

Highlights of Meeting of the Monitoring and Evaluation Colloquium

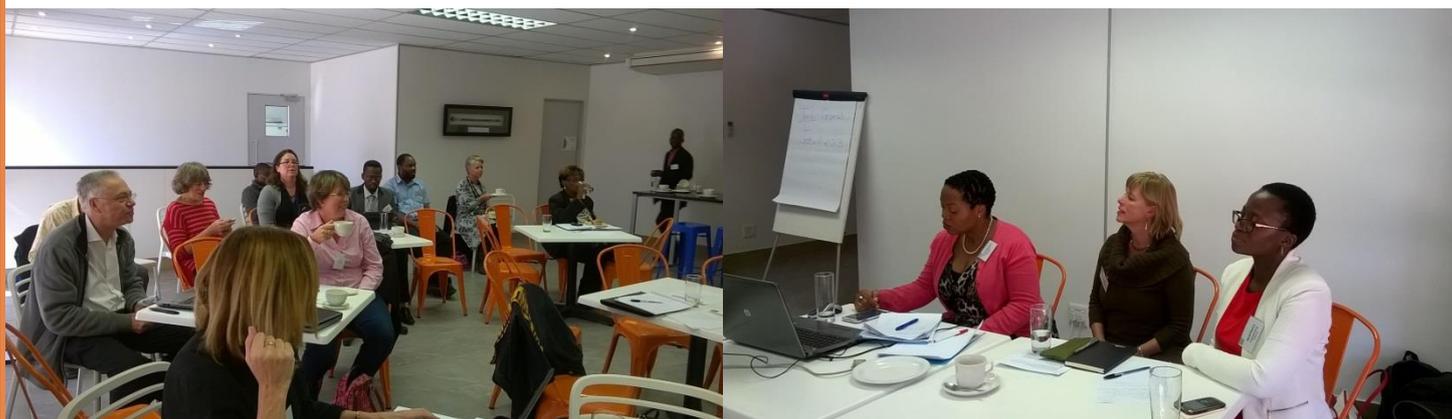
Review of Maths Chairs Initiative Evaluation

14 May 2015



Setting the scene

The Monitoring and Evaluation action group of the Maths and Science Learner Support CoP met in May 2014 to discuss and review the recent evaluation conducted on the First Rand Foundation Mathematics Chairs Initiative in South Africa. The community was comprised of various academics, researchers in Maths education as well as evaluation specialists. Seated in the room we also heard perspectives from programme managers and a district official from the Gauteng East district. Presenting the background to the evaluation and programme was Tshikululu's Mokibelo Ntshabeleng, joined by Jennifer Bisgard of Khulisa Management Services and Thandi Mgwebi of the National Research Foundation. The purpose of the day was to engage with the content and processes of the evaluation, rather than the findings, as a way of collaboratively reflecting on Monitoring and Evaluation processes as a whole in the country.



Overview of presentations

The day began with a broad overview of the programme and rationale for the Maths Chairs Initiative also referred to as MECI. The programme was first conceived in 2008 as a blended model that engaged higher education research with a focused developmental approach. It is a public-private partnership between the FirstRand Foundation (Rand Merchant Bank Fund), the Anglo American Chairman's Fund and the Department of Science and Technology. Through working with the National Research Foundation, MECI made funding available for 6 academics around the country who undertook to do research in Mathematics education while starting development projects that would support and make use of that research. Two chairs were focused on early foundation mathematics learning known as the Numeracy chairs, and the remaining chairs focused on the GET and FET bands. Each chair identified ten primary or secondary schools to work in, with an investment of R60 million for a five year period, and the district departments were integral to the success of all the initiatives.



Envisaged outcomes

- Focus on possible solutions rather than the crisis
- Moving focus from 'what is' to 'what ought to be'
- Changing the conversation/discourse about mathematics education in SA based on well researched, practical and sustainable solutions to the maths crisis



MECI evaluation methodologies



Because of the uniqueness of this project it also required a unique evaluation process. Essentially two evaluations were conducted: One focused on content and quality of the research outputs, and the other on the impact of the developmental projects.

Click this [link](#) to view the video of Mokibelo’s introduction.

