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Final Technical Advisor Report Philip R. Christensen

***Educational Policy, Management and Technology
(EPMT) Project
Swaziland
August 1991—April 1995***

Submitted 7 June, 1996

PD

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**interoffice
memorandum**

DATE: Friday, June 7, 1996.

TO: Cooper Dawson

FROM: Phil Christensen 

SUBJECT: Final Report

At long last, here is my final report. I would like to again extend my apologies to you and, through you, to the USAID Mission for the extended delay in its arrival. In retrospect, it seems to have had the gestation period of an elephant with the birth weight of a mouse. However, as the report itself explains, much that would normally be included in such a document is now irrelevant. Furthermore, as I have already discussed with you and with Don Foster-Gross, the kinds of insights that I still might offer constructively are probably reflected better in my inputs to Julianne Gilmore's monograph on the project than they could be in this more formal report.

I am faxing you one copy of the report today. We will FedEx the original hard copy plus a disk with the text in WordPerfect 5.1 (PRCFINAL.WP5) and Microsoft Word 6 (PRCFINAL.DOC) formats. The report was prepared in Word 6, so the translated WordPerfect version may use strange fonts or have other problems. However, the computer-readable versions should still allow you to access or alter the document should you so require.

It was a true pleasure working with you and the rest of the EPMT team. My experience in Namibia has shown me with stark clarity just how fortunate we were to have such effective cooperation among host ministry, donor and contractor. It was a rare privilege, one that I will always appreciate.

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INTRODUCTION

This report is being written more than a year after my departure from Swaziland on 16 April 1995. The delay was caused by the unexpected suddenness of my transfer from the Swaziland EPMT Project to the new Namibia Basic Education Support (BES) Project and the unusually prolonged start-up pressures of that new project. I sincerely regret the late submission of this document.

The report covers my tour of duty with EPMT from 15 August, 1991, through 15 April, 1995. For the first two months of this tour I was assigned the position of Management Information Specialist, replacing Dr. Rick Johnson. In October, 1991, the first EPMT Chief of Party, Mr. Roy Thompson, suffered a severe heart attack. Fortunately he made an excellent recovery, but nevertheless he was forced to retire early from the Project for medical reasons. I took over from him as Chief of Party on an acting basis immediately upon his falling ill, and was confirmed in early 1992 as the permanent EPMT Chief of Party. My technical responsibilities initially focused on the MIS. However, the arrival in January, 1992, of a Peace Corps Volunteer in the MIS Office, Ms. Sue Grolnic, allowed me to broaden my technical support to include instructional systems design work for both Continuous Assessment and Head Teacher Management Training. This account, therefore, is being written from my point of view as EPMT Chief of Party for much, but not all, of the Project's life, as well as from my technical perspective as an Instructional Systems Designer with Management Information Systems expertise.

Usually a Chief of Party's end-of-tour report is the project's final report itself. It assesses project accomplishments and problems from the perspective of the finish line. However, the fact that I took over as COP more than a year after the project began and left more than a year prior to its scheduled completion means that my work was only a part of the whole story. Furthermore, the fact that this document is being written so long after my own departure means that the current status of the project has moved substantially beyond what I knew. Therefore, a long analysis of EPMT from the vantage point of April, 1995, seems both unnecessary and unimportant. My personal conclusions and recommendations are, by now, obsolete.

Instead, I have prepared a more concise document whose intent is to provide a "snapshot" of where the Project was at the time I left. It comprises a component-by-component summary of progress to that date, a discussion of each of my contractual duties, and a report on four additional handover responsibilities. The recommendations section commonly found in final reports is absent for the reasons just explained. I will leave it to the technical advisors still in Swaziland to complete the story of EPMT's success in their own final reports.

The EPMT Project benefited from an unusually effective collaboration between the host government, through the Swaziland Ministry of Education, the donor, USAID, and the contractor, the Institute for International Research (IIR). I sincerely hope and believe that the children of Swaziland will ultimately be the beneficiaries of this successful partnership. For my part, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for having been given the chance to participate in this success and my deepest gratitude to all of my colleagues, Swazi and expatriate alike, for having made my time with EPMT so rewarding.

SUMMARY PROJECT STATUS

As explained above, my leaving Swaziland prior to EPMT's conclusion means that I cannot report on the final status of each project component. For the same reason, there would be little value in my detailed discussion of planning or implementation issues as of April, 1995. The project continued to grow successfully after I left, and I trust that the concerns facing it in more than a year ago have, for the most part, long since been addressed. However, for the record I will briefly summarize here the status of each EPMT component as of my departure.

