

Binding Constraints Lab

# Scaling youth pathways in education


## Summary

The Binding Constraints Lab (BCL) hosted a workshop on scaling youth pathways in education on 27 October 2023. The BCL's goal is to identify high-potential opportunities in education and transitions to work, and explore how they might be implemented at scale.


BINDING CONSTRAINTS LAB




# Background

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South Africa faces significant challenges in both youth unemployment and education:



**1 in 3 young people** are not in education, employment or training (NEET)[1]



**Just 1 in 5 children** can read for meaning by Grade 4.2

Efforts have been made to address these challenges. Notably, over the last three years 860,000 young people have been placed in schools through the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI), part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus.[3] Schools are overwhelmingly pleased with the programme: 95% of teachers and principals say it has strengthened the learning environment and want the programme to continue.[4] And a number of smaller-scale programmes have demonstrated that young people are capable of delivering programmes that measurably improve children's learning outcomes.

In this context, the Binding Constraints Lab (BCL) hosted a workshop on scaling youth pathways in education on 27 October 2023. The BCL's goal is to identify high-potential opportunities in education and transitions to work, and explore how they might be implemented at scale.

The workshop drew together 26 sector experts from the Department of Basic Education (DBE), higher education institutions (HEIs), initial teacher education (ITE) programmes, and civil society organisations focused on education and youth employment (see Appendix A: participants for a list).

This briefing note summarises key insights from the conversations.

1 Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023
2 Department of Basic Education 2023
3 Youth Capital 2023
4 Philip 2022





# Workshop overview

The workshop objectives were to:

- Identify and share working models for building youth pathways in education – highlighting evidence, lessons learned and on-the-ground examples of what's possible;
- Re-imagine a more supportive and streamlined system, while balancing what is practically and politically possible; and
- Forge new, cross-sector connections between influential players in the space that spark further collaboration.

Participants reflected on the current context, shared experiences and lessons from their own work, and unpacked two key questions:

1. What might a **quality youth programme** in schools look like that achieves positive outcomes for youth and children, and is politically and financially viable?
2. What kinds of **pathways** exist or could be developed for young people who have worked in schools, and what would it take to develop these?

This report summarises discussion on the above questions, in terms of:

- The **context and considerations** that impact on these questions;
- **Opportunities to explore** further.

Renewed funding for the Presidential Employment Stimulus, which includes the BEEI, was confirmed in the budget speech on 1 November. This affirms that it remains topical and urgent to explore the potential young people hold to improve learning outcomes in South Africa.



# Workshop outcomes

**Question 1**

**What might a quality youth programme in schools look like that achieves positive outcomes for youth and children, and is politically and financially viable?**

## Framing the question

Motivated, well-trained and supported young people have extraordinary potential to move the dial on learning outcomes. At the same time, service-orientated work experiences develop key work readiness skills and give young people an opportunity to explore what they want to do next. At a prior BCL workshop in July, participants mapped key components of what makes a youth experience role meaningful for both young people and children – see Appendix B: ingredients of a meaningful youth work experience for a summary.

Access **full report** here

The BEEI has placed young people in schools at an unprecedented scale since 2020, and is set to continue for at least another year. There is an opportunity to explore how to tap into the resource already in place – Education Assistants (EAs) at nearly every school in the country – to tackle learning outcomes in a more structured and intentional way while offering a meaningful work experience. This requires carefully defining Education Assistants' role in schools, and clarifying how existing systems and structures can be best used to enable and support them.

Any efforts to do this must be politically and financially viable: they must align with the Department of Basic Education's priorities and existing efforts; be acceptable to unions; and be aligned with professional guidelines. And they must leverage what exists already, given the context of heavy fiscal constraints.

