

CASE STUDY

The Second Early Grade Reading Study

Case Studies in EGRS II Schools 2018

Wits Health Consortium

**DEB BOTHA
ERIC SCHOLLAR**

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Acronyms

BICS	Basic Interactive Communicative Skills
C2005	Curriculum 2005
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements
CFP	Call for Proposals
DBE	Department of Basic Education
EFAL	English First Additional Language
EGRS	Early Grade Reading Study
FP	Foundation Phase
HOD	Head of Department
INSET	In-service Training
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Materials
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OBE	Outcomes-based Education
RTR	Rally to READ
SGB	School Governing Body
WHC	Wits Health Consortium



1 Background to the Case Studies

The Case Studies are a component of the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS) operated by the Wits Health Consortium (WHC) and two independent service providers, Class Act and Molteno. The brief for the commission outlined in the Call for Proposals (CFP) issued by the research team appointed by WHC specifies that the Case Studies are to investigate the qualitative changes in English First Additional Language (EFAL) instructional practice resulting from the additional training and support received through the interventions that are the subject of EGRS II. The objectives of these studies are to ascertain:

- Which changes in instructional practice, behavioural attitudes and motivations coalesce to improve learner outcomes
- The impact of the current EGRS II intervention strategies on these changes.

The CFP places the commission in the context of the expansion of DBE research into alternative ways to improve teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase (FP). In this context, the focus of EGRS II is on the early acquisition of English as the first additional language in preparation for the language transition faced by learners from Grade 4 onwards.

The programme intervention consists of:

- Scripted lesson plans
- Additional reading resources
- Instructional coaching and training.

Two alternative approaches to coaching and training are employed. The first is based on the 'conventional' face-to-face format while the second combines the face-to-face format with an ICT component including tablets and cell phone messaging for teachers.

EGRS II is designed as a clustered RCT which aims to isolate the effects of each of the interventions and compare them with the outcomes of learners in a control group. The study has already collected a growing and rigorous body of evidence from the EGRS I study, as well as the initial Wave 2 data, that suggests marked improvements in learner outcomes given the strategies used.

Since the impact study has already suggested that marked improvements have, in fact, been obtained, the CFP remarks that what remains to be understood are the possible contextual factors influencing this marked improvement and the ways in which these factors could be leveraged in taking the intervention strategies to scale across all FP schools in quintiles 1–3.

1.1 Methodology

Six schools in Mpumalanga were selected by the research team, three with a virtual coach and three with an On-site coach. The research team selected these schools by purposely sampling three schools from each intervention group. The three schools were sampled to ensure that there is one high-compliance Siswati school, one average-compliance Siswati School and one average-compliance isiZulu school. Compliance was measured by considering the average percentage of curriculum coverage based on the data collected by the coaches, as well as the (1–3) status rating given to the school by the coach, based on her perception of their compliance to the programme.

Each school was visited for one day by two specialist researchers; one focused on generic issues of school and curriculum management in relation to the operation of the EGRS programme, and the other for the language-specific aspects of the brief.

At each school, the principal, Foundation Phase (FP) HOD and Grade 2 EGRS-trained teachers were interviewed. Lessons by all eight of these teachers were observed and learner workbooks from their learners investigated.

The two guiding methodological principles of the Case Studies were:

Assertions, reports or responses that are supported by some kind of *formal evidence* are given most weight.

The greater the degree to which assertions, reports or responses are supported by *alignment of different participants* (are they singing the same song?), the more likely that they reflect actual conditions, practices, attitudes or outcomes.

1.2 Instruments

The CFP acknowledged that data collection instruments used in Case Studies are 'semi-structured'. They are not, by definition, the rigid and prescriptive instruments, typically using as many quantitative indicators as is feasible, that are employed in large-scale survey research and nor do they have the same purpose. The nature of the information that we wish to collect determines the methods through which we can collect it. Case studies work with qualitative information and are most useful in generating an integrated understanding of context, agency and causation when researchers are free to follow discussions and investigations that are driven by participant responses and, especially, in a search for evidence of qualitative assertions.

