UNIVERSITEIT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

APPENDIX E

PROJECT PROCESS REVIEW

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ANNEXURE TO THE GRADE 3 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH, SUPPORTED BY THE WESTERN CAPE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AND THE WESTERN CAPE PROVINCIAL TREASURY

August 2010

Version: 10 August 2010

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INTRODUCTION

The Grade 3 Improvement Project was conceived as collaboration between the Western Cape Treasury (WT), the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) and the University of Stellenbosch. Of particular importance for the success of the project was the level of collaboration and deliberation in conceiving, planning, finalising and executing the policy proposals.

A key reason for the successful completion of the research project was the extremely good levels of co-operation between the University of Stellenbosch research team, headed by Prof Servaas van der Berg, and the WCED Project team, in particular Ms Sindy Mafanga Kibi and Dr Andile Siyengo. The WCED Project Team's active involvement created the conditions necessary for the smooth roll-out of the project. Even more so, they formed a vital partner for reflection, ensuring that proposals, instruments and processes were grounded in the realities of schools and the Education Department.

Furthermore, this level of involvement lay the best possible groundwork for successful transfer of expertise and research skills and possible implementation of proposals. The University of Stellenbosch research team is therefore confident that the project thrust will have a longevity that far outlives just this project.

This addendum of the final report focuses on the process of conducting the research, aiming to identify those factors that contributed to the successful execution of the project and its research, the lessons learnt for the potential future utilisation of the results, the instruments and the general aim of the project.

Conception of the project proposal

As the outcome of the research is policy proposals potentially to be implemented by the WCED and its structures, the research had to be co-led by the WCED. At the same time, the focus on effective systemic outcomes was an important focus of the Treasury.

The aim of the research was always policy development to address the development of policy proposals and development priorities and opportunities.

Development of the project implementation plan

The level of co-operation in finalising the project plan ensured full buy-in from all participating parties. Important adjustments were made to the research design on recommendation from the WCED. Again this illustrates the importance of involving the Provincial Departments at every step of the project.

The fact that the project plan was co-developed by the research teams of the WCED and University of Stellenbosch meant that all required resources could be identified and assembled. In particular, ensuring that the school visits took place during suitable times was important.

An extremely helpful decision was the choice of the fieldworkers. After much discussion and on the strong recommendation of the WCED, it was decided to use Foundation Phase curriculum advisors as fieldworkers.

The two-fold benefit of this choice was that (1) fieldworkers were familiar with the particular conditions found in foundation phase classrooms as well as having specialist knowledge about the educational requirements, styles, methodologies, pace, etc., and (2) even more importantly, by being involved in the process, participating curriculum advisors gained substantial insight and professional growth and became an important part of the legacy of the expertise and skills developed during the project.

Capacity building was carried out in more than one way. A core team of knowledgeable and motivated staff are now available to the WCED to drive the policies in the Department, their respective districts and schools under their guidance.

Project implementation

School engagement

The best planning comes to nought without proper implementation. Here we have to commend the WCED project team again for their dedicated and professional conduct. All activities were properly planned and communicated. The fieldworkers therefore experienced little problems in entering schools. Principals were co-operative and indicated that it was also important for them to get a clearer understanding of the relative performance of their schools. Teachers were in the main also positive about participating in the process. School visits were undertaken by the project manager, Mr Herman Meyer, to monitor the process, but no major problems were encountered. Conversations with principals and teachers were very positive as they all expressed interest in the outcome of the project and the potential implications for their work.

Feedback sessions

During the fieldwork phase, weekly feedback sessions were held between the research teams of the WCED and the US as well as the fieldworkers. The results of these debriefing sessions were fed back into the research findings, and provided an opportunity to get a more nuanced view of the data collected. At the same time, it also gave the research teams an opportunity to identify and address possible challenges experienced by fieldworkers.

The only major disruption was a voluntary religious holiday during one week, which led to a number of classes not being observed on that day. The research team adjusted the data to compensate for that, and some rescheduling took place in the field.

At final feedback session held at the University of Stellenbosch, more detailed feedback was received and fieldworkers were also presented with some preliminary data findings. They all expressed the wish to be given more thorough feedback on the research findings at an appropriate time.

Change management and implementation of policy proposals

Some of the policy proposals, especially those aimed at institutional and systemic changes, require dedicated implementation guided by a change management process. It is proposed that the dissemination of results as well as the implementation of the policy proposals be incorporated into the general development plan of the WCED. The implementation also needs to be overseen by the change management experts within the WCED.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The research team identified capacity building as an important feature, if initially not included in the original proposal.

