assess project effectiveness and impact in order to contribute to research in the sector.

Build in efficient processes for monitoring and gathering data on project progress for each phase of the intervention.

Be adaptable: Project scope needs to be responsive to changes in context. In long term projects over more than one year, it is probably desirable that Year 2 looks different to Year 1. The feedback loop from internal monitoring (or external evaluations at key stages) should be used for 'troubleshooting' implementation or delivery issues, in order to improve the project as it evolves. Unexpected outcomes need to be recorded and addressed.

Get comparative data at different stages of the intervention from initial baselines to post-project assessments.

Budget for a full and phased evaluation process.