FUNDA WANDE
Language and Literacy Program

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REVIEW OF FUNDA WANDE: EARLY GRADES LITERACY CURRICULUM

INTRODUCTION

Funda Wande has embarked on an ambitious effort to design research and evidence-based early grades literacy curricula (R-Grade 3) for the mother tongues of South Africa. The curricula are based on developing the five pillars of effective literacy instruction, which are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (NRP, 2000). The Teacher’s Guide (TG) supports instruction in which the learners are actively engaged in reading and responding to a variety of narrative and informational texts, through direct whole class lessons and through independent reinforcement and extension in the Learner Activity Books (LAB). The TGs offer weekly lesson overviews with guidelines for the order and timing of the literacy components. Professional development is provided through the online Reading Academies, which provide teachers with the background necessary to implement effective early grades literacy instruction in the mother tongues of Sepedi and Afrikaans, with an English language strand that acknowledges the social and educational role of English in South Africa, even when it is not the primary language of teaching and learning.
THE REVIEW PROCESS

At the request of the Funda Wande early grades literacy curricula design team, Pamela Mason, Senior Lecturer on Education, and Catherine Snow, Professor of Education, and their students at the Harvard Graduate School of Education reviewed the Grade 1, Term 1 instructional materials in English, Sepedi, and Afrikaans, as well as the Reading Academy courses. The students represented the following academic programs, Language and Literacy, International Education Policy, and Technology, Innovation and Education. This interdisciplinary group investigated the elements of effective literacy instruction, the principles of professional development, and the phonotactics of English, isiXhosa, Sepedi, and Afrikaans were all addressed. The group formed curriculum review teams to analyze each of the five Grade 1, Term 1 literacy components: oral language, reading, group guided reading, phonics and handwriting, and writing. The Life Skills component of the curriculum was examined by all five review teams, looking for opportunities to incorporate/reinforce literacy skills more intentionally into this component. The Reading Academy materials for decoding, comprehension, and CAPS Reading Activities 1 & 2 were also reviewed by all the review teams, to explore how the professional development elements were aligned with the instructional elements of the Grade 1 Term 1 curriculum.

A limitation of this curricular review is that it was a “paper review,” i.e., only the resources available on the Funda Wande web site served as the source materials. Due to time, geography, and a global pandemic, the review team was unable to observe the implementation of the source materials by teachers with learners. The HGSE team met with the Funda Wande team twice over the four months of the academic semester (January-April 2021). The Funda Wande team presented the design principles for the Foundation phase literacy curriculum, some of the lessons learned, and the questions to be investigated by the HGSE team during the first meeting. Over the course of the semester frequent electronic exchanges between the Funda Wande and HGSE teams clarified questions about the curriculum and the professional development resources available to the teachers implementing the curriculum. The HGSE review teams presented their analyses to the Funda Wande team in late April, engendering a lively discussion about the strengths of the curriculum components and suggestions offered for consideration.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The report presents the reviews prepared by five teams of students, each focusing on the following components of the Funda Wande early grades literacy curriculum: oral language, reading, group guided reading, phonics and handwriting, and writing. Each section addressed the activities presented in the respective component for each of the weeks of the term, noting changes across the term; reports focused on what worked well, suggestions for improvements, and suggestions for integrating the literacy learning across the components. The Life Skills component of the Funda Wande literacy curriculum, which the group saw as an underutilized resource for literacy, was addressed in each of the component reviews. Each review team provided recommendations for a more intentional integration of the literacy skills taught into the Life Skills activities.

Two aspects of the Funda Wande early grades literacy curriculum, oral language development and phonics instruction, present particular challenges in developing a cross language curriculum. English, Sepedi, and Afrikaans, as languages of learning and teaching, have very different phonotactic and morphological structures and different orthographies. Using exactly the same instructional texts in the early grades literacy curriculum makes it difficult to teach and reinforce oral language structures and phonics knowledge in language-specific ways in a sequential and iterative curriculum. These special considerations are addressed in the sections preceding the individual component reviews.
ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT (PREPARED BY CATHERINE SNOW)

Literacy skills build on oral language skills. A wealth of evidence confirms that learners with strong oral language skills (as indexed, for example, by vocabulary size, grammatical comprehension, and narrative production skills) are likely to acquire literacy skills easily and quickly, when provided with good instruction (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). What precisely is the mechanism linking oral language to literacy?

First, there is support from meaning for the novel challenge of decoding (converting sequences of letters or graphemes into sequences of sounds or phonemes). If an effort to decode a string of letters produces a word in the learner’s oral vocabulary, the learner’s effort is rewarded and the cognitive connections between those graphemes and those phonemes are strengthened, leading ultimately to the automaticity of word recognition that characterizes fluent readers (Yildirim, Rasinski, Ates, Fitzgerald, Zimmerman, & Yildiz, 2014). Learning to read in a language one does not speak is possible, but it is a laborious and rote process unscaffolded by meaning.

Second, a large oral vocabulary offers learners more fodder for developing phonological awareness, an entrée to phoneme-grapheme mapping. Knowing many ‘word neighbors’ (words that rhyme like pat, mat, rat; that vary only in vowel, like pit, pat, put; or that vary only in offset, like pit, pin, pill) helps learners isolate phonemes in their language, so they can then learn how those phonemes are represented by graphemes.

Third, solid (though initially implicit) knowledge of the morphological rules of a language supports learners in parsing and then decoding morphologically complex words in that language. This is of particular importance in Sepedi and other African languages with rich agglutinative morphological systems. English and Afrikaans, because they are morphologically relatively impoverished languages, fall short as models for using morphological structure in teaching reading of the multisyllabic words typical of agglutinative languages.

Finally, and most importantly, oral language skills are related to literacy outcomes because literacy is ultimately about meaning – we learn to read in order to comprehend the world through text. One cannot comprehend a text without knowing the meaning of almost all words in it (Hsueh-chao & Nation, 2000) and understanding the grammatical and discourse structures it contains. Though the written texts being read by early grade learners typically match the level of their oral language skills, those learners will, in the middle grades, encounter texts with greater linguistic and cognitive challenges – more infrequent vocabulary linked to more abstract and challenging content. Building the oral language skills and the knowledge base that will be needed for processing those more complex texts is a task that should be started in the earliest grades, to allow enough time for the learning that is needed. Oral language skills can be characterized as unlimited or unconstrained skills (Paris, 2005), in contrast to constrained skills like phonological awareness or decoding, skills that can be fully mastered.

In short, while reviewing an early grades literacy curriculum certainly requires evaluating the opportunities it offers to learn about letters and sounds, to grasp and master the alphabetic principle en route to the accurate and fluent reading expected of a 2nd or 3rd grader, it must also attend to the learner’s need for rich oral language skills that are acquired in the context of learning about the world through talk and not just through reading.
The acquisition of reading skills, especially for alphabetic languages, is greatly facilitated by phonics—explicit instruction in how letters map sounds (Graham & Santangelo, 2014; Mesmer & Griffith, 2005; Morrow, Mesmer, & Tracey, 2019; NRP 2000). The writing systems of isiXhosa, Sepedi, and Afrikaans are considered transparent or shallow orthographies, in that there is a consistent mapping of phonemes to graphemes (sounds to symbols). Words in these mother tongues are long, because morphemes marking number, gender, and tense are attached to the base words (agglutinative morphology). Emergent readers need to be explicitly taught these grammatical markers as syllables (affixes) added to the beginning or ending of the base word. However, the orthography remains transparent.

Phonics leverages phonemic awareness, oral language, and letter knowledge skills. Learners hear the sounds of their mother tongue and differentiate these sounds in their oral language, making their speech intelligible. In learning to read, learners attach the sounds to the letters they are taught, so that they can read the words in their mother tongue, producing reading that sounds like their oral language. Phonics is taught in the service of decoding the words in continuous, meaningful texts. The sequence of teaching how sounds map onto letters (and combinations of letters, e.g., digraphs, trigraphs, blends) is based on the frequency of the letters used in text and the distinction between the sounds. For example, one would not teach the sound of the letters m and n in the same lesson in English, because their sounds are so similar and are produced with similar tongue and lip placement. In English nap and map can be easily confused in isolation, with semantic context helpful in distinguishing them (Pollatsek, Treiman, & Ehri, 2015).

An important challenge to the Funda Wande curriculum design team is preserving consistency of instructional texts across the mother tongues, while introducing phonics instruction that reflects the phonological and orthographic particularities of the various languages. Using the same target text across the mother tongues of isiXhosa, Sepedi, and Afrikaans may undermine the use of words that include the letter sounds being taught in the phonics and handwriting component of the early grades literacy curriculum. One can understand the production effort and cost of preparing reading passages that are appropriate for introducing the scope and sequence of letter sound instruction for each mother tongue. However, phonics instruction is provided to help emergent readers decode written text. Otherwise, it is a key with no lock. Phonics is the means to the end of making meaning from written text, and the early grades literacy curriculum should not divorce one from the other. Languages having transparent orthographies, such as isiXhosa, Sepedi, and Afrikaans, provide teachers with the opportunity to teach phonics and then to apply those phonics skills to word reading which, in turn, supports the development of automaticity (reading words with minimal cognitive burden) and thus of conceptual knowledge. The Phonics and Handwriting component could be strengthened by including additional decodable (and consumable) texts that contain words selected to exemplify the phonics skills being taught in each lesson (phoneme–grapheme relationships). Such texts could include familiar word rhyming patterns and word play (such as short rhymes, sayings, song lyrics, poems) that would be familiar and culturally and linguistically appropriate across the mother tongue groups in South Africa. Further suggestions for strengthening the Phonics and Handwriting component will be presented in a subsequent section of the review.
REFERENCES


Oral language development is one of the core components of the Funda Wande Curriculum. The development of oral language, in particular vocabulary and oral comprehension, is important because vocabulary and comprehension development are two of the five pillars of effective reading instruction (Ambruster et al. 2009). According to Kim et al. (2016), oral language is a “broad construction encompassing various aspects such as phonology, morphology, vocabulary, syntax, grammar, and discourse” (p. 25). To develop effective oral language skills, children need to hear words, sentences, and stories frequently to engage in meaningful, rich language experiences. Some common strategies include reading aloud and using the E^3 Strategy: Expose, Elicit, and Extend to intentionally increase language learning opportunities for students (Kim et al. 2016). The oral language review team examined the Grade 1, Term 1 English Literacy Workbooks: Teacher’s Guide, Learner’s Activity Book (LAB), Term 1 Lesson Plan, and Professional Development modules from the Reading Academy to provide a comprehensive review of the oral language component of the curriculum, and considered the Sepedi and Afrikaans materials for specific oral language skills.

