



The Education Triple Cocktail

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How can we achieve the President's goal of ensuring that all 10 year olds can read for meaning by 2030? We now have the scientific knowledge of how to do it. This knowledge is built on research conducted in South Africa by our top South African educational researchers.

The education 'Triple Cocktail': Over the past ten years, South African researchers developed a robust intervention model geared to improving learning outcomes system-wide in the early grades in disadvantaged schools. Together with the research from Kenya and India, there is a growing international recognition that what has become known as the 'education triple cocktail' or 'structured pedagogic programme' model is best practice in government-led large-scale early grade learning interventions across the Global South. The model includes (1) the provision of lesson plans and other related curriculum guidance, (2) appropriate learning materials (phonics, graded readers, storybooks, mathematics manipulatives etc.) and (3) high quality and ongoing professional support including centralized just-in-time training and, crucially, onsite instructional coaching and support in the classroom. Given that onsite classroom visits are not cheap, the triple cocktail requires additional resources than are currently available to schools, but not exorbitantly so. Importantly, this is the only approach for which we have evidence of sustained improvements in reading and mathematics outcomes over time. Like the triple-cocktail drug regiment for people with HIV/AIDS, the education triple cocktail has the potential to fundamentally change the course of early grade reading performance in South Africa.

First large-scale implementation in Gauteng (GPLMS): The research programme on this intervention model began with the design and implementation of the Gauteng Primary Literacy and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS) in 2010 under MEC Barbara Creecy. The intervention showed that Grade 3 learning profiles in reading and mathematics improved significantly. Working at scale in over 800 Quintile 1-3 schools in Gauteng, this government-led intervention demonstrated the feasibility and effectiveness of implementing the model by provincial departments of education.

Positive results in North West and Mpumalanga (EGRS 1 & 2): But would the GPLMS approach work in other provinces? Using a randomized control trial in studies that involve large groups of schools, the GPLMS approach was tested in two additional provinces. Dr Stephen Taylor, Director of Research in the Department of Basic Education, led the scientific study of this South African intervention model in the North West (in Setswana) and later in Mpumalanga (in English as First Additional Language). The results of these studies consistently showed the positive impact of the model on learning outcomes in Foundation Phase reading. The largest effects were found in intervention arms that included regular onsite classroom visits by an instructional coach.

The 'Triple Cocktail' becomes the new standard in SA: The basic model is now the standard practice in large-scale interventions in South Africa. In particular, Funda Wandé (Eastern Cape), PILO (KZN) and the NECT (various) have adopted versions of the 'educational triple cocktail'. Peer-reviewed articles that have appeared in the top scientific journals show that the model works across provinces, with different service providers and in the three Foundation Phase subjects, that is, Home Language, English as the First Additional Language, and Mathematics. The research shows that the South African model is scalable and

affordable (can work across an entire province and can be paid for from within provincial budgets) and with impact that is sustainable. Although the 'dosage' of coaching varies across programs, international research is clear that without regular onsite visits by a coach, learning outcomes do not improve.

What are the next steps?

In the change journey, researchers have done their part to provide a scientifically sound change model. The next steps involve translating research into action at-scale across the education system. The first and most important insight for this is that we need to have a 10-year plan. International experience shows that turning around any education system takes at least eight years (Michael Fullan).

We have the scientific evidence of an effective implementation model that works at-scale in South African schools. Implementation requires us to do the next steps:

- 1. Set achievable targets, made public and regularly reported on.** The president has set the overall goal of all 10 year olds reading for meaning by 2030. But to make this work, we need actual publicly started targets stating upfront where we are at present and where we hope to be at regular intervals in the journey towards 2030. Senior government officials need to take ownership and be held accountable for achieving the targets. That said, transparency and honesty in moving forward would ensure genuine public engagement in the change journey.
- 2. Measure gains in learning that is simple, cheap, quick and trustworthy.** One of the most urgent challenges is to ensure we have an accurate and meaningful measurement of early grade reading, something that does not currently exist. These must be simple, low-cost, rapid, independent and credible. It must be meaningful for parents who observe their children reading, teachers in classrooms, principals, district officials and higher level government managers. Although teachers should be empowered and equipped to administer their own assessments of reading, there is also a need for an external (independent) measure of reading at the Grade 2 or Grade 3 level.
- 3. Ensure that all Foundation Phase classrooms are equipped with a minimum set of resources.** Teachers cannot teach reading without a minimum set of resources. We do not need to come up with an entirely new list of resources. The Foundations For Learning Government Gazette (promulgated under Minister Pandor) made explicit the resources needed in every Foundation Phase classroom. Only one of the ten or so resources required (the DBE Workbooks) were actually made available to all schools. It is critical to ensure that all children receive anthologies of graded readers in their home language, phonics flashcards etc. and have access to classroom libraries, Big Books etc.
- 4. Establish effective implementation teams in all provincial departments with the highest authority. The tasks of the teams are to keep implementation on track, maintain a positive stance, remain focused on key strategies while managing other interests.** If any substantive change is to take root in early grade reading, it must be led and managed by the provincial departments of education. Given the silos that often exists between different branches and directorates within provincial departments, it will be necessary to appoint powerful implementation teams empowered with the mandate from political and executive leadership.
- 5. Align NGO service providers working in the early grade reading space.** One of the assets that exists in the education sector in South Africa is the many dedicated organisations in civil society. These include donors, funders, aid agencies, local community groups and education NGOs. To ensure that their contribution is optimally mobilized and does not result in duplication and incoherence, strong efforts need to be made to ensure effective coordination, sharing of resources and common approaches to measurement and evaluation.

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