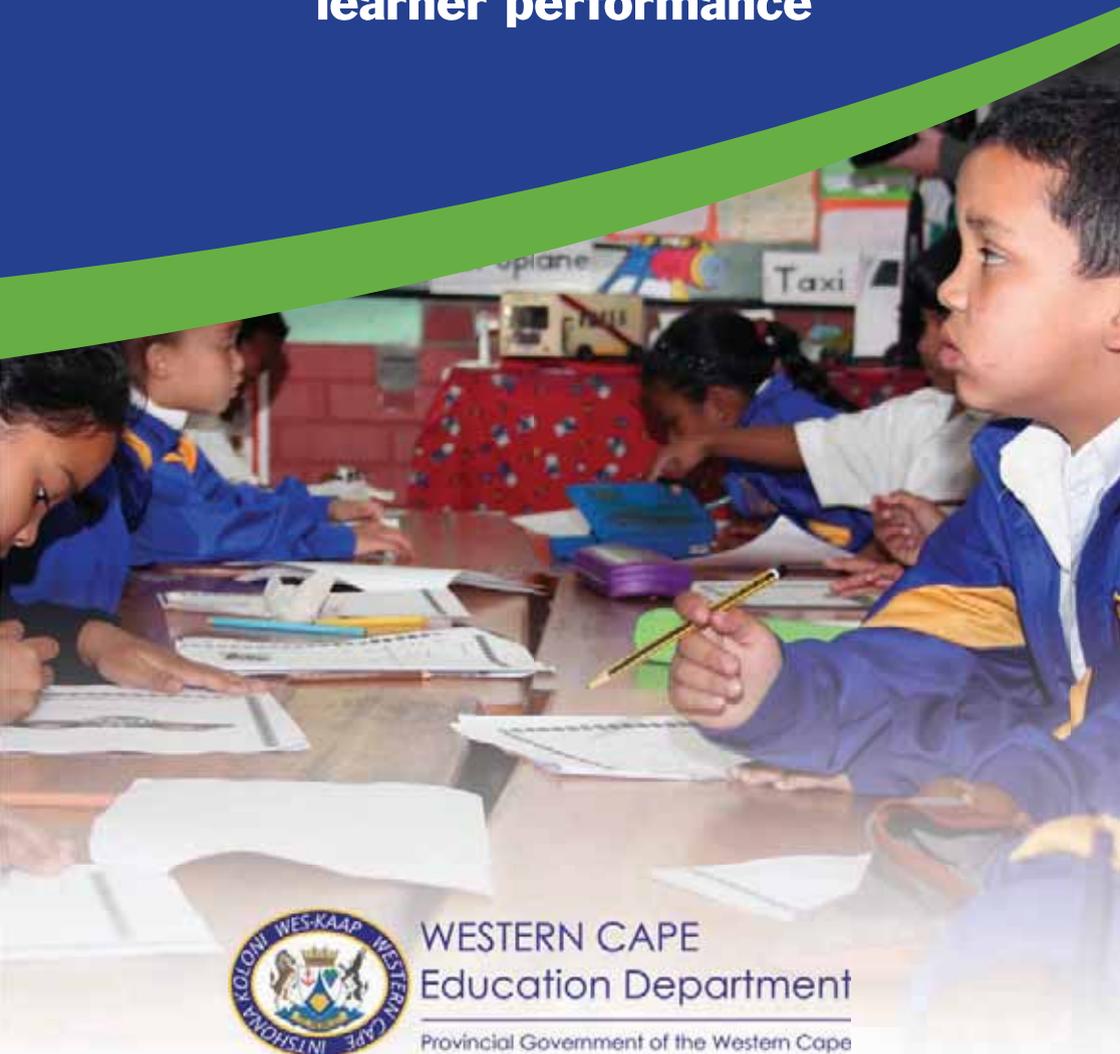


Foundation Phase Study

Findings & Recommendations

**Improving classroom practice &
learner performance**



WESTERN CAPE
Education Department

Provincial Government of the Western Cape

In 2010 the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) and the Western Cape Provincial Treasury requested a team from the University of Stellenbosch to conduct a large scale study of teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase. The study involved 135 full days of classroom observation, plus interviews with teachers and principals. This allowed the study to obtain a broad picture of teaching and learning in classrooms and schools in the Western Cape.

This booklet sets out the main results of the study. The full report is available at circuit and district offices.

I would like to encourage schools, in particular School Management Teams and Foundation Phase teachers, to make use of the findings of this study.

Each school is unique and not all the findings will apply to all teachers, schools and districts. Please identify those findings that are applicable to your situation, discuss them with colleagues and consider how you can use them to improve learning in the Foundation Phase classroom.