Using the six-component definition of oral language development, we examined both the Teacher’s Guide and LAB and found age-appropriate, engaging activities with appropriate assessments to build children’s oral skills. Phonology practice includes activities like reciting poems, rhymes, and songs to reinforce pronunciation of new vocabulary words. Morphology practice includes the distinction between singular and plural words in Sepedi and Afrikaans LAB workbooks. Vocabulary review occurs in the daily fifteen-minute morning routine where students practice common vocabulary words, such as during the weather and name review. Lastly, syntax, grammar, and discourse practice encompass reenacting, role playing, retelling, and answering questions about a story, in addition to listening and comprehension practice by, for example, asking students to repeat instructions prior to an activity in the Teacher’s Guide. The various activities included in the Teacher’s Guide as supports for listening, comprehension, and vocabulary provide students with fun and engaging ways to help students develop their oral language abilities. Simultaneously, the activities also offer opportunities for informal assessment, during which teachers can test younger students in a fun, engaging, and stress-free way. Lastly, the colorful visuals in the student LAB are engaging and offer an opportunity for students to reinforce skills learned during class.

**WHAT WORKED WELL?**

**TEACHER’S GUIDE**

Overall, the Teacher’s Guide is a comprehensive resource for teachers to locate information about each week’s lesson plan and learning goals. The structure of the lesson plans show effective application of the spiraling method; by focusing on one topic and revisiting the same vocabulary each week, students have ample opportunities to practice and build on new vocabulary each week. Between weeks, there is a logical progression that connects the topic of week one with that of week two, and so on, to build on previous knowledge. The guide is organized by literacy component, each of which offers a thorough overview summarizing the key topics and activities that will be implemented each week. Additionally, the guide spells out the types of materials needed for teachers to successfully prepare and implement the lesson plans. The lesson plans provide teachers with clear instructions about what to do before, during, and after reading activities. This information is helpful, because the lesson plans not only spell out what teachers need to do, but also scaffold the learning process for students. Specifically, the practice of asking open-ended questions reinforces dialogic reading strategies, which are important because they give learners a chance to talk during which teachers can informally assess their skills. “Why” questions help teachers evaluate children’s oral abilities; the thinking process required to answer enables students to make inferences and use more complex vocabulary and sentence structures.

Oral language skills are effectively practiced both in the fifteen-minute morning routine and throughout the day. The timing of the morning routine allows students to remember and come back to key vocabulary words taught throughout the day. Furthermore, the curriculum incorporates attention to oral comprehension, which is an important precursor of reading comprehension. During the listening activity, the teacher models fluent reading out loud with attention to intonation and expression. Ultimately the students are asked to read by themselves, instantiating the “I do, we do, you do” model. Some of the readings (e.g., Week Six) incorporate additional questions for teachers to ask students to check on reading comprehension.
Overall, both the Teacher’s Guide and LAB do a great job of reinforcing oral-language focused activities and skills that students have learned in the whole class instructional setting. These activities are helpfully indicated in the LAB with the icon of two children speaking. Many of the LAB activities allow students to practice newly taught skills on their own. These activities consist of one picture book-like story at the beginning of each week. Each story has 3-4 page-sized images with a short sentence that is related to the image. The illustrations or pictures are simple and clear, and a child can identify many aspects of the images that could spark a conversation. On page 10 of the LAB, there is an illustration with explicit questions the student should answer. This is helpful for students to explicitly connect the activity of looking at the images with comprehension.

Activities are engaging and motivating when they challenge the child yet appear doable (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2018). The stories in the LAB are age-appropriate and relevant: visuals represent elements of school- and out-of-school contexts that students are familiar with. This familiarity poses an appropriate challenge for students to use both contextualized and decontextualized vocabulary. That is, they can talk about uniforms and lunch boxes that might be in front of them, as well as remember elements outside of their current context like what they do before going to bed.

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

TEACHER’S GUIDE

Areas for potential improvement include incorporating better training support for teachers in the Teacher’s Guide and Reading Academy, strengthening vocabulary skills, and improving on formal assessments of student progress in the Teacher’s Guide. While the Reading Academy resource for teachers provides comprehensive, content-rich lessons on best practices for developing comprehension and vocabulary, it would be helpful to provide demonstrations of how various strategies of explicit vocabulary teaching can be better incorporated into the classroom. Likewise, incorporating more explicit vocabulary strategies in the Teacher’s Guide would support teachers in creating more opportunities for students to practice sentence making and using new vocabulary. For example, teachers have found the E^3 Strategy useful in helping students extend their thinking and vocabulary. E^3 is shorthand for Expose, Elicit, and Extend; teachers intentionally engage with students by exposing them to new ideas and thinking, then eliciting responses by posing a question, and ending the exchange by extending the student’s response, for example by relating a personal observation to a general observation (Kim et al. 2016).

Furthermore, there are opportunities to incorporate more advanced vocabulary in oral instruction and feedback. Research has demonstrated that hearing more “sophisticated” and advanced vocabulary in different contexts supports oral language development (Kim et al. 2016). While students are not expected to incorporate all advanced vocabulary into their own language productions immediately, exposure to richer and more sophisticated vocabulary, for example by expanding on the simple vocabulary in the LAB, promotes familiarity with and comprehension of novel words.

In addition to vocabulary, the Teacher’s Guide could focus more on comprehension, by scaffolding materials for teachers to think aloud while reading (Armbruster et al., 2009). Some of the readings already have questions that check for students’ understanding and listening comprehension. However, it is important to make sure teachers check for comprehension with every read-aloud because it will help children develop reading comprehension skills they will enact later in life when reading more complex texts. To accomplish this, teachers could ask additional questions prompting students to imagine the characters in their minds and the actions as they are read to them (using mental imagery) or think about a situation when something similar happened to them (using prior knowledge). During the Week Six reading—after we learn that Freddie Frog is sad and doesn’t want to go to school—the teacher could ask the students to think about times when they felt sad or didn’t want to go to school. This rationale, along with reasons for the other proposed strategies, could be included as an Appendix at the end of the Guide for teachers to easily access when preparing the lesson.

Lastly, while we appreciated the diversity of “fun” activities to informally test students’ oral language development through the explicit scaffolding of skills, we wonder how the formal assessments can be better incorporated into the teaching material or even Reading Academy to ensure that teaching practices are reflective of the important components of literacy instruction.
LAB

Because oral language development is mainly focused on vocabulary and comprehension development, there are limitations on the opportunities that can be offered in the LAB. The few pages that are used for the oral language component would benefit from more graphical instructions, to meet the needs of learners who cannot read the questions posed. The fact that so few pages in the LAB are dedicated to oral language might appear to downplay the crucial role of language skills in supporting the literacy skills being developed. It would be useful to consider whether any of the LAB activities might be expanded to support oral language development. For example, after the week six activity of reciting a poem called the “ten little frogs” there might be a page included with ten little frogs to trace or color, and encouragement to make up a story about one or more of the ten frogs to share orally with a classmate.

SUPPORT FOR LEARNING IN OTHER COMPONENTS, PARTICULARLY LIFE SKILLS

Opportunities to develop oral language skills are present during activities designed to support other domains of literacy, including writing and shared reading. In the Teacher’s Guide, prior to a writing activity that entails students listing out colors, teachers are instructed to scaffold by orally asking students to recite different color names, before giving out instructions and proceeding with the writing activity (TG p. 129). In another shared writing activity where students are practicing a sentence structure, students are asked to answer orally before the teacher writes down the answer for reinforcement (TG p.66). For shared reading, after students have had the opportunity to read a book and complete activities in the LAB, students are asked to orally practice sentence-making by selecting words that appear in the shared reading (LAB p.111). These various examples of oral language practice integrated with other components of the five pillar of literacy instruction illustrate the importance of adapting a comprehensive approach towards learning and teaching. These activities can serve as models for how to provide additional support to teachers by intentionally scaffolding oral language practice throughout the day, to supplement the learning that happens during the 15-minute designated timeframe in the morning.

Specifically, the life skills component is an area where oral language skills could be reinforced. According to the life skills assessment in the Teacher’s Literacy Guide, students should be able to follow classroom routines, talk about personal experiences, engage in visual arts, and engage in performing arts, including roleplay and song/dance performances. Many of these activities, including roleplay and drawing a picture of the self, are already practiced during the morning routine and/or LAB. We propose exploring life skills activities for opportunities to supplement oral language skill through practice in speaking and listening. For example, in Week Two’s Life Skills activity of making a Musical Shaker, rather than telling students that “small objects” are needed, use this opportunity to ask students to brainstorm about the kinds of “small objects” that could be used and introduce vocabulary for different types of small objects, or have students complete the LAB first so that students can practice visualizing before providing them with a word bank as a source in naming drawings.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUNDA WANDE TEAM

We end with several suggestions and areas of consideration to further strengthen the curriculum and support students’ oral language development. First, the PD training in the Reading Academy could be expanded to ensure that teachers are not just cognizant of what is expected, but also how to implement strategies to best support students. As mentioned in the “what could be better” section and discussed with the Funda Wande Team, the checklists for the formal assessments of oral language development can be leveraged to reflect current teaching practices in both the LAB and Teacher’s Guide. Moreover, the checklists can also be better incorporated in the Reading Academy resources by explicitly teaching teachers how to use them. Ensuring that teachers understand the meaning of each criterion and what it looks like in the classroom would support their classroom practice. Incorporating more “best practices” videos in the Reading Academy would be helpful in demonstrating what effective oral language support looks like, and alternatively what “less effective practices” may look like as well. Teachers who have access to more effective and reflective PD opportunities will be able to better teach and support oral language skills intentionally throughout the day.

A tighter connection between oral language, writing and reading could also be forged. As mentioned in the prior sections, oral language is the most interconnected of the five literacy components. Furthermore, listening and speaking are informally and formally practiced throughout the day. Writing activities can be supported by practices that also develop oral language, such as asking students to repeat instructions prior to a writing activity or asking students to turn-and-talk to an elbow partner about what they are going to write.
Lastly, we want to make sure that oral development skills are taught and scaffolded to ensure the curriculum is inclusive of all students’ learning needs. In the formal assessment in the Teacher’s Guide, for example, we noticed that the assessments asked questions that tested two skills at once: listening and speaking. To ensure that slower learners are supported, perhaps provide a word bank and sentence stems they could use in answering questions. Additionally, while we mentioned the importance of practicing advanced vocabulary, slower learners and second language speakers may have a more difficult time grappling with these advanced vocabulary words. For second language learners, one way to overcome this challenge is to teach vocabulary in both L1 and L2 contexts so that advanced vocabulary can be reinforced (Kim et al., 2016). Lastly, providing multiple learning channels – not just printed sources like the LAB, but also audiobooks, podcasts, and take-home reading books – can enhance listening skills and meet the needs of learners with delayed word reading.

CONCLUSION
The Funda Wande team developed a thorough curriculum that offered various supports for oral language development. The curriculum includes varied listening and speaking activities with both informal and formal assessments throughout the school day. Moreover, both the Teacher’s Guide and LAB provide materials and practices useful for addressing learners’ oral language development.

