



HARVARD
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
LITERACY AND LANGUAGES CONCENTRATION

A Review of the Grade 2, Term 1 Funda Wande Early Literacy Curriculum

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A Cycle of Continuous Teacher Support

Grade 2, Term 1

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Trujillo

Introduction

The Funda Wande literacy program goes beyond just providing instructional materials by offering multiple elements of support to help teachers implement the curriculum. Current teacher supports include training activities, coaches and teaching aids to support teacher's use of instructional materials and build skills surrounding literacy instruction. This report provides a review of the main Funda Wande teacher supports, including Teacher Guide usability, current training, and coaching programs. Recognizing that teacher support activities can be resource-intensive and complex, this report recommends minor revisions to the Teacher Guides alongside a model for sustainable and scalable teacher-led teacher support through training, communities of practice, and peer coaching. This teacher support model offers a structure for Funda Wande to sustain and scale up its successes around the key themes of appropriate guidance and scaffolding, peer relationship, modeling and practice, and reflection for teachers.

Areas of Strength

Our review of Funda Wande's second grade Teacher's Guide to the curriculum focused on two main themes: usability and its implementation. A strength of the teacher guide is its structured nature, consistent formatting and graphics, and standardized activities throughout, which makes it easy for teachers to follow lessons. For instance, the phonics, reading, handwriting, writing and life skills lessons all follow the same format. At the beginning of the Teacher's Guide there is a detailed and structured explanation of how each one of the lessons should be carried out. Additionally, the beginning of every week has an overview of the materials that will be used, guiding questions, and resources. At the lesson level, each one is kept to a two-page spread, has time stamps for each activity, and scripted activities. The Funda Wande Teacher's Guide follows research-based best practices on curriculum writing. Studies

have demonstrated that structured curriculums in low- and middle-income country classrooms have a positive impact on student learning. According to Piper et al. (2018), interviews with teachers across contexts about the formatting of teacher guides yielded several recommendations like smaller guides, larger fonts, lessons on one page, and more colorful pictures. Funda Wande's Teacher's Guide aligns with many of these recommendations, most of which relate to "easing the burden on teachers to understand the teachers' guides" (Piper et al. 2018). The format of the guide allows for teachers to be able to easily access and use the guide during teaching.

Another aspect we focused on was implementation of the lessons, and professional development offered to teachers on how to use the Teacher's Guide. Funda Wande has invested time in creating resources that aid teachers in understanding and implementing the guide. For example, the guide in each week's overview section has a QR code that takes them to short YouTube videos that provide more guidance on teaching strategies for that particular week. The YouTube page has over 400 videos ranging from how to set up a classroom, pedagogical descriptions of how lessons are structured, and models of literacy lessons found in the guide. The videos also come in multiple languages representative of the linguistic diversity of South African schools. In addition, Funda Wande has a partnership with Rhodes University to advance teacher professional development. The course is made up of 12 online modules with one day of workshops per module that is taken over two years. Funda Wande's efforts in teacher preparedness have yielded positive results. Their Midline Evaluation conducted in June 2020 shows an increase of 20 to 27 percent of a year's worth of learning in grade two students (Ardington, 2021). Lastly, Funda Wande's approach to implementing the Teacher's Guide and professional development is grounded in research that highlights the importance of teaching teachers how to use the guides to strengthen practice (Piper et al. 2018, and Bashir et

al. 2018). Overall, Funda Wande's research-based approach to implementing the Teacher's Guide and structured professional development has aided them in their success.

Areas of Challenge

The Funda Wande program has experienced success despite a host of contextual challenges, many of which relate to resource constraints and system capacity. Evidence from the literature on teacher development emphasizes the importance of creating ongoing support systems for teachers to help them practice, reflect, and learn from one another's experiences with new methodologies or ideas (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). However, putting these kinds of support structures in place is often time-consuming and resource-intensive. For example, while coaching has proven highly effective in improving teaching practices and learning outcomes (Ardington, 2021; Department of Basic Education, 2017), it is relatively expensive to implement as it often relies on external coaches and facilitators.

Similarly, while the training videos are well-designed and useful for teachers in demonstrating the new practices, they require access to a steady internet connection or a personal computer for a flash drive, both of which are not common across the country (Spaull, 2020). In addition, teachers may require more structure in order to fully benefit from the training videos through questions, analysis, and reflection. These kinds of support structures can help teachers become familiar and comfortable with the resources in the program, such as the Teacher's Guide and videos, and facilitate deeper learning with peers.

Lastly, a challenge faced by many teachers in South African schools is the heterogeneity of children entering the school system, with a wide range of prior content knowledge and skills. The teacher needs various resources to accommodate the needs of students with different learning abilities. The Teacher's Guide could provide additional materials such as classroom activities and assessment instructions to introduce new pedagogy

to their knowledge asset and ensure every child would stay stimulated and engaged through the lesson. In this regard, the Funda Wande design team sought to provide more guidance in the Teacher's Guides around differentiation or modifications that teachers could make to reach every child, bearing in mind the large class sizes in most schools.

Recommendations

Recognizing the strengths and challenges that Funda Wande faces in creating and implementing a Teacher's Guide that serves every teacher and learner, we would like to recommend the following: 1) a teacher support framework that will allow the organization to scale up and sustain its successes; 2) a layout that facilitates differentiation in the Teacher's Guide; 3) ongoing cyclical training; 4) teacher-led communities of practice; and 5) peer coaching.

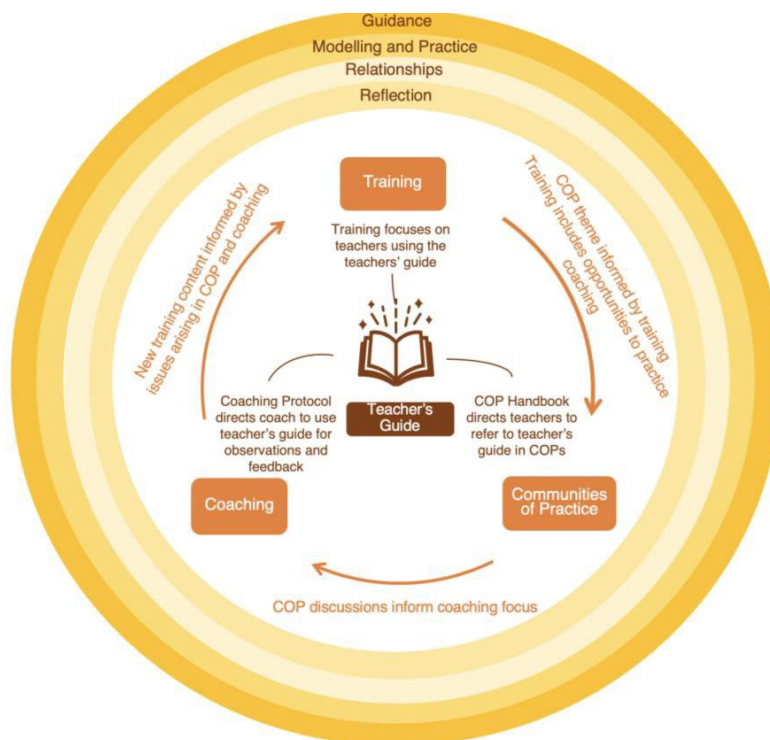
1. Teacher Support Framework

The Teacher Support Framework (see Figure 1) aims to support Funda Wande's implementation of the teacher guide and sustain their successes. The framework uses elements such as training and coaching, which have proven effective in Funda Wande's first years, to support teachers in implementing the curriculum. At the center of the framework is the Teacher's Guide and other instructional materials provided to teachers. Each of the three surrounding elements - training, communities of practice, and coaching - leverage the Teacher's Guide to help teachers develop skills and mastery in teaching lessons. First, trainings use Funda Wande's bank of videos to model and then facilitate practice using the Teacher's Guide. Then, communities of practice for teachers at the school level provide a forum for sustained discussion, practice, and reflection on the training topics. Building off Funda Wande's successful coaching intervention, peer coaching then offers a structured opportunity for teachers to observe and support each other as they implement what they have

learned in their classroom. Each element is informed by four themes: appropriate levels of guidance and scaffolding for teachers, modeling and practice of new skills, relationships between teachers, and reflection.

In addition to the Teacher Support Framework, this report provides one recommendation for revising the teacher guide itself. For scripted lessons to be most effective, teachers must balance fidelity of implementation with the agency to make modifications to adapt lessons for their learners (Piper et al., 2018). Based on Funda Wande’s identification of challenges around differentiation of lessons for classes with heterogeneous skill levels, this report recommends adding a simple graphic to lessons in the Teacher's Guide to help them make positive modifications for differentiation.

Figure 1: Teacher Support Framework



2. Teacher Guide: Focusing on Differentiation

After our review of the Teacher's Guide for usability, with a focus on differentiation, we suggest a potential layout change. Currently, the weekly lessons do not provide space or content on how to differentiate reading or writing activities. From a review of several other Teacher's Guides around the world, we found that differentiation activities were often incorporated throughout the lesson plan in a 'sidebar' (see Appendix A). An option for Funda Wande would be to adapt the layout of the guide by including a sidebar, allowing space to add specialized instructions on how to differentiate the lesson. However, we acknowledge that adding the sidebar might change the two-page weekly spread that the guide currently has, which was created for teachers to easily access the lessons. Another option is to incorporate a structure at the beginning of the guide on how to differentiate lessons, as has been done with other methodologies. Teachers would then be able to go back and refer to it whenever they need it.

To ease teacher burden, Funda Wande can use the guided reading chart, titled "Climbing the Reading Ladder" to designate differentiation groups. Teachers already know the structure and the color codes, so it will be easier for them to identify when they need to be differentiating for an emergent reader, an early reader, and an early fluent reader. Students who are emergent readers will require more scaffolding and reinforcing, so their form of differentiation will be the most guided. Students who are early readers and early fluent readers will have less scaffolding appropriate to their level, following a gradual release model.

We recognize that Funda Wande would like to keep the Teacher's Guide short because of issues regarding cost-effectiveness and usability. According to Piper et al. (2018), teachers

would like guides to be shorter and easier to use, so adding more pages to the guide might be counterproductive, particularly in a larger classroom. We therefore suggest that Funda Wande considers the second option of adding a one-page section at the beginning of the guide that gives more guidance on how teachers should be differentiating taking account of all of their students' particular learning needs.

3. Training

Regular teacher training forms an important part of the ongoing cycle of teacher support outlined in the model. This cycle begins with training, informed by specific content in the Teacher's Guide, builds on these topics through Communities of Practice (CoPs) and coaching, and then develops the next cycle of training in response to challenges or questions arising from teachers.

Research on literacy programs in similar contexts suggests that training content should be centered on specific methodologies in Teacher's Guide and that trainers/facilitators should be provided with a clear facilitator's manual for each training session (Mejia, 2020). This ensures that training content and quality is consistent across venues, and that facilitators have a shared understanding of the core tenets of the program. The facilitator's manual should contain examples from the Teacher's Guide and should be as concise as possible.

One of the most frequently cited reasons for the success of a training program is the practical nature of the activities, and opportunities for participants to observe and practice methodologies (Loyalka, Popova, Li, & Shi, 2019). We therefore recommend that a substantial proportion of training sessions be dedicated to modeling and practice. This time should also include opportunities for teachers to practice observing one another and providing feedback, based on the Teacher's Guide and observation protocol (see Appendix D). As

teachers become more comfortable with being observed and coaching one another, a culture of peer feedback can develop that will feed into the next stages of the teacher support cycle, i.e., CoPs and peer coaching.