## Context and considerations

A number of key contextual factors need to be considered when envisioning a quality youth programme that achieves positive outcomes for children and young people. These include:

- New South African research is solidifying the consensus that home language instruction is best – in the foundation phase, and even into the intermediate phase.
- Large class sizes remain a problem in schools; there is also significant inequality between provinces.
- There is duplication, fragmentation and overlap in schools – often multiple pilots and NGOs are working in the same space; schools can grow tired of programmes and interventions.
- The overarching consideration, however, was the tension between what works at a small scale, versus what is feasible at a systems level.

From DBE's perspective, it is important to position EA roles as distinct from teachers. They should not be tasked with work that teachers are expected to do, that is not in line with the South African Council of Educators (SACE) professional standards (see Appendix C: SACE professional teaching standards), or that may be perceived as replacing teachers or threatening their jobs. For example, Education Assistants are not meant to deliver new topics in the curriculum, sign off on attendance, formally assess or discipline children, or work with children who need remedial support.

That said, several small-scale programmes have demonstrated that with clearly defined roles, quality training and support, unemployed young people with matric can deliver learning outcomes for children – and can effectively implement tasks including small-group activities, catch-up support and tracking progress. For example:

- The **Funda Wande programme** which was piloted in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo recruited unemployed matriculants from communities sorrounding the schools and trained them to support foundation phase learners in small groups in maths and home language during school time. An external evaluation found that learners improved their reading and mathematic skills by up to 130% of a schooling year.
- The **Nobalisa programme**, run by Axium Education in the Eastern Cape, recruits young people from local communities to provide small-group literacy instruction to foundation phase learners during school time. These "Nobalisa" use a combination of informal Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) assessments and the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) to track reading progress, with evidence of strong gains after only one year in the programme.
- The **YearBeyond programme**, run by the Western Cape Government, uses unemployed matriculants to deliver an academic programme to Grade 3s and 4s. An external evaluation found that participating children improved literacy and maths skills and attended school more often.
- The **Zazi iZandi programme**, which is currently being piloted in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo by The Learning Trust (TLT), Binding Constraints Lab, Masinyusane and Funda Wande, also uses a small-group model. The external evaluation is still underway, but the evaluators have observed that gentle, high-quality relationships and one-on-one connection are making children excited about learning.

## Opportunities to explore further

Leveraging young people's presence and potential to improve learning outcomes in schools is likely to be most effective, and most politically viable, if they focus on supporting teaching and learning (particularly foundational literacy and numeracy) for children in Grades R to 4, in functional Quintile 1-3 schools, particularly those with large class sizes. Ideally, if sufficiently trained and supported, they should focus on learners needing to catch up to grade level (with the caveat that children with learning difficulties will need remedial support from especially trained teachers).

To move towards a systemic, large-scale approach, opportunities and questions to explore further include:

- **How best to design and frame the EA role so that it is distinct from teachers and achieves learning outcomes?** This requires identifying tasks that enhance learning outcomes and take pressure off the system, without encroaching on teachers' responsibilities. This may include activities such as:
    - Leading a whole-class activity (e.g. reading aloud) so that a teacher can work with a small group
    - Working with learners in small groups to provide targeted literacy/numeracy/catch-up support
    - Observing children, and notifying the teacher when a child is struggling
    - Helping learners individually if they are stuck
    - Supporting classroom management, as directed by the teacher
    - Doing administrative work to free up more of the teacher's time to teach
    - Capturing teachers' marking
    - Making copies
    - Setting up the space so that it is conducive for planned activities

The role should not be called a "general assistant" or "admin support" role, as this can easily consign young people to tasks like wiping desks and chalkboards. Offering "support for teaching and learning" may be appealing to the system as it encompasses a wide range of tasks but focuses on learning outcomes.

