



LEADERSHIP FOR LITERACY

*Case study school D(L):
Raw case study notes*

Name of study:

Leadership for literacy or officially “Succeeding Against the Odds: Understanding resilience and exceptionalism in high-functioning township and rural primary schools in South Africa”.

Funder:

Economic and Social Research Council [grant
ES/N01023X/1]

Data submission: February 2019

D(L) Primary School

Limpopo

ESRC Case Study 5-7 June 2017 | F de C & N S



1. School background and context

D(L) Primary is a school in the well-served Indian suburb in Limpopo. It was founded in 2009 by the then-President of the country. It is a Quintile 4 school, charging R2800/year. About 30% of parents do not pay fees and around 7% of learners are non-African. The principal believes that 80% of parents are employed. The total budget of the school is R4,4-million and R3,7million of this is derived from school fees.

In 2017, there are 1334 learners and 45 teachers, 10 of which are paid-for by the SGB (nearly half of the budget goes towards SGB educators). 2 of the 45 teachers are Indian, the rest are African. Class sizes range from 45/50 to a maximum of 63. There are four classes per grade. In Foundation Phase there are 2 Sepedi-LOLT streams and 2 English-LOLT streams, and these streams remain separate during the Intersen grades. Typically, the English LOLT learners at FP consist of Africans from other countries such as Nigerian, Zimbabwean and even Pakistani residents in South Africa (although these are a minority). These non-Sepedi speakers in the English stream are joined by the Xitsonga and Tshivenda

learners. These are wealthier than the Sepedi-LOLT learners. The SES profile of the learners is diverse, ranging from learners that are very poor (and sometimes orphans) to children of civil-servants. Many teachers of the school seem not to have their children in this school. D(L) was the wealthiest of the 60 schools in our ESRC sample with median (P50) SES being 2,6 SD above the mean. 94% of Gr6 learners indicated that they had a car (60-school mean was 54%).

The school recently received four mobile-classrooms from the district and 4 FP classes just moved from shared space in the hall to these mobile units. It has a vast library room but it is not functional as a library. The room seems more currently used to store LTSM. The buildings are relatively usually well maintained except for the 4 mobile classrooms that do not have aircon. They have two run-down tennis courts and general sport areas. There is a nice staff-room and admin cluster and 2 new photocopy machines. There are many framed pictures of learners and staff celebrating an occasion (Mother's Day, Earth Day, sports, excursions etc) but nothing focusing on reading.

Although at first sight this school seems to be relatively well-resourced, charging relatively high fees (R2800/year) and thus generating R4,4-million additional income. Being a Quintile 4 school, only R584,000 comes from the government in terms of the Norms and Standards funding. It is worth noting that much of the budget raised through fees is necessary to compensate for the fact that the Limpopo DoE does not provide the school with its full post-allocation, despite many attempts by the principal to remind the district they need these permanent posts to be filled. This forces the school to recruit 10 SGB-paid educators. Thus, even with these 10 SGB educators, the class sizes are still 45-50 on average. In a sense, this additional private income generating source helps to fill the gap that the Limpopo DoE is creating.

- *To follow up on: How widespread is the practice of provincial departments not filling post-allocations. Surely this is discernible from PERSAL.*

2. School performance

It is important to note that, because D(L) has 2 LOLT streams (one Sepedi and one English), our assessments in February mixed the Gr 3 and 6 classes for this

school. That is to say that the two Grade 3 classes assessed were Sepedi-LOLT stream, whereas the Grade 6 class that was assessed (6D) was the English-LOLT stream. Average score for Gr6 Eng-LOLT stream on Fly Eagle Fly was 59%. Only 40% of Gr3 Sepedi-LOLT stream could read at >40 WCPM.

This might have contributed to the Gr3 results being worse than the Gr6 results. (Note that D(L) was wrongly described in our schedule as an OK-OK school but actually it is PoorGr3-GoodGr6 school mainly because of the learners we tested.)

There is no real matched-pair for D(L), as it is a well-performing outlier. However, we believe D(H) could be a quasi-match to D(L), given that they charge big fees (D(H) = R2800/yr and D(L) = R1800.yr) yet it is worth noting that D(L) has much poorer students, but does better.