Finally, training sessions should encourage reflection and metacognition among teachers to help them become expert practitioners (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner, & Espinoza, 2017). Activities that encourage reflection can include thinking routines, such as “I used to think.../ Now I think...”, or “Connect, Extend, Challenge” from [Project Zero](#). Reflection and analysis questions can also be built into the training manual, particularly to guide teachers through watching the training videos (see Appendix B).

4. Communities of Practice

Our fourth recommendation is to create Communities of Practice (CoPs) at the school level to support teacher engagement with the guides and inform practice. Currently, Funda Wande provides ongoing coaching for teachers from a team of expert coaches. The coaches visit each school an average of three times a month, observe classrooms, and provide targeted advice on their practice (Ardington, 2021). Funda Wande does not currently have formal CoP. CoPs, when implemented with high quality, have been proven to develop teaching practice and increase student learning gains (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Ideally, Funda Wande’s CoPs will be cyclical and grounded in the Teacher’s Guide. When designing the CoPs, Funda Wande should consider the four themes: guidance, modeling and practice, relationships, and reflection.

The first theme relates to the content and structure of the CoPs. Funda Wande will need to decide how structured or scripted the CoPs will be and whether they will be held in person or virtually. According to Soares and Galisson (2021), there are three models for

implementing CoPs: autonomous, structured, and scripted. The autonomous model emphasizes teachers' autonomy and the importance of a teacher's ability to make decisions regarding how the CoPs are run and what is discussed. The structured model provides teachers with a series of steps to guide the dialogue. The scripted model gives teachers scripted materials with pre-defined objectives, focuses, and learning exercises. We recommend that Funda Wande's CoP be structured, similar to the Teacher's Guide. When choosing the format, Funda Wande should consider how often CoPs should meet and whether they will be held in person or virtually. We recognize that because of the pandemic and budgetary reasons, virtual meetings may be easier to implement.

The second theme focuses on modeling and practice. Ideally, CoPs will be a place where teachers can practice using the teacher guide and receiving feedback from peers, leaving them feeling better prepared to implement the lessons in their own classrooms. Additionally, CoPs should be teacher-led, so we propose a training session before their launch, focusing on CoPs' purpose, structure, and how to run them. We acknowledge that running CoPs would be additional work for teachers, but we would like to emphasize the benefits of having a shared community. According to Villegas-Reimers (2003), CoPs allow teachers to promote their own professional development, giving them agency and control over their practice. Teachers will have the opportunity, during CoP sessions, to problem solve based on problems in their own classrooms, allowing them to dictate their own professional development.

The third and fourth themes focus on the power of relationships and reflection. CoPs promote positive relationships amongst teachers, creating a safe space for them to have candid conversations about their practice and challenges that might arise. Finally, when considering

how to structure CoPs, we recommend allowing time for reflection. According to Du Plessis and Muzaffar (2010), “reflection on teaching practices become especially important for teachers who attempt to change practice toward new and innovative instruction...it is only after articulating these new practices in their unique setting that they can reflect on the challenges and uncertainties and together find viable ways of changing their practice.” Funda Wandé should consider having reflection questions at the end of every CoP session so that teachers can debrief, allowing time for uncertainties to surface. Strong relationships amongst teachers is the purpose of creating communities of practice. Teachers need to feel supported by their colleagues, which can lead to fruitful reflective conversations. (See Appendix C for a guide of a CoP session).

5. Coaching

The final element of the teacher support framework is teacher coaching, with a scalable and sustainable option of using a peer coaching model. Funda Wandé’s 2020 Midline Evaluation of the Eastern Cape intervention with expert coaches supporting teachers showed the effectiveness of teacher coaching (Ardington, 2021). But with a coach to school ratio of 1:5, keeping an expert coaching model with sufficient contact time is likely prohibitively expensive at scale (Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015). As an alternative, this teacher support framework proposes creating a structured peer coaching system in which teachers sit in on each other’s lessons to observe, learn, and give supportive feedback. Kraft et al.’s (2018) seminal meta-analysis of teacher coaching found that the most effective coaching is individual, intensive, sustained, context-specific, and focused. This model uses the resources that already exist in South African schools, particularly the Funda Wandé materials and the expertise of teachers, to facilitate a sustainable and scalable approach to effective coaching.

The peer coaching model will follow the same themes as training and CoPs, starting with appropriate levels of guidance and scaffolding. While the Eastern Cape coaching model relies on the expertise of coaches, this model will provide a package of resources to guide teachers to use their own expertise with the Teacher's Guide to conduct peer coaching. The resources will include: 1) instructions for the coaching teacher to follow before, during, and after the lesson; 2) a checklist-style observation form that refers them to compare the observed teaching to the Teacher's Guide; and 3) a worksheet with reflection prompts to guide the conversation between the coaching and coached teacher after the lesson (See Appendix D). Studies in Nigeria and Ghana have shown that non-expert coaches can provide expert coaching to their peers (Smiley et al 2020). Teacher training and CoPs meetings will provide opportunities for teachers to practice using the resource to observe each other modeling lessons and take turns giving coaching feedback.

This peer coaching model will also follow the themes of relationships and reflection. Rather than a supervisory or directive model, this approach should use a reciprocal and reflective model in which the "coaching" and the "coached" teacher engage in a discussion after the lesson about what they both learned and what they would like to work on (Showers and Joyce, 1996). The protocols will guide the "coaching" teacher to identify not only "glows" and "grows" in their peer's lesson, but also to analyze how their peer is applying what they have both learned in training and CoPs, and what they learned from observing their peers. In this way, the relationships teachers develop through training and CoPs will be further strengthened as, together, the coaching and coached teacher reflect on their progress and goals for future improvement. Remaining challenges identified in coaching can then inform the topics of future trainings and CoPs in an iterative cycle.

Conclusion

Building on Funda Wande's successes, we have proposed a teacher support framework that aims to strengthen and scale up this progress. The framework is centered around the high-quality Teacher's Guide and aims to assist teachers in mastering it through three cyclical elements: training, communities of practice, and coaching. Our recommendations incorporate four cross-cutting themes from the literature on teacher support: appropriate levels of guidance and scaffolding, modeling and practice, relationships, and reflection. We believe that this cohesive framework with its cyclical, iterative structure could help teachers to support one another in becoming experts through reflective practice and strong relationships.

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Appendix A

Examples of Teacher Guide Revision for Differentiation

WEEKS 1-2

Pages 12-14 *How do people play a role in environmental damage? (They build on wetlands and dunes.) How are others working to restore the wetlands and dunes? (They plant grasses in wetlands or build sand dunes.)*

Respond to Reading Revisit the Essential Question and have students complete the Text Evidence questions on page 15 after they have finished reading.

Analytical Writing **Write About Reading** Have students work with a partner to write about the similarities and differences between landslides and hurricanes. Make sure students cite three or four supporting details from the text.

Fluency: Accuracy


Model Reread page 6. Model reading page 6 with accuracy, being sure to pronounce every word clearly and correctly. Next, read the passage aloud and have students read along with you.

Apply Have partners do repeated rereadings of the passage.

Paired Read “Students Save Wetlands”

Analytical Writing **Make Connections: Write About It**

Before reading, ask students to note that the genre of this story is expository text, which means it explains about a topic. Have students discuss the Essential Question. After reading, ask students to use the information from both texts to explain why it is important to keep the wetlands intact.



Leveled Reader

Build Knowledge

Talk About the Text Have partners discuss how people respond to natural disasters.

Write About the Text Have students add their ideas to the Build Knowledge pages of their reader’s notebooks.

FOCUS ON SCIENCE

Students can extend their knowledge of how to prepare for natural disasters by completing the activity on page 20.

LITERATURE Essential Question

Ask students to wish to have a whole class discussion about the information learned about why it’s important to help maintain the wetlands.

GIFTED AND TALENTED

Synthesize In *Changing Landscapes*, students learn about natural disasters and erosion. Challenge students to research ways to reduce the impact of such natural disasters on communities and surrounding landscapes. Have each student write a short paragraph telling how he or she could help reduce the damage of natural disasters.

BEYOND LEVEL T69

Appendix B

Example of Discussion Guide for Training Videos

Watch [Video 63: What is Shared Reading?](#)

Before watching:

1. Discuss in pairs: What is shared reading and why is it important?
2. Share out
3. What are some of the biggest challenges you face with shared reading?

Watch until 8min30sec, then pause for discussion.

4. Why does the teacher read the same story three times?
5. How does the teacher use flashcards during shared reading?

Watch until 12min, then pause for discussion.

6. How does “reading pictures” help children develop reading skills?
7. Why does the teacher discourage learners from “singing” together?

Watch until 18min, then pause.

8. Why does the teacher read alone the first time?

Complete video. Post-video discussion questions:

9. What do you think this teacher did well? What could she improve?
10. Was there anything in this video that you would like to incorporate in your own shared reading lessons?

Post-video practice:

- Turn to pg. 54 in the Teacher’s Guide.
- In groups of 5, practice implementing the various Shared Reading lesson components:
 - Monday Read Aloud
 - Monday Picture Walk & Comprehension
 - Tuesday Sentence Making
 - Wednesday Group and Individual Reading
 - Thursday Vocabulary and Language
- One participant will act as teacher to facilitate the activity, one will act as the peer coach, and the other group members will act as learners.
- The practice coach will use the Peer Coaching Protocols (Appendix D) to practice observing, giving feedback, and engaging the teacher in reflection discussion.
- Participants should take turns acting as teacher, coach, and learner. “Learners” will watch the coaching conversation to give feedback to both “teacher” and “coach

Appendix C

Guide for Communities of Practice Session

| 5 Step Process for CoP Session | Description | Timing |
|--|---|---------------|
| Debrief | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social Emotional Check-in ● Debrief on how successes or challenges implementing the previously discussed strategy | 5-7 minutes |
| Define Session Goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify pedagogical strategy that will be discussed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ex: Shared Reading | 3 minutes |
| Explore New Practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read/watch an article or video about the research or methodology surrounding topic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers will watch Video 63: What is Shared Reading? ○ Teachers will discuss what they see ○ Teachers will compare and contrast how it is similar or different from their own practice | 15 minutes |
| Collaborate and Experiment with New Practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teachers practice with one another the new strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers can take a lesson they have done or will do and practice how they will deliver it with one another | 25 minutes |
| Reflect and Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teachers will reflect on the new strategy, what they currently are doing and what adaptations will they make <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Examples of guiding questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What are some challenges you might face in using this strategy? ■ How can you adapt this strategy to fit your classroom and students? ■ What other training/supports/resources will you need? | 10-12 minutes |

Appendix D

Peer Coaching Protocol and Template

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Teacher and coach discuss the following and write down answers:

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of teacher who will teach: | Name of teacher who will coach: |
| Today's lesson topic and page number: <i>Both teacher and coach should have the appropriate Teacher Guide in hand.</i> | Teacher support topic of focus: <i>From most recent training, community of practice, or other agreed-upon area for improvement</i> |
| Teacher hopes and goals: What do you hope to improve on or achieve during your lesson? | |
| Coach hopes and goals: What do you hope to see from the teacher? What do you think you can learn from them? | |

DURING THE LESSON

- Teacher introduces the coach to the class and coach sits in the back of the classroom or out of the way.
- Coach watches the lesson while following along in the Teacher Guide and takes notes, using the following questions as a guide:

| |
|--|
| Did the teacher facilitate each activity in the Teacher Guide? If not, what did they add, remove, or adapt? Write at least one modification they used that helped their learners: |
| Did the teacher use appropriate facilitation, learner engagement, and classroom management strategies? Name and describe at least one activity or learner interaction they managed well: Write down at least one activity or learner interaction you would have managed differently and what you recommend: |
| What challenges did the teacher encounter during the lesson? How did they respond? How was that response successful? How could it have been improved? |
| How did the teacher demonstrate teacher support topic of focus? |

AFTER THE LESSON: Coach Reflection

Coach reflects on their observation before discussing with the teacher, using the following questions:

Glow: Describe one or more ways the teacher succeeded. Consider how they demonstrated the topic of focus.