Continuous Assessment

CA implementation for Maths and English was extended to Grade 3 at the beginning of 1995. Grade 3 teachers had been given initial training and plans had been made for their zonal follow-up training. Initial training for Grade 1 and 2 teachers was complete. Head teachers had been trained since 1993; they received an additional three days of CA training in January, 1995. CA objectives and item specifications for the first three grades had been distributed. All term tests for Grades 1 and 2 had been developed along with the Grade 3 end-of-year test, which was used at the end of 1994 for baseline data collection. Specific remedial and enrichment strategies for Grade 3 Math and English had been implemented. Grade 4 end-of-term tests were being pilot tested, and work on Grade 5 objectives and item specifications had begun. New strategies for developing remedial materials and an item bank had been prepared and were awaiting implementation. Preliminary work had been accomplished on extending the CA program to Social Studies (Grade 3 objectives and item specs) and Science (Grade 1 objectives and item specs). A systematic formative evaluation system involving ongoing classroom observations was in process. Master's degree training had been provided to two CA Unit staff members, and two six-month internships at UMass had been carried out.

Head Teacher Management Training

A needs assessment for head teacher management training was completed and a curriculum developed to address the critical skills it identified. This work was done under the leadership of the Technical Advisor, Dr. Harold Bergsma, and in cooperation with the Ministry's In-Service Education unit, INSET. Training courses (each comprising a trainer's manual and a trainee's manual) were developed for Personnel Management, Organizational Management, Money Management and Instructional Leadership. Money Management was designed as a two-week course; the remaining three were one week each. The first three cycles of head teacher training, aimed at primary-level school heads, had been completed successfully. Cycle 4, for secondary school heads plus remaining primary heads, began with the Money Management course in January, 1995. That course had been revised for use at the secondary levels, and similar revisions were being completed for the other three courses. Master's degree training had been provided to two INSET Lecturers (one of whom was working closely with CA), as well as three-month UMass internships to two additional INSET Lecturers (both working with CA).

Management Information Systems

Building on a school mapping exercise carried out just prior to the commencement of EPMT operations, a data base was constructed as the core of the Ministry's new MIS function. The Teaching Service Commission (TSC) personnel system was then computerized and linked to the MIS. Additional data were captured from other GOS offices, primarily the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Treasury. Arrangements were concluded with the CSO to provide routinely for MIS data from its annual school survey, and to include additional questions of interest to MOE in that survey. MOE had hired a permanent MIS Specialist who was in the process of being trained on the job as well as through short courses and study tours in the region. The system was being used regularly to respond to specific demands from key MOE staff members and other government ministries, to generate informational reports of general interest to Ministry staff and other constituencies, and to support policy development for the Ministry. Some training seminars on interpreting and using data from the system had been held for interested Ministry staff.

Organizational Development

Our conception of organizational development evolved significantly over the course of the project to focus eventually on a new policy support process and a related Ministry effort to improve the quality of education. Thanks to excellent cooperation from the World Bank and the Research Triangle Institute (RTI), EPMT was able to support a computer-based modeling tool for examining the implications to the education system of potential changes in policy and practice. Examples of the impact of these interventions could be readily found in Ministry deliberations on issues ranging from budget preparation to teaching post allocation. The OD component also supported classroom-based research activities, not only for the sake of the useful information they generated but also as a capacity-building exercise within the system.

Guidance and Counselling

The purpose of this component was to assist the Ministry's Educational Testing, Guidance and Psychological Services (ETGPS) to extend career information to Swazi students at the primary and junior secondary levels. Four specific guidance documents were produced with support from the Technical Advisor, Dr. Lily Chu: *Career Education Lessons*, *Counselling Articles*, *Career Interest Booklet*, and *Career File*. Work was completed with the National Curriculum Centre on a career guidance unit for the revised Grade 7 Social Studies textbook. Master's degree training was provided to two ETGPS staff members. In-service workshops were held for a variety of Ministry staff representing guidance, teaching training and curriculum functions. However, on-the-job training for new primary guidance officers could not be carried out as planned because the posts were still vacant at the conclusion of the advisor's tour.

POSITION DUTIES

The EPMT contract as amended in July, 1994, specified 11 duties for the Chief of Party. These are listed below with a brief statement of accomplishments and issues for each one.

As technical assistance:

- 1. Support the on-going evaluation and improvement of a sustainable and effective Continuous Assessment system for English and Math in Grades 1-4.*

My primary inputs to CA were through cooperation with and direction to the two CA Technical Advisors, Dr. Aida Pasigna and Ms. Grolnic. In the earlier stages of the project, during Dr. Pasigna's time, the main issues I addressed included insuring that the system developed was technically sound while also manageable in practice, mediating differences between EPMT and UMass inputs, building support among senior Ministry officials, and containing costs (current and projected) for the system. In the later stages, after Ms. Grolnic became the advisor for training, I continued to monitor these areas. I also worked with the new TA on helping MOE redesign the CA system to enhance its sustainability and impact. I made several attempts to describe and systematize the CA production process, but these ultimately were unsuccessful. In the end, instead of trying to better articulate a very complicated process we decided to simplify that process wherever possible. The CA Planning retreat in March, 1995, one of my last major project activities, represented the beginning of this work.

