Three levels of analysis from large-scale research on interventions to improve literacy in South Africa
The findings from the case studies and implications for teaching

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UKFIET September, 2017
For an RCTs to produce ‘useful knowledge’ beyond its local context, it must illustrate some **general tendency**, some effect that is the result of a **mechanism** that is likely to apply more broadly.

Deaton, 2010 p. 448
What are the theory of change?

- Lesson Plans (Setswana)
- Quality Learning Materials:
  - Graded Readers: Vula Bula Books
  - Posters
  - Flashcards
  - Handwriting book
  - Exercise Books
  - Assessment Rubrics and Guides
  - DBE Workbook
- Instructional Coaching
  - Classroom visits
  - Cluster meetings
  - Informal Whatsapp groups
Two sets of case studies

1. Independent consultant with researcher assistant
2. PI and university-based early grade literacy specialist

- **Case study sampling**
  - Team 1: Average (four schools across entire province)
  - Team 2: Extreme (two strong, in one district)

- **Data collection**
  - Lesson observations
  - Teacher, HoD and Principal Interviews
  - Document review

- Classroom environment
- Literacy and language instruction
- Time on task and curricular pacing
- Learner’s opportunities to listen and speak, read, write
- Teachers’ and learners’ use of books and other learning material
- Level of cognitive demand
- In-class assessment of learners
ABOUT THE SCHOOLS
Mmabatho (Community)
Molopo (Community)

1.5 hours away from provincial capital along, deep sand road. Rural area on country border. High levels of alcoholism repeated identified.
• Infrastructure in all but one school was good/very good.

• Running water and electricity in all schools.

• All classes had qualified teachers, some teachers had advanced qualifications (e.g. FDE).

• All teachers were female, ages ranged from 39 – 62 years, with the majority in their 40s and early 50s.

• Class sizes on the day of the visits ranged from 28 to 60, most in the upper 40s and lower 50s.
ABOUT THE CLASSROOM AND INSTRUCTION
Team 1: Elements of the interventions which appear to be successful

- Teacher confidence and attitude
- Print rich classrooms and organisation and storage of learning material/Reading corners and carpets or mats
- Use of lesson plans
- Sufficient instructional time for Setswana Home Language
- Frequency of written work
- Appropriate division of time in lessons/internal lesson coherence
- Strong classroom management
- Assessment and records of assessment
- Collaborative discussions with other teachers

Evidence of structured literacy instruction

- Phonics instruction
- Handwriting instruction
- Creative writing instruction
- Group guided reading
- Shared reading
- Listening and speaking
Team 1: Elements that appear to be constraining impact

- A culture of dependency
- Absence of a culture of reading for enjoyment
- Less than optimal use of time and opportunities for reading
- Undifferentiated literacy tasks
- Insufficient understanding and knowledge of what it means to teach learners to read independently
Team 1: Conclusion

Based on past observations in similar schools (see Reeves 2008; Reeves 2010) it certainly does seem that aspects of teachers’ classroom practice have changed. For example, teachers spent time teaching phonics and handwriting; they asked learners to identify where text began or the beginning and end of sentences; they demonstrated punctuation, upper and lower case, etc.; they made regular use of a reading series and provided group guided reading; they used illustrations in the readers provided to support learners in understanding text; all learners had records of work covered in class and were writing regularly in their workbooks and exercise books.

Whilst it is difficult to separate out the most probable sources of possible improvements, the scripted lesson plans, pace setter and the ‘curriculum pacing/tracking’ messages teachers receive via WhatsApp do appear to be working to help teachers cover the Grade 2 Setswana HL curriculum.
Team 1: Conclusion

The four EGRS teachers seem to have gained an instrumental understanding of literacy instruction and development rather than a principled understanding. For example, they do not necessarily understand the principles underpinning the concept of differentiation in group guided reading; or what it really means or takes to teach children to read, write and speak independently.

... it also seems unlikely that very marked gains in the quality of writing and especially reading outcomes will be evident in the EGRS schools in the short term. Findings in the four case study observations showed that that learners are not yet being provided with sufficient opportunities to practise reading extended text and with adequate and appropriate opportunities to practise generating more complex spoken and written texts or to produce their own texts.
Firstly it was difficult…even if we were trained….I didn’t know where do I look for group and individual teaching. It is nice that everything is written there, that everything is written step by step …the children enjoy them and I also enjoy them [the stories]. The children are talking a lot. (MmGr2D)
‘It saves you time...you have everything in hand’.
Gr2RMG
Systematic and structured pedagogy

‘I have seen that even if it is not all of them, but most, most, of the children they can write, they put them [letters and words] properly in the lines....Yes I have seen a difference.’ (RG2D)
Coaching

‘Very helpful…. When I don’t understand and I phone she explain to me…. if we have a problem we just WhatsApp her and ask for clarification’

(MmGr2L)

S: Yes. So that’s how I started to enjoy to teach both readings, group guided and shared reading.

(RGr1SM)
Problem areas

- Phonics teaching is inadequate and teachers have no technical language to describe phonics practice.
- Choral chanting during group-guided reading activities
- No differentiation of reading level
What about the mechanism?
## Instructional Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Baloyi</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Bagele</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of observation</td>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of lesson observed</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>76 minutes</td>
<td>67 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetabled</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers and Grade</th>
<th>Mrs D Grade 1</th>
<th>Mrs S Grade 1</th>
<th>Mrs M Grade 2</th>
<th>Mrs R Grade 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day of observation</td>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of lesson observed</td>
<td>Observed numeracy EFAL lessons</td>
<td>95 minutes</td>
<td>80 minutes</td>
<td>100 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timetabled</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Learners</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>½ minute</td>
<td>Transition period: Introduction of visitors to class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>½ minute</td>
<td>Whole class ‘kinesthetic’ activity: Singing ‘Heads and shoulders’ (in Setswana) touching parts of their body to settle class.</td>
<td>Speaking (singing)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>Whole class phonics instruction with interaction.</td>
<td>Chalkboard</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 minute</td>
<td>Verbal instructions for individual seatwork task.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Transition period: Setting up for group guided reading and phonics task.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16 minutes</td>
<td>First group guided reading: 7 learners</td>
<td>Material used: Flash cards Vula Bula reader</td>
<td>Individual seatwork: Rest of the class reproducing phonics spider word diagram.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rulers Pencils</td>
<td>29 learners writing</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phonics exercise books Eraser</td>
<td>7 learners reading (12 minutes reading 4 minutes listening and speaking)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ minute</td>
<td>Transition period: Group returning to their desks;</td>
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The Use of Space
Organisation of space: resources
Conclusion

We’re making progress, but we’re not there yet.
President Obama, 2011

• Case studies show improved instructional practice -- more time, more educational resources, varied methods of instruction.

• Key insight involves the effective use of time, both macro and micro and space by teachers within their classrooms.

• Teachers took to methods that were familiar, the programme gave them an opportunity to extend and systematise and structured.

• Next stages needs to focus on independent reading, deeper understanding and practice of key methods, particularly Group Guided Reading, more comprehensive understanding of the theory of reading, and love of reading.
Lesson Observation Study: How has this changed?

External Intervention

Instructional practices

Improve learner achievement or outcomes

RCT: Rigorous Evidence
Thank you