3. Material resources

At D(L) the Grade 3 classrooms were considerably far more print-rich, than the Grade 6 classrooms. Each Gr3 classroom had a literacy corner with a scattering of graded readers. At the Grade 6 level, there is virtually nothing beyond the textbook-workbook combo for each learner.

In the Grade 3 English LOLT, there was a scattering of many different types of readers coming from apartheid-era. Gayway Series consists of many coloured-graded-series compared to more recent readers seemingly “without levels but with nice colourful illustrations”. She was good at knowing their level and utilizing them accordingly with her different learners’ ability groups. She complained of the lack of grading in new English readers and felt that she did not have enough readers, especially for her fast readers. There were about 210 different readers and she had made her own readers by tearing out some pages from various old departmental books to make more graded readers for her learners. It seems that there were sufficient reading materials to implement a reading programme, taking into consideration different reading levels.

She was also the Afrikaans FAL teacher for the 2 English streamed classes and there were about 110 books for the kids (half old and half new)

In the Grade 3 Sepedi LOLT, there was also a scattering of random English readers as well. There were around 210 English readers and very few Sepedi readers. There was no evidence of her managing the reading books in her classroom or her teaching of reading.

She uses the PSRIP/NECT lesson plans and praised them, saying:

These resources are so special and make the teaching so much simple and easy.

At Grade 6 (Sepedi-stream) English stream classes, there were no books except for 1 textbook per child and 1 DBE workbook and 1 textbook-workbook per child. The teacher complained about stories in the new Sepedi reader-textbook. She felt that the current ones were uninteresting and all about animals and that the kids don't like to read them. She prefers to go back and use an old out-of-print Sepedi story book called "Mahlonthebe" which has more interesting Sepedi stories. For grammar, she said:

I am using my grandmother's out-of-print textbook called "Dilakalaka tša segagešo". It's much easier to find good books in English than for Sepedi. The problem with the DBE workbooks is they keep repeating the same thing all the time. Keep repeating verbs and adverbs mainly



The textbook and accompanying workbook seem the only textual resources available in Grade 6, whether for HL or FAL. The Sepedi readers found in the library, don't seem to be graded. According to the FP HOD, "they don't go per level". - they have 40 of the exact same reader. In the library, there was one Sepedi book called ('Dikanegelo Tšeo Di Bolelago') with more than 1400 copies that did not seem utilised by the learners (guess where they are in the picture!).



The ordering and delivery of books was not clear. On the one hand, the principal mentions that the district does give them books as part of their routine delivery but the school also decides after consultation with the teachers what to buy or top up each year. The school also had a retrieval system in place penalising learners who did not return their books.

There was no sign of other interventions or NGOs giving them additional textual resources, if it was not for the NECT LPs but with not many other texts or readers, may be because it was a Quintile 4 school.

4. Material resources: Time

Actual time spent reading is difficult to measure based on teachers' responses. When we asked how many of 'these' [holding up single-story-reader] will the average child in their Gr 3 class read by the end of the year, the Gr 3 Sepedi teacher said "6 readers". That being said, she seemed to follow the PSRIP lesson-plans for HL Sepedi. The grade 3's learners are being taught reading "4 days a week, in line with CAPS." There is no monitoring of time spent on reading.

The English stream Gr 3 teacher seems to expect more from her learners, especially her good learners. She also teaches reading 4 days a week and expects

these learners to read 20 readers in Grade 3 explaining that some learners are very competitive and assisted at home by their parents while other struggle, don't get assisted by their parents or have accumulated a deficit since Grade 1 because they were allowed to pass to the next grade. She tries to assist after schools but these slow learners don't come.

Both teachers acknowledge that there is not enough time to do well what the LPs or CAPS content expects and that more remediation activities and time should be inserted for these learners. The Grade 6 Sepedi stream teacher explains the need to incorporate remediation:

I remain with learners at the break. 10 come during break for 15 minutes every day for 2-4 weeks. Phonics is needed with the difficult words. Often, I have to apply remediation to those that come from other schools.

There seems to be none-to-little HOD monitoring taking place in terms of what the FP teachers cover in terms of reading or CAPS coverage

5. Human resources: reading specialist

The FP teachers seem to have taught FP grades for their whole teaching careers. The school struggles to get the district to give them their due allocated posts and they then appointed quite a lot of SGB teachers where they have more autonomy to select teachers with the expertise, they need to find for what is needed in their school.