Grow: Describe one or more ways the teacher could improve. Consider how they demonstrated the topic of focus.

Show: Describe one thing you learned from watching your peer and how you will use it in your classroom.

AFTER THE LESSON: Coach-Teacher

Reflection Coach and teacher reflect together:

- Teacher shares what they consider their own “glows” and “grows” from the lesson.
- Coach shares the “glows,” “grows,” and “shows” from their observation of the teacher’s lesson.
- Teacher and coach celebrate the “glows” and both reflect on ways that they can learn and improve in their future teaching.

Use the following questions as a guide:

Glow: What do teacher and coach agree was successful in the lesson? How did the teacher apply what they have learned from the topic of focus?

Grow: What does the teacher commit to working on in future lessons? How will they learn and practice? Write at least one “grow” and one learning/practice activity.

Show: What does the coach commit to working on in future lessons that they learned from the teacher? How will they learn and practice? Write at least one “show” and one learning/practice activity.

Teacher and coach sign this sheet to indicate the conclusion of the peer coaching session. Teachers within the same school or community of practice should take turns acting as peer coaches to one another.

 Teacher

 Coach

Life Skills Curriculum: An Opportunity to Extend Literacy and Background Knowledge

Grade 2, Term 1

Maya Alkateb-Chami and Emily Powell

Introduction

In preparing this report, we were guided by three principles. First, the right to education is not only a fundamental right but also an enabler of civic, economic, cultural, and other rights (Right to Education, n.d.). Second, learning matters. Access to education does not suffice (see Spreen & Vally, 2006). Third, the processes of learning to read for meaning and of expanding the child’s knowledge go hand-in-hand to support the development of lifelong learners, critical thinkers, and community members able to realize and defend their rights and the rights of others. The first section of this report addresses the intimate relationship between literacy development and the deepening of background and content knowledge. In the second section, we present expanded possibilities for teaching rigorous content and disciplinary literacy alongside—and as part of—reading and Life Skills lessons in Funda Wandé’s grade 2 curriculum. But first, let us take a broad view of what Life Skills entails in the context of this report.

The Life Skills subject in South Africa’s curricular standards includes the areas of Beginning Knowledge (BK), Personal and Social Well-being (PSWB), Creative Arts, and Physical Education (PE) (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 8) (see Figure 1). It is set to receive six hours of instructional time weekly (2011, p. 6) (see Figure 2). In Funda Wandé’s grade 2 curriculum, two hours per week are allotted to BK and PSWB and four to Creative Arts and PE (Funda Wandé, 2021, p. 1). The instructions for “teaching beginning knowledge” in Funda Wandé’s English Home Language and Life Skills Teacher’s Guide outline the following high-level goals:

- Developing Creativity, Critical thinking, Communication, and Collaboration
- Concept and skill development
- Contributing to reading comprehension by expanding general knowledge and vocabulary (2021, p. 16).

These are followed by six skill objectives for students, including learning to observe, compare, classify, and communicate—all of which are aligned with the rigorous expansion of students' background knowledge, which is the focus of this report. Similarly, what is curated as the “Find Out Lessons” content area under Life Skills has the goals of “Developing simple research skills; Encouraging home involvement in Schooling; [and] Engag[ing] learners' imaginations while developing their knowledge of the world” (2021, p. 17). Our recommendations explicitly align with these goals as well. The pursuant question is: does the curricular content at hand (2021) facilitate the achievement of these goals?

Funda Wande's grade 2 curriculum is full of opportunities for students to learn rigorous content alongside and as part of literacy development, building on their oral language and emerging literacy skills. However, we see room for improvement. Taking a holistic approach to curricular development, expanding students' background and content knowledge needs to take place across the school day, in the Life Skills as well as the Language Arts periods. This approach aligns with the guidelines of South Africa's Department of Basic Education.

Specifically, that BK and PSWB are integrated throughout the curriculum and cut across as well as support subjects such as Home Language and Math (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 8). Additionally, the Department's guidelines state that the Life Skills curriculum is organized in order to support the teaching and development of “foundational skills, values and concepts” of not only early childhood development, but also the subjects learned in grades 4-12, including language arts (2011, p. 8). Accordingly, we will present opportunities to accelerate students' conceptual knowledge and language development through the systematic integration and expansion of Life Skills content throughout the curriculum, *as well as* opportunities to expand students' knowledge of the world as they read

texts in language arts.

Why Content and Background Knowledge Matter for Literacy

In their discussion of the science of reading comprehension instruction, Duke et al. (2021) invite a metaphor from public health, explaining that for good health, we are not advised to do one or the other of adequate sleep, good nutrition, or ample physical activity. Rather, a holistic approach is adopted. Similarly, they advocate for synergies in reading-related instructional practices compared to advocating for one strategy or another. Hollis Scarborough famously conceptualizes the process of skilled reading as many threads representing foundational skills woven into two strands before intertwining to form a single rope that represents skilled reading. The first strand, language comprehension, includes background knowledge, vocabulary, language structure, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge. Whereas the second strand, word recognition, includes phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition (2009, p. 24). Scarborough explains:

Skilled readers are able to derive meaning from printed text accurately and efficiently. Research has shown that in doing so, they fluidly coordinate many component skills, each of which has been sharpened through instruction and experience over many years... It is customary to consider separately the strands involved in recognizing individual printed words from those involved in comprehending the meaning of the string of words that have been identified, even though those two processes operate (and develop) interactively rather than independently. (2009, p. 23)

Skilled reading, the outcome in Scarborough's reading rope, is produced by students employing their word recognition skills *together with* their language comprehension skills to make meaning out of text. As such, comprehension is both the goal of literacy *and* a foundation on which making meaning while reading stands.

Throughout the life span, for beginner as well as advanced readers, reading comprehension success is the product of an interaction among the reader: their skills,

background knowledge, as well as the motivation they bring; the text, including its level of difficulty; and the reading activity or process being engaged in—all of which are situated in a social context (Snow & Kang, 2007, p. 83; Snow, 2010). The reader’s linguistic skills and background knowledge start to form long before the beginning of formal schooling. This process begins as children are socialized into linguistic communities from infancy (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Like all processes of learning, people learn literacy by leveraging their past knowledge and experience (National Research Council (U.S.) Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning et al., 2000, pp. 10–68). Reading for meaning, correspondingly, is a lifelong journey that students embark on in infancy and continue in the early grades, continuously building on and leveraging background knowledge.

An additional benefit of expanded background and content knowledge is increasing student motivation to read as well as their reader self-efficacy, or the belief that they can be successful readers. In fact, the relationship between improved comprehension and increased reading motivation and self-efficacy is interactive: “Reader self-efficacy grows with comprehension skill, which in turn supports reading engagement, which in turn further builds comprehension skills and background knowledge” (Snow, 2010, p. 416).

Leveraging Advantages of Learning Via the Home Language (L1) in the Early Grades¹

A powerful benefit of using students’ L1 as the language of instruction is that it allows educators to connect to and leverage the deep and unconscious funds of linguistic and

¹ A note on terminology; we use students’ first language or mother tongue (L1) to indicate a language (and possibly multiple languages) that they know and understand before they start school. We use second language (L2) to refer to the language(s) that students do not know or understand at the time of starting or entering school. While the labels L1 and L2 are useful, it is important to note that the two linguistic codes have fluid boundaries and interact in the minds of bilinguals, including bilingual learners (Grosjean, 1989). Furthermore, we acknowledge that the current policy governing assignment of “mother tongue” curriculum to a particular school in which Funda Wande works has a large grain size—catchment level—, which may result in linguistic diversity at the classroom level and some students learning in L2

background knowledge implicit in the students' oral language skills that they have developed over their lifetimes (see Perfetti, 2010). These funds provide an important schema and structure through which children use their basic decoding skills to link text to its meaning in order to support text comprehension (Perfetti et al., 2005; Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005). Starting in grade 4, students will face the additional obstacle of understanding L2 in addition to the content they are taught through it. Reciprocally, the more background and linguistic knowledge they have by that time, the easier they are likely to experience learning “of/in” L2 (DeGraff, 2019, p. xxvi). For example, the more students know about natural phenomena related to bird migration (including what they have learned at school and beyond the classroom walls via L1), the more they are likely to find a lesson on bird migration via L2 accessible.

Furthermore, bilingual students who have further developed and gained better command in L1 of what is often called “academic language” have been found to benefit from these resources when learning of/in L2 (Phillips Galloway et al., 2020). This knowledge includes precise vocabulary, certain syntactic constructions, and functions for developing frameworks of understanding such as describing, defining, and classifying, as well as conversational moves for academic tasks including collaboration, discussion, and debate (Uccelli & Phillips Galloway, 2017). These skills are often referred to as disciplinary literacy and relate to the skill objectives for students set out by Funda Wandé, which include learning to observe, compare, classify, and communicate.

Teaching disciplinary literacy should not be confined to literacy-dedicated classes. Since the Funda Wandé Life Skills curriculum effectively includes all subject areas other than Mathematics and Language Arts, the enhancement of disciplinary literacy across the Life

Skills subjects is essential. The following section includes specific examples to explain how developing the disciplinary literacy skills described above can be achieved during disciplinary lessons in Life Skills, as well as in reading lessons.

Content and Literacy Integration: Developing Disciplinary Literacy Throughout the Curriculum

Since our recommendations focus on the development of rich content and disciplinary language across subject areas, with the purpose of increasing background knowledge as a means toward improved reading comprehension, we find it helpful to outline a framework for approaching this development systematically. Research by the U.S. National Research Council Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning et al. reveals that

“To develop competence in an area of inquiry, students must: (a) have a deep foundation of factual knowledge, (b) understand facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework, and (c) organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application.” (2000, p. 16).

This framework aligns with the research findings highlighted in the previous section regarding the role of content and background knowledge in comprehension and guides our recommendations below.

1. Opportunities in the Life Skills Domain

The concrete examples below show how the learning of vocabulary and concepts could be expanded in Funda Wande’s BK as well as Creative and Performing Arts lessons, with a focus on seizing opportunities to expand factual knowledge, offering conceptual frameworks to contextualize newly learned ideas, and grouping learned concepts in ways that facilitate their recall and application. We have chosen to zoom in on one unit to showcase our recommendations:

As part of the Week 3 theme of “Everyone is Special” (Funda Wande, 2021, pp. 50–

63), the opportunity is laudably seized by Funda Wande to teach some geography in the BK content lesson.

Specifically, names of several countries and their capital cities. The map of southern Africa is introduced on Monday, which could be extended by learning to name different areas by size (for instance, village, city, province, country, and possibly continent). Students could also be taught the different components of a map, including a map key that details what different symbols mean and expands their background and disciplinary knowledge in the area of social studies. For example, at the country level, there are political features such as borders and cities; natural features such as rivers, shorelines, and mountain ranges; and transportation features such as train tracks and highways. Presenting these concepts together within the framework of a map facilitates their future recall and application. This should expand what they already know about maps by building a repository of new vocabulary and concepts that could be easily recalled and used in practice.