Table of the Dual M&E Processes

Khulisa Management Services	National Research Foundation
Conducted two evaluation processes 1) Level 1 Mid and final evaluations of each chairs’ programmes 2) Level 2 Mid-term and final evaluation of the model as a whole.	Maths Chairs form part of the established South African Research Chairs unit. Thus, monitoring and review systems are already set in place for chairs to meet.
Negotiations, School functionality diagnostics and development of Theory of Change informed evaluation.	At proposal stage chairs had gone through a review and approval of outcomes that guided this process.
Approaches used: - Developmental Evaluation - Utilisation Focused Evaluation - Appreciative Inquiry Evaluation	In put processes followed: - Annual Progress Reports (APRs) submitted by the Chair holder - Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) institutional level impact report - Five-year postal review of each Research Chair - Site visits to the Research Chairs at host universities by the NRF management team
7 Core indicators: - Impact - Effectiveness	Indicators sought for vary under each process: APR

- Relevance
- Cost Analysis
- Sustainability
- Research Outcomes
- Replication and Generativity

- Performance Assessment
- Benefit analysis
- And more

DVC Report

- Details of the chairs hosted at the University
- Benefit assessment of the chair

5 year Postal Review

- Research Outputs
- Development Outputs
- Students support (post graduate students and postdoctoral fellows)
- Support from host institutions
- Funds leveraged from other sources
- Proposed Research Plan and Budget for the next cycle.

Difficulties cited in process:

- Establishing differences between research and evaluation.
- Each chairs used their own hypothesis, and evaluation needed to reflect and speak to each chair individually.
- Communication between this evaluation and the NRFs was difficult, tried to avoid duplication.

Difficulties cited in process:

- Two parallel evaluations using some indicators that are common but data and information not always easy to share.

Click [here](#) for the full presentation given by Khulisa and for the full presentation NRF click [here](#).



For the video to these presentations follow the link [here](#)



Discussion

- Lessons for programme managers were plenty; central was the issue of streamlining and combining the evaluation process. It was also noted that moving forward the project needed to build in a verification and validation process for data collected.
- The process of getting district support was a long one. A chair, present in the room, highlighted how initially relationships with the district departments of education had to be established, as well establishing functionality of schools before buy in of school leaders and teachers could be identified.

THEME

Key to the discussion was the urge expressed by many CoP members for the sector, and especially funders, to start sharing their evaluations. Making findings, challenges and recommendations public goes a long way to informing lessons learnt and avoiding similar experiences.

- The issue of functionality was discussed and questioned considering how unstable levels of functionality can be. Jennifer Bisgard explained the Rapid Diagnostic Test (Previously presented in another CoP) as the tool used to determine functionality, and how schools can easily slip into dysfunctional if not properly monitored. Context also plays a big role in determining the relevance of each category a school may sit in. A point was raised about how the department of education understands school functionality and the indicators they use. Are the indicators programme implementers using to determine and support school functionality aligned to the departments indicators? And what does that mean for schools involved in interventions needing to balance the two?
- In defence of the sector starting to change its secretive ways around publishing evaluations, a conversation ensued about the new Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation's repository. It is not yet available to the public as reviews and approval processes need to be followed but the potential usefulness of such a repository was highlighted.
- Impact on learners and learner outcomes was also debated, with some cautioning the ability to make conclusions about the chairs as they work with school teachers. It is difficult to establish causality. This issue was linked to how we assess learners. Good quality tests are scarce and hard to find, should there be an investment in building a test repository or should government be investing in building up expertise in assessments country wide?



Facilitator Reflection on the CoP

- The discussion ended with overall agreement about needing to share lessons learnt in order to build better programmes, and reach stronger impacts. The question of the sustainability of the projects was raised and this linked to conversations about steps moving forward, however a re-investment into this project would be needed to continue the gains already seen.
- A question was left unanswered in terms of developing the viability of this model into other research chair components. Is there a benefit to having more researchers engaged in developmental work using their established knowledge and in turn having practice knowledge feedback into their research?
- A discussion on the need to share knowledge links closely to an upcoming BRIDGE community of practice meeting, and all were encouraged to attend.

Annexure

Name	Organisation
Caphius Chauke	Penreach
Carol Wyeth	Alexandra Education Committee
Chim Kamanga	JET Education services
Craig Pournara	Wits University
Elizabeth Henning	UJ Education
Hamsa Venkat	Wits
Jennifer Bisgard	Khulisa Management Services- Presenter
Jill Adler	University of the Witwatersrand
Kim Draper	Centre for Development and Enterprise
Maryla Bialobrzaska	SAIDE
Melissa King	BRIDGE
Mike Askew	Wits University
Moipone Maleka	Department of Education: Gauteng East District
Mokibelo Ntshabeleng	Tshikululu Social Investments - Presenter
Moloko Malahlela	Sci-Bono Discovery Centre
Nick Taylor	JET education
Sanette Mattheus	Penreach
Thabo Moloji	Dinoto Technical School
Thandi Lewin	JET Education
Thandi Mgwebi	National Research Foundation - Presenter
Zarina Khan	Facilitator