After a comprehensive review of the curriculum followed by an enlightening discussion and feedback from the Funda Wande team, we highlighted areas in the curriculum and Teacher’s Guides where oral language skills can be better supported. It is crucial to incorporate activities and support for learners at different levels of learning and language use, as well as increasing opportunities for oral language development during activities focused on the other four components of literacy precisely because oral language is a huge domain -- an unconstrained skill. Furthermore, increasing and varying vocabulary and activities designed to give learners an opportunity to talk with one another and with the teacher would advance oral language development. For teachers, incorporating various strategies to intentionally engage with students, such as introducing the E^3 strategy in the Teacher’s Guide, should be evaluated as possible contributors to learner language development.

We are grateful for the opportunity to offer our observations to the Funda Wande team and are confident that the teachers who follow the Funda Wande lesson plans and use these resources will play a key role in improving children’s literacy. By building on the learners’ language abilities in their mother tongue teachers can help all children become successful readers.

REFERENCES


This document is written for the Funda Wande team, in response to their request for an early literacy curriculum review and as input into their continuous improvement process. It provides a summary of the main findings from our review of the Term 1, Shared Reading curricular component. Our findings are organized into six short sections. Following the overview in this introduction, section two provides a brief description of the Shared Reading component. Section three summarizes those aspects of the component that we believe work well and why. Section four discusses those aspects of Shared Reading that we believe can be better and how. Section five explores how Shared Reading relates to the additional components of the Funda Wande early literacy curriculum. Finally, we offer our conclusions in section six.

DESCRIPTION OF SHARED READING

Along the spectrum of the gradual release of responsibility model (see Figure 1), the shared reading activities in the Funda Wande (FW) curriculum fall in between Read Aloud and Group Guided Reading (FW CAPS Reading Activities 1, 2021). In a given week, shared Reading sessions occur three times from Tuesday to Thursday, each day focusing on a different area of literacy instruction (FW Teacher’s Guide, 2021). The first day focuses on comprehension, followed by decoding and responding to text. Students are also introduced to flashcard vocabulary found in the Shared Reading text contained in the Big Book (BB) (FW Big Book, 2021).

From the first session, the teacher models fluency for her students by reading with expression. After the teacher reads once, students join the teacher in reading as she points under the print. Each page of the Big Book is accompanied by comprehension and decoding-focused questions that the teacher is expected to ask her students during the Shared Reading sessions (FW Teacher’s Guide, 2021; FW Big Book, 2021; FW Learner Activity Book, 2021). For instance, during the first two sessions students are expected to predict story content based on the title, examine choices of characters, recall concepts of print (letters, words, full stops, etc.), and identify words. Additionally, on day three students respond to the story by discussing questions related to the story in pairs and as a class. Some story response activities involve movement and/or comparisons of words/concepts, both of which incorporate learned vocabulary.

Overall, during the Shared Reading sessions, learners are engaged by reading and listening to stories, orally responding to questions posed out loud by the teacher, and participating in group games that attempt to reinforce speaking and listening skills and gained vocabulary knowledge.

WHAT WORKS WELL?

SHARED READING ACTIVITIES

Shared Reading activities do a good job of reflecting the essential elements of good Language and Literacy practices, through integrating the five pillars of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension (Armbruster et al., 2009; Gove & Ovelich, 2011). For first grade, the time allotment of 15 minutes three times a week, given for read alouds and Shared Reading appears to be adequate (FW Teacher’s Guide, 2021).
TEACHER SUPPORT

Given the level of structure of the Shared Reading activities, it can be asserted that teacher support is substantial (FW Teacher’s Guide, 2021; FW Big Book, 2021; FW Learner Activity Book, 2021; Piper, et.al, 2018). Pedagogically, teachers are provided a clear sequence of activities across the three days of Shared Reading, each with a distinct scope. There is also evidence of spiraling of the curriculum, as the comprehension and decoding questions in particular increase in complexity for the students while reinforcing prior learning. Since all questions can be found in the Big Book, it is reasonable that a teacher can successfully navigate what is expected of students each week.

Within the Teacher’s Guide, the step-by-step instructions provide guidance without being overly scripted, allowing for relative autonomy of the individual teacher and addressing a common criticism of teacher guides (Piper, et al. 2018). For instance, as demonstrated in Figure 2, some steps prompt teachers to teach concepts, such as sight words, or concepts of print, without providing a standardized procedure. This level of structure to the lessons appears to reflect the need for teachers to develop their own style, and be confident in it, while being empowered by appropriate content and pedagogical foci to effectively teach literacy and form an organic classroom learning culture.

In terms of the physical materials, there is a high level of alignment between the Teacher’s Guide, Big Book, and the Learner Activity Book (FW Teacher’s Guide, 2021; FW Big Book, 2021; FW Learner Activity Book, 2021). Graphically, the Teacher’s Guide provides a clear roadmap for each week, while the Shared Reading texts found in the Big Book and Learner Activity Book are appropriately identical. Additionally, in the Big Book the main questions for each day are found in the margins of the text to allow teachers to rely only on that one teaching resource during instruction time.

SUGGESTIONS ON WHAT COULD BE BETTER

DECODING

Decoding is an important early reading skill, as a prerequisite to acquiring fluency and the development of reading comprehension. So it is good to see decoding skills reinforced in the Shared Reading activities. As we know, decoding refers to the ability to recognize letter-sound correspondences in words. In this context, it could be confusing then for teachers (especially those that are not strong in literacy instruction) to find activities labelled decoding, that instead refer to grammar - as occurs periodically in the TG and BB activities reviewed (FW Teacher’s Guide, 2021; FW Learner Activity Book, 2021).
Below, are two examples of this in the BB, for Weeks Four and Five:

**Day 2: Decoding focus**
- How many sentences?
- Look at the end of the sentence. The full stop looks different. This is an exclamation mark. This shows the boys are excited.

**Day 2: Decoding focus**
- How many words on this page? How can you tell?
- How many sentences on this page? How can you tell?

To avoid conceptual confusion for teachers, without a strong literacy background, it would be better to simply relabel those activities that do not involve letter-sound correspondences as something other than “decoding”. Perhaps “punctuation” would be more appropriate.

**VOCABULARY**
A systematic lack of alignment between weekly vocabulary words and the text in the BB and LAB was detected, that may be reflective of an overlooked error on an early version of these materials (FW Teacher’s Guide, 2021; FW Big Book, 2021; FW Learner Activity Book, 2021). It occurs as follows. During the Shared Reading activity children are asked to match “reading vocabulary” flashcards to the BB, Shared Reading text mirrored in the LAB. The problem is that on average only half (two out of four) of the weekly flashcard vocabulary words are actually found in the BB/LAB text. The other two vocabulary words are missing. On the right margin, we provide an example from Week five, where the second prompt under Comprehension Focus, introduces the “reading vocabulary”: “help, friend, big, small”. Yet the BB version of the “Lion and Mouse” text only contains two of those vocabulary words: “help, friend”. The other two words, “big, small”, are not found in the BB text.

This systematic lack of alignment between vocabulary words and the BB/LAB text, could be confusing for teachers (and even more so for early readers). It also creates a missed opportunity to align vocabulary instruction with best practices, that involve text-based vocabulary instruction. Conceptually it is straightforward to address by ensuring alignment between all of the weekly vocabulary words (found on the flashcards) and the Shared Reading texts in the LAB and BB.

**Week 5**
**Shared Reading**

**Day 1: Comprehension focus**
- How did the story end? (conclusion) (they became friends) Why are they best friends now? (they had helped each other)
- Show each vocabulary flashcard (help, friends, big, small). Children match the flashcards to the words in the text. Children also use each word in an oral sentence. Place the flashcards on Word Wall.
As a visitor navigates the ‘Learning Resources’ tab of the Funda Wande website, they will find a wealth of resources that cover a variety of materials Funda Wande has created for different interventions (e.g. Reading Academy, Teacher Guides, TA training, etc.). While this is a page that will likely rapidly evolve with new content, it is suggested that a short video or infographic be created to explain the interrelatedness of materials and how they are intended to be used by a wider audience in South Africa and beyond. If those suggestions are deemed unfeasible, we suggest that each subtitle should at least include a short description to explain the relationship of that material to other documents and Funda Wande interventions.

**COMPREHENSION**

Across the nine weeks of the Grade 1, Unit 1, Big Book, roughly half (five of nine) of the comprehension-focused days have three, or fewer, text-based comprehension questions (out of approximately ten questions total) (FW Big Book, 2021). Of those five weeks, two have zero and one has one text-based question. The remaining questions are either based on pictures or require recalling information from Read Aloud stories (FW Teacher’s Guide, 2021; FW Big Book, 2021; FW Learner Activity Book, 2021).

While questions based on images are suitable for emerging readers and allows for an engaging reading experience, there should also be text that corresponds to the images shown so students can adequately practice reading skills and illustrate the meaning of words (Armbuster et al., 2009). Moreover, the speculative questions have little or no connection to the text or images, but instead are dependent on recall of the Read Aloud stories. For instance, in Week six, students are asked “How does Simon know what to pack for school?”. However, the image is limited to Simon holding two items, accompanied by the text: “No! Your pencil case and your lunchbox.” Neither form of information from the Big Book or Learner Activity Book can reasonably answer the question, or appropriately demonstrate a learner’s ability to comprehend text. However, in the read aloud, which students would have listened to prior to the Shared Reading session, it is established Simon has already begun his schooling.

In future iterations of the Big Book, and accompanying comprehension questions, we suggest more consistent frequency of text-based questions embedded in the Shared Reading activities, to provide students with ample opportunities to continuously practice reading comprehension. Writing additional short sentences may be required to give more dimension to the Big Book stories and allow for more text-based comprehension questions to be formulated.

**ASSESSMENTS**

Beyond the formal assessments of the Funda Wande intervention, teachers are expected to continuously assess learners across all aspects of the curriculum, including Shared Reading. Of the 12 activities from the Continuous Assessment Checklist found at the end of the Teacher’s Guide (and in Figure 3 below), seven appear to be relevant to Shared Reading (R6 to R12) (FW Teacher’s Guide, 2021).

Activities R6-R8 focus on oral or visual skills, which are not specifically assessing fluency or comprehension; whether these activities should be replaced for those more closely related to reading skills must be determined by Funda Wande. Regardless, ensuring continuous assessments are varied will help inform why learners perform at certain levels in formal assessments (Kim et al., 2016). In addition, the activities in R9-R12 would benefit from a clearer explanation of what is expected of learners. In particular, detailing which concepts of print, text features, language, word identification strategies, and comprehension strategies must be covered in the curriculum of each various term should be a priority to allow teachers to adequately plan those parts of the Shared Reading activities that allows for autonomy, as previously mentioned in section three, and enable teachers to identify ways to best assess students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R 1</td>
<td>Read logos and words from environmental point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 2</td>
<td>Recognise his/her own name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 3</td>
<td>Recognise the names of 10 peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 4</td>
<td>Read labels and captions in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 5</td>
<td>Discuss book handling and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 6</td>
<td>Use pictures to predict what the story is about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 7</td>
<td>Listen to and discuss stories and other texts that are read aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 8</td>
<td>Interpret pictures to make up own story (“reads” pictures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 9</td>
<td>Join in with Shared Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 10</td>
<td>Identify concepts of print, text features and language in SR text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 11</td>
<td>Use word identification strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R 12</td>
<td>Use comprehension strategies at a range of levels (literal, reorganisation, inferential evaluation, and appreciation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.: Continuous Assessment Checklist for Reading
Currently, there does not seem to be a clear procedure for how teachers can continuously assess students during Shared Reading time. Moreover, teachers would be better served, if more structure was provided in the Teacher’s Guide to manage the continuous assessment process - where this checklist is found - particularly in light of the constraints of the South African classroom (FW Teacher’s Guide, 2021).