Visual and performing arts lessons offer a creative and joyful environment to consolidate students' conceptual knowledge. The current visual arts class for this unit prompts students to imagine how Samson may have come to South Africa from Malawi, providing the examples of plane, bus, and car; and asking students to draw the transportation mode. This could be altered or extended to support students' growing conceptual knowledge by collaboratively creating a map key for a city or neighborhood map: deciding what symbols and landmarks to include and writing their names, followed by students drawing and coloring the map. This activity is one approach to situate the use of vocabulary for disciplinary content in a context familiar to the learners, in a hands-on and engaging way. Additionally, it lends itself to the type of classificatory language relevant to the development of syntactical constructions that

support disciplinary literacy functions such as describing and classifying.

On Tuesday, the BK section is spent on learning names of some African countries and their capital cities. Unless the child is likely to find this information usable in their daily life in the short run, we suggest replacing it with vocabulary that is more adept for use in different contexts. For example, given the following day's information about Lake Malawi, students could learn names of water bodies at different scales, such as pond, lake, sea, and ocean, as well as stream and river. This will give students more tools to be able to compare and categorize information, aligning with the instructional goals in the Teacher's Guide. Finally, on Friday, students will learn that Lake Malawi is a freshwater lake, which is great. To extend this, the teacher could engage students into classifying bodies of water they know into "freshwater" and "saltwater" categories, which is a good primer for an element of the South African curricular standards for BK: classifying animals and creatures that live in freshwater and saltwater (Department of Basic Education, 2011, pp. 43-44).

These numerous examples linked to only a few pages of the curriculum serve to illustrate that the overall goal is to *seize every opportunity to enrich students' background knowledge as well as vocabulary* that will help them describe and understand what they see around them using rich language, and that will also assist them in the process of reading progressively harder texts for meaning.

2. Opportunities in the Domain of L1 Language Arts

The Funda Wandu curriculum already creatively connects to and extends students' repositories of knowledge through the reading lessons in several ways. Weekly texts link to different themes across the curriculum. Beautiful illustrations contextualize the language and scaffold understanding by facilitating the activation of prior knowledge in non-linguistic ways.

Looking at multiple examples related to the Week 3 story, “The waterhole” (Funda Wandé, 2021, pp. 38- 39), in which animals work together to overcome a bully—an elephant who chases the other animals away from the waterhole: The content of this story connects to multiweek PSWB themes about sharing, helping, and dealing positively with conflict. These concepts are extended in the following week by a fictional text in which students must problem-solve when a schoolhouse bully chases the newcomer student away from the water fountain. This text is also connected to BK standards. Specifically, what we need to live and the types of animals, as well as the seasons and how they affect different animals (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 42-45).

The text is introduced through a read-aloud, which leverages students’ receptive oral language skills (including syntax, morphology, and vocabulary), and the story lends itself to dramatic storytelling by the teacher, which can further activate students’ prior knowledge to catalyze comprehension. The same stories in the Learner’s Activity Book (Funda Wandé, n.d.) notably incorporate more student-friendly vocabulary (such as “said” versus “trumpeted”) and simpler syntactical structures, which could be a successful scaffold toward more proficient reading. Conversely, the Teacher’s Guide includes additional support in a sidebar, and the inclusion of rich and expressive vocabulary in the text is aided by student-friendly definitions provided to teachers for words like trumpeted, waterhole, and puddle. This extends opportunities for students to develop vivid and precise oral language (Funda Wandé, 2021, p. 38-39). The additional inclusion of comprehension and extension questions that link to science and social themes is also fitting. For example, “what do we call it when there’s not enough water?” and “do you think that was a kind thing to do?” (ibid.)

We recommend further utilizing the Teacher’s Guide sidebar to explicitly and

systematically build students' academic and content knowledge in the following three ways: First, we recommend seizing the opportunity to introduce content concepts and vocabulary relevant to each lesson. In the referenced unit, such words might include drought, arid, savannah, habitat, and environment. Second, we recommend for comprehension questions to more explicitly connect the text to Life Skills BK themes and standards, facilitating review and consolidation of knowledge across the curriculum. For example, questions might include which season readers think the story takes place in, connecting to the seasons BK knowledge standard; and what animals need to live, related to the BK standard on what we need to live. Third, we recommend incorporating questions that involve disciplinary academic language functions such as describing, comparing and contrasting, and classifying. For example: what is a different type of habitat? And how might the story change were its events to take place in another habitat? In the subsequent thematically linked lesson, students might compare the setting or characters in the story using disciplinary language from Language Arts, such as character and setting. Repeated reading of the weekly text offers an opportunity to incorporate questions like these on different days as a routine, which has the benefit of creating a rich web of connections that facilitate retrieval and application of new vocabulary across contexts (Perfetti, 2007).

We also recommend leveraging vocabulary flashcards systematically to connect to and extend students' language resources during reading routines. For content vocabulary, Morrow et al. (2019) suggests that words be connected by a theme or topic, such as animals or habitats. We see evidence that this is the approach used in the Funda Wande curriculum, as chosen words appear to be generally thematically linked. However, we suggest expanding the set of flashcard words to include a larger set of thematically connected concept words, in this

case, all the animals in the lesson—which both further scaffolds the reading experience and allows for constructing overarching conceptual frameworks like types of habitats or seasons. Additional recommendations regarding disciplinary vocabulary development include explicit instructions in morphological awareness as well as explicit teaching of connectives like “because,” “for example,” and “so.” This can be achieved by incorporating these elements into the existing sentence strip activity, as detailed below.

We see that syntactical and morphological elements of academic language are already being made explicit through the sentence strip activities. For example, in the unit we have been examining, the sentence strip is “One year, the rains didn’t come.” The Teacher’s Guide includes instructions to repeatedly read the sentence, elicit synonyms for different words, and have students cut apart words and fit the sentence back together. It also has instructions for asking students which part of the sentence answers questions such as who? or what? for the subject, what happened? for the verb, and when? for verb tense or adverbial phrases such as “one day.” This is an interesting routine that we see as flexibly allowing teachers to examine syntax and morphology, even across languages. We recommend using increasingly sophisticated syntactical constructions to make explicit the syntactical and morphological features of disciplinary literacy. For example, sentence structures that support language functions like comparing and contrasting as well as defining and describing could be used to help scaffold students’ learning of these constructions. Furthermore, the use of connectives, which have been reported to cause breakdowns in comprehension for some students (Morrow et al. 2019), could be incorporated in this way as well. The extended use of these constructions should be highlighted across the week’s activities as broadly as possible in the BK, PSWB, Creative Arts, and PE Life Skills lessons toward the goal of improving students’ linguistic background knowledge and their reading comprehension.

Conclusion

In our report, we have illustrated the breadth of goals, outcomes, and activities in the Funda Wande Life Skills content. We acknowledge Funda Wande's strengths in addressing the broad curricular standards in this area in the allotted time and have highlighted how content, background knowledge, and disciplinary language are incorporated into the existing curriculum. Taking into consideration the contextual parameters which limit extending instructional time, we recommended deepening and integrating content-learning and language-learning along the established principles of what we have referred to as the science of learning framework incorporating: a) facts: rich vocabulary and conceptual knowledge, b) frameworks: thematically linked words and their relationships; and c) facilitating structures: organizing learned linguistic and background knowledge in a way that facilitates retrieval (National Research Council (U.S.) Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning et al., 2000).

Our recommendations focus primarily on curricular adjustments as well as instructional moves, both of which remain close to the current curriculum, and which could be included in the Teacher's Guide and Learner Activity Book. Our suggestions require clear communication to teachers regarding routines to support elaborated questioning, use of flashcards, and sentence strips. Additionally, beyond specific curricular and pedagogic adjustments, we recommend that teachers be informed and supported in taking on a leadership role in expanding students' background knowledge whenever they can during the school day.

We recognize the resource constraints and other restrictions facing the Funda Wande team in designing the best curricula possible and in supporting teachers to deliver the best education possible and hope that our humble contribution through this report will be helpful in the commendable process of continuously revisiting and improving the quality of Funda

Wande's program. Our recommendations go beyond deepening and integrating content areas to conceptualizing a successful outcome as preparing students for future study. Therefore, we recommend that, in the process of deepening the curriculum, for developers to strive to link across grade 1-3 standards and even to the types of texts and activities that students will encounter in grades 4 –6. We also urge developers to capitalize on the opportunity of learning via L1 to prepare students with as much background and content knowledge as possible in the early grades.

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Appendix

Figures

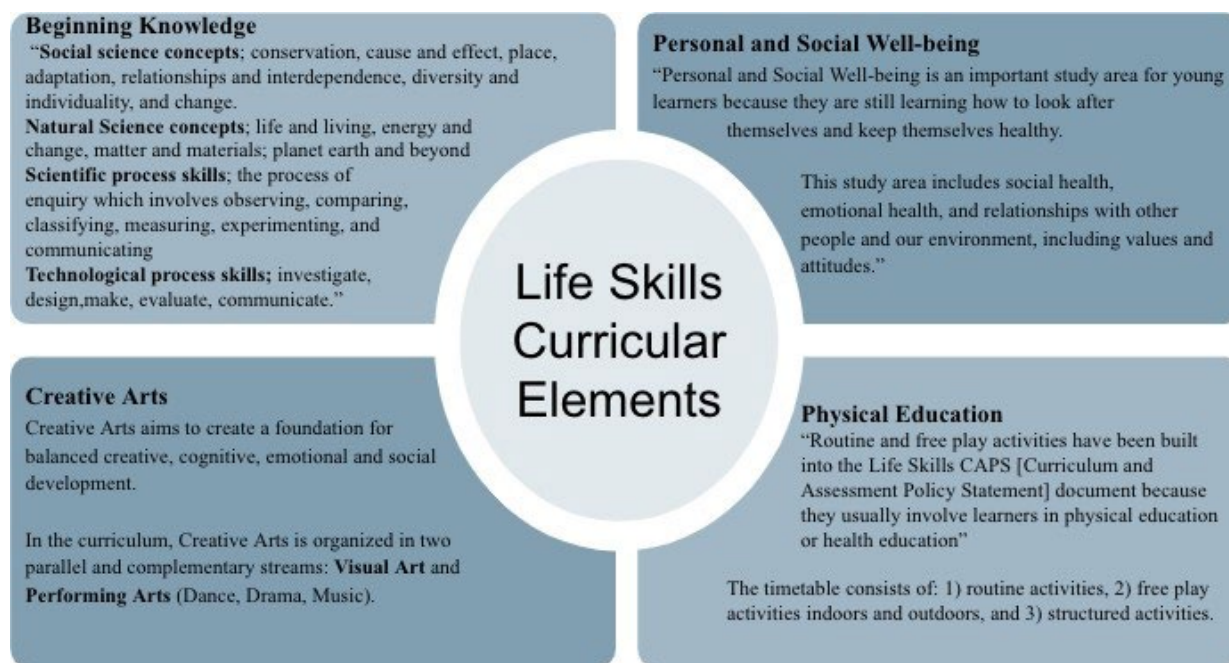


Figure 1: Life Skills curricular elements in South Africa’s Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 8)