WCED research team in particular Research Services

The WCED Research Services section was closely involved in the detailed planning, execution and generation of the research result report. As already stated, their effort under the guidance of Ms Mafanga Kibi and Dr Siyengo was of great value. Their role as discussion partners and soundboard ensured a greater awareness on the part of the research team of the institutional and educational contexts and conditions within which the research was conducted and within which the policy proposals will have to be implemented.

It is also proposed that further development and training is conducted in and with this section to ensure that they are able to take the research further. A first step may be to look at strengthening the capacity of the WCED to conduct good and accurate data analysis though training.

Fieldworkers (Curriculum Advisors)

The choice of district curriculum advisors as field workers was discussed in quite some depth as there were good arguments why fieldworkers should or should not come from the WCED. In the end it was decided to use curriculum advisors, inter alia in order to transfer skills/ build capacity.

The group of curriculum advisors selected was of a high quality and definitely contributed to the project success. However, it became apparent in the course of time that a substantial amount of training was required to ensure that curriculum advisors were fully able to fulfil the role of fieldworkers/researchers. The training included a strong focus on ensuring that fieldworkers refrain from intervening in class interaction. This forced them to not jump to conclusions about what they were observing, but to be guided by the instruments (questionnaires) that they were administering. Even so, a substantial amount of observations still dealt with form rather than substance.

The outcome of the process was a group of curriculum advisors who were exposed to classrooms over an extended period of time, having received training to sensitise them to identifying the key aspects of classroom interaction and practice. They were also guided in recording their observations in a systematic way, utilising uniform instruments. In addition, the feedback sessions also acted as a forum for reflection and further development during which many important issues were identified and discussed under guidance of Dr Cheryl Reeves and Prof Servaas van der Berg.

The general feedback from the fieldworkers was that the process was an important opportunity for them to reflect on classroom practices. They were forced to question their own views on classroom practice and pre-conceived ideas about what they expected to find in classrooms. It also provided them with examples of the type of interventions required for them to be able to identify with greater certainty what was going on in class. All indicated that the process provided them with the skills and tools to continue similar practices during their normal interaction with teachers. They expressed a desire to have access to the instruments (in particular the classroom observation schedule – Instrument 1) as a tool to use. It was stressed, however, that if this was to become a more widely used instrument for all curriculum advisors, it would have to be combined with some training. It also created awareness in them about all the required processes, educational challenges and classroom materials necessary in the FP. It appeared to show many of them that problems were not confined to their own work environment, but were part of a bigger pattern of educational non-performance

Benefit of extended training

Even with the training, some smaller problems in the application of the instruments still arose. If the Department wishes to utilise the instruments again for whatever purpose, it is important to ensure that educators who will use the instruments need to be familiar with not only the correct methods of applying the instruments, but more importantly perhaps, that they be familiarised with the educational rationale that underpins the instruments.

Further research and development

A study as comprehensive as this is likely to encounter areas where further information and in some cases are required.

More importantly though are opportunities for development of materials and training. The instruments can be used (with some modification) as tools for classroom observation and analysis to form the basis for support to teachers in the FP as well as provide a tool for training materials. This is particularly the case for Instruments 1 (Classroom Observation), Instrument 2 (Document Review), Instrument 3 (Grade 3 Learner Test) and Instrument 5 (Teacher Interview).

Communication and dissemination of research results

The successful implementation of policy also depends on the acceptance and acceptability of such policies. A key question that needs to be addressed is in what way the results and proposals should be disseminated and communicated. Dissemination of the insights and results must act as a sensitisation to the magnitude of the problem and motivation to become actively involved. At the same time it would be important to ensure that the recommendations are linked to other monitoring campaigns such as the systemic testing.

It is proposed that a number of media and other opportunities are utilised to disseminate the information:

1. An established forum be selected where the results can be disseminated to specific audiences at head office level.

2. Similar events be held for other educational leaders such as principals and district officials (e.g. curriculum advisors, etc.)
3. Opportunities at local and district level be created for dissemination to teachers.
4. Written communication with results be utilised to reach the widest possible audience, e.g. circulars, article in the WCED newspaper
5. Opportunities for dissemination at seminars, workshops and conferences should be sought.
6. Publication of research papers be encouraged.
7. Further research using some of the information gathered be encouraged.
8. Dissemination to the wider population, in particular the parent community, be pursued.
9. The research findings to be linked to popular information campaign about Foundation Phase.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

The data collection instruments are not included in the final report because of a need for brevity (and regards for the environment).

However, the WCED and WCT have received a full set of the instruments in both electronic and hard copy formats.