HOW DOES THE SHARED READING REINFORCE OTHER COMPONENTS?

Of all the components examined by the review teams (including phonics, handwriting, oral language, and writing), Shared Reading embeds oral skills the most (FW Teacher’s Guide, 2021; FW Big Book, 2021; FW Learner Activity Book, 2021). In the most basic iteration of the Shared Reading session, the consistent format across all weeks reinforces listening and speaking skills as the sessions ask students to first listen to a model of fluency and then read shared text aloud. Moreover, all questions a teacher asks across the comprehension, decoding, and responding iterations of the sessions are said aloud by the teacher for learners to listen carefully and reply orally with corresponding answers. This ranges from checking for understanding, asking students to apply things to past experiences, or to interpret texts or images. In all cases, students respond in a whole-class discussion or in pairs.

Writing and handwriting are not specifically reinforced by the activities within the Shared Reading sessions while phonics is reinforced in a limited amount by some decoding questions presented in the Big Book (e.g. “Identify any words beginning with the phonic sound of the week”). As previously mentioned, Shared Reading is prior to Group Guided Reading (GGR) along the spectrum of the gradual release of responsibility model, therefore Shared Reading activities help provide a skills foundation for reading during the GGR time.

With regard to the life skills readings found in the Big Book, there appears to be either a nominal or more intentional incorporation of Life skills themes in the Shared Reading stories. For instance, in Week nine a life skills diagram on handwashing, provides an intentional hygiene connection to the story that follows an elephant being scrubbed clean by his mother. On the other hand, a diagram on the sleep cycle, that precedes the well-known tortoise and the hare story, suggests a very nominal connection between the two activities. Overall, the connection to Life Skills seems to be more nominal than integrated into the Shared Reading sessions. There is a latent opportunity to better integrate Life Skills during the third day of Shared Reading. To illustrate the potential, in Week nine (the Elephant story) the movement activity asks students to pretend they are baby elephants trying to get their whole body clean. Instead, the activity could reference the handwashing diagram, and ask students to pretend to make baby elephants with their hands, and proceed to wash both of their baby elephants (“baby elephant hand model” example in Figure 4 photo).

CONCLUSION

On the whole, we found the Shared Reading component of the Funda Wande early literacy curriculum, to be well structured and coordinated with the other curricular components. The materials adequately reflect the 5 pillars of effective literacy instruction, and we were delighted to hear that all students receive a copy of the Learner Activity Book (LAB), under this model. Furthermore, the strong conceptual and graphics design characteristics of the TG, BB and LAB, persuade us that the intervention provides needed support for teachers and learners.

As with any instructional resources, we have also identified opportunities for improvement; some priority areas, others nice to have. The priority areas that could be better addressed are discussed in the sections about Vocabulary, Comprehension and Continuous Assessment. The secondary, but not insignificant, opportunities for improvement can be found in the sections which refer to Decoding, Web, and integration of Life Skills activities. We find this to be an inspiring intervention, especially given the enormity of the need for low-cost, scalable, quality literacy interventions within and beyond South Africa. We hope to visit and see the program in action one day.
REFERENCES


Funda Wande (2021). Resources. Funda Wande: Reading Academy, Booklet 3, CAPS Reading Activities 1, Teaching Children to Read, https://fundawande.org/img/cms/resources/FW_ReadingAcademy2020_Booklet3_v5_GENERIC.pdf


The Funda Wande curriculum phonics activities include teacher led games, partner work, and songs as well as worksheets in the Learner Activity Book (LAB). The Teacher’s Guide (TG) provides scripts for each lesson, as well as a ‘week at a glance’ which highlights the skills and activities that are the focus of each week. Handwriting and phonics are paired in this program. Before beginning to teach letter sounds and formations, the first several weeks of Funda Wande focus on hearing, segmenting, and manipulating sounds through call-and-response style games (development of phonemic awareness). A name game is introduced, in which teachers model identifying the first sound in their name, and students follow suit. This game spirals over the first several weeks and is used to identify and reinforce sound-letter correspondence as the teacher takes attendance.

Instruction is focused and clear. Foundational penmanship skills, such as pencil grip, familiarity with writing lines, and drawing different types of letter formation, are explicitly taught, and practiced. The Teacher’s Guide (TG) has photos and a brief script to help the teacher explicitly demonstrate how to hold a pencil correctly, and then students practice holding the pencil while completing an activity in the Learner Activity Book (LAB). In the first week, students are introduced to the cat which acts as a visual cue for using the writing lines. There is a phonics connection in that students identify the initial sound in the word ‘cat’ before practicing their pencil grip and completing the drawing of the cat on page 17 of their LAB. Finger spaces are introduced by the teacher (TG, p. 69) and reinforced with images in the LAB (p. 78).

Same or different is another phonics game that is introduced in week one and built upon in subsequent weeks. Students listen to the teacher making sounds and hold up fingers to show if they hear one sound or two different sounds. It is also used to identify upper-case and lower-case letters drawn on the board and practiced in the LAB (e.g., pp 21, 38, 41). Eventually, this activity asks students to identify pictures that are different but begin with the same sound. Each subsequent iteration of the same or different activities is explicitly introduced with direct instruction and a gradual release of responsibility. Same or different also evolves into yes or no, in which students indicate whether something is correct or not. This is first done with checks and crosses and progresses into students writing yes or no in the target language, English, Sepedi, or Afrikaans.

Students progress to identifying the letters that make up their names and writing numbers during week three. More complex patterns are introduced in the LAB for students to trace and replicate, which aim to support fine motor development in anticipation of letter writing (e.g., LAB p. 54). Students sing the alphabet song and, in week four, fill in missing alphabet letters in their LAB (p. 62). Counting and writing numbers continues as a phonics activity. Students identify if animals are facing left or right, and record their responses, count pieces of fruit in a bowl, and complete connect-the-dot pictures, building on their fine motor skills.

Students learn letter sounds and formations together, beginning in the fifth week of the first term. Letters are introduced through an explicit and consistent routine. The teacher shows the letter and tells the class its name and sound. Students are invited to list words that begin with the sound, practice saying the sound, and are directed to notice the shapes their mouth makes when making the target sound. An image in the LAB (p. 90) also demonstrates a person saying the target sound. Then, letter formation is taught through a chant and students practice tracing the letter in the air, on paper with their finger, and finally with a pencil. They find the target letter within sentences in the LAB (pp. 90, 91) before tracing and copying the target letter themselves. This routine is consistent across languages and letters. Approximately two letters are introduced in each language each week, although the sequence in which letters are learned varies across languages (see Appendix A). As letters and their sounds are introduced, they are reinforced with practice pages that invite students to identify the target letter or sound. Familiar letters are used when playing same or different orally. In week six, some of the LAB activities combine two of the taught letters (e.g., ‘m’ and ‘a’ in Sepedi) to complete words, as seen on page 128 of the LAB.

Assessments are embedded throughout the weeks. Students clap syllables, are asked to delete, or substitute initial sounds in target vocab words from their shared reading, and complete assessment pages in the LAB (e.g., p. 102). Minimal guidance is provided for teachers if students struggle with these activities, although the Teacher’s Guide does direct the instructor to notice whether students are completing pages correctly. In addition to the formative assessments throughout the curriculum, formal assessments are embedded periodically.

Phonemic awareness is supported by a variety of oral activities, as well as LAB pages that ask students to count out sounds within a word (i.e., LAB p. 160). This activity is reviewed as a whole class, which may provide students the opportunity to reflect on their own learning. Initially, the LAB uses lines to segment sounds within words. By week ten, students segment sounds within words themselves while counting and recording the number of sounds they hear. Rapid number naming is also introduced. Same or different is played orally throughout term one to reinforce known sounds.
In week seven, word building is introduced during phonics and handwriting. Letter tiles of the familiar letters are used to create words, students sound out words written and pictured in the LAB. Students also practice tracing and copying sentences in the LAB. This grows over time, with the teacher dictating words for students to build, read, and record (e.g., LAB p. 221). Week seven also introduces, in the target language, the months of the year which are then practiced orally and traced in their LAB (p. 145). During this week students also create identity cards with their own names, birthdays, and ages (p. 146).

In week ten, an activity is introduced that asks students to ‘crack a secret code.’ To do this, learned letters are paired with a picture that represents the corresponding sound. Sequences of the paired pictures are presented, and students use the ‘code’ to spell out target words (p. 246).

Throughout, the independent work pages offer some review of familiar concepts. Students color in pictures using letters embedded in them as a guide (LAB, p. 163) and use the alphabetic sequence as a guide to solve mazes (p. 164). Same and different asks students to review known letters, and upper- and lower-case letters are connected. Near the end of term one, students play Bingo to review known letters (TG, p. 197).

WHAT WORKED WELL?
The first four weeks are described as orientation in the Teacher’s Guide and focus on developing phonemic awareness, community building activities, such as using name-games to reinforce sound-letter correspondence, early penmanship skills, and introduce one sight word a week. The curriculum uses a variety of exercises to improve fine motor skills. Worksheet-based activities reinforce the writing lines for letter formation. Following the orientation period, letters are introduced, and students learn the corresponding letter sounds as well as chants to help remember correct letter formation. As new letter-sound combinations are introduced, students use letter tiles to spell words and manipulate letters, and complete worksheets that reinforce the sound letter relationship.

Rationale for the activities can be found at intervals in the Teacher’s Guide as well as in the Reading Academy training materials. The Reading Academy professional development materials are content focused, provide models of effective practice, and while self-paced, are of a sustained duration. These meet criteria for effective professional development (Darling Hammond et al., 2017). Self-assessments after each lesson provide opportunities for teachers to reflect upon their learning. Embedded within the Reading Academy lessons are opportunities to analyze sample student work as well as videos of effective classroom teaching, both of which serve to provide coaching and support for teachers as they learn.