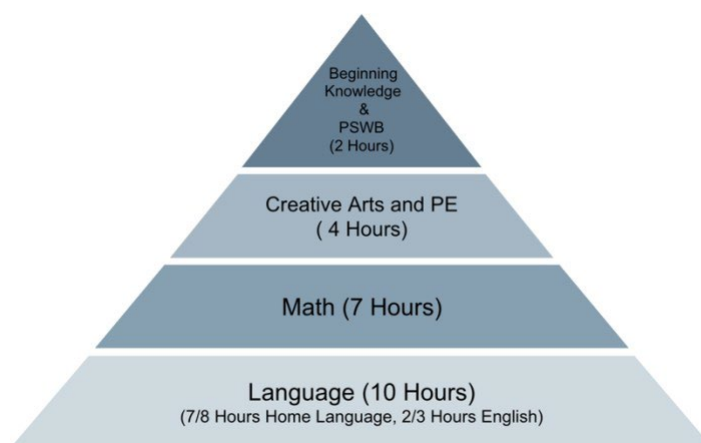


Figure 2: Weekly allocations of instructional time in grade 2 (Department of Basic Education, 2011 p. 6)

Structured Reading: Ensuring Eyes on Text

Grade 2, Term 1

Amanda Clark, Manar Hazzaa, Julia Sproul

Introduction

This section is based on Funda Wandé's request to review the second-grade curriculum for Group Guided Reading. Here we offer insights on how to enhance reading proficiency for their second-grade students. According to the Funda Wandé Teacher's Guide, students should be early fluent or fluent readers by the end of the school year. To reach this goal, the Funda Wandé program offers a Group Guided Reading block as a tool for teachers to conduct differentiated instruction, as well as to help students achieve reading success. The afforded Group Guided Reading structure depends mainly on dividing the class into five small homogenous reading groups of similar abilities, each group working with the teacher for fifteen minutes at a time, twice a week using the anthology or other available leveled readers.

What Worked Well?

The current Group Guided Reading sections in the Funda Wandé Teacher's Guide and the Group Guided Reading stories in the second-grade curriculum allow for three advantages. First, having a slot embedded in the schedule for Group Guided Reading promotes the goal of putting eyes on the text. Research shows that the amount of time with eyes on text reading is the best predictor of reading achievement, including a child's growth as a reader from second to fifth grade (Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding, 1988). The link between exposure and access to texts and strong literacy skills is well established in the literature. Therefore, those who benefit the most from Group Guided Reading are the students who lack access to books outside the school setting. Second, the current structure of the Group Guided Reading block allows students who are not participating in it to work independently on other activities (handwriting, life skills...). This provides a chance for those students to do work with minimal help from their teacher. Third, the current collection of stories in the Funda Wandé curriculum is culturally and

developmentally relevant to their students.

The 2021 Harvard report reviewed the Funda Wande First Grade curriculum and provided strong research-based feedback on how to do Group Guided Reading. If Funda Wande wishes to implement Group Guided Reading as a reading routine in Grade Two, we suggest they refer to the Harvard 2021 report.

Areas Of Improvement: Why Not Guided Reading

While Group Guided Reading may be a staple of reading instruction in the USA, it is not necessarily the best practice in all educational contexts. Group Guided Reading depends on adequate resources, proper teacher training, and small or average-sized classrooms. The 2021 Harvard report raised the question as to whether Funda Wande should think about a different approach to reading instruction rather than Group Guided Reading (Mason et al., 2021). We are choosing to recommend that Group Guided Reading be discontinued in the classrooms Funda Wande serves. The following subsection will unpack the reasons behind our recommendation and will be followed by another two subsections that will offer alternative tools and methods to replace Group Guided Reading.

Research shows that Group Guided Reading is ineffective in certain schools. A summary of findings follows.

- Research suggests that South African teachers struggle to implement Group Guided Reading because of the insufficient amount of appropriate leveled reading materials (Kruizinga and Nathanson, 2010; Makumbila & Rowland, 2016; Bashir et al., 2018; ZENEX Foundation, 2021; Stern et al., 2022).
- Additionally, several studies argue that policies calling for Group Guided Reading fail to offer teachers a sufficient explanation of Group Guided Reading. This

affects the teachers' knowledge and their teaching practices (Kruizinga and Nathanson, 2010; Wiener, 2011; Bashir et al., 2018; Stern et al., 2022).

- Research continually shows that what works well in large-sized classrooms with small numbers of students does not necessarily work in smaller-sized classrooms with large numbers of students. Group Guided Reading works best in classrooms that have an average of 20-25 students. In larger classrooms, each student receives less than two minutes of teacher's focused attention per lesson. This further compromises scaffolding for struggling students (Makumbila and Rowland, 2016).

Since the classrooms Funda Wande serves struggle with a lack of reading materials, inexperienced teachers, and large class sizes, we feel Group Guided Reading would not be the most effective reading practice for their students.

Structured Reading

Based on the limitations noted above, we recommend that Funda Wande use Structured Reading instead of the current Group Guided Reading framework. Structured Reading is a deliberate, systematic, and scaffolded instructional pedagogy under which Shared Reading and Reciprocal Teaching live. Structured Reading also supports the Big Six elements of reading (Konza, 2014). The Big Six elements of reading include oral language and early literacy experiences, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Every single day, educators face a multitude of challenges - no two classes, students, or days are exactly the same. Therefore, by creating a structured routine and instructional framework for Structured Reading, teachers can maximize instructional time despite what challenges may arise. A strict routine in a classroom, especially in literacy development, lends

itself to greater classroom management and more individualized instruction for students.

Students and educators will know exactly what to expect during Structured Reading time and as such, will spend more time with their eyes on the text. Shared Reading and Reciprocal Teaching build on strong foundational practices while also allowing for implementation with fidelity in the classroom. This scaffolded Structured Reading framework allows for educators to move from more structured instruction to more independent reading for students with the gradual release of responsibility.

The design of Structured Reading has a series of benefits that are particularly pertinent for classrooms with large student populations and novice educators. Within the current structure of Group Guided Reading, valuable time is lost while students transition to different tables or locate the correct independent work for the day. Structured Reading also allows educators to use data to influence their decisions in real-time, rather than waiting an entire week when the teacher has worked with all five groups, to address misconceptions and misunderstandings. This format will allow educators to see half the class at a time and thus more student work samples on a daily basis while also presenting the opportunity for struggling readers to receive the same lesson twice to garner greater understanding, practice, or think time.

During the Structured Reading block, the class should be split in half before the lesson. By splitting the class in half, the teacher has a multitude of different grouping and differentiation possibilities throughout the entire school year. For example, at the beginning of the year, the teacher could use diagnostic reading data to help place students in initial groups for students who need additional support and more independent readers. By collecting consistent data, teachers can make real-time decisions about the different grouping structures for students - this allows students to change groups and partners to provide more opportunities to work with different

students in the class. By allowing more opportunities to change grouping, educators can use data to help change groupings and pairings on a more frequent basis than may be possible with five different guided reading groups. Splitting the classroom in half will allow the teacher to teach the same lesson twice a day. Students who are not working with an educator will have time to complete independent work. This structure affords educators more autonomy over the lesson, greater opportunity for reflection about what went well and what could be adjusted, as well as a boost in overall confidence with multiple opportunities with the same lesson. Much like reading the same text multiple times can help struggling readers – teaching the same lesson twice can help novice teachers become stronger educators with the ability to make instructional decisions with self-assurance.

Shared Reading

Therefore, within our Structured Reading framework, we recommend that Funda Wandé implement two new Structured Reading strategies to replace Group Guided Reading. The first Structured Reading strategy is Shared Reading. Shared Reading is an evidence-based instruction approach that benefits any emergent reader, regardless of their age, and can be done individually, in small groups, or in larger groups. During Shared Reading, teachers read with students and not simply to students to help students interact with each other and their educators, while also making meaning of the text (Erickson & Koppenhaver, 2016). In order for students to not only read fluently and accurately but also foster a lifelong love of reading, there must be ample opportunities for students to have their eyes on the text. Shared Reading is a form of reading along with children that helps them move from the emergent stage of reading to the conventional stage of reading with the ultimate goal of being able to read a text independently through a gradual release model – of I do, we do and you do.

Initially, during Shared Reading, the teacher does a majority of the reading because the level of text may be beyond what students can read themselves. However, as students become more familiar with the text during re-reading and listening to the teacher, they will join in (Victoria State Government, 2018). This instructional strategy also exposes struggling readers to language that they would not otherwise be exposed to. Literacy experts explain that during Shared Reading, children can hear and see more complex language that would otherwise be inaccessible due to limited vocabulary or reading skills (Heath, 1983). Additionally, experts reiterate that this type of language, different from daily conversational language, is what assists students to comprehend at deeper levels and think critically (Chall, Jacobs & Baldwin, 1990). When children see and hear the complexities of language, this exposure assists students to comprehend at deeper levels and think critically, while also simultaneously boosting their confidence (Walther, 2022). Students also benefit from Shared Reading by building critical background knowledge, developing concepts about print, and demonstrating how meaning is made from print (Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium, 2016).

Although many critics note that Shared Reading leaves opportunities for students to simply 'pretend' to follow along, or that students will simply repeat or parrot the words of the teacher reading, a consistently structured reading block will negate some of these challenges. During Shared Reading, at the beginning of the year, in order to expose students in the course to strong reading practices, metacognition strategies, and appropriate pace and tone, the teacher will read aloud the text first and later invite the students to join in choral reading. Research has found that sixteen minutes of whole-class choral reading enhances decoding and fluency dramatically (Paige, 2011). In variation, educators can also omit particular words, or sentences, during choral reading, or karaoke reading, to ensure that students are following along during the first section of

the Shared Reading block (Gupta, 2006).

However, this is not the only instructional strategy that should be utilized throughout the entire school year. As students become more comfortable with the text and reading with their peers, teachers should use popcorn reading, popsicle stick reading, or touch go reading to encourage more student voice and independence (Finley, 2014). As the school year carries on and responsibility is gradually released from educator to child, teachers can utilize a variety of other instructional approaches. These instructional approaches include partner reading, Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) such as taking turns reading, re-reading and retelling to partners, and Timed Repeat Readings (Saenz et al., 2005; Hilden and Jones, 2012). A variety of instructional practices that educators can use during Shared Reading allows for greater teacher autonomy while also allowing students the opportunity to learn from a variety of reading activities that can simply be modified or adapted based on students' needs during any given lesson.

Shared Reading is a great instructional strategy for educators as well. This pedagogical approach to literacy development is a way to boost children's emergent literacy development in a way that does not place any extra demands on educators' planning time, instructional time, or mandated schedule throughout the day (Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium, 2016; Justice et al., 2010). Other benefits include more child-centered discussions, with multiple "at-bats" of the same text which allows children ample opportunities to pick up on critical elements of the plot or text that they may have missed initially due to a focus on fluency or word recognition (Piasta et al., 2012; Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium, 2016). These affordances provide ample opportunities to aid students' comprehension. Furthermore, Shared Reading allows children time to relate the story to their own lives, through text-to-self connections, text-to-text

connections, and text-to-world connections (Gajeton, 2016; Facing Ourselves and History, 2022). These connections have been shown through research to help foster a love of reading and being an active participant in their lifelong learning journey because ultimately, reading should not be a chore but a task that children enjoy (Council of Great City Schools, 2020).