The Western Cape Education Department will use the results from the study and from the compulsory testing to develop appropriate support mechanisms for teachers and schools. For these interventions to be effective, principals, teachers, parents and officials must work together to ensure a solid grounding in Languages and Mathematics for all our children in the Foundation Phase.

Principals should be concerned with and be informed about, what happens in classrooms. It is only in this way that they can provide instructional leadership. The findings below give principals guidelines for monitoring learning in the Foundation Phase classes at their schools.



HEAD EDUCATION

CLASSROOM PRACTICE AND LEARNER PERFORMANCE IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE

Findings



Findings of the study can be categorized into two: The first table presents ten positive practices that were observed.

The second table provides details of practices that the study was critical of and suggests some corrective measures to address these problematic practices.

Some of the challenges are more prevalent in some schools than in others. More information can be found in the full report that has been circulated to each district and circuit office. Schools are encouraged to study these findings closely. Schools should identify those aspects of the report that apply to them specifically and utilise the information for improving learning and teaching in the Foundation Phase.

General findings:

1. In general, the study found that most schools are functioning in the sense that normal procedures are being followed, basic functions are performed and resources, in particular teachers, are in place and a daily routine is followed. However, the study established that there is too much attention to form rather than substance. **Not enough is done by schools and teachers to ensure that substantive and sufficient learning takes place in the Foundation Phase.**
2. The same applies to teachers' ability to teach. Teachers kept discipline and teaching procedures were followed. However, the study found that many teachers were simply not setting the bar high enough, that is, levels of cognitive demand being made on children were far too low. Many schools were unlikely to cover the curriculum in the year. There was also some confusion about assessment and the curriculum and results showed that learners often did not grasp the fundamentals of language and mathematics.

3. Evidence from the study and children's books showed that not enough reading, writing and calculating was taking place on a daily basis.

It is the combination of these three factors that leads to poor learner performance. In the most fundamental way, most weakly-performing schools are not fulfilling their main task, of ensuring that substantive learning takes place in the classroom.



TEN POSITIVE PRACTICES



| Focus Area | Positive practices observed | Room for Improvement |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Basic classroom equipment and conditions | Classrooms appear to have sufficient furniture, chalkboards (or similar) and classrooms were arranged in a way that learners could see the board. Reading mats or carpets were found in most schools. | The provision of carpets or mats to all classrooms in the FP, particularly at the Grade 1 and 2 levels, would promote 'story time' or similar shared reading experiences as well as one-on-one interaction with the teacher. |
| 2. Availability of essential writing material | Most classes have the necessary writing materials, although some classes have only one language exercise book. | Separate books for different subjects and different sections of language are recommended. |
| 3. A print-rich classroom environment | In most FP classrooms, the walls are relatively print-rich. | Replacement and up-to-date resources are important, especially mother-tongue resources in Afrikaans and African languages. |
| 4. Availability of book collections and the promotion of a book culture in classrooms | Most FP classrooms have classroom book collections. | There is a need for more information/ non-fiction books with attractive pictures and appropriate language levels. Teachers should foster an interest in books as sources of information as well as pleasure. It seems that more picture books are needed in classrooms, especially in Grade 1 and 2 classrooms. |
| 5. Assessment of written work | Most FP teachers are marking learners' class work regularly and learners in most classes regularly do corrections in their mathematics workbooks. | Corrections in the Home Language books should be done more regularly. Learners marking their own work or each others' work should be used as a form of reinforcing learning. |
| 6. Curriculum support and monitoring of curriculum implementation by School Management Team | School Management Teams (SMTs)/ Heads of Department (HoD) of the FP monitor teachers' progress on their work plans | SMTs/HoDs need to be active in ensuring that grade-appropriate and sufficiently demanding reading, writing and numeracy activities and tasks are done each day in class. SMT's also need to be aware of the schools' progress against the curriculum as well their performance in compulsory testing. Principals need to play a stronger instructional leadership role. |