The activities are very student centered. There are games, connections to life outside of school, and life skills that make the curriculum feel relevant to students. There is consistency in the LAB and TG across the target languages, and visuals are used in both teacher and student materials. The Teacher’s Guide and Learner Activity Book align with what Gove and Cvelich (2011) describe as the 5 Ts; a series of research-based recommendations for the international educational community to improve early literacy outcomes in under resourced countries. Gove and Cvelich’s 5 Ts are Teaching Technique, Time Use, Texts, Tongue, and Test. The first issue raised by Gove and Cvelich is how few teachers are trained to teach reading well. This can be addressed through teaching effective instructional techniques and providing teachers with up-to-date knowledge on reading development. Teaching teachers to teach reading is an essential component of improving student outcomes. Research from Piper and colleagues (2018) found that well-written teacher guides are both effective and cost-efficient ways of supporting instruction in low-income areas and can contribute meaningfully to improved learning for students. While too much scripting can be detrimental, the researchers found that a gradual release from scripted lessons to structured lessons provides teachers with opportunities to hone their teaching techniques. Features of quality teacher guides include limiting lesson length (recommended length is roughly one page per 45- minute lesson), explicitly stating the goals and ‘why’ of the lesson. Consistent formatting and including student workbooks in lesson outlines also were highlighted as helpful features. The Funda Wande’s Teacher’s Guide adheres closely to these recommendations. Time, the second of the 5 T’s, is also addressed in the teaching guide in that lessons are clearly and carefully paced, and timing suggestions are provided to help teachers maximize classroom instruction. The timing appears to be well-balanced for the various activities.
Access to texts, both in school and in home, is a crucial component of early literacy development (Gove & Cvelich, 2011). Funda Wande has materials for students in their workbooks, as well as shared texts for the class. Term 1 in the Funda Wande curriculum is focused on early concepts of print and emergent reading; subsequent terms appear to have their own ‘Anthology’ series that is used for shared reading. Classroom, school, or community libraries are not featured in the curriculum, and outside texts are not mentioned. Materials are available in multiple South African languages. Research from Trudell and Piper (2013) lends strong support to early instruction in students’ mother tongues as a key component of long-term educational success. Below, we focus on Sepedi and Afrikaans, two of the languages supported in the Funda Wande Curriculum. The final of the five T’s described by Gove and Cvelich is testing. Consistent assessment of student skills provides information to teachers and supervisors. Gove and Cvelich recommend country and language-specific assessments, which Funda Wande includes.

WHAT COULD BE BETTER IF…?

The Funda Wande curriculum is thoughtfully designed and uses phonics and handwriting to connect across curriculum and scaffold students’ knowledge. Some areas where the curriculum could see improvement include a stronger connection to oral language and life skills, and a more detailed rubric that provides teacher guidance for evaluating student learning and provides support for struggling students.

Sorting activities, such as those found on page 115 in the LAB, are used to distinguish shopping items but could also provide an opportunity to incorporate a phonics component, as well. While the teacher are giving directions, they could ask students to find the foods that start with different sounds, a skill they already work on daily in the beginning of the year; adding a phonics component to this activity would provide a circular scaffolding framework for students. During the action rhyme/song portion of the lessons, a connection could, again, be drawn to phonics and handwriting. For example, the rainbow song in week seven (TG, p. 134) the different colors in the rainbow could be used as connections to the letters and sounds introduced during phonics lessons. This incorporation of skills would be like the phonics connection in the ‘vowel song’ (Funda Wande: Lesson Plan Grade 1 Term 1, p. 26).

Funda Wande includes baseline assessments, checklists to track student skills, and each assessment activity has explicit scoring instructions for the teacher. In the Rhodes Funda Wande Course, Course 1 (Funda Wande: CAPS Reading Activity) a recommendation is provided for uses of rubrics and the benefits of keeping records for students; the assessments are included in the scope and sequence to ensure that data collection happens at consistent intervals. However, little guidance is provided for teachers in the event of students struggling with particular skills or concepts. Greater specificity of learning targets and suggested modifications for the inevitable student who struggles would be beneficial.

LIFE SKILLS CONNECTION TO PHONICS AND HANDWRITING

The Life Skills components in the Funda Wande curriculum are particularly present during the beginning of the year. The orientation period provides the opportunity for students to learn routines and learn to read diagrams. The connection between life skills and phonics may be intentionally loose because of the differences across languages in the phonics programs. However, the Funda Wande curriculum is still able to incorporate a strong connection between its phonics and life skills through the name games used in week two (TG, p.16); this game draws students’ attention to the first sounds in their own, and their classmates, names. A Life Skill that could be more strongly connected with phonics is the lullaby in week eight; it provides a simple opportunity to reinforce sounds students have already learned. The lullaby connects thematically to a unit having conversations about dreaming and how to handle nightmares, and provides students with the opportunity to draw a happy ending for their dream.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUNDA WANDE DESIGN TEAM

The Funda Wande Reading Academy Reading Academy booklet makes frequent use of graphics, checks for understanding, and videos. The videos provide clear models of instruction, an important component of professional development (Darling Hammond et al., 2017), and the checks for understanding provide opportunities for teachers to reflect upon their learning. The booklet seems like it is suited for asynchronous use. It seems that engaging with this content in a community of teachers would provide valuable opportunities to discuss, practice applying, and reflect upon the techniques described rather than simply working through this workbook in isolation. Opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own practice in the classroom throughout the professional development would also provide meaningful chances to connect with this learning.
A deeper connection between the Life Skills and phonics components of the curriculum have been discussed. Although there is room for improvement (as outlined above) the justification provided for the lack of connection between the two is sufficient. Funda Wande designers need to decide whether similarity of content across languages is more important than ensuring alignment with the phonics curriculum for each language.

When considering the opportunity for a rubric modification, the incorporation of clear suggestions for differentiation in the Teacher’s Guide for when students struggle to meet the learning targets would offer support to teachers when adapting instruction to meet the varied needs of students in their class. The possibilities of including some recommendations from the Funda Wande materials that reference rubrics in the TG may help classroom teachers organize their plans on how to implement rubrics in a more meaningful manner. There is also a need for some guidance on how to aid students who are not meeting the criteria set for the learning goals, beyond the broad reference about using rubrics to help teachers “work out how to support each child” (Funda Wande: CAPS Reading Activity, p. 33). Including explicit examples or instruction on how teachers should use the rubric to help support their students would greatly increase the efficiency of the assessment process.

**CONCLUSION**

The handwriting and phonics component of the Funda Wande curriculum is thoughtfully sequenced and includes several student-centric games and activities to introduce and develop key foundational skills across several languages. The Reading Academy training provides clear and specific instruction for teachers, including video examples of teachers putting Funda Wande materials into practice within classroom contexts. The Teacher’s Guide contains concise instruction, visual supports, and provides guidance for pacing and delivery. The Learner Activity Book makes use of visuals and simple directions to support students learning and promote engagement. While the phonetic scope and sequence varies by language of instruction, there are intentional connections made between letters and sounds across languages and Learner Activity Books, and phonemic awareness is developed through games and activities to support this learning. While some adjustments, such as including more suggestions for differentiation and increasing opportunities for teacher collaboration, may enhance this curriculum, the existing materials are robust and thoughtfully crafted.
REFERENCES


## Appendix A: Comparing Sepedi and Afrikaans Phonetic Scope and Sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson introduced</th>
<th>Sepedi</th>
<th>Afrikaans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pp 90-91</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mohlare, mobu, magapu, moriri</td>
<td>Son, sop, suiker, slak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malome o loma bana ka meno moropa</td>
<td>Slang en slak sit in die son son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pp 96-7</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apola, aga, anega, alola</td>
<td>Appel, apie, arm, agt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ana o ala malao a mma apola</td>
<td>Anna het agt apples in die sak appel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111-114</td>
<td>Mokotlana wa dipuku</td>
<td>Die skoolsak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEEK 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Story for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shared reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Na ke nyaka eng ka mokolaneng waka wa dipuku?</td>
<td>1. Wat benodig ek in my skoolsak?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Aowa! Mokotlana wag ago wa diphentshele le lepokisana la dijo tša gago tša letena.</td>
<td>3. Nee! Jou potloodsakkie en jou kosblik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pp 116-117</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dieta, diaparo, dijo, lepidibidi</td>
<td>Os, otter, rot, olifant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dibede o duba mafodi a mabedi</td>
<td>Os is onder op ons plaas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dieta</td>
<td>Os</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pp 121-22</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isele, nariki, leihlo, moriri</td>
<td>Muis, man, malvalekker, roomys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Itu o ila tamati</td>
<td>Melanie se mooi muis hou van roomys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isl o a inama</td>
<td>Die muis soek haar ma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P 128</td>
<td>FILL IN ma or di in picture captions</td>
<td>FILL IN m or o in picture captions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pp 137-140</td>
<td>dikherayone tše mpsha</td>
<td>Nuwe kryte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Lebogang o na le dikherayone te mpsha!</td>
<td>1. Sannie het nuwe kryte!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Šomiša nna hle! gva realo Khubedu</td>
<td>2. Gebruik my asseblief, se Rooi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Šomiša nna hle! gva realo Talaterata</td>
<td>3. Gebruik my asseblief, se Blou.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Šomiša nna hle! gva realo Serolwana</td>
<td>4. Gebruik my asseblief, se Geel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Šomiša nna hle! gva realo Talamorogo.</td>
<td>5. Gebruik my asseblief, se Groen.</td>
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<td>Page</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>142-143</td>
<td>Emere, Emiša, eie, kereke&lt;br&gt;Ekela o ela meets.&lt;br&gt;Kee pa molete.</td>
<td>Lemoen, leeu, lamp, lip&lt;br&gt;Lennie eet die lemoen.&lt;brLeeu loop langs luiperd.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Mmutla le Khudu</th>
<th>Haas en Skilpad hardloop resies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>168-172</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lemoen, leeu, lamp, lip&lt;br&gt;Lennie eet die lemoen.&lt;brLeeu loop langs luiperd.</td>
<td>Donkie, deur, duif, duim&lt;brDie duif sit op Dina se duim.&lt;brDrink die koeldrank.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Review: S, A, O, M, L, E</th>
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<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Mmutla le Khudu</th>
<th>Haas en Skilpad hardloop resies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>168-172</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lemoen, leeu, lamp, lip&lt;br&gt;Lennie eet die lemoen.&lt;brLeeu loop langs luiperd.</td>
<td>Donkie, deur, duif, duim&lt;brDie duif sit op Dina se duim.&lt;brDrink die koeldrank.</td>
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<th>Page</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>174</td>
<td>Lesea, leloba, lala, legapu&lt;brLeleme la Lolo le a bonala. Ke e telele.</td>
<td>Donkie, deur, duif, duim&lt;brDie duif sit op Dina se duim. &lt;brDrink die koeldrank.</td>
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<th>Page</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>G</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>182-3</td>
<td>Oli, moillo, foroko, kgogo&lt;brOuma o oka koko. Lolo o ora molo.</td>
<td>Gogga, geel, groente, glas&lt;brGawie geniet groente&lt;brGroen goggas in die gras.</td>
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<th>Page</th>
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<tr>
<td>204-209</td>
<td>Oli, mollo, foroko, kgogo&lt;brOuma o oka koko. Lolo o ora molo.</td>
<td>Gogga, geel, groente, glas&lt;brGawie geniet groente&lt;brGroen goggas in die gras.</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>210-211</td>
<td>Sefofane, setimela, sesepa, seta&lt;brSebo o sola sesola.&lt;brSesi Selina o apea sopo.</td>
<td>Kat, kas, kam, kaas&lt;brKieter Kat sit op die kas.&lt;brKieter Kat sit op die kas en eet koek.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**U**
- Kubu, pudi, rula, puku
- Seudu o bona kubu.
- Lulu o uta puku.