The Sepedi and other teachers pointed to the same teacher (the FP HOD, Mrs M) as the best teacher to speak to when having a problem with teaching reading, and so says Grade 6 young teacher (1st year) teaching English as FAL. So, the FP HOD seems to have acquired the expertise to act effectively in her post. The other Grade 3 English stream teacher, who is a rather private discrete teacher working on her own, says she does it herself given her long serving career of 35 years. The Grade 6 English (FAL) teacher for the Sepedi stream referred to another Grade 6 teacher with psychology training or another Grade 7 teacher to understand how to deal with learners with learning barriers.

6. Professional qualifications

The Deputy and HODs all have honours in management from UNISA and the principal has honours in leadership from Pretoria. These are the highest qualifications. The teachers in the school vary from Honours (UNISA) to B.Ed (Uni-Limpopo) to a Diploma in Primary Education from a teachers college.

Table 1: Qualifications and experience of interviewed staff

	Completed Qualifications	Currently studying	Teaching subjects	Years of teaching experience	Years of SMT experience
Principal (Mrs M)	Senior Certificate, Further Diploma in Managt and Hons in Mngt (UNISA)	No	LO and NS	38	14
DP (Mr M)	B Ed Hons management (UNISA)	No	Afrikaans, Maths and NS (Gr 7)	21	7
Intersen HoD (Mr R)	Senior Primary Diploma Hons in Managt (UNISA)	No	Technology	23	6
FP HoD (Mrs M)	Secondary teaching diploma and HDip (VISTA) B Hons in Managt (UNISA)	No	Grade 3 Sepedi	32	14
Gr 6 Sepedi teacher (Mrs P)	Senior Teacher Diploma (Setwelane College) FTE - Uni-Natal Hons - UNISA ACE in LO - Uni-Limpopo	No	Grade 6 Sepedi	4	
Gr 6 teacher (English FAL)	B.Ed (Senior Phase and FET) Uni-Limpopo	No	Grade 6 English and LO	1	
Gr 3 English teacher (Ms K)	Teaching Diploma (Transvaal College)	No	FP English and Afrikaans	35	
Gr 3 teacher	Diploma in teaching - RAU - FP	No	FP Sepedi	25 (with 9ll health	

Sepedi teacher				break and now SGB teacher)	
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The higher professional qualifications of D(L) staff does not necessarily translate into better or more effective teachers, compared to D(H). This seems to do with the hard work and caring work ethos of D(H) to a more “bureaucratic-compliant but not going the extra-mile” SMT of D(L) school

7. Symbolic resources

The culture of reading at a school-wide level does not seem to be actively promoted by the SMT, although there are pockets of committed teachers are keen to achieve this with their learners through more time and practice. Reading does not seem to be a high priority for the SMT. They know their English results are not very high but there is no recognition or understanding that a reading-specific focus might be needed (rather than their generic focus on ‘language’ or ‘CAPS’ or other equally amorphous topics).

There are only a few individual teachers who are aware of the what, when and how of reading, having been explicitly trained to use phonics and various reading practices. These teachers implement this in a relatively isolated way in their own classrooms as, most of the time, teachers are left on their own to do what they think is appropriate (whether good or bad).

The interviewed participants were split as to what it takes to teach effectively reading vs maths: the teachers seem to agree that reading needs as much expertise as maths while the senior staff argues that maths needed more expertise to be taught effectively.

On the understanding of Group Guided Reading (GGR), there was some coherence among FP interviewed teachers. The Sepedi teacher mentioned that she uses GGR to ensure that slow learners keep up with the strong readers, explaining her interpretation of GGR:

I select one learner who will guide the group, the good one is to guide the others. Then I do groups, and then read in pairs and then individually

She did not mention that she needs to supervise 2 groups per day. In contrast, the FP HOD explained:

They are sitting in groups. They read the same book, all the groups. We read together. After you've read with them, I go to one group. If they are not struggling, then I go to help the struggling group. The purpose of GGR is to have time for those who are struggling. Those who are fine must have extra work to do. The Vuma DVD shows us GGR.