Nonetheless, instrument development for Case Studies still depends on an understanding of the strategic and operational logic model of the intervention programme from theoretical underpinning to delivery of inputs and processes to intended outcomes. To this end, ESA met with Class Act and Molteno and were taken in some detail through the strategic and operational designs, including an explication of programme materials, coaching and virtual coaching. Intended outcomes emerged through this process and the meeting concluded with a description of the key programme achievements, along with key barriers to their achievement, as reported by the implementation agencies.

These intended outcomes are based on a recognition that a sustained programme is being delivered and has already obtained early evidence of improved learner performance; the question is the degree to which this programme is effectively delivered in the real-world context of schools and classrooms. To be effective the programme must be routinely capable of providing designed inputs and these inputs must achieve the outcome changes that are the objective of the inputs and processes of the ERGS II programme. The intended outcomes in context are examined through six key research questions.

Instruments were developed and submitted to the research team based on the following broad areas of investigation for the research:

- School and Curriculum Management
- Assessment Policy and Practice
- Uptake of EGRS intervention and perceived outcomes (process) and impacts (product)
- Application of the EGRS programme in classrooms.

1.3 Key Research Questions

The final clarification meeting with the research team enabled us to define a number of key questions which were to be considered by the Case Study research.

The inherent quality or effectiveness of the language programme itself is not in question. Performance testing has already shown that positive effects have been obtained. What is at question is how well it has been delivered and the degree of 'uptake' by the schools or teachers. Also at question is the specific elements of the programme that appear to be the most effective in the development of language skills.

While the objective of going to scale is relevant to the research, the study does not require a detailed investigation into the operational relationship between the intervention treatment, the schools and district officials of the department. More at question is the 'shape' and structure of the eventual intervention treatment, and how it is delivered, that will be proposed for use at scale. Some investigation of the relationship of districts to schools may be relevant to this task but it does not require a detailed examination.

An important question – for both items above – is the degree to which different elements of the intervention (In-service Education and Training, Coaching and Materials) are integrated and how they interact with the delivery of the curriculum. This includes consideration of how lesson plans are used in conjunction with trackers and classroom materials, and how well teachers use them in presenting organised classroom instruction. In short, what influence has the intervention programme had on teaching and how has it changed since the inception of the EGRS?

The difference in operational modalities (on-site and virtual coaches) is important. The research team acknowledged that the sample is very small and it may not be possible to come to really reliable judgements about differences in the outcomes of the two approaches. What is of interest is how teachers interact with coaches of both types: motivational effects, ease of access and relevance of responses. Also of some interest is the monitoring and concept reinforcement role of coaches, as well as potential effects on Communities of Practice in schools in between interactions with coaches.

Generic questions of school and curriculum management, monitoring and assessment are directly relevant to understanding the context in which the outcomes of the intervention have been achieved. This includes questions of time on task, curriculum coverage, assessment, departmental reporting and time allocation on timetables for specific subjects. In short, is the intervention programme coherently integrated with school routines and is it likely to be sustained after the withdrawal of the intervention agencies; can it be institutionalised?

Both the research team inception meeting and the ISP clarification meeting suggested that a shortage of a variety of reading materials in schools is a key barrier to the achievement of the intervention outcomes and impacts. Many schools use only DBE books and intervention-supplied materials. Therefore, we added another research question: How much potential reading and other language material is actually available to the schools and are high-performing schools more likely to use more existing materials than low-performers?

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What is at question is how well it has been delivered and the degree of 'uptake' by the schools or teachers.

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2 Summary of Findings

These findings are based on the work of two researchers. The first investigated the generic issues surrounding the delivery, uptake, operations and outcomes of the EGRS programme in the sample schools. The brief specifically directed the Case Study away from an examination of the inherent effectiveness of the language programme itself on the basis of early significant impact data obtained during the quantitative study and, consequently, it was treated as a sort of 'black box' by this form of research. It assumed that the language programme is inherently capable of improving learner performance to the degree to which it is effectively delivered and implemented.