- 2. Assist the MOE to develop training strategies that will enable teachers to use CA tests and remedial strategies appropriately to increase student learning.*

These training strategies were successfully developed by Ms. Grolnic. They involved a careful reworking of the written support materials, an innovative redesign of the basic training strategy to incorporate zonal follow-up workshops after the initial beginning-of-year training week, and continuing training-of-trainers workshops for the CA Unit plus other training team members. My support was limited to occasional conceptual discussions with Ms. Grolnic and general monitoring of the development and implementation of the new training program.

- 3. Help the MOE plan for the continuation of CA after project support ends, and for its extension to other grades (and, possibly, other subjects).*

Point one above summarizes my support of the planning process for CA continuation. While the issue of extending CA to other grades and subjects was raised during this process, I left before it could be explored in any depth.

- 4. Support MOE's efforts to complete the initial head teacher management training and design on-going in-service head teacher training.*

By the date of my departure the final cycle of head teacher training was underway. The target audience was all secondary head teachers plus a few primary school heads not already reached by the program. INSET was fully in charge of planning and implementing the training. They arranged to edit the training modules with assistance from one EPMT consultant. Further project support was limited to arranging to reprint edited modules and paying for workshop accommodation costs. INSET was having some difficulty staying on schedule, due primarily to delays in the materials editing work, but adequate time still remained to complete the training. I had not yet instituted discussions on the on-going, post-EPMT program in-service training program.

5. *Assist Swazi counterparts to implement a management information system that is used by MOE planners and policy makers, providing technical assistance to the MIS specialist.*
6. *Support MOE organizational development efforts, as required.*

The lead IIR Advisor with direct responsibility for points five and six was Mr. Dawson. Mr. Steve Lewis, the Peace Corps-provided MIS Specialist who replaced Ms. Grolnic, also played a key role here. Much of their work was based on the policy support model developed by RTI in collaboration with Ministry and IIR staff, as well as its developing links to the World Bank-supported quality improvement exercise. I provided general support to the work of Messrs. Dawson and Lewis, primarily at the strategic level. I also worked with them to develop a viable approach to professional development for the MOE MIS Specialist.

As Chief of Party:

7. *Develop annual work plans. Monitor progress of project components and carry out short-term planning and implementation adjustments with MOE, USAID and Contractor staff members.*

During my tenure as EPMT Chief of Party I developed four annual work plans for project years three to six.¹ I made substantial changes in format for the first of these, using a new planning and reporting model designed to more clearly link specific activities to project goals. After an executive summary and introductory section to make the plan more accessible to readers whose time might be limited, each annual plan begins with a list of the project's EOPS (end-of-project status indicators). For each component the relevant EOPS are then restated, followed by the main activities planned for the year in order to make progress towards those goals. Specific tasks are listed under each activity and summarized (with dates) on Gantt charts to show precisely what will be done and when. A proposed budget for each component estimates costs to the contract and to GOS for each activity under the component. The work plan concludes with consolidated reports on IIR personnel, consultants required during the year, training activities planned for the year, the overall EPMT contract budget, and anticipated GOS contributions. This format worked well in practice, making it relatively easy for MOE, USAID and IIR's technical team to monitor progress and make necessary adjustments. For this purpose I held weekly meetings with USAID's project manager and meetings as required with key MOE officials.

8. *Prepare semi-annual progress reports and other reports as required.*

When I began work for EPMT in 1991 the project and its advisors faced a heavy reporting load. Each advisor submitted a monthly activity summary to the Chief of Party, who in turn had to prepare quarterly reports for USAID with additional sections semi-annually. Feeling that the paperwork involved was impeding the advisors' technical inputs, and with support from the USAID Project Officer, we eliminated the internal monthly reports and two quarterly reports per year. These were replaced with an expanded semi-annual report. As with the work plan, I adjusted the format of the semi-annual report in order to improve its utility as a monitoring tool for USAID, MOE and IIR. Wherever possible I provided the same types of information required by USAID for its own semi-annual project implementation reviews and presented it in a manner consistent with those requirements. I also linked the semi-annual

¹ Project year one was a pre-implementation year that preceded the beginning of IIR's institutional contract. The work plan for year two, the first year of IIR's operation in Swaziland under EPMT, was developed by the first COP, Mr. Roy Thompson, along with a life-of-project plan. The final annual work plan was prepared by my successor, Mr. Cooper Dawson.

reports directly to the annual work plan. For example, for each EOPS the report showed the baseline (e.g., the situation that obtained when the project began), the current status, and our strategies for achieving that goal. Every component reported on the status of all activities in the work plan and (for the mid-year report) suggested any adjustments required to that plan. Broad issues requiring the attention of the EPMT partners were discussed in a separate section. This format seemed to work well in practice, although it required substantial time from individual advisors and, especially, the COP. The new quarterly reporting format implemented by USAID in 1995 simplified the task substantially, although some useful information from the earlier semi-annual reports was lost.