**N**
- Nes, net, nege, nul
- Nel vang nege visse met die net.
- Daar sit nege voels in die nes.

**Pp 233-236**  
**Week 10**

**Ditšhošwane di ya gae**
- Ditšhošwane tše hlano di a sepela, di sepela letšatšing.
- Ditšhošwane tše nne di a sepela, di sepela a moyeng.
- Ditšhošwane tše tharo di a sepela, di sepela mo puleng.
- Ditšhošwane tše pedi di a sepela, di fihile gae di bolokegile gape.

**Die miere stap huis toe**
- Vfy miere stap. Hulle stap in die son.
- Vier miere stap. Hulle stap in die wind.
- Drie miere stap. Hulle stap in die reen.
- Twee mieren stap weer veilig huis toe.
Group guided reading (GGR) is a key component of Funda Wande’s curriculum, which supports student learning through differentiated teaching and instruction. Scaffolded structures are put in place to slowly introduce the GGR block to students. GGR takes place for 30 minutes each day and within those 30 minutes, teachers see two groups of students, each for 15 minutes. The goal of GGR is for teachers to spend dedicated time with small groups to support their engagement with texts that are “within the child’s control” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 269). During this time, teachers should be attending to specific elements of strong reading instruction, such as decoding, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary (p. 270) to ensure children are in their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). This review will explore the types of activities we saw in GGR, and the ways in which these activities build early literacy skills for students in South Africa. Additionally, we will outline the aspects of GGR that we feel to be the strongest, as well as the elements that could be stronger in connection to our suggestions for moving forward. We will touch on the ways in which GGR supports and reinforces the learning in other curricula components, such as life skills, and will close with our concluding remarks. As we write this memo, we acknowledge that GGR is a newly developed component of Funda Wande’s comprehensive curriculum and understand that it is a work in progress.

SUPPORTING ELEMENTS OF LITERACY

The Funda Wande GGR curricular activity reinforces four of the five pillars of literacy: phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). Specifically, for the Afrikaans anthologies that are organized by the letter of the week, the GGR routine supports, and is mutually reinforced by, vocabulary and phonics found in the LAB. For example, week eight focuses on the letter sound “g.” The corresponding story in the anthology is “Grillerige Goggas” which reinforces the “g” sound through diction and alliteration. Independent work also reinforces the letter “g” as students engage in activities to strengthen their “g” letter handwriting, engage with vocabulary words with “g” letter sounds in the story and word/letter recognition activities. In Sepedi, specific vocabulary words are taught prior to reading the stories and are found on the first page of each story. For both Afrikaans and Sepedi, fluency is supported during GGR as students read multiple iterations of the same story out loud or silently follow along as another peer reads aloud. Pictures that accompany text as well as questions that occur at the end of each story draw on various levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy to build comprehension skills, reflecting the Funda Wande team’s attention to aligning materials with PIRLS resources and recommendations.

Further, GGR reinforces oral language development, another strong feature of the Funda Wande curriculum. This occurs in tandem with fluency as students engage in reading stories aloud. The questions that accompany each story in the anthologies are also intended to be responded to orally, further solidifying both oral and comprehension skills. This integration of GGR and oral language supports the best practices in guided reading as students develop the ability to talk about books (Bauman, 2009; Gafner et al., 2014).

COMPREHENSION

The goal of guided reading, according to the research, is to support learners to move from learning to read to reading to learn (Renzulli, 1998). Through strong instruction, teachers should be using their small group time to support students’ metacognitive skills (Palinscar & Brown, 1984) by asking questions, thinking about what they have read, and making connections to their own world and other texts (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). As we were reviewing the Funda Wande GGR curricula materials, we thought the Group Guided Reading Booklet was extremely helpful for teachers’ learning, thus students’ learning, too. On page ten, there are some strategies, skills, and behaviors that teachers can potentially focus on in GGR; these include, decoding skills, oral reading fluency, using different comprehension strategies, interpreting punctuation, identifying the characters and setting, reading silently while others are reading aloud, and using pictures as clues to figure out the meanings of words. Beneath that are resources to support teachers towards their understanding of how to implement different reading strategies into their GGR block. These resources include “word attack” strategies, and questions that can be asked to develop comprehension skills. The embedded questions are incredibly well thought out and help to support meaningful and rich comprehension conversations between teachers and students.
As noted above, GGR is a time to develop strong comprehension skills through small-group, differentiated instruction. While the comprehension questions noted on the Group Guided Reading Booklet are extremely strong, we feel as though they should be highlighted more prominently, and further developed throughout the GGR booklet, as well as throughout the different Anthologies. In the GGR booklet, there is room to provide more guidance to teachers on how to engage in comprehension conversations that go beyond surface level discussions. For example, instead of always asking plot-based questions that typically require a one-word answer, there could be another section for teachers to rely on, in the GGR booklet, that explains the way to build comprehension skills through dialogic questioning of students. Additionally, this could be reinforced with more notes in the Anthologies that prompt the teacher to pause and ask targeted, inferential, and critical thinking questions. We do understand that there is a need for this small group time to be used to reinforce and compliment other skills in the classroom (such as decoding and fluency). However, as GGR continues to be developed, we would like to encourage the design team to keep text comprehension as an ongoing goal to infuse into GGR instruction.

DIFFERENTIATION

One of the main purposes of guided reading is for teachers to differentiate and provide necessary feedback and supports for all students (Baumann, 2009; Gafner et al., 2014; Menzies et al., 2008; Newkirk, 2009; Resnick and Hampton, 2009). In doing so, students can engage with and discuss level-appropriate stories, and deepen their comprehension skills, ensuring that they ultimately achieve the benchmarks in literacy. A significant strength of the Funda Wande curriculum, particularly the Sepedi resources, is the use of levelled readers to support the diverse needs of students, thus addressing the importance of differentiation. As Kruizenga and Nathanson reveal in a multi-method research approach, schools in South Africa often lack resources, such as levelled readers, needed to implement guided reading well, and thus resort to full-class instruction during this time instead (2010).

While there are many ways to group students to achieve differentiation, such as through readiness, interest and learning preferences, the literature argues that readiness, or grouping by levels, is the most effective way to group emergent readers (Clay, 1991, 2001; Lyons, 2003). Grouping by levels requires that teachers have the resources to assess learners’ skills. These resources should extend beyond the on-going formative checks outlined in our assessment section. We will speak about this more in the next section. (Pinnell and Fountas, 2008; Resnick and Hampton, 2009). The baseline assessments in the Funda Wande curriculum are conducted at the start of the school year to group students based on abilities and provide a foundation from which teachers can differentiate. This, too, aligns with best practices that exceed expectations in South Africa as teachers often make groups based on seating arrangements (Kruizenga and Nathanson, 2010; Makumbila and Rowlan, 2016). While the Funda Wande baseline assessments prove to be instrumental in starting GGR for the year, it remains unclear what resources and strategies teachers use to continually reevaluate groupings and decide when students should be moved to different GGR groups. Similar to the way the teacher guides prompt teachers to conduct baseline assessments, we recommend that additional prompts be added to the Teacher Guide biweekly to remind teachers to reorganize groups if necessary and direct them to applicable resources to do so.
ASSESSMENT

Assessments are useful to identify students’ independent and instructional reading levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Assessments should be used on an ongoing basis to track growth and movement in all areas of literacy instruction. Typically, especially with younger students, assessments are designed so that teachers can estimate a child’s decoding abilities, fluency rate, and level of comprehension (p. 270). In the Funda Wande curricular materials, we noted the strong emphasis on conducting baseline assessments. As noted in the Group Guided Reading Booklet, the baseline assessment is a “short test to find out children’s reading levels. It is ... done one-on-one with each child” (p. 8). We think this description of the importance of using a baseline assessment is imperative, well created, and should be kept in its entirety. We also thought the explanations of when, how long, and why teachers should administer baseline assessments were strong and clear to teachers.

To ensure students are consistently receiving the level of support and instruction necessary, it is important to administer ongoing assessments (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). These assessments can then support teachers in regrouping students based on children’s growing reading level, as learners master skills and progress throughout the school year. We noticed that in the Teacher’s Guide, there was a checklist for “ongoing assessment tracking,” but there does not seem to be an abundance of guidance around when to administer ongoing assessments. For example, should teachers reassess students every five weeks? If so, should they use GGR blocks to test students, or should it happen at another time of the day? We see room for more guidance around re-assessing students, and then how to use that data to ensure GGR blocks are being readjusted to meet students’ new needs as the year progresses.

INDEPENDENT WORK

Independent work supports literacy development by having students engage with vocabulary, phonics and letter writing and recognition. Specifically, we see the connection between GGR, independent work and the other elements of literacy in Afrikaans because the anthologies match to the letter sounds and thus, the activities for the week. These independent work activities diversely address various components by getting students to draw, write and match. While these efforts are noteworthy, we wonder if Independent Work activities maximize opportunities to develop literacy as it relates to GGR and if the activities engage students for the duration of GGR time.

Independent work during GGR serves a dual purpose. While it is intended to engage students so that teachers can effectively manage their small groups, it is also equally important in strengthening all pillars of literacy. Reconsidering some of these tasks to serve as extensions of guided reading will enable independent time to move beyond busy-work and further develop higher-order thinking skills and literacy development (Ford and Opitz, 2008; Gafner et al., 2014; Guastello and Lenz, 2005; Menzies et al., 2008). One potential way to utilize the independent work block would be to provide students with a task to be completed as independent work, following the guided reading lesson. Questions can range from low-level questions on Bloom’s taxonomy (for example, recall and draw the main character) to high order thinking (for example, write a story about what you think would happen next or tell me how you are like the main character). Additionally, we encourage you to consider having a listening station as the station prior to guided reading whereby students listen to, and follow along with their fingers, to the story they are about to read in GGR. Naturally, we understand that such an activity is resource permitting, and wonder if there is the ability to find old cassette players or CD players to support such an opportunity. These activities are open-ended, choice activities that align with the best practices in literacy centers, contributing to effective GGR time while simultaneously reinforcing other areas of the Funda Wande curriculum, such as oral, decoding, comprehension, fluency, and writing.