Table 2: Comparing responses to questions on knowledge sequencing

	Correct answer is...	Deputy Principal	FP HOD	IP HOD (not English teacher & Gr3 English teacher)	Gr3 Sepedi teacher	Gr 6 Sepedi	Gr 6 English FAL
Knowing letters of the alphabet	R	1	3	1	1	2	2
Knowing letter-sound relationships	R	1	1	3	1	2	3
Reading words	*R-1	1	1	4	1	1	2
Reading isolated sentences	1	2	1	5	1	2	3
Reading connected text	1	2	2	5	2	3	4
Identifying the main idea in the text	1	3	3	6	2	2	4
Locating information within the text	1	4	3	6	2	3	4
Comparing a text with personal experience	1	5	3	7	1	2	4

Making predictions about what will happen next in a text	*4 +	1 2	6	1 2	4 5
Making generalisations and drawing inferences based on a text	*4 +	6 3	7	2 2	3 6
Describing the style or structure of a text	*4 +	7 3	7	3 2	4 6
Determining the author's perspective or intention	*7+	7 3	7	3 3	5 6

It is clear from this Table that there is no shared understanding of how and when to teach reading at the school, or what appropriate resources might be required. Expectations of what learners should be able to do by when vary widely, reflecting their position in the grades taught as well as in the school. Teachers' expectations are definitely influenced by the phase they are in. Teachers also blame previous teachers for not ensure that the learners who pass to the next grade are equipping with grade-appropriate skills.

Another noteworthy point is that D(L) achieves the 5th highest core at Grade 3 (40%) while a Grade 6, it was (with the Sepedi stream) second with 60%, a major improvement in the Intersen phase. However, teachers' estimates of learner results were different and more optimistic.

Grade 3 English reading (%)	Grade 3 fluent English reading with understanding (%)	Grade 3 fluent isiZulu reading (%)	Grade 3 fluent isiZulu reading with understanding (%)	Grade 6 English reading (%)	Grade 6 fluent English reading with understanding (%)
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Gr 3 T1		50		20 (Afrikaans)		
Gr 3 T2	90		80	35		
FP HOD	70			50		
Gr 6 T1						80
Gr 6 T2						90

Most interviewed teachers mentioned how difficult it is to ensure all learners master the different reading skills. They use games to incentivise learners, arguing that learners like reading competition. Note that the district-organised Spelling Bee is only in English and never in Sepedi.

8. Strategic resources

When asked why she spends only 1% (R40,000) of her total budget on staff development and rather uses her fee-income to hire SGB teachers not books or teacher-training, the principal explains her priorities:

How can I address reading if there are 90 in a class? That is my priority and why I need to address mobile classrooms first. Then they have no books. I must make sure there are books. And then there is no money for workshops to sharpen my educators”

She also mentioned the struggle to fill vacant posts that the school is due to be allocated by the district:

I must apply for ad hoc teachers every year and usually don't get them. The students I have in January they will not die in December but I must still apply for the ad-hoc teachers again.

This is why she uses most of her school-fee generated income to hire SGB teachers. It is to compensate for why the DOE in Limpopo doesn't give them their proper post-allocation.

Very little of the R4,4million budget is spent on library books. Although the Norms and standards funding points to R584,000 only and 60% of this towards LTSM, the school spends 796,000 on LTSM! Yet the presence of books in the FP classes and in the un-used library does show that books exist and were probably donated, especially the 1400 copies of the Sepedi book.

9. Strategic resources: reading programmes and assessment

The school does continue to implement the “Drop Everything and Read” Campaign whereby they read for 15-minutes every day, irrespective of what subject they are in during that time. The teachers believe in it, explaining that it continues to be practiced. There seems, however, little SMT- led and -organised campaign or intervention to improve reading.

Most teachers mention a CAPS-compliant assessment rubric, although they also added their own. One less competent teacher mentioned that one criterion for reading assessment was: posture (LOL)!

Teachers do seem to use assessment to identify which struggling learners need additional support or different ways to teach, so it seems as if they use assessment results for their day-to-day interactions with learners. Teachers believe struggling students just need more time and practice, including support from parents which is not often there.

10. Strategic resources: collaboration and professional development

During our interviews we heard of no worthwhile off-site teacher development opportunities from districts or NGOs that targeted specifically reading instruction. District-led one-hour workshops typically focussed on topics such as “L2, “Language” or generic topics like “Teaching practices.” The principal mentioned management workshops that some of their SMTs went to UP. The best teacher development intervention was the NECT lesson-plans for the Sepedi Foundation Phase which were used and appreciated by the teacher.