| Focus Area | Positive practices observed | Room for Improvement |
|--|---|---|
| 7. Making up time lost to teaching | When school days are lost or lessons missed, teachers said that lost time is usually recovered by extending teaching time so that lessons run after school. | Schools should have a guiding framework/policy on how this is done. |
| 8. Learner absenteeism and monitoring of learner attendance | Learner absenteeism is not a major factor limiting learning time in the classrooms, although it is a problem in some schools, especially on Fridays or Mondays. In general, FP attendance registers at schools seem to be kept up-to-date | High absenteeism rate on Mondays or Fridays should be investigated and dealt with. |
| 9. Classroom interaction patterns | There is good interaction between teachers and learners. Most teachers try to ensure that all learners participate in classroom interactions. | Verbal knowledge 'exchanges' between learners should be encouraged. For teachers to be more responsive to individual learners' needs, they should identify and work with learner error. Teachers should ensure that all learners are asked and given opportunities to respond or solve problems on the chalkboard and read it out loud. |
| 10. Strategies for coping with differences among learners | Most FP teachers are trying to address the issue of varying ability amongst their learners. | In large classes, not all learners get equal 'contact time' with the teacher. The challenge is to ensure that all learners are on-task and putting in their best effort, and that time is used productively. More support for classroom management, appropriate support materials and graded readers should be provided. |



PRACTICES REQUIRING ATTENTION



| | Practices that the study was critical of | Teacher strategies and practices that will lead to better learner performance |
|---|---|--|
| Effective use of teaching and learning time | Much less time is spent on actually 'doing' Mathematics and Language each day than is allocated to the subject on the timetable. | Know exactly how much time should be spent in the classroom each day on the different subjects. Every minute counts! |
| | Managing late coming is not always done effectively. | Make learners and parents aware that learner late coming is being monitored. Learners must be encouraged to attend classes every day and on time. |
| | The time allocated for teaching Mathematics and Languages in the Foundations for Learning guidelines and CAPS, is significantly more than the actual teaching time observed in class. | Ensure that the teaching day in the FP is well-organised, with specific times set for each of the subjects. Monitor progress against these goals over time. |
| | Too many incidents of non-teaching episodes deprive learners of teaching time. Remember every minute counts | Teachers must make effective use of teaching time. Keep non-teaching activities to the absolute minimum. Ensure that the planned programme for the day is completed. Ask the principal to minimise disturbances such as parents, other teachers or organisations visiting classes during teaching hours. |

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|  | Practices that the study was critical of | Teacher strategies and practices that will lead to better learner performance |
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| Pacing | Too much time for literacy and numeracy development is lost through slow pacing and poor monitoring | A greater sense of urgency is needed. Remember every minute counts. This is particularly important for learners who have limited opportunities for learning outside school. |
| | Teachers pace activities at the rate of the weakest learners in the class. | Learners must be given opportunities to engage with more challenging work. Graded reading series and textbooks/ pre-printed workbooks allow learners to progress at different rates. |
| | Learners are allowed to work on written tasks at a very slow pace. The amount of written work learners do each day is not adequate. | Learners must be urged to 'pick up the pace' to complete enough writing and computation tasks each day. |
| | Over use of the chalkboard for writing out tasks which is both time- consuming and generally reduces learners' opportunities to engage with extended texts. | Use textbooks and workbooks for learners every day in every lesson. Use the chalkboard judiciously and where possible prepare tasks outside teaching time. |
| | Homework does not form an important enough part of the teaching programme. Only a third of FP learners are given homework three or more times a week. | Formulate homework policies for the FP with realistic but concrete goals. Homework is a way of extending time spent on learning beyond the school day, and also a means of giving learners additional opportunities to practice. Let learners exchange homework to mark in class and use it as a teaching opportunity. |

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|  | Practices that the study was critical of | Teacher strategies and practices that will lead to better learner performance |
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| Content complexity and cognitive demand of tasks | <p>Low content complexity and cognitive demand in Mathematics and Languages: Learners are not covering the curricula at a high enough standard or level of content complexity and cognitive demand.</p> <p>In Mathematics learners are mainly involved in writing numbers and math notation. Not enough classes are involved in interpreting mathematical devices such as graphs and tables. There is limited exposure to word problems.</p> <p>In Languages: Learners are mostly involved in writing individual letters and words and not enough in writing extended texts.</p> | <p>Demand more from learners to ensure that they are moved beyond their current levels of competence. Curriculum advisors will pay special attention to this challenge. More assistance will be provided to ensure that the curricula are covered at an appropriate level in class and that assessment tasks are set at an appropriately demanding level.</p> |
| | <p>Low levels of cognitive demand and too slow pacing leads to disruptive learner behaviour and indicates that learners are often bored.</p> | <p>Learners must be challenged to complete more writing and computation tasks. Expect more!</p> |
| Instructional leadership | <p>Principals do not pay enough attention to curriculum issues at the Foundation Phase.</p> | <p>Principals will be required to report on progress against the curriculum. Principals should take an active interest and role in the Foundation Phase.</p> |
| | <p>Class size of more than 40 learners in the Foundation Phase.</p> | <p>The SMT must allocate staff efficiently and adhere to policies that prescribe acceptable teacher: learner ratios. No FP classes should have more than 40 learners.</p> |
| Effective use of resources to support teaching and learning | <p>Too few learners are allowed to take any books home.</p> | <p>Where possible, make books available to learners to take home. Learners should be exposed to books as often as possible and encouraged to read on their own.</p> |
| | <p>The use of worksheets restricts learners' opportunity to handle books and find out how books work.</p> | <p>Worksheets consist of discrete activities, while textbooks and workbooks are systematically organized and sequenced. Ensure Grade 2 & 3 learners have textbooks and/or workbooks for every subject.</p> |