Time allocations are visible and intentional throughout the Funda Wande curriculum. In the Learner Activity Book, time allocations for activity are shown using a clock which assists students in building time management and time-telling skills (connected to Life Skills outcomes). As it relates to GGR, groups get two 15-minute time allocations a week. We wonder if this time allocation is sufficient to listen to each student read, answer questions, and engage in all the other best practices of GGR, such as activating prior knowledge, predicting, and engaging in discussion (Fountas and Pinnell, 2012; Gaffner et al., 2014). The literature recommends that beginning readers should spend at least 20 minutes a day reading to or directly with someone. Indeed, some of this time is covered in peer reading in the timetable, but not with the same level of support and focus offered through guided reading practices. The time limit is especially restrictive if classes are large and there may be some students who get missed each week. We know that all the Funda Wande components deservedly require time for successful literacy. However, we wonder if there may be extra time found for GGR by combining certain life skills topics with group guided reading, a suggestion we will elaborate in the Life Skills section. Or perhaps, there is a home guide that students can participate in with caregivers to read their GGR stories aloud, although, understandably, this support is not always guaranteed.
STRATEGIES FOR LARGE CLASS SIZES

Another barrier to GGR is conducting GGR lessons effectively within the allocated time, given large class sizes; this barrier was echoed by the Funda Wande team. According to the Teacher’s Guide, five groups with 4-6 students are recommended, and we commend the Funda Wande team for striving to implement time for five groups in the curriculum. Understandably, this poses a challenge when classrooms in South Africa tend to exceed 30 students (Spaull, 2016). One strategy used to buffer the impacts of large class sizes on guided reading is to spread GGR throughout the week, which Funda Wande has already done (Guastello and Lenz, 2005). As previously mentioned, dedicating more time to GGR would allow for more students to actively participate and be supported; however, that is not necessarily a feasible option. Other strategies include using independent work tasks to support guided readings so that less time is on the pre-reading and post-reading activities; and increasing proficient group sizes to a maximum of eight students (not the emergent groups as these should remain the smallest groups) (Cummins, 2016). Support and guides to highlight these strategies for teachers are provided in the already excellent professional development video series.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development, when designed well and implemented consistently, can help create professional learning communities where teachers are supported and encouraged to develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to become strong educators (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). While good professional development is costly, research shows a causal relationship between teacher coaching and teachers’ instructional practice, as well as students’ academic achievement (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018). The Funda Wande guides provide teachers with comprehensive materials, as well as a range of videos to support implementation of the many parts of the GGR block. The materials provide detailed information on how to set up the groups and expectations, explanations for students who are not in GGR, and give the teachers tips about what to look for as students are reading, as well as among the independent work groups. The materials also give teachers the CoP checklist, as well as questions and in-text reading prompts for students in the Anthologies.

It might be helpful for teachers to discuss the PD videos with one another. We understand that a strength of the materials is that they are self-paced but learning for teachers happens best through collaborative discussions and professional relationships. Further, teachers may feel “lost” once they are using multiple different books and engaging in comprehension conversations with readers of varying levels. The nuances of GGR can be overwhelming and confusing to teachers, and we believe that if regular, in-person coaching is not feasible in schools, then additional videos or training around how to facilitate the multiple, different leveled, GGR lessons would be useful for teachers.

LIFE SKILLS

We notice that there are strong opportunities for Life Skills to be integrated into GGR time. In general, there are connections between the Life Skills outcomes and components of the Funda Wande curriculum. For example, morning routines, name games and weather conversations can build oral language and phonics skills while simultaneously promoting Life Skills outcomes. Further, there are nuanced connections to Life Skills Outcomes reflected through themes of the anthology stories in GGR. For example, in Maats, there is evidence of unlikely friends, pointing to the Grade 1 Life Skills goal, “How am I different and the same as my friends?” Here, we recommend including comprehension questions that reflect levels 3-5 (apply, analyze, evaluate) of Bloom’s Taxonomy. Questions could prompt students to connect these stories to their lives, experiences, and relationships to surface the themes and connections.

Further, we believe that the content of the stories in the anthologies can be well aligned to serve GGR and Life skills outcomes, specifically, the Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being components of the Life Skills curriculum. This may be achieved through Social Stories. Social Stories originally emerged as a behavior intervention for students with exceptionalities, particularly students on the autism spectrum (Gray and Garand, 1993). As social-emotional learning surfaces to the forefront of education in the 21st century, we see the integration of Social Stories into curricula and regular classroom contexts (Reimers and Chung, 2016). Social Stories effectively address routines, expectations, and behavioral standards in an alternative way that engages students in their learning and encourages participation. In providing information through a story format with visual examples of expectations, the stories promote the Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being aspects of the Life Skills.
Table lists some examples of these specific outcomes that could be beautifully addressed and reinforced in the Grade 1 group guided reading by Social Stories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Skills Outcome</th>
<th>Book Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waiting my turn</td>
<td>My Mouth is a Volcano by Julia Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to others</td>
<td>Strega Nona by Tomie dePaolo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting other people and what belongs to them.</td>
<td>Don’t Touch My Hair by Sharee Miller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Golden Rule by Eilleen Cooper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing kindness</td>
<td>Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Pena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Kindness is my Superpower by Alice Ortego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing kindness</td>
<td>For Pete’s Sake by Ellen Stoll Walsh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being honest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We suggest considering how to fold the Life Skills curricular content into the GGR activities, in order to free up time for GGR while also meeting the South African curricular guidelines for Life Skills time and content.

DESIGN
We would like to extend this paper to reflect on the design of the Funda Wande materials. In general, both the LAB and the Teacher’s Guide are well organized with graphics to capture attention. Intricate details in the design of the materials add clarity for both students and teachers. The Teacher’s Guide is not too overwhelming; it is easy to know what to teach and questions to ask students. The icons, such as the GGR crocodile, as well as clear labels, page numbers and color-coded weeks further support learners to be engaging in the correct task, even if they are not proficient in reading yet.

We found the stories in the anthologies to be culturally relevant. Story comprehension building opportunities in GGR were reflected in the design of the anthologies as both pictures and text complemented themes leading to greater understanding. The amount of text on the pages were appropriate to sustain student participation and efficacy. Moreover, we found the Afrikaans anthologies to be particularly well designed as the same characters are tracked throughout and the graphics are modern and colorful, thus engaging students.

We did, however, find the sheer number of resources to navigate through the website to be quite overwhelming and did not know where to find the relevant materials for GGR. We wonder if the resources on the website might be organized into tabs by language. Each language tab would still have the same format as the current website; however, this system of organization may be less overwhelming and make it less likely to miss materials, which we found ourselves doing. We also wonder if there might be a checklist document which teachers can use to ensure they are using all the necessary and correct materials. The teacher resource videos describe GGR in Afrikaans and Sepedi, including the required resources. We came about this video by chance, and we wonder if it would be suitable to take the information from this video and put it into a checklist document that teachers have in either their teacher guide or separately. This can be grouped on a document with all the Funda Wande components and relevant materials, not just GGR.

CONCLUSION
Group guided reading, while new to Funda Wande, has been developed thoroughly with the goal to provide teachers with small group time to meet students’ needs in the classrooms. As we examined the various aspects of the curricula, we saw many moments where GGR supports strong literacy instruction. We understand that this portion of Funda Wande’s curriculum is a work in progress, but we see some extremely promising resources and ideas that will support students’ reading development. It has been an honor to review and provide feedback to Funda Wande’s guided reading component; thank you all for welcoming us into your community.
REFERENCES


According to statistical data, South Africa has long been regarded as one of the top nations on the African continent, boasting a bustling and thriving economy. The wide array of talented and resourceful citizens in the country play a pivotal role in explaining why South Africa stands out from many of its African counterparts, and a large part of this is because of its strong educational foundation. But there are still gaps. According to Statistics South Africa, a governmental data ecosystem developed by the Republic of South Africa, almost half of children aged 0-6 have not attended any educational institution in 2018 (the latest figures available) (2021). Furthermore, an International Monetary Fund report suggests that while there have been improvements in basic and tertiary education enrollment, South Africa still suffers from “significant challenges in the quality of educational achievement by almost any international metric,” (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019, p. 5) adding that many of these issues stem from “insufficient subject knowledge of some teachers, history, race, language, geographic location, and socio-economic status. Low educational achievement contributes to low productivity growth, and high levels of poverty unemployment, and inequality” (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019, p. 2).

It is evident that the Funda Wande team is attempting to reverse these statistics. Through comprehensive research and using a strategic, iterative process, the Funda Wande teaching team has created and executed a comprehensive curriculum for young school students to excel both inside and outside the classroom. We have taken into account Funda Wande’s vision, which has proposed the challenge to ensure that by 2023, all South African children can read for meaning by the end of grade 3. Funda Wande also prides itself on making sure that teachers are well equipped to teach children how to read and write, and it is evident as we combed through the teacher’s guide and Learner Activity Book (LAB) that they have used meticulous measures in enhancing and enriching the academic experience for first grade students. We focus here on the writing component of the Funda Wande curriculum, which has a wide-ranging array of tools and resources that are helpful as students transition from beginner to intermediate writers. The curriculum uses an in-depth approach to the style of teaching that lays out specific activities and examples students can use to expand – and expound upon – what they learn in the classroom and take what they learned to become more expressive writers throughout their academic journeys.

**TYPES OF ACTIVITIES**

The curriculum follows a meaning-based skill development sequence to teach young learners about writing. The Funda Wande approach reflects the fact that children cannot be taught to write just according to the standards and through rote learning. A connection to students’ lives is needed, linking student, family, teacher, and the larger environment. Funda Wande’s midline assessment did not include a writing component to avoid learner fatigue with writing assessment (Ardington & Meiring, 2020). It will be interesting to see the results from children on both quantitative assessment of their ability to perform on the writing assessment and qualitative assessment of whether their learning is meaningful for them during the final evaluation of the program. We suggest the Funda Wande design team incorporate into their formative assessments procedures for asking questions like the following of the children: How did you feel when you were asked to make a list of things to bring to school? How did you feel about being able to write your own name to label your belongings? Do you ever help your parents write at home?

Various activities in the LAB support children’s writing to meet the South Africa curriculum framework with thorough scaffolding and meaningful learning. Children start by drawing pictures in the first two weeks of the school year, before phonics and letter writing skills are established. By the third week, in the “Draw my Shaker” activity, children start to incorporate both drawing and writing. They are given words related to the shaker contents. This activity combines handwriting and writing words that connect with what they are doing. Children may not remember how to write the words again since there is no opportunity for repetition, but the activity is designed to pique children’s interest. By week five, children are asked to copywrite an entire sentence, instead of just short words; the curriculum scaffolds the children’s growing capability. Starting in week five, children start to write their own name. This activity is repeated until week ten to consolidate their knowledge. In week 8, children answer comprehension questions with a “yes” or a “no” response, which means children are exposed to different forms of writing: Descriptive, Functional, Informational. In the last week of the term, students are asked to complete a sentence on their own after being given a drawing task. At the very end of the tenth week, there is a summative assessment to check children’s learning.
In the teacher-led component of the curriculum, there is a lot of formative assessment – opportunities for teachers to observe learners doing independent or shared writing. There are also guidelines on how to facilitate sharing children’s writing activities that support positive skills for children: confidence, public speaking, and sharing. The Teacher’s Guide, lesson plan, and professional development resources are very detailed and descriptive in demonstrating how teachers should teach and how they should incorporate active learning. Moreover, at the end of an activity introducing a new concept or practice, teachers are given assessment tips which inform them about what to look for in children’s work to understand their progress.