There is no evidence of teachers watching each other as a systematic practice. Teachers are observed once a year for the IQMS. Occasionally some teachers seek advice from expert teachers (best teacher in reading instruction with slow learners). In these instances, it is understood to be about how to counter the deficit of the learners more than examine how the teacher could improve their teaching to reach more learners.

Thus, teachers at D(L) work in and maintain their respective silos with idiosyncratic practices but not interested in or asked to sharing what seems to be working well [or not] in some areas. The sense one gets is that there are teacher-generated requests for help with slow learners rather than HOD-generated advice or sharing for improvement.

11. Strategic resources: Strategic leadership

There are no reading-specific targets set by the SMT, even though the school has generic targets that appear slightly ambiguous and/or ambitious: throughout the school, we heard that the target is “100%” (also displayed) but the interviewed staff had different understandings of what this means. Some people believe this means 100% pass rate, others believe that this translate in 60% mastering well the concepts, while others argue it is about 100% on the actual test. Management argue that more resources could help improve learners’ reading and that educators should be assisted to be good specialist in their language teaching. It also argued that it is essential to understand learners’ reading and keep their confidence up before pushing them to improve. Some of the management could and did act as container for reading, given her reading expertise but it was not the case for most of the SMT.

One teacher mentioned she knew of an attractive weekly little journal/paper with fun exercises for primary learners (Free for All??) that is available in some areas and well-liked by learners. However, but she would not take it onto herself to find out and obtain it for the school’s learners. There was no indication that the principal or deputy principal was engaging in pushing for the improvement of reading practices by teachers. They understood that reading is an important

skill in primary school but did not believe in initiating meeting or conversation to mobilise staff to find new programs or initiatives that could promote reading among their learners. They did not see it as important to allocate additional resources to improving reading or finding a reading programme.

Implications/insights for quants study:

- ***Value-add relative to learner poverty and readiness-to-learn:*** In any school we need to assess the value-added by the teachers given their competence (both teaching and language competence) as well as the poverty-level and home-language of the majority of the learner.
 - It was clear from both of our school visits that despite the similarity in reading outcomes between D(L) and D(H), D(H) had poorer students and therefore had to do better to get the same outcomes. Their teachers seemed to have higher levels of content-knowledge, PCK, and English proficiency, as well as a stronger work ethos, and a more collaborative culture.
- ***Disentangling the island/silo nature of classrooms:*** There were very large differences between grades (Grade 3 vs Grade 6) and LOLT-streams (Sepedi-LOLT vs English-LOLT) in all manner of variables, e.g. books in the classroom, content-knowledge of teachers, reading practices etc. School-level averages are highly misleading in individualised schools.
 - *Getting at continuity-across-grades in the ways that teachers are teaching reading.* If Gr1, 2 and 3 teachers are each doing their own thing and have their own routines and resources and methods this is confusing to learners.
- ***Mixed-LOLT schools:*** Many of the questions became complicated because we couldn't just address "Grade 3's" – which Grade 3's? or "Grade 6's" which grade 6's. Questions need to be very specific. There is also the added complexity of ensuring that we are assessing the 'right' stream. In this school Limpopo we assessed Gr3 Sepedi stream but Gr6 English stream.
- ***Terminology confusion*** – the distinction between a 'Reader' and a 'Textbook' is confusing at Grade 6. Is a 'textbook' full of stories a 'Reader' or a textbook? Is a reader with 6 stories in FP 1 reader or 6 readers?
- ***Need to mention phonics and GGR specifically*** - we thought that the GGR and Phonics questions helped separate the wheat from the chaff very quickly. Perhaps open-ended questions about this (that they fill out themselves) and we can code after-the fact?
- ***Teacher colleges vs universities for PRESET reading training*** – Many of the participants mentioned that the teacher training colleges were better at training teachers on the main competencies of teaching reading in the classroom (phonics, using readers etc.)
- ***Suitability of current vs old reading resources*** – a number of teachers referred to old textbooks or reader series and explained that they were superior to what is out there today (this is mainly in Sepedi, not English).