- What can we learn from models that are working, and how can we align them to system pressures and imperatives? This requires interrogating the programmes that are currently showing promise, and identifying the programme elements that (a) lead to successful delivery of outcomes, (b) are scalable, and (c) are politically and financially viable at scale.
- What role might After School Programmes play in delivering learning outcomes? The Learning Trust and many of its partners are effectively using unemployed young people to deliver 'beyond the classroom' academic support; this often takes place after school, but can also happen during the school day. Is there a role for BEEI youth to implement some of these models in addition to in-classroom support?
- Explore how schools and teachers can best support young people in schools. At a classroom and school level, teachers oversee EAs. In order to best support EAs, Teachers need to play a leadership role, buy into the programme, and give young people direction and support. Tapping into the network of 100,000 teachers on the DBE's E-Cubed project Teacher Connect platform may help mobilise and raise awareness; other options to engage school-level stakeholders should also be explored.
- Look at blueprints from other sectors to learn about how to roll out programmes at a provincial

level. For example, in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector, programmes are often rolled out by working through local NGOs with ECD expertise.

- Identify opportunities to mobilise co-funding and investment. Where the state is paying for youth stipends and covering the basic costs of training and materials, can private funders and business cover the costs of the elements that are required to run quality programmes but are beyond the state's resource envelope? These include, for example, additional training and mentoring for EAs, some materials for programme delivery, pathway support to young people, monitoring and evaluation, etc.

**Question 2**

**What kinds of pathways exist or could be developed for young people who have worked in schools, and what would it take to develop them?**



## Framing the question

More young people are being placed in schools, and gaining experience working with children, than ever before in South Africa. They are making a positive contribution to their schools; developing basic skills, networks and confidence; and figuring out whether they want a career that involves working with children.

But after that opportunity, what do they do next – what opportunities are available, achievable and attractive to them? How do we prepare them for these opportunities – what do they need?

How do school-based work experiences speak to the journey of becoming a teacher – and how do we ensure young people studying to become teachers also gain sufficient classroom experience?

How do we think about doing this at a systemic level, in a context of fiscal constraints? And what would these pathways look like, if BEEI EA roles remain part of the education landscape in the medium- to long-term?



## Context and Considerations

Key factors to consider when attempting to answer the above questions include:

- **South Africa is producing more teachers**; the major bottleneck is hiring.[5] This can lead to teaching graduates growing frustrated, taking other jobs and leaving the teaching profession.
- **The teacher pipeline needs to recruit the right people**. In a recent international survey, only half of teachers in South Africa said teaching was their first choice as a career (vs an average of 71% in other OECD countries). Short-term work opportunities in schools, like the BEEI, give young people an opportunity to see if teaching is the right fit for them before investing in a full degree.
- **Teacher graduates need more in-classroom experience**. Approximately half of Bachelors of Education (B.Ed) graduates in South Africa study via the University of South Africa (UNISA), which is primarily a distance learning programme. A large proportion of teaching graduates complete their studies without any in-classroom practical experience. This is in part because insufficient internships are on offer (including foundation phase home languages). Even those who have done an internship are often insufficiently prepared for a real school environment.
- **Currently, young people cannot participate in the BEEI (or any public employment programme) if they are receiving NSFAS funds**. This means people studying towards a B.Ed remotely are ineligible for a work placement in schools. While this policy arguably makes sense if the goal is poverty alleviation and reducing the number of youth who are NEET, it means that people studying towards a B.Ed remotely are ineligible for a work placement in schools – which would be beneficial from a teacher development perspective.
- **Educator Assistant pay prices them out of some prospective pathways**. Working in ECD or becoming a Learner Support Agent may be a logical next step, but because the pay is lower than EAs' pay, young people are unlikely to pursue these roles.

## Opportunities to explore further

To attract the right people into the teaching profession and ensure they have opportunities to gain practical experience; and to develop post-BEEI pathways for young people, opportunities and questions to explore further include:

- **Clarifying who EA roles are intended for – or exploring different placement options at schools**. Given the lack of practical experience amongst new teachers, there is a strong argument that they should be prioritised for in-school work experience. However, it is also useful for matriculants to explore whether they want to work with children before investing in a teaching degree. Both groups can make a valuable contribution in a school environment. It may be worth exploring different school-level support roles – one that targets teaching graduates, one for education students, and another targeting unemployed matriculants – and clearly delineating the roles, responsibilities and duration for each role. There are likely opportunities for targeted recruitment campaigns.