As shown in Appendix A, Shared Reading is also a great way to help struggling readers. Acknowledging the learning losses that are plaguing students across the globe due to the COVID-19 pandemic and interrupted periods of instruction, Shared Reading is a great way to re-acclimate students to reading in a more structured environment while also providing students with the scaffolds that they need to be successful (McKinsey & Company, 2022). By allowing students to read together, through choral reading or other partner focused instructional strategies with their educators and classmates, students will become more confident and comfortable in a warm and nurturing classroom environment and will thus become naturally more familiar with reading out loud or independently (Colorin Colorado, 2021; Eastern Stream Center on Resources and Training, 2003; Tharp et al., 2000). This structure allows students to become more self-confident and self-reliant problem solvers who can think critically about challenges both inside and outside of the classroom and tackle these hurdles with assurance.

Now more than ever, it is important to give students ample opportunities to engage with each other to help circumvent many of the "missing skills" that students are showcasing in the classroom. These "missing skills" include not only students' academic abilities but their social abilities as well (Goldstein, 2022). Shared Reading helps foster classroom community through a shared experience. Students learn how to respectfully engage with each other and their peers while also learning valuable conversational and literacy skills such as building on ideas, asking targeted questions, and asking other students to stretch out their answers or provide evidence

from the text for comprehension questions (Honchell & Schulz, 2012). Following the social isolation due to COVID, Shared Reading allows for students to grow social and emotional learning skills as well (Mahoney et al., 2021). Although these same skills could be garnered during Group Guided Reading, Shared Reading allows for a greater diversity of student voices than would be possible in small and uniform homogeneous groupings during Group Guided Reading.

Reciprocal Teaching

The second effective structured reading teaching practice we are suggesting is Reciprocal Teaching. Reciprocal Teaching is especially beneficial once children can read well enough to decode simple texts independently. This method uses expert scaffolding, a valuable tool based on Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development. The Zone of Proximal Development is defined as the difference between a child's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the child's potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Expert scaffolding is a guided practice where the teacher models and assists students in using reading strategies, gradually transferring responsibility to the students and becoming a facilitator who monitors student groups. Through expert scaffolding, students are given appropriate support activities to achieve the goal of Reading (Vygotsky, 1978).

Reciprocal Teaching is a reading approach that incorporates expert scaffolding. It was designed by Annemarie Palincsar and Laura Klenk, to help students develop the ability to construct meaning from text and monitor their reading comprehension. Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar, 1984) is a cooperative grouping strategy that calls on learners to become the teacher, working as a group to bring meaning to the text. There are four roles students will have to learn:

summarizer, questioner, clarifier, and predictor. An optional fifth role of leader can sometimes be helpful to keep students on track, facilitate turn-taking and monitor conversations. Initially, the teacher models the four cognitive strategies as a whole group. It is important to focus on possible question stems for each role, as this assists students in the types of questions that should be asked. Appendix B has examples of different student roles and question stems. Although researchers have not found any one particular order for teaching the four comprehension strategies to be most effective, they recommend the strategies be taught individually. Summarizing can be difficult for students and might best be saved for last (Hashey & Connors, 2003).

Employing Reciprocal Teaching relies on using expert scaffolding as the foundation for instruction. As students learn the roles, the teacher can gradually release autonomy to the students. A suggested gradual release model is:

- Teacher modeling: model each of the four parts individually, one at a time. Don't move on to the next part until the one prior has been mastered. Students practice each part as a whole group.
- Teacher/student groups: teacher leads and models how a four-part reciprocal discussion would work, with students practicing in small groups.
- Student groups: student-led discussion with teacher observing and giving feedback. (Alfassi et al., 2009)

Student-led groups give teachers time to monitor discussions and provide support. As students become more comfortable with the format, they should need less support. The ultimate goal is to have half the class doing Reciprocal Teaching while the other half is working on independent work. Halfway through the time allotted for GGR, the groups can switch. Students should rotate

through the roles, so they have a chance to experience each one. Teachers can use a checklist as a formative assessment based on their observations of conversations, looking for the depth and meaning of student questions and responses. Eventually, Reciprocal Teaching can also incorporate a written response as well, which could be used as a post conversation formative assessment.

Research shows Reciprocal Teaching can be used with any grade level or subject area and with any story or passage. No specific curriculum is required to implement Reciprocal Teaching because it is an instructional strategy that does not rely on a particular content (Promising Practices Network, 2005; Quezada, n.d.). Because of the importance of helping students connect their personal background experiences with the texts, Reciprocal Teaching is also highly beneficial in diverse classrooms and communities. Soto (1989) attributes the success of Reciprocal Teaching to the social construction of knowledge. When students collaborate to construct the meaning of texts, this allows them to focus on information in texts that is meaningful to them and enables them to use their diverse backgrounds and experiences to introduce multiple perspectives. Biemiller and Meichenbaum (1992) researched children's approaches to learning and found that one source of the differences between the highest- and lowest achieving children is in the degree to which they become self-regulators of their own learning. Research also shows Reciprocal Teaching can be done with any age group. Myers (2005) concluded that kindergarten students were not too young to learn strategies that would help them assume responsibility for their own learning. Palincsar & Brown (1985) reported success when Reciprocal Teaching was implemented in larger classes with groups ranging in size from eight to 18. Due to the fact that class size is an issue in many South African classrooms, Reciprocal Teaching would be a strategy that could be done in classrooms with

many students. Additionally, Brown and Campione (1992) found that students who used Reciprocal Teaching averaged a two-year gain on reading standardized test scores.

Limitations of Structured Reading

While Structured Reading is proven to be an effective literacy strategy there are some limitations to consider. Many times teachers don't implement Structured Reading with fidelity due to a lack of training. If educators don't really understand the method, the students won't either. If a child does not understand what is going on, they may mentally "check out" by daydreaming and not focusing on the structured reading activity. Teachers also need training as many have difficulty encouraging high-quality dialogues.

Teachers also need to be aware their poor decoders may struggle. A common criticism of Structured Reading is that it was designed for students who are adequate decoders and therefore it may not be as effective for readers with poor decoding skills. As was mentioned before, Structured Reading is more effective with students who have basic reading skills, yet there are ways to make it work for all students. One way to increase the effectiveness of Structured Reading instruction with poor decoders is to help them identify unfamiliar words before engaging in conversation about the text. Strategies such as tape-assisted Reading (listening to a recording of the text while following along with the printed text), reading passages orally, supplying unknown words when students are reading, and rewriting classroom materials at the struggling reader's instructional reading level could be used (Foster & Rotoloni, 2005; Bruce & Robinson, 2001). Structured Reading still has a large student-to-teacher ratio, yet not all children need the same amount of attention. Hopefully, motivating stronger readers to lead discussions, leaves more time for the teacher to walk around and work with weaker readers.

Although splitting the class in half for Shared Reading does not resolve all spatial issues

in Funda Wande classrooms, Shared Reading does present several promising instructional freedoms for educators. In particular, this Structured Reading strategy does provide an opportunity for teachers to purposefully place students at different locations in the classroom, at different times in the year, based on data points to refine and polish students' literacy skills. For example, less confident students may do better in the front of the classroom where teacher intervention is easily accessible. Other students who are independent readers may benefit from the opportunity to have another partner who is also a fluent, strong reader, and these students may sit in the back. Other strong readers may benefit from being partnered with a student who is not quite as confident, allowing students to work together collaboratively to strengthen their skills. Shared Reading affords educators the ability to move students around in the classroom based on their needs.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, Structured Reading is more beneficial in developing grade-level readers than Group Guided Reading as this instructional strategy increases time with eyes on the text, student engagement, instructional time, and time spent with the teacher. Given the pertinence of this unique moment in history, with educators and students still reeling from the social and academic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Structured Reading affords students the opportunity to excel not only academically, but socially and emotionally. Ultimately, incorporating Structured Reading within Funda Wande classrooms is an affordable, practical, and critical measure to ensure that students are receiving the best literacy instruction possible to meet their unique needs.

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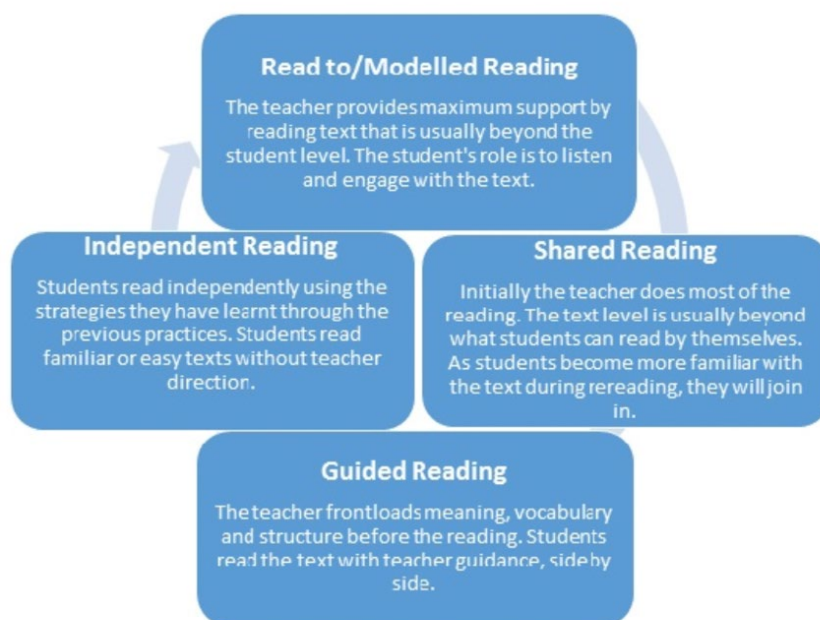
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Appendix A



(Victoria State Government, 2018)

Appendix B

| Skill | Language stems |
|--|--|
| Prediction <i>Use clues to make logical predictions</i> | I think that... I think we will find out more about... I think (character's name) is feeling... because... |
| Clarify <i>Identify parts that are confusing and formulate understanding</i> | What does the word... mean? Can you explain what...? Why does (character's name)...? |
| Question <i>Ask questions based on the text</i> | Why does it say...? How/why did...? How is... an example of...? How do (character's name) and (character's name) compare? |
| Summarise <i>Reiterate the main ideas in their own words</i> | The text is about... The main ideas are... The author's key points are... The important concepts are... |

(Brough, n.d)

A Response to the Funda Wande Grade 2 Writing Curriculum

Grade 2, Term 1

April Dobbins, Nicah Santos, Tonia Williams

Introduction

The Grade 2 Funda Wande writing curriculum features a cycle of activities that repeats weekly from Week 1 through Week 9. On Mondays, students write their personal news. On Tuesdays, the class engages in shared writing in which the teacher models a writing frame. On Wednesdays, students write independently in response to the weekly reading text. Usually, several sentence stems or frames are provided for them to accomplish this reading response.

Thursdays are dedicated to editing and revising on odd-numbered weeks and written comprehension on even-numbered weeks. Learners practice editing their work by revising their news or independent writing from the week. Written comprehension introduces students to different types of question formats in order to expose them to question types that may appear on standardized tests, such as multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank. Friday lessons center creative writing, and learners are encouraged to brainstorm in order to fill in writing frames, to write and to illustrate their own stories.

During Weeks 6 and 7, students are assessed on the skills that they are expected to have developed through the weekly cycle of writing tasks. There are three writing assessments: writing news, writing a story, and paragraph writing with commas. There is also a handwriting assessment in Week 7, which is a repeat of the news writing assessment, with the sole difference being that only penmanship is evaluated in that instance.

What Worked Well

There are several parts of the Funda Wanda grade 2 curriculum that work well and contribute to the effectiveness and feasibility of both the Teacher's Guide and the Learners Activity Book. These elements include the friendly layout, vocabulary lists, repeated use of materials, variety in activities, assessment criteria, and push for a writing community.