| ! | Practices that the study was critical of | Teacher strategies and practices that will lead to better learner performance |
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| Effective strategies of teaching numeracy and literacy | Language: Collectivised as opposed to individualised reading opportunities was found. | Every learner in the class should regularly read individually to the teacher for guided reading so that she can monitor and record individual progress and differentiate between learners' reading levels. |
| | The ability to derive meaning is dependent upon the ability to read fluently. There is not enough emphasis on developing learners' fluency and reading comprehension skills in most FP classrooms. Teachers are not teaching learners a variety of strategies for making sense of texts. | Teachers should take a more structured and systematic approach to teaching phonics, syntactic, grammatical and spelling skills. Learners should be involved in answering questions that require them to read, search for and use information in texts for their responses. |
| | The emphasis is on learning to read simple narrative text found in basic readers. Learners are not engaged in reading expository texts for example, whole sentences or paragraphs in textbooks. | Learners should have regular individual practice reading expository (information/non-fiction) texts for different purposes such as Life Skills and Mathematics. |
| | Numeracy: Oral mental arithmetic tasks mainly involve counting or addition. | Teachers should ensure sufficient practice in mental arithmetic and multiplication tables in class, so as to provide learners with opportunities to develop the ability to rapidly compute. |
| | Learners are not encouraged to read and follow instructions for themselves often enough. They are also not encouraged to ask questions often enough. | Develop learners' capacity to work independently. This is particularly important to familiarise learners with testing conditions experienced during compulsory testing. |

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|  | Practices that the study was critical of | Teacher strategies and practices that will lead to better learner performance |
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| The role of parents | Parents need to be involved as much as possible in reading stories but also enhancing Language and Mathematics development by assisting with and monitoring homework. | Involve parents (or other family members such as older brothers and sisters) as much as possible in homework. Let them help with basic activities such as helping children to learn the letters of the alphabet and numbers, practise mental arithmetic and memorise multiplication tables, and spelling. |
| | Few learners are allowed to take any books home. | Make parents and other family members aware of the importance of homework in the FP. Encourage them where possible to monitor and support homework and home reading. |
| Assessment | Assessment tasks are not always well organized and lack the necessary detail to determine the type of revision or intervention that is needed. | Schedule regular assessment points to establish whether learners are ready to continue to the next level. Set assessments at an appropriate level, considering the curriculum and work plans, to ensure that learners are tested at the right levels. Use the assessment information to work out where and what type of revision or intervention is needed. |
| | Classroom interaction and assessment tasks are not used enough to identify misconceptions and provide explicit feedback. | Develop the capacity to identify and work with learner errors. Use this capacity to identify differences between learner's levels of learning. |

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|  | Practices that the study was critical of | Teacher strategies and practices that will lead to better learner performance |
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| Language of instruction and vocabulary development | Development of deliberate conceptual language and 'specialist' vocabulary or terminology does not happen often enough. Conceptual language and 'specialist' vocabulary or terminology is not introduced by Grade 3. | Developing the conceptual language and 'specialist' vocabularies and terminology for the various subjects will improve academic literacy and teach concepts that are necessary such as 'add', 'subtract', 'divide', and 'multiply' etc. Learners need to develop these conceptual language skills if they are to cope with subjects in the Intermediate Phase. Teachers should ensure that more 'general' or 'everyday' vocabulary is supplemented with more complex concepts and terminology. |
| | In schools where the LoLT at the school is different from most learners' home language, or where learners will be required to make a transition to learning in English, teachers are not using bilingual approaches judiciously to enhance learners' comprehension of and engagement with the FP curriculum. | Teachers need to know when, where and how best to use bilingual approaches, such as code switching to enhance learners' comprehension of and engagement with the FP curriculum. They also need to know where languages should be kept separate. |
| | In schools where learners will be required to make a transition to learning in English, there is a delayed introduction to English First Additional Language. | Learners in Grade 1-3 classes should have time that is clearly demarcated and specifically allocated for teaching the First Additional Language, and schools should ensure that this time is used to the maximum. |

attention