5 See Teacher Demographic Dividend project

- **Exploring the possibility of creating a paraprofessional role and qualification in education.** There has already been discussion and research over the last several years about the opportunity to develop and institutionalise a paraprofessional qualification and role within the basic education sector. This could draw lessons from other formalised "care worker" roles, such as Community Health Workers in the Department of Health or Child and Youth Care Workers in the Department of Social Development. As discussed above, this would require carefully demarcating the role in relation to teachers. Clarity is needed on how such a role would articulate with the B.Ed pipeline, and what other kinds of opportunities would be available to people with these qualifications.
- **Mapping and exploring the viability of diverse pathways that Education Assistants could follow after completing their placement.** These may include earning a B.Ed, social work or community development degree; earning another paraprofessional qualification (e.g. Child and Youth Care Worker, Community Health Worker); becoming an ECD practitioner; working in the NGO sector, as an After School Practitioner or in another role; entrepreneurial activities e.g. tutoring or extra lessons; or mental health services such as lay counselling.
- **Exploring existing funding pots and programmes** that might support the above e.g. organisations working with the Learning Trust utilise the Social EMployment Fund to pay youth stipends
- **Exploring the role that recognition of prior learning (RPL) might play in building pathways to formal qualifications.** Is there a way for young people to be formally recognised for their experience as Education Assistants, and for this to count towards paraprofessional and/or B.Ed qualifications? This would require working with SACE and SETAs to understand what existing qualifications this work experience might contribute towards.
- **Exploring the demand for bridging programmes for BEEI alumni who are passionate about teaching but did not qualify for a B.Ed.** is there a way to bridge people with the right mindset, drive and emotional intelligence, but who did not get high matric marks, into the teaching profession? What might this look like?
- **Reviewing remuneration for EA programmes.** As noted above, BEEI wages are pegged well above many of the exit opportunities young people might consider, which makes these pathways less viable. One option to adjust remuneration would be to keep the same hourly rate, but reduce EAs' working hours per day.



# Acknowledgements

Thank you to Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropies South Africa (AGGPSA) and the DG Murray Trust (DGMT) for supporting the workshop and the work of the Binding Constraints Lab.