While the in-class videos and information on short courses are extremely useful, in-person coaching would ideally be available. Perhaps teachers could be supported to seek feedback from each other and to formulate practical coaching techniques to aid each other during their teaching careers (Kraft et al., 2018).

Many aspects of the structure of the curriculum are very helpful in setting goals, identifying foci, and supporting planning, e.g., giving “The week ahead” page in every lesson week. Since the ‘week ahead’ page is also included in the LAB, which children take home, parents can also support children as they are learning. The icons indicating which components of literacy children are working on (writing, reading, oral language) included with each activity are also very helpful.

Teachers are asked to explain new concepts carefully before children practice them, in alignment with good pedagogical practice. The rules of writing are taught at the same time children are asked to develop a love for writing and words. In the LAB, the creative writing activities are very engaging, with designs and writing prompts that relate to the learners’ family life and friendships. Teachers take regular assessments of the student’s progress during individual time.

WHAT WORKED WELL?

In the Funda Wande curriculum, there were three 15-minute sessions for writing each week. Within writing, there are components that encourage writing letters (Word Works) and writing words. Particularly for early readers/writers, connecting these specific skills to familiar topics is key (Lonigan & Shanahan, 2009). The Funda Wande curriculum ensures the relevance of the literacy activities of reading, writing, phonics, and our focus topic of writing to the learners’ schooling, home, family and friends. As prescribed by the international primary, as well as South African Grade 1 curriculum, students’ main writing goals at this stage are to be able to write their own names, copywrite, and write some sight words. Reading receives a heavier emphasis in the first term curriculum, as it has shown to be the best indicator of learning success later in life.

In our review, we look at the pedagogy and content aspects of the writing curriculum. The pedagogy included the use of gradual release, spiraling and repetition to make students remember the building blocks of literacy without the rote method. The curriculum begins with drawing, short words, which are high frequency words and short sentences to begin a student’s writing journey. Finally, students are encouraged to write their name starting at week five.

The content of this integrated curriculum that connects reading, writing, phonics, group guided reading and life skills. For example, the reading from stories and life skills become writing prompts and creative writing exercises that motivate children to write and become confident writers. It is also a good message to children that what they read are words and the words can be written or sounded out.

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**WHAT COULD BE BETTER?**

While there is an ample array of tools and resources in the curriculum available to help students as they build upon their writing skills, we wonder if there are more advanced approaches to cultivate creative writing in coursework. Writing in itself should be an engaging and exciting experience for those who want to convey a story. By first grade, we propose that students begin the process of learning how to express their creativity and temperament through words. This is, for understandable reasons, not easy. In fact, for many students the technicalities of writing (letter formation, spelling) can be burdensome and an obstacle to learning how to express their feelings or writing about a fun memory in a creative way. Luckily, the Funda Wande team has devised ways to use visual elements to make creative writing more fun. For example, in the “Lion and Mouse” story, visual elements paired with written words help students to comprehend what they are reading. The short story is taught in an effective way and begins to touch the surface of the creative writing process, but falls short on depth. Students are taught where to put full stops, how to identify the sequence of the story and the difference between common and proper nouns. Again, these are all useful skills in the writing process, but could there be more room for students to write stories like these on their own? This leads us to explore another design feature of the curriculum that we recommend the teaching team re-strategize: time.

We find that there is insufficient time in the curriculum devoted to cultivating writing skills amongst students. Shared writing, Independent writing and Sharing Students’ Writing only take up 45 minutes of the five-day school week and we wonder if there could be more time carved out for students to develop their writing skills. Compared to Maths (which takes up 90 minutes per day each day of the school week) and Group Guided Reading/Independent Work (which takes up another 90 minutes per day each day of the school week), little time is left for students to fully hone their writing skills and use them to effectively communicate their thoughts. Given these time constraints, we also contemplate how learners at different skill levels will be assessed and supported in their work. Perhaps, in collaborative writing time, teachers can purposely group students who are more comfortable with writing with another group of students who need more support from peers and teachers. Peer feedback is also an effective way to assess progress during the writing process. We notice that in the Professional Development resources there is an explicit explanation of how to observe children and give them feedback, but without enough time in class the teacher may have to call on parents to support children’s learning. Strong home environments and school support are crucial for children’s success in early literacy.

We understand that many curricula in South Africa must follow the core mission of the National Department of Basic Education’s (DBE) Curriculum and Assessment Plan Statement (CAPS) which was created to “develop, maintain and support a South African school education system for the 21st century” but could there be more extra-curricular activities implemented throughout the day which leave room for students to build upon their writing skills? How can school administrators and teachers work collaboratively to ensure that students finish the term confident in their ability to write thoughtfully and engaging stories? We also wonder if the act of writing would be more engaging to students if they are taught about the conceptualization of the writing process earlier in their academic journeys, rather than focusing solely on the technicalities that seem to overwhelm the school term. If the barriers that inhibit students from wanting to learn how to write are more closely identified early, this may make room for advancements in how writing is taught in schools across the country. Adding more time to the writing component of the curriculum may help teachers understand more about the different ways in which they can engage their students.

**IN RELATION TO LIFE SKILLS**

The writing component of the curriculum does an excellent job of linking Life Skills to writing within the framework of the other components of the curriculum. For instance, we find that by the end of a school term, students have gained a full grasp of how to write their name. This is followed by starting to learn how to write sentences using “I like” and “I can.” Students start by drawing what they “like” and “can” do, followed by them showing the class their drawings. This component of the curriculum is crucial. Writing is a communicative process, making one’s thoughts visible so others can comprehend them. This relates to life skills in that it allows students to document past experiences and future hopes. It has become clear to us how carefully the Funda Wande team has used the writing component of the curriculum to ensure that students are aware of the interconnectivity of life and academics. The combination of writing, drawing, and then speaking what students have written and drawn strengthens interconnections among the curricular components and connections to students’ own communicative intents.
CONCLUSION

Overall, we are impressed with the inclusive approach the curriculum has implemented to ensure that students maximize their learnings in the classroom. Many of the issues that we have identified as “what could be better” are not the responsibility of the school alone to address. There are many challenges outside of the classroom that can hinder a student’s ability to be engaged and fulfilled in their learning. These factors include socioeconomic status, language(s) spoken at home, and motor skills. However, we find that Funda Wande’s curriculum uses videos, interactive text, tests, and formative assessments to ensure that the academic experience is an enriching one. We hope that our suggestions will help school administrators recognize and understand how to augment teacher learning, with the intent of supporting interprofessional collaboration both with internal and external stakeholders. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to offer the Funda Wande team some observations and recommendations that may help build the next generation of South African leaders.

REFERENCES


Zaina Adamu, International Policy Education Program

Zaina Adamu is the executive director at Ghana Girl Rising, a social enterprise aimed at improving education access for Ghana’s underserved young women. Prior to her current role, she was a journalist at CNN, covering both the 2012 and 2016 U.S. presidential elections. She is currently studying International Education Policy at the Harvard Graduation School of Education.

Emily Bond, Language and Literacy Program

Emily Bond is an elementary school teacher and literacy specialist living in Seattle, Washington. After earning her teaching credential from Woodring College of Education, she taught in both public and independent elementary schools. She completed a master’s in Language and Literacy at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she won an award for intellectual contributions to her cohort. Ryleigh Jacobs, International Education Policy Program Ryleigh Jacobs is a graduate of the International Education Policy Program at HGSE. Prior to her year at HGSE, she worked as a middle school Math and Science specialist. Currently, she serves as a Learning Associate who reviews K-12 school programs in Canada, a Project-Based Learning Coach, and Learning Leader for Assessment in Belize. She is grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside Funda Wande as they continue to serve children in South Africa, her homeland, through education.

Maw Maw Khaing, International Education Policy Program

Maw Maw Khaing is an educator from Myanmar. She founded a Montessori preschool and K-12 Bilingual school in Myanmar. Teaching children and training teachers to learn early literacy in both Myanmar and English has been the focus of her work in the past three years as she develops her work.

Ryan Pakebusch, International Education Policy Program

Ryan Pakebusch is mission-driven postsecondary success professional and independent consultant to governments and NGOs. He currently works with the Aga Khan Development Network in East Africa. Ryan received a BS and BA from the University of Texas at Austin and is a current master’s student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Beatriz Perret, Technology, Innovation, and Education Program Beatriz Perret, Ed.M., is a K-12 computational thinking curriculum designer and researcher. She collaborates at the Education Development Center’s Science+C project, where she tests, revises, and refines curricular units, tools, and professional development materials in Data Science and Machine Learning. Perret holds an Ed.M. in Technology, Innovation, and Education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a B.A. in Computer Science from Georgetown University.

Alex Quada, Language and Literacy Program

After earning a Bachelor of Arts in history from Hillsdale College, Alex joined the Language and Literacy program at Harvard Graduate School of Education to obtain a Master of Education. At HGSE, she explored her passion for equity in learning and early childhood literacy. Quada has spent the past year, while studying at HGSE, creating a curriculum for a small homeschool classroom of two in Ann Arbor, MI. When she is not busy with school or teaching, you can find her doing yoga, lying in the sun, or reading a good book!
Jessica Sivin, Language and Literacy Program

Jessica Sivin is a master’s student in the Language & Literacy Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Prior to joining Harvard’s program, she worked as a third-grade teacher in Brownsville, Brooklyn. Teaching reading has been a passion of hers for the past four years, and she looks forward to joining another school team as a second-grade teacher and a literacy coach in the fall.

Tammy Tang, International Education Policy Program

Tammy Tang is a master’s student at the Harvard School of Education with an emphasis in International Education Policy. She has extensive experience pursuing language studies in China and Taiwan. She has also taught English abroad with the Fulbright Foundation and implemented a reading curriculum at an Elementary School to help students catch up to their reading levels. In her spare time, Tammy loves to read, run, and spend time with friends and family.

Renata Villers, International Education Policy Program

Renata Villers is founder and executive director of ADA, an NGO transforming the way children learn to read and write in Costa Rica. She is a Fellow of the Aspen Global Leadership Initiative and serves on a number of advisory boards. Renata holds an BA in economics from Harvard College, an MBA from Columbia Business School, and is a candidate for an Ed.M. at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Eve Woogen, International Education Policy Program

Eve Woogen holds an Ed.M in International Education Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her primary areas of interest are refugee education, language education policy, and education in emergencies. As an education consultant specializing in monitoring and evaluation and qualitative research, she has worked on projects in the United States, Kenya, Rwanda, Fiji and Timor-Leste, and with organizations including UNICEF, MIT D-Lab, and the Center for Global Development.