



What PILO has learned about implementing systemic improvement in reading

– Mary Metcalfe (PILO)

I have been asked to provide an overview of the various PILO initiatives and evaluations that focus on reading. This requires an explanation of PILO's work at the Foundation Phase since reading interventions are predicated on the design principles of our work at scale.

What does PILO do?

1. PILO was established to design and test programmatic and systemic interventions aimed at improving learning outcomes on scale.
2. Whilst improving reading and numeracy is fundamental to all learning improvement, our focus is on understanding and testing what is needed in the system of support across all grades/ subjects. These systems of support are pre-requisites for any system improvement
3. PILO designs for implementation within the system, by the system, not as an outside intervention. An evaluation is currently underway to deepen understanding of challenges of 'embedding'. The system is accustomed to accommodating external interventions with little system involvement and consequent minimal incorporation into system practices (many interventions are resourced at a costing that is not available in the system). A core principle of design has been costing for replication at scale
4. PILO has worked at the scale of a district since inception (2015⁴⁵). This has been an exceptional learning experience as it is at this scale that the challenges in the ecosystem of support become visible
5. The primary focus is on leadership and management at school and district level, with a focus on routines of support for teaching and learning (the instructional core)
6. The work has drawn from change management. For adoption, teachers must believe that what is proposed will help them with the challenges they face, and what they are given is filtered through what they already do and believe works. The change programme was run as a campaign *Jika imfundo* with the active support of stakeholders (e.g. teacher unions)
7. Extensive investment was made in Foundation Phase (FP) teaching and learning material and pedagogic support. In other Grades the key practices of planning teaching, monitoring learning, reflecting, collaborating and adjusting teaching plans were supported by helping teachers align CAPS/ ATP to approved textbooks and lesson plans were not provided.

45 PILO 'tried at-scale' in 1 200 schools in 2 districts in KZN from 2015–2017. The scale has increased with a decrease in external support as the Districts/ Province assume greater responsibility. The KZN work has been largely funded by the NECT. PILO has also worked at scale in Gauteng, Free State and is currently supporting the DBE in Mpumalanga, and in incorporating learning as part of improving the national framework for implementation of the Curriculum

What PILO has done in Foundation Phase Literacy in KZN⁴⁶

1. All FP teachers in the 4 800 KZN schools with FP have been provided with lesson plans, CAPS Planners and Trackers⁴⁷, graded readers, posters, and big books in both isiZulu (FL) and English (FAL). This material stresses the acquisition of reading in the first language (isiZulu) and provides a structured programme in phonics as well as structured opportunities to read for meaning, with appropriate text, in both languages. This material is now available to be replenished by schools from within the provincial LTSM procurement process.
2. FP curriculum advisers were supported in the design and delivery of FP Languages Teacher Development workshops and material. All of the material is available as Open Educational Resources. Participants' Handout and Facilitator's Guides are available for a range of main topics⁴⁸
 1. The workshops were delivered by the Advisers and attended by FP Department Heads (DH) and a lead teacher from all schools in the province once a term for the first 3 terms. The intention was to develop the DH as an instructional leader.
 2. PILO is partnering with VVOB (Flemish support agency) to sustain the initial Jika iMfundo FP reading intervention in the VVOB support to the KZN reading strategy.

Learnings: Improving reading

1. **Reading material for learners is critical:** FP classes are generally not reading-rich environments. Interventions must put quality books in the hands of learners – at school and at home.
2. **Lesson Plans can create a framework for improving the teaching of reading:** Lesson Plans are an important tool to guide teachers through new and unfamiliar practices, but are not a script. Their use must be supported by individual and collaborative professional reflection (on the basis of evidence) on what worked, and what might be done differently.
3. **There is a dearth of support for changing teacher practices within the system from outside of schools:**
 - i. There is little support for teachers grappling with adjusting teaching to the needs of learners. Few provinces have sufficient FP advisers to provide timely and relevant support. The table below shows the current ratio of FP advisers to schools in KZN. Funding constraints mean that this is unlikely to change, nor could the provincial budget accommodate additional 'coaches'.

# of Districts with this ratio	# Number of Schools to be supported by a single FP advisor
2	<100
3	101 – 150
6	151– 200
1	>200

* The number of FP teachers per school can vary from 1 to ± 9 (generally a minimum of 3 per school). In 6 districts, an FP is responsible for between 151 and 200 schools, and thus up to 600 teachers.

- ii. There is little use of data to segment of teacher needs, and to provide support that is targeted to these needs. Training is generic.

⁴⁶ PILO also worked on Foundation Phase Maths on the same principles and model, and work was done with intermediate phase reading.

⁴⁷ The activities of *planning teaching and tracking learning* are not compliance activities, but reciprocally informative.

⁴⁸ Assessment in the Lesson Plans (LP); SA-SAMS; Teaching language structures in the LP; Home Language phonics; Phonemic awareness and phonics; EFAL Phonics (Writing and reading and EFAL); language structures using posters; using the African Storybook resources; Shared reading in isiZulu; Songs and rhymes in EFAL; Teaching 'Grammar' (both languages); Writing; Editing writing (both languages); Reading; Group Guided Reading (GGR); Paired and Independent reading; Reflection on the use of lesson plans; Differentiation strategies; Differentiation in GGR; Assessing learners for GGR groups; and developing a grade timetable.

iii. Resource constraints (device, data, Wi-Fi) limit access to on-line resources/ training

4. Support for changing teacher practices from *within schools* is critical

iv. The professional community within the school is the first immediate support available and this must be strengthened

v. Opportunities for school-based reflection to adjust teaching on the basis of evidence of learning must happen within teaching teams, and SMT must support this by scheduling collaborative time. FP teachers and the HoD teach the whole day.

vi. Adviser support for FP teams at school level has to shift away from compliance monitoring to being in touch with learning

5. The importance of improving assessment to guide teaching

vii. Brahm Fleisch argues that schools need regular external benchmarking information to guide school-based reflection, and system learning. I agree.

6. Evaluation

The NECT led an evaluation process which was completed in FP schools in KZN after the first year of implementation. This has not yet been made public. PILO has been informed that: there was evidence of positive changes in curriculum planning and management practices within schools; learners in treatment districts wrote more and tackled more complex work than comparison groups; the impact findings suggested that the learning programme contributed to better learner performance; and the programme was highly integrated into the work of the district office.