9. Coordinate activities of project components. Review equipment and software specifications, training plans, and implementation plans for project components.

When I assumed the Chief of Party position, meetings of the technical team were held monthly. I changed these sessions to regular *component* meetings, held just prior to every meeting of the EPMT Steering Committee, as my primary strategy for coordinating implementation plans, training plans and work plan activities. Each project component was represented by its technical advisor and the responsible MOE officer. This eliminated the appearance that advisors were operating unilaterally and brought the Ministry directly into the implementation and monitoring processes. The later benefit was especially important as advisors began to leave the project at the conclusion of their contracts, since the components affected were still represented by their Ministry heads. As for equipment and software specifications, these were primarily an issue at the beginning of the project, when procurement was most intensive. For such reviews I worked directly with the advisors and components involved, with substantial assistance from Ms. Grolnic for computer-related procurement.

10. Manage and administer the Contractor field office in the Ministry of Education.

11. Manage the procurement, receipt, distribution, and inventorying of all commodities purchased under the contract.

Points 10 and 11 were carried out on a day-to-day basis that would be trivial to report in detail. In most of this work I was ably assisted by the EPMT Administrative Assistant, Mr. Mduzuzi Shongwe, who took primary responsibility for point 11 and substantial administrative responsibility under point 10. In all of our efforts the objective was to accomplish project goals and contractual deliverables by making it possible for our technical team and their Ministry colleagues to carry out their work smoothly, with as few constraints as possible.

HANDOVER RESPONSIBILITIES

On 27 February, 1995, IIR's President, Dr. Paul Spector, submitted a detailed proposal to USAID/Swaziland for responding to my early departure from Swaziland. This proposal was based on discussions with USAID's Project Officer and Project Manager for EPMT, as well as informal consultations within the Ministry of Education. It was reviewed in depth at a meeting with myself, Mr. Cooper Dawson, my designated replacement in the Chief of Party position, and key USAID staff. Although IIR had not yet received a formal reply from the Mission prior to my departure, we had been informed that a Project Implementation Letter reflecting its contents has been delivered to the Principal Secretary at MOE and was awaiting his signature. Furthermore, the Regional Contracting Officer approved my early departure under the "key personnel" provision of the EPMT contract. Therefore, we operated on the assumption that this proposal was acceptable to USAID.

Dr. Spector's submission identified four key tasks that I was required to complete prior to departing post. All of these were accomplished, as described below. I would like to thank all of my colleagues for their support in helping me finish these activities on time, with particular appreciation to Mr. Dawson and Ms. Grolnic for the extra help that they offered when it was so badly needed.

1. Supporting the CA planning retreat and the follow-up planning efforts during Dr. Pasigna's consultancy

The Continuous Assessment planning retreat was held from 7th to 10th March, 1995, in Piggs Peak. It succeeded in at least two significant ways. First, it specified important revisions to the design and implementation of the CA system, revisions that should enhance the sustainability of the program. Second, it broadened the constituency discussing how to insure the continuation of the CA program, including representatives from key GOS ministries such as Economic Planning.

2. Completing the financial monitoring and planning system for EPMT

By the date of my departure, the EPMT Field Office had developed a sophisticated spreadsheet for tracking and projecting expenses throughout the remaining life of the project. This tool was designed to track actual versus anticipated expenses on a month-by-month, line-by-line basis, identifying areas where expenditures were likely to substantially exceed or fall short of the budget. The tool was intended to serve as an early warning system, allowing IIR and USAID to effectively spend all project funds within the time available.

3. Designing the new quarterly reporting system

On 13 October, 1994, the Agency for International Development's Office of Procurement issued a universal, unilateral modification for all cost-reimbursement and requirements contracts exceeding \$200,000 in calendar-year expenditures. The modification specified a new format for quarterly progress reports intended to simplify the process while providing the Agency with information in a consistent format. Based on this guidance I developed a new model for EPMT's quarterly reports that maintained our previous approach of clearly tying progress reporting to contractual deliverables while complying with the new USAID requirements.

4. *Planning a smooth handover to Mr. Dawson*

The details of accomplishing this task are too numerous and uninteresting to list here. Suffice it to say that by the day of my departure, Mr. Dawson and I had worked together to make certain that each of us was ready for our new roles. I had completed all pending responsibilities (with the notable exception of this report), and the two of us had held several meetings to insure that a smooth transition could take place.