The Teacher's Guide is laid out in an easy to follow way. The activities are in the same position each day, allowing teachers to quickly glance at materials during the stress of a school day and large classrooms. They can always quickly turn to a specific activity, day and week, making navigating lessons easy.

Next, there is a strong focus on vocabulary building. Units have tailored vocabulary building, and there are several opportunities for students to engage with the vocabulary over a variety of activities and multiple weeks. Students' vocabulary is further expanded through the shared writing activities that take place on Tuesdays, where teachers provide novel examples of words and phrases that students may use to fill out their writing frames.

Moreover, the same text is often used for more than one week, which is both an efficient use of materials and a strong teaching tool. Students receive repeated exposure to the vocabulary and grammatical structures introduced in the text without having to print a large number of texts.

Additionally, the assessment criteria for writing and other assignments have multiple criteria. This means that assessments can remain robust and can provide valid insights to students' abilities.

Lastly, the Funda Wanda Curriculum fosters community writing and invites students and teachers to create, edit and experience text together, ensuring support around writing.

What Could Be Better

1. Scaffolding of the Difficulty of Writing Tasks: The Problem

One area for improvement in Funda Wande's Grade 2 writing curriculum is the scaffolding of skills, as writing activities tend not to gradually increase in difficulty. There are activities that are repeated throughout Term 1 without changing in difficulty, some that regress, and others that jump too suddenly from basic to advanced. Presenting learners with appropriate



challenges increases their motivation to engage with the material, and increased motivation, in turn, leads to increased learning. Activities should be achievable at the students' development stage but novel and difficult enough to sustain their interest. In other words, they should be within the learner's "zone of proximal development," or the range between children's present level of performance and their potential performance with optimal scaffolding (Yarborough & Fedesco, 2020). Thus, we recommend that Funda Wande ensure a more gradual release of scaffolds over the course of

the Grade 2 writing curriculum.

The Monday News Writing activity is particularly in need of improvement in this area. From Weeks 1 to 5, students are expected to use the same prompts and the same worksheet to write about their personal news. Week to week, students complete the following sentence stems to write about their weekends (with the exception of Week 1, where students are prompted to write about their holiday): This weekend I went to... I went with... We... I felt... because... Each prompt is accompanied by an image to reinforce the idea of the sentence. By Week 6, students are assessed for their news writing skills. They are presented with a similar worksheet but with all sentence stems removed. The image prompts remain along with blanks. This assessment is the sixth time that students must write their weekend news following the same frame.

2. Scaffolding of the Difficulty of Writing Tasks: The Solution

To improve the gradual release of scaffolds and sustain student interest, we recommend that one sentence stem be removed each week leading up to the Week 6 assessment. Instead of being guided by words on the page, the students can use the image prompts to create their news stories. Furthermore, we suggest that students practice writing about different time periods aside from the usual "this weekend." Students may end up writing the same thing over and over again if they are always asked to report on their last weekend. Instead, they can write about their previous birthday, their most recent visit to the doctor, the last time they spent quality time with their friends, or other such occasions. Not only would this make the activity more interesting and varied, but this is also an opportunity for weekly texts and themes to be integrated into the writing task. Moreover, this helps to ensure that news and personal writing skills are transferred from one context to another.

Gradual scaffolding can also be improved for the story writing skill that Funda Wande aims to develop in Grade 2 students every Tuesday. Story writing is introduced in Week 2 through the frame of a letter and continued in Week 3. Starting Week 4 until Week 6, students learn how to write a story using a narrative frame that closely resembles a summary of the week's reading text. Thus, the themes of the students' stories vary weekly to match that of the weekly reading texts, but roughly the same number and quality of sentence stems are provided week to week. This is accomplished through teacher-led whole class writing. Then, on the Friday of Week 6, students are assessed based on how well they can independently perform the story writing task that they accomplished as a class on the prior Tuesday. The narrative frame is replaced in Weeks 7 and 8 by a different paragraph writing task, but it is returned in Week 9 when students are asked to write a story about a party at school.

This progression of tasks can be improved in a couple of ways. For one, the narrative form should be practiced consistently from Week 2 up until Week 6, when the story writing skill is assessed. It should not only be practiced consistently but also, more importantly, authentically. That is, the writing prompts – still aligned with the reading text's themes – should draw on students' own experiences and interests. After all, students will be more motivated to perform challenging writing tasks if they are asked to write about what interests or excites them. That may mean different things for different students; some may want to write about stories in their own lives, while others may opt to write fictional tales (Seban & Tavşanlı, 2015). Our last recommendation for improving this set of tasks is to gradually reduce the scaffolds that are provided to students week to week. This might mean reducing the number of sentence frames, or moving from whole class writing to group writing, then to paired writing, then finally to independent writing.

A third and final area where we see room for gradual scaffolds is in developing the paragraph-writing skill. Under the Funda Wande curriculum, Grade 2 students are expected to write a paragraph with the proper use of commas to list items. This skill is introduced and assessed in the same week (Week 7). Grade 2 students should be taught how to do this earlier on in the term and given more opportunities to practice before being assessed; four days is certainly not enough time for the learners to master the use of commas. We suggest that listing be introduced as early as Week 2 and used in a variety of writing tasks before it is gradually integrated with paragraph writing. We see opportunities to do this during Tuesday and Wednesday writing activities.

3. Ambiguity of the Writing Assessment Grading Rubric: The Problem

Another gap in the Funda Wande curriculum is the vagueness and ambiguity of the

grading rubric. The grading rubric leverages the multiple criteria to ensure that it is robust but includes various criteria for each level. This leads to increased subjectivity, discrepancies in assigning grades, and consequently difficulty in grading.

In Table 1 below, we can see an example of a Funda Wande writing task grading rubric. The words in the left column highlight the criteria being tested. Each color in this rendition of the table represents a different grading criterion. The numbers at the top of the table represent the number of points required for each criteria. However, there are multiple criteria that need to be met in order to achieve a certain score from the rubric, meaning it is easy to grade the strongest and the weakest writers, but not those in between.

Take for instance, a student who writes 5 sentences, thus warranting a 5, but uses capital letters incorrectly – which would receive a score of 2 – but also uses full stops which warrants a 3. What score would a teacher or assessor assign to that student? The subjectivity around grading could lead to discrepancies for students who in reality have similar writing abilities.

We can also see in this table that there is a criterion added just for levels 4 and 5, i.e. correct grammar and spelling. This is not a part of the original criteria (left column) that this activity should be testing for. Take for instance another case, where a student writes 2 sentences – score 2– but uses correct grammar and spelling - score 4 or 5? Teachers are left guessing what score to give, thus leading to bias and inaccuracies. If assessments are neither valid nor reliable, it is difficult for teachers to pinpoint troubled students and highlight the areas in which they need support.

Table 1: Example of a current Funda Wande G2 Writing Assessment Rubric

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Writes one paragraph (at least five sentences) on | Struggles to write 1 | Attempts to write 2 | Writes 3 sentences of | Writes 4 sentences of | Writes 5 sentences of |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|---|
| personal experiences or an event Uses capital letters (at the beginning of a sentence and for proper names) and correct punctuation (full stops, commas, apostrophe) | sentence of own news and does not use any punctuation | sentences of own news but uses capital letters incorrectly | own news using capital letters and full stops | own news in paragraph format using capital letters, full stops and correct grammar and spelling | own news in a paragraph format using capital letters, full stops and correct grammar and spelling |
|---|---|--|---|---|---|

4. Ambiguity of the Writing Assessment Grading Rubric: The Solution

We propose a rubric that breaks down each criteria into individual levels where points can be assigned to. For the illustration of this solution, the colors used in Table 1 become individual levels, with each color having its own row. We believe that the rubric can be transformed into something that resembles Table 3, where each criteria is exhaustive and can be assigned its own score rather than being tethered to each other.

The change we are proposing is not too time consuming as most of the levels are already present in the current versions of the rubric – normally in the maximum score, and as such do not have to be developed from scratch. The details of these steps for change are as follows, and a summary is included in Table 2:

- 1) Firstly, identify all the criteria that are being tested.
 - a) Using a perfect score rubric would provide the largest selection of criteria. In the example in the figure above, that would be criteria for a score of 5.
- 2) Separate criteria into numerical/quantifiable criteria and "yes/no/sometimes" unquantifiable criteria, to be discussed further below.
 - a) For numerical criteria, choose intervals that increase in points correlated with the numerical increase of the points.

e.g., The criteria, "Write one paragraph (at least 5 sentences). This is numeric as the

criteria is distinctly quantifiable. In this case, 5 is the maximum number of points, so each interval – 1 sentence – is an increase of 1 point. If a paragraph were 10 points, the interval would be 2 sentences for 1 point.

- b) For all criteria that can be answered as a yes, no or sometimes, there are two options.
- If the criteria does not ask about correct usage, e.g., "[Does this student] use capital letters":
 - Fill the points rubric from the lowest points with a response that means, "no, the student never ...".
 - The next level should be "the student does this incorrectly every time."
 - The next level should be "the student does it correctly sometimes."
 - Then lastly, "the student does it correctly all the time."
 - For all criteria that specify correct usage, e.g. "[Does this student] use *correct* punctuation":
 - Fill the points rubric from the lowest points with a response that means, "no, the student does not use correct ...".
 - The next level should be "the student uses correct ... sometimes."
 - Then lastly, the next should be "some correct," and the next should be "correctly all the time."

Table 2: Summary of how to remake the rubric

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Quantifiable criteria: "Does this student do the action X number of times" | Struggles to do action x/5 time | Does action 2X/5 times | Does action 3X/5 times | Does action 4X/5 times | Does action X times |

| | | | | | |
|---|------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Non-quantifiable criteria, no correct usage necessary. "Does this student do this action?" | Never does this action | Does this action incorrectly all the time | Does this action correctly sometimes | Always does this action correctly | - |
| Non-quantifiable criteria, correct usage necessary. "Does this student do this action correctly?" | Never does this action | Does this action correctly at least once sometimes | Always does this action correctly | - | - |

Table 3: Example of a new version of the current Funda Wande G2 Writing Assessment Rubric

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| Writes one paragraph (at least five sentences) on personal experiences or an event | Struggles to write 1 sentence of own news | Attempts to write 2 sentences of own news | Writes 3 sentences of own news | Writes 4 sentences of own news | Writes 5 sentences of own news in a paragraph format |
| Uses capital letters (at the beginning of a sentence and for proper names) | Does not use capital letters correctly | Uses capital letters incorrectly | Uses capital letters correctly sometimes | Uses capital letters correctly all the time | - |
| Uses correct punctuation (full stops, commas, apostrophe) | Does not use any punctuation | Uses punctuation incorrectly | Uses one type of punctuation correctly | Uses all necessary punctuation correctly | - |
| Uses correct grammar and spelling | Does not use correct grammar | Uses correct grammatical tense in more than 1 sentence | Always uses correct grammatical tense | - | - |

By breaking down the current grading criteria into individual levels and assigning points based on individual criteria, there will be less subjectivity in grading and hence less difficulty in doing it. This consequently increases grading and assessment reliability by allowing all teachers to grade on the same level. With more reliable assessments, teachers will be able to better measure the part of writing that a student is struggling with, which can in turn lead to better-targeted assistance, and better evaluation of which lessons may need more attention.