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# Appendix A

Participants

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| 25 | Kristal Duncan-Williams | Youth Capital |
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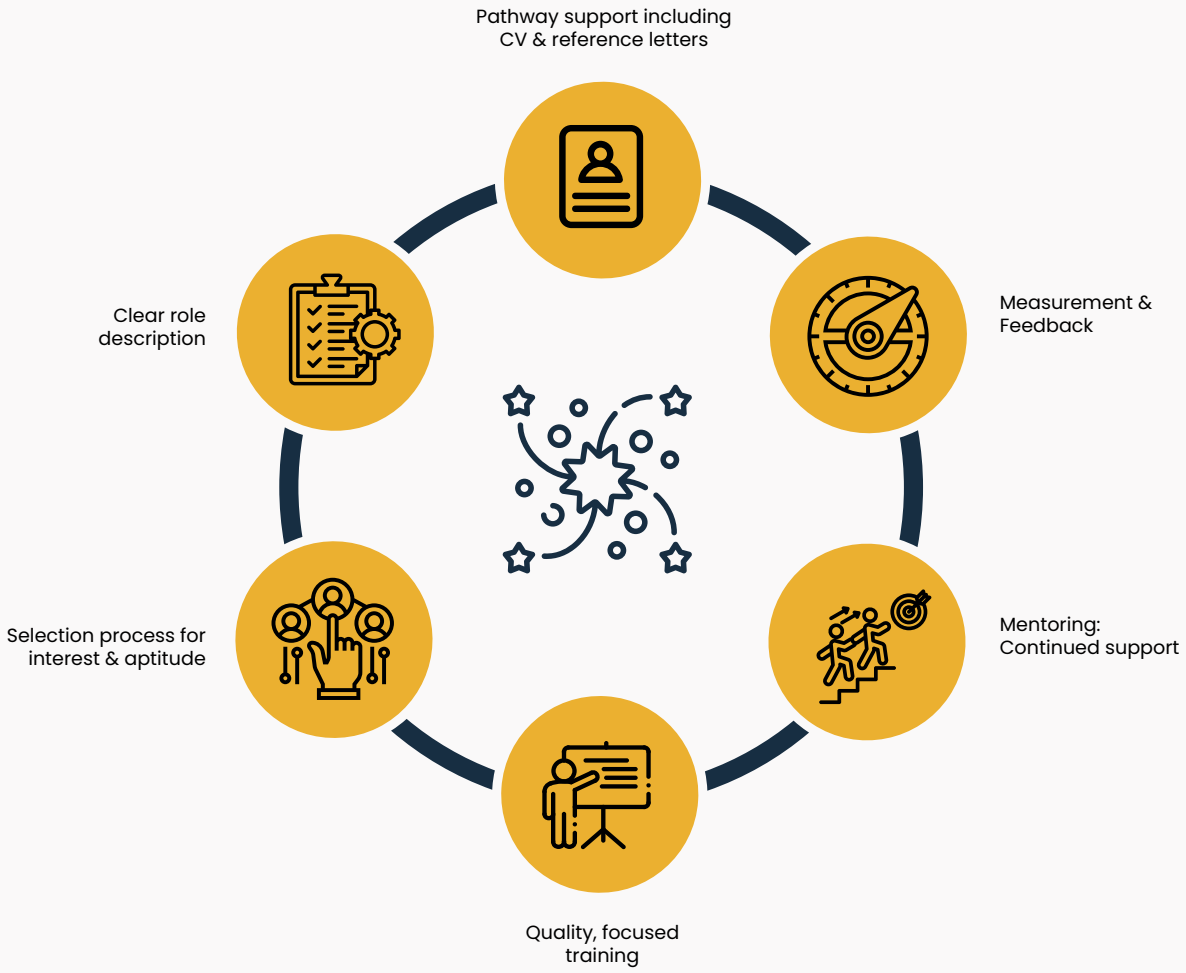
# Appendix B

## Ingredients of a meaningful youth work experience

The infographic below is based on the outcomes of the BCL's July workshop on "Working with youth to deliver foundation phase learning at scale." It captures the key ingredients of a meaningful youth experience that is rewarding and fulfilling for the young person, as well as for the school in which they are placed, and the learners they serve.

Access full **July workshop report**

**A meaningful youth experience:**
Positive outcomes for youth and learners



# Appendix C

The South African Council of Educators developed a set of ten national Professional Teaching Standards (PSTs) to "*promote professional teaching practice and embed a strong professional teaching culture in South Africa.*"[6]

The ten standards are:

1. Teaching is based on an ethical commitment to the learning and wellbeing of all learners.
2. Teachers collaborate with others to support teaching, learning and their professional development.
3. Teachers support social justice and the redress of inequalities within their educational institutions and society more broadly.
4. Teaching requires that well-managed and safe learning environments are created and maintained within reason.
5. Teaching is fundamentally connected to teachers' understanding of the subject/s they teach.
6. Teachers make thoughtful choices about their teaching that lead to learning goals for all learners.
7. Teachers understand that language plays an important role in teaching and learning.
8. Teachers are able to plan coherent sequences of learning experiences.
9. Teachers understand how their teaching methodologies are effectively applied.
10. Teaching involves monitoring and assessing learning.

The full Standards, including a background to why and how the PSTs were developed, the process undertaken, and focus areas explaining what needs to be demonstrated to reach each standard, can be downloaded here:

Access **full standards** document here

6 SACE n.d.



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