The second researcher investigated in some detail how the EGRS intervention programme may have achieved the improved learner performance levels obtained by the quantitative impact study. It provides multiple specific findings, reflections and recommendations for the continued development of the programme and of the lesson plans themselves. In terms of the brief for the Case Studies, this research seeks to respond to the research question: *Which changes in instructional practice, behavioural attitudes and motivations coalesce to improve learner outcomes?*

2.1 Programme Delivery, Uptake and Outcomes

There is no doubt that an organised and structured developmental programme has been consistently delivered to the schools. All the participants interviewed reported that they had received all the expected training and physical inputs, and confirmed that the use of these inputs has been explicated and supported by coaching. Coaching, whether on-site or virtual was uniformly popular as a supportive and developmental, rather than administrative and punitive, process.

All the participants reported that the EGRS programme was relevant to their needs at both managerial and classroom levels and has helped improve curriculum coverage and teacher confidence – as well as learner confidence and performance. Equally, principals, HODs and teachers all report that programme materials, the lesson plans in particular, are regularly and consistently used in classroom EFAL lessons. Nothing we saw during the study provides us with any evidence to reject these reported outcomes, even if the quality and completeness of application of the programme and its outcomes varies widely from teacher to teacher and from school to school. Essentially, just about everyone is actually using the EGRS programme, to one degree or another, and the cumulative effect is becoming apparent in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

The reported acceptance and uptake of the programme is, at least partly, due to the integration of the EGRS programme with CAPS and departmental Annual Teaching Plans (ATP). Unlike many NGO programmes of the past, the EGRS programme does not require schools to deviate from routine departmental requirements for coverage and reporting. Consequently, there are no substantive clashes between what departmental officials and EGRS staff expect and schools do not have to keep two sets of records, or attempt to run two programmes, to satisfy both. In fact, almost all formal written reporting on coverage and assessment is produced in the required departmental formats.

The cross-referencing of DBE workbooks and EGRS topics in lesson plans is an important operational component in this regard and has helped cement in the minds of officials, HODs and teachers the belief that the EGRS programme is an 'officially' approved CAPS programme. In fact, as we shall see later in this report, the use of the EGRS programme and materials has to some extent replaced the use of the DBE workbooks. School-level participants generally all agree that the EGRS programme is an expanded 'unpacking' of the CAPS curriculum, and of the departmental CAPS-based ATP; the one is a much more detailed operational description of the other two. The really big practical difference is the provision by EGRS of paced and sequenced lesson plans that embody the sequenced delivery of the whole CAPS curriculum by teachers at the correct grade complexity level. These plans include weekly routines, reading schedules, SA-SAMS compatible assessment plans and all the classroom activities required to teach each lesson – all supported by the reading materials and other resources needed for these activities.

Prior to the advent of EGRS, all the schools used the DBE workbook as the basis of their lesson plans for the EFAL programme. Currently teachers all report that the EGRS programme is more effective than their own previous programmes. They explained how the EGRS materials tell them what to teach, how to teach it and when to teach it, at the pace required to cover the curriculum, and at the correct grade level complexity. It appears that this operational detail of the EGRS programme – in the form of the lesson plans – is the principal reason why the schools and teachers are using the programme and why early gains in learner performance have been obtained.

Principals, HODs and teachers, therefore, all regard curriculum planning and management as a question of monitoring the actual delivery of a provided set of lesson plans. They do this to varying degrees of quality and reliability but this is, in practice, the only operational curriculum management they provide and reasonably so, in our view. The EGRS-supplied planners or trackers and lesson plans themselves *are* the planned curriculum *and* scheme of work as well as the means to monitor the coverage of these plans.

2.2 Gaps Filled by the EGRS Programme

As far as the language programme itself is concerned, the research suggested that the intervention has filled a number of identified gaps in the teaching of EFAL in South African schools.

The first gap was created because of the nature of CAPS Curriculum (DBE, 2011). It is more detailed than previous post-democratic curricula (DBE, 1999; 2005), and provides the scope and sequence of content that needs to be taught in the Foundation Phase EFAL subject in some detail. However, the curriculum also suggests the instructional strategies and teaching methodologies that should be used to deliver the content.