Conclusion

Funda Wanda has been gracious enough to share some of the challenges of designing a comprehensive curriculum for learners in South Africa. The team must navigate the nation's multilingualism, shortage of home language materials, large classroom sizes, and teachers who are overburdened due to class size, lack of resources, and/or insufficient training. We believe that the design of Funda Wanda's Teacher's Guide exhibits specific strengths that alleviate challenges for teachers of varied experience levels in a variety of school settings. In our opinion, the strengths of the Funda Wanda curriculum include a well-designed Teacher's Guide, strong vocabulary lessons, efficient use of materials, layered assessments, and ample communal writing activities.

The Teacher's Guide is designed with busy teachers in mind as activities are located on the same section of the page from day to day and week to week. Color coding and recurring photographs are additional design elements that contribute to the user-friendly layout.

Vocabulary building is reinforced as learners revisit stories throughout the week, and texts are utilized for several lessons and activities. This efficient use of texts is economical in that it keeps the guides at a manageable size in terms of page count. Assessments apply multiple criteria in determining student progression and allow for deeper insight into student performance. The shared writing and brainstorming activities foster a supportive, communal experience centered on reading and writing, allowing students time to learn from one another and build together.

In our review of the Funda Wanda materials, we identified two main areas for potential improvement--scaffolding progression and grading rubric. Our recommendations for strengthening elements of the curriculum and Teacher's Guide are as follows:

Adjust scaffolding for writing tasks with assessments in mind so that there is a gradual increase in difficulty, which can lead to better student engagement and outcomes. Examine exercises such as Monday's News Writing activity and add variations so that students are not writing about the same topic from week to week. Gradual release of scaffolding will better prepare students for the final writing assessment, which contains no scaffolds. For story writing and paragraph writing, we suggest introducing lessons and scaffolds for independent writing and comma usage earlier in the term to aid in student progression.

Simplify the levels of the grading rubric so that teachers are assessing skills (use of capital letters, number of sentences written successfully, punctuation, etc.) individually and not in grouped assessment blocks. Breaking down the layers of each assessment block will allow for a more accurate assessment of student performance. A simplified rubric would eliminate some of the subjectivity in grading and facilitate more consistent assessments from classroom to classroom and school to school. We recognize that the learning gap in South Africa, as in most countries, has increased during the Coronavirus pandemic, spurring unforeseen learning losses at many levels, so we believe that assessments are vitally important at this time.

We greatly appreciate Funda Wande's transparency and openness to this process, and we hope that our examination of these materials assists, in some small way, with the organization's goals.

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Appendix A

Table 1: Example of a current Funda Wande G2 Writing Assessment Rubric

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Writes one paragraph (at least five sentences) on personal experiences or an event.</p> <p>Uses capital letters (at the beginning of a sentence and for proper names) and correct punctuation (full stops, commas, apostrophe)</p> | <p>Struggles to write 1 sentence of own news and does not use any punctuation</p> | <p>Attempts to write 2 sentences of own news but uses capital letters incorrectly</p> | <p>Writes 3 sentences of own news using capital letters and full stops</p> | <p>Writes 4 sentences of own news in paragraph format using capital letters, full stops and correct grammar and spelling</p> | <p>Writes 5 sentences of own news in a paragraph format using capital letters, full stops and correct grammar and spelling</p> |

Appendix B

Table 2: Summary of how to remake the rubric

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Quantifiable criteria: <i>"Does this student do the action X number of times"</i> | Struggles to do action x/5 time | Does action 2X/5 times | Does action 3X/5 times | Does action 4X/5 times | Does action X times |
| Non-quantifiable criteria, no correct usage necessary. <i>"Does this student do this action?"</i> | Never does this action | Does this action incorrectly all the time | Does this action correctly sometimes | Always does this action correctly | - |
| Non-quantifiable criteria, correct usage necessary. <i>"Does this student do this action correctly?"</i> | Never does this action | Does this action correctly at least once sometimes | Always does this action correctly | - | - |

Appendix C

Table 3: Example of a new version of the current Funda Wande G2 Writing Assessment Rubric

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| Writes one paragraph (at least five sentences) on personal experiences or an event | Struggles to write 1 sentence of own news | Attempts to write 2 sentences of own news | Writes 3 sentences of own news | Writes 4 sentences of own news | Writes 5 sentences of own news in a paragraph format |
| Uses capital letters (at the beginning of a sentence and for proper names) | Does not use capital letters correctly | Uses capital letters incorrectly | Uses capital letters correctly sometimes | Uses capital letters correctly all the time | - |
| Uses correct punctuation (full stops, commas, apostrophe) | Does not use any punctuation | Uses punctuation incorrectly | Uses one type of punctuation correctly | Uses all necessary punctuation correctly | - |
| Uses correct grammar and spelling | Does not use correct grammar | Uses correct grammatical tense in more than 1 sentence | Always uses correct grammatical tense | - | - |

Reviewer Biographies

Maya Alkateb-Chami, Ph.D. Program

Maya Alkateb-Chami is a Ph.D. student at Harvard University with research interests in the language of instruction policies, epistemic injustice, and refugee education. Prior to doctoral studies, she led a career in non-profit management, focused on human rights, refugee education, culture, and the arts. More recently, as an educator and researcher, Alkateb-Chami designed trainings on linguistic rights and the right to education for the benefit of Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights, taught in a Harvard Graduate School of Education course entitled "Education in Uncertainty" as a Teaching Fellow, and joined the editorial board of the Harvard Educational Review. She holds an MEd in Language and Literacy from Harvard University, an MSc in Education from Indiana University, Bloomington, and a B.A. in Political Science from Damascus University.

Amanda Clark, School Leadership Program

Amanda has worked as an elementary school teacher for fourteen years, having spent the last seven years in the Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Florida. Throughout her teaching career, she has led grade-level teams, mentored teachers, created literacy curriculum, and advocated for quality literacy instruction. With the majority of her teaching experience concentrated in the early elementary grades, she has a true understanding of the science of reading and the five pillars of reading instruction. She hopes to use this knowledge and experience to assist in closing the literacy achievement gap in schools. Amanda holds a master's degree in School Leadership from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, a master's

degree in Elementary Education from Boston University, and a bachelor's degree in English from the College of the Holy Cross.

April Dobbins, Arts in Education Program

April Dobbins is a writer and filmmaker based in Miami, Florida. Her work has been supported by Sundance Institute, ITVS, Fork Films, International Documentary Association, and Firelight Media, to name a few. For six years, she served as Director of Prestigious Awards and Fellowships at the University of Miami, where she also taught film courses in the School of Communication. In 2018, she was awarded an Ellies Creator Award by Oolite Arts. Her work is deeply rooted in Black southern experiences, which she detailed in *Home is Where the Heart of the Story Is*, her TEDx talk. She writes about arts and culture for *Miami New Times* and *Sugarcane Magazine*. She received her Ed.M. in Arts in Education from Harvard in 2022.

Manar Hazzaa, International Education Policy Program

Hazzaa holds a Master of International Education Policy degree from Harvard Graduate School of Education and a Master of Anthropology from the American University in Cairo. Her academic focus is on language and literacy, and family engagement in education. Hazzaa recently assisted the Pedagogy of Play (POP) team at Project Zero. Her post entailed a review of POP academic literature around the Arab world. In 2018, Hazzaa founded TFT, an in-person storytelling program in Cairo, Egypt, to promote family engagement in storytelling. Since 2020, TFT has run as a remote program. Hazzaa is also a children's book author. In 2021 two of her books were shortlisted in the best picture book and best early reader categories, respectively, for the Etisalat Award for Arabic Children's Literature, one of the most respected awards in the field in the Arab world.

Cathryn Moodley, Education Policy and Analysis Program

Cathryn Moodley is a master's student in the Education Policy and Analysis Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She previously worked in South African basic education on a research project exploring the development of social, emotional, and cognitive competencies in public schools. She is interested in improving the quality and equity of education systems in Sub-Saharan Africa through research and policy.

Emily Powell, Human Development and Education Program

Emily Powell is a master's student in the Human Development and Education Program at Harvard University with a Specialization in Literacy and Languages. She is a multiliteracy advocate and language and literacy educator with 15 years of domestic and international experience. She has worked with a wide variety of cultures and language groups across levels and specializations. At Harvard, she has worked as a lab assistant in the Jeanne Chall Reading Lab, as well as a special projects assistant with the School of Professional Education in PreK-12 Programming. She earned a B.A. in Teaching English as Second Language from Kent State University and her teaching credential through Murray State University. In the future, she plans to continue her work to broaden access to literacy instruction for speakers of less commonly taught languages in the United States.

Nicah Santos, Education Leadership, Organization, and Entrepreneurship Program

Nicah Santos will be doing research on youth gun violence prevention on a Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Fellowship during the summer of 2022. After that fellowship she will be interning for IEB-UNESCO remotely from the Philippines.

Elyssa Skeirik, Education Policy, and Analysis Program

Elyssa Skeirik is an education in emergencies professional with over seven years of experience in curriculum development, teacher training, and program design and implementation in developing and humanitarian contexts. Specializing in psychosocial support and social-emotional

learning, she has supported education interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. She graduated in 2022 with a master's in Education Policy and Analysis from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a certificate in Humanitarian Studies from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Elyssa currently works for FHI 360's Education in Emergencies team, supporting the implementation of educational programming that empowers children and youth worldwide to access equitable and quality education.

Julia Sproul, Education Policy and Analysis Program

Julia Sproul is a current master's student and lifelong learner studying Education Policy and Analysis with a concentration in Global, International, and Comparative Education. Before coming to Harvard Graduate School of Education, she taught at Blackstone Valley Prep in Rhode Island for six years and served as Teach for America corps member in the Mississippi Delta. She holds a Master of Science in education from Johns Hopkins University and has taught students at both the elementary and post-secondary levels. She looks forward to taking her passion for literacy, educational equity, and teacher voice in education policy to Capitol Hill in the Fall.

Nathalia Trujillo, Education Policy and Analysis Program

Nathalia Trujillo graduated from Harvard's Graduate School of Education with a major in Education Policy and Analysis and a concentration in Global, International, and Comparative Education. She also holds a master's in Early Childhood Education. Her previous work entails teacher training, curriculum development, education program design, implementation, and grant management in Latin America.

Tonia Williams, Human Development and Education Program

Tonia Williams was born and raised in Jamaica, where she began the foundations for her

academic career. A recent graduate from the Harvard Graduate School of Education with a Master of Education in Human Development in Education. Tonia holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychological Science and French from Vassar College. Tonia will complete her Doctor of Philosophy in Experimental Psychology with a focus on Developmental Psychology at the University of Oxford with a dissertation focusing on lexical development in early childhood. Tonia considers herself a budding educator and researcher preparing for her career in Education Research and Child Development. Tonia has worked at education technology startups and has been invited to participate in international conferences, including the World Innovation Summit in Education.

Yiting Xia, Learning Design, Innovation, and Technology Program

Yiting Xia is an expert in Elementary Education with extensive knowledge about Second Language Learning. She has many experiences working with bilingual students internationally. Yiting has dedicated three years to teaching in many pre-k classrooms in Michigan, USA. The different styles and philosophies of teaching make her very mindful of student-oriented study and the power dynamic between a student and the teacher. As a former student who had spent many hours being confused and easily distracted in the classroom, Yiting likes to focus on students that seem not fit in the classroom or having trouble engaging with the whole class. She also believes that everybody would benefit from coaching, but not everybody would benefit from the same coach or would reflect from the same set of survey questions. As a believer in differentiated learning, she believes that the format of coaching would vary based on the content and the learner.