Zambia Primary Reading Programme

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Zambia Primary Reading Programme

Background and Concept

• Based on survey of reading skills in Malawi and Zambia carried out in 1994
• Very low levels of reading comprehension in Grade 4, only about 30% average score.
• Decision to start major literacy programme linked to wider sector reforms in primary education led by World Bank.
• DFID provide the funds and technical support over 7 years from 1998 to 2005
• Approach: Mother Tongue Literacy to English – Breakthrough to Literacy – South Africa
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Project Inception

• Political economy approach determined need to bring national and local political and traditional leaders on board, along with heads of schools, parents and communities

• Major focus on media and public relations to explain the concept of MTL to English – feeling that pupils should start English from Grade 1 originally

• 45 dialects – but in the end 7 main Zambian languages identified for programme – no major ethnic tensions in Zambia over languages but dominant ones tended to be Icibemba and Chinyanja

• PRP largely housed in Teacher Education Dept. and project team based in Ministry with local counterparts
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Project Implementation

• Piloting in one of 8 provinces – and selected districts
• Scaling up over 5 years until PRP now fully embedded in education system
• Methodology – Teams of Zambia trainers provided intensive in-service to heads and teachers in district and school-based courses. Follow-up, support and observation in schools
• Grade 1 – Introduction to Reading in MT – letter/phonic identification, word recognition, sentences, phrases – small group drawn from class – rest of class assigned group activities – backed up by letter, word and sentence cards, and colourful posters. 80 mins lessons (2 double periods a week.

• Oral English introduced. Grade 2 Expansion of MT reading, introduction of reading in English in second term.
• Grade 3 – Readers in MT and English supplied – consolidation of reading skills in English
• Grade 4-7 – Advanced reading activities and readers
Zambia Primary Reading Programme

Results and Further Consolidation

• After only one year of PRP, evaluation showed improvements in MT Literacy by over 150% and in English by 100%.
• Pupils, teachers and heads highly motivated by results, and parents/leaders much more supportive.
• Development of materials initially expensive because of complicated royalty arrangements with Molteno, South Africa, originators of Breakthrough to Literacy.
• Readers published initially in Hong Kong, then South Africa and finally Zambia when suitable printing facilities became available.
• Focus switched to pre-service in 2002/3 and closer working with Curriculum Dept.
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Challenges in terms of sustainability

• Despite scripted lessons and guidance notes, teachers found preparation heavy and management of the small group approach challenging.

• Regular transfers of heads and teachers meant re-training was needed but the structures and financing of district trainers at in-service centres was weak.

• Positive national assessments of literacy improvements did not always receive wide publicity

• There were differences between Curriculum and Teacher Education Departments over who should manage the project

• Colleges of Education did not buy into the approach sufficiently when they were trained in the later stages

• Despite huge reduction in costs of materials, and good dialogue with Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance over budget forecasting and replenishment, there was a problem in resupplying materials
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Possible Lessons

• Keep materials and approach as simple and cost-effective as possible

• Ensure good district or zonal support system in place to induct new heads and teachers, and refresh and motivate experienced teachers

• Ensure that there are champions at all levels and the main responsible departments are fully engaged – avoid ‘turf’ wars

• Start earlier with changing approach and attitudes in colleges of education – key factor

• Ensure that national assessments continue to be publicised to show continue improvement