This complication, of requiring particular instructional strategies, within the constraints of a content-rich curriculum, together with allied assessment and pacing requirements, makes delivery of the curriculum very complex. A *scheme of work*, detailing the finer sequence of daily teaching and learning, weekly routines and the integration per term of the assessment activities, all within the constraints of the prescribed instructional strategies and content, is needed in order to deliver the curriculum effectively. This is particularly important given the historical situation regarding teacher training in this country (Hartshorne, 1999; Du Plessis, 2003; Equal Education, 2011). The scheme of work needs to be drawn up by a specialist with knowledge beyond that which has been provided to teachers in pre-service training in the past.

In essence, this is precisely the gap that the EGRS intervention is filling. EGRS provides a scheme of work in the form of lesson plans, precise procedures for enacting different instructional strategies, as well as weekly routines and assessment activities for teaching and learning EFAL in the CAPS curriculum.

The need for a scheme of work in any effective language and literacy programme has been identified as crucial for curriculum coverage and systematic language and literacy development both overseas (Au, 1997; Chall & Curtis, 2003; Heilman, 2002; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008) and in South Africa (Schollar, E. & Associates, 2012; Needu National Report, 2013).

The question is what the teachers in this study had been using as a scheme of work before the EGRS programme and we have already noted that the DBE workbook was used as the basis of much of this planning. This is inherently problematic as these workbooks were developed, not as a scheme of work, but as a series of activities for learners, in line with the curriculum, and intended to supplement the classroom teaching of EFAL. The DBE workbooks were not designed as a core textbook or meant to provide all the reading practice required at this level. In addition, the workbooks are directed at learners rather than teachers, and assume that learners are being *taught* the concepts underpinning the different activities.

A second gap that the EGRS programme has filled is the gap learners experience when they are not engaged with what is being taught and are not motivated to learn. This is important as the long term relevance or benefits of learning any subject, including a new language, will not be fully understood by young learners.

Young learners respond well to 'playful', interactive and integrated pedagogies (Excell & Lington, 2012), and the EGRS programme is more pedagogically interactive than one delivered solely through a core textbook or single

workbook. Although the level of pedagogical playfulness incorporated into the lessons varied from teacher to teacher, it is significant that the best teacher in this study was using the most playful and interactive approach (Teacher 5). It is also significant that seven of the eight teachers elected to demonstrate an interactive oral lesson, and that all the teachers explicitly said the learners in their classes enjoyed EFAL lessons far more since using the EGRS programme: *the learners remind me when it is time for English* (Teacher 3) and *they really enjoy this lesson* (Teacher 4) which revealed the learners' level of motivation.

The third gap being filled by the EGRS programme concerned the teachers' own language proficiency in English. This was sometimes not developed sufficiently to enable them to teach EFAL confidently, and the teachers who were more fluent in English, for example Teachers 5 and 7, had a distinct advantage in their implementation of EFAL lessons. The four teachers who were less proficient in English specifically cited the EGRS programme with helping them to develop their own language skills, enabling them to teach EFAL confidently for the first time. This may be because the programme does not only instruct teachers to create writing frames or oral questions, but actually provides the sentence structures and questions that the teachers will need. The significance of this was seen when Teacher 8 attempted to innovate on the 'question of the day', but was unable to do so because of her own lack of English skills. This is described in detail in the school Case Studies.

It is interesting that, although all the teachers innovated on the *pedagogies* or procedures outlined in the lesson plans, often simplifying the lesson steps, only two teachers (Teachers 7, 8) attempted to (very briefly) innovate on the *content* of one part of the lesson. In both cases this did not work very well, illustrating the reliance of the majority of the teachers on the language structures provided.

The fourth gap that the programme filled was in providing access to the instructional strategies, and management techniques with which many language teachers at this level may not be familiar. The 'whole-language' inspired instructional strategies prescribed by the curriculum were only imported into South African teaching practices in the last 10 to 15 years (Botha, 2018; Goodman, 1986). Thus, the group of teachers trained before that will be unfamiliar with these teaching practices and the procedures and equipment needed to enact them. There has been little national in-service training regarding these strategies, with most training being done by Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) (READ Educational Trust, 2005).

A second group of teachers who may not have had exposure to these strategies, or to classroom management techniques for younger learners, are those who were trained to teach in the Intermediate Phase. It is significant that half of the teachers in this study were not trained to teach in the Foundation Phase and it appears to be assumed that any teacher can teach FP learners.

In this context it is unsurprising that all the teachers said they appreciated the detailed lesson steps and procedures, the clear descriptions of pedagogies, and the organisational and managerial strategies that are taught as part of the EGRS lesson plans. Some educationalists expect teachers to resist scripted lesson plans but in this context this was clearly not the case. Lesson plans as artefacts are recognised as a helpful way to change teacher practice and, together with teacher training can have a significant effect on changing practice (Beeby, 1966; Hiebert & Morris, 2012) which seems to be the case in this programme.

The final gap the EGRS programme filled is the identified gap between BICS (Basic Interactive Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) for young learners learning a new language (Cummins, 1979; Baker, 1993). For these learners, their proficiency in CALP, in English, will determine, to a large extent, whether they succeed in a schooling system that privileges English as the Language of Teaching and Learning.

To become proficient language users, children have to develop not only their communicative skills, but also learn to use language that is less contextualised, for example the language used in books or writing. EGRS develops both BICS and CALP in a programme that encourages learners to extend their oral language skills and vocabulary (BICS), but also to read and write in meaningful contexts (CALP). This is achieved through linking the initial oral work with the stories in the big book, and with the Writing Frames, and supporting this with the provision of vocabulary theme words, sight words and phonic words provided both orally and in written form.

In each theme, the daily activities teach greetings and other communicative language structures that develop the learners' BICS, while the shared and Group Guided Reading lessons expose the learners to decontextualised language in formal structures, which develops CALP. This transition is made accessible through the recycled vocabulary and structures used in each theme, the provision of allied flash cards and reading texts, and the clear teacher mediation outlined in the lesson plan procedures. The writing lessons are particularly important for the acquisition of CALP. The quality, and particularly the quantity, of written work in these Grade 2 learners' class workbooks was significant, and in all eight classrooms, learners were developing early forms of CALP through their extensive and meaningful writing.

2.3 The EGRS Programme in the Classroom

As far as the operation of the programme at school and classroom level is concerned, all the participants endorsed the central components of the intervention which are clearly linked and integrated with, and supportive of, each other. Training was reported to be useful in explicating and describing how to use the programme materials in the first place, the materials themselves are, as we have seen, regarded as exceptionally useful in delivering the educational curriculum, and coaching is strongly approved as a form of personal support.

The programme is underpinned by a sequence of lesson plans which are organised into a weekly routine. Different skills are taught, practised or tested, in a 'balanced' way, each week. The need for a 'balanced' programme is shown in the literature (Burns, 2006; Gough & Tunmer, 1986) referring to *balanced* in terms of the four language skills, and also in terms of a balance between 'bottom-up', decoding, or phonic-based approaches to reading and writing and 'top down', Whole language, or meaning-based approaches (Scarborough, 2001; Gough & Tunmer, 1986). The EGRS sequence of lesson plans, and the resources provided, are 'balanced' and are in line with the 'balanced' national curriculum. However delivering the 'balanced' programme provided by EGRS means enacting all aspects of the programme faithfully, and following specific procedures provided in the lesson plans.

The criticism of providing scripted lesson plans is that it can lead to the rigid implementation of lessons regardless of context. This study shows that the EGRS programme and lesson plans were being implemented differently by different teachers, even in one school, depending on the teacher's experience, motivation, expertise, and the school at which she works. This meant the lesson plans weren't being rigidly followed, which is a positive finding, but also meant the programme as a whole was sometimes not entirely 'balanced,' which is not. Thus Teacher 5 followed the lesson plans and weekly routines faithfully but her interpretation of the lessons was underpinned by her own excellent classroom management, her thorough preparation, her excitement with implementing a programme she has 'been waiting for for 20 years' and her excellent teaching practices. By contrast, Teacher 6 had been trained as an Intermediate Phase teacher and had therefore had less experience or knowledge of teaching learners at this level, and a limited knowledge of the English language. She had simplified some of the lesson procedures, but was only able to approximate the instructional strategies outlined. In another case, Teacher 1 had substituted independent reading for Group Guided Reading which she said she did not do.

Yet all three teachers claimed the intervention was improving their own, and the learners', English skills, and also motivating the learners to learn English. Overall, it was evident that each teacher in the sample interpreted the lesson plans in nuanced but different ways while maintaining the basic structure of the lesson and of the language structures (content) being taught. In addition, while some teachers did not teach all the lessons every week, the programme was being enacted with a high degree of 'faithfulness'.

Identifying and describing the aspects of the programme which seemed to be most and least effective, and the lessons which were most or least faithfully enacted, requires an analysis of the lessons and workbooks observed. It is the patterns that emerged from this that will be investigated in the following section.

2.3.1 EGRS Lessons that Were Privileged

There were three specific types of lessons in the programme which were clearly privileged over the others by all the teachers in this study. These could plausibly represent the core lesson types that have impacted on the success of the programme across these schools.

The first lesson was the lesson called 'daily activities'. This was demonstrated in the classroom visits by seven of the eight teachers and is a lesson that is given three days a week in the programme. It includes greetings, a song, the 'question of the day' and the introduction of new words, either theme vocabulary, sight words or phonically regular words. Essentially it is an interactive, 'playful' oral lesson that learners evidently enjoyed. The learners were actively involved in speaking English and also in making choices, providing opinions and learning new words. The lesson extends knowledge of English vocabulary, sentence structure, phonemic awareness and phonics, all essential aspects of an EFAL course (Baker, 1993; Chall & Curtis, 2003; Nation, 2001; Goswami, 2007). The oral work also aligns with Cummins's ideas of beginning with BICS and moving to CALP (Cummins, 1979). The content of the lesson changes with each theme but the structure of the lesson is consistent.

The teachers all followed the procedure described in the lesson plan but often with simplifications because the lesson was taking too long (Teachers 1, 5) or with slight innovations (Teacher 8). In two cases (Teachers 4, 6) the lesson procedure was followed rigidly, despite learner interest waning and the time being considerably extended. However, in all seven classrooms it was evident the learners were familiar with the lesson and enjoyed it.

The reasons why this lesson was privileged might be simple: for example, because the procedure in the lesson plan is simple to follow, the lesson had been demonstrated by coaches or on video, or because the learners respond so well and their new learning is evident. Two teachers (Teachers 2 and 3) explained that they had never understood how to teach oral English language before. Whatever the reason, in this study it was a lesson seen or described by all eight teachers, uses 'playful pedagogies' and may be an important factor in the success of the programme.

The second lesson that was privileged in all six schools, and by all eight teachers, was the use of the Writing Frame. This was evidenced by the learners' workbooks, in which writing frames were completed regularly and involved a quantity of connected writing exceptional at Grade 2 level. The quantity was similar across the classrooms but the quality did vary to some extent. In many workbooks, the sentences written by the learners were identical which presumably show that learners were copying directly from the chalkboard.

However in some classes, there were signs of individual answers in the workbooks, again, significant at this level for learners writing in a new language (Teacher 5). Apart from this, there were often meaningful illustrations drawn by the learners under the writing, showing that the learners understood the sentences and were making meaning, even if the sentences were copied from the board.

Only one writing lesson was observed in this study (Teacher 6) and the procedure she used was considerably simpler than the procedure described in the lesson plan. Nevertheless, however the other teachers were delivering their lessons, it was evident that these learners were regularly participating in writing lessons, and that writing English sentences was occurring consistently and systematically. This is a crucial aspect of moving learners from BICS to decontextualised CALP in language learning (Cummins, 1979). In this context, the implicit and explicit teaching and learning that occurs when using the writing frames could be a second factor in the success of the programme.

The third lesson that was privileged in the majority of the schools in this study (five of the six schools) was the weekly spelling list and spelling test. This was also evident in the workbooks analysed and it formed part of many of the observed lessons. The spelling tests implied that learners had written a list of words during the week and taken the list home to memorise. The lists contained some sight words, some theme vocabulary but mainly comprised a set of phonically regular words with the same phonic pattern. With this teaching and assessment routine, the learners were extending their vocabulary, and learning phonics implicitly even if they did not have direct instruction in the target pattern or understand the meanings of all the words (Goswami, 2007; Hill, 2008).

Most of the teachers mentioned the spelling routine as a new practice (Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6). Differences were noted in the lessons observed; some teachers (Teachers 3, 5) would explicitly teach the phonic pattern as well as the meaning of the words, and use the words in example sentences – examples of Quality First Teaching – while others (Teachers

1, 4) would only have the learners read the flash cards two to three times, as for sight words. Pronunciation errors were sometimes observed (Teachers 3, 4, 6) and some teachers lacked underpinning phonic knowledge or knowledge of the meaning of the words (Teachers 4, 6, 8) but the learners were learning English phonic patterns implicitly and also learning common English sight and vocabulary words, and this may have had an impact on the overall success of the programme.

These three lessons exemplified the EFAL programme being enacted by these eight teachers. All three lessons align with Cummins's ideas of moving EFAL learners from BICS to CALP (Cummins, 1979), and also with Nation's research on the centrality of vocabulary development of EFAL learners (Nation, 2001).

2.3.2 EGRS Lessons that Were Problematic

The lessons that appeared to be given irregularly, or given very differently from the procedure described in the lesson plans, or even omitted altogether, are also important to investigate. They may indicate lesson types that are less important to the success of the programme, need greater intervention emphasis or suggest adaptations through which the programme could be strengthened.

The first lesson that was routinely misinterpreted by all the teachers in the study was Shared Reading. The procedure described in the *Teacher's Book* outlines a four-part lesson, with the purpose of developing reading skills, particularly emergent reading skills, vocabulary and knowledge of sentence structure, thus supporting the writing activities which are based on the theme of the story. This is in line with classical interpretations of the methodology (Holdaway, 1982) but there were two problems in the lessons observed. The first is that these learners are not *emergent* readers, but *early* readers of English and the level of text they are exposed to in the big books and group readers confirms this.

Secondly the EGRS big book cannot be used for Shared Reading as the print size is too small. These teachers understood this and used the big book as a reading-aloud book which meant it did not entirely align with the procedures in the lesson plans. Essentially the 'Shared Reading' lesson had become a listening comprehension lesson. The teachers went to some trouble to ensure the learners understood the story and engaged with the illustrations (Teachers 1, 3, 6) and the stories seemed relevant, interesting and valuable (Trelease, 2006; Beck & McKeown, 2001), but the format of the EGRS big books precluded the development of decoding skills, an essential issue in early reading.

The second lesson that was left out by three of the eight teachers in the study, and taught in an almost perfunctory manner by some of the others, was Group Guided Reading. Two teachers (Teachers 1, 2) used the group readers supplied by EGRS not for group reading but for independent reading, and then only for the quicker learners. In these classrooms Group Guided Reading was not taking place. Two teachers interpreted Group Guided Reading in the classic way (Teachers 4, 5) (Hornsby, 2000; Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). Teacher 5 used sets of books at the different groups' ability levels which meant deviating from the EGRS programme and using additional sets of books she had in her classroom. Teacher 4 followed the steps of the procedure given in the lesson plan and mediated the same EGRS-supplied group reading books with different ability groups but made extensive use of scaffolding. Both were good reading teachers and excellent classroom managers and used this time well. The other teachers (Teachers 6, 7, 8) implemented Group Guided Reading in ways that meant that reading practice was occurring but little reading development was taking place.

The problem may have been the one-level-fits-all group readers supplied by the EGRS programme or the teacher's lack of knowledge regarding the purpose of Group Guided Reading, and the benefits of using differentiated instruction. Allied to this, in the observed lessons, while Group Guided Reading was taking place, even in the best managed classrooms, the rest of the class was not engaged in meaningful tasks. In the classes observed, only 5% to 50% of the learners were ever engaged in the independent or paired work given to them to complete while the teacher did Group Guided Reading with one group. Only one teacher (Teacher 5) actually checked that all the learners had the correct page and had begun reading before she worked with a group while the other teachers simply gave the instruction and then went ahead with the Guided Reading.

The independent work given to the learners consisted of either completing a page from the DBE workbook (Teacher 4) or reading the Homework Sheets individually or in pairs (the other teachers). With the Homework Sheets, the learners seemed to have difficulty finding the correct (current) page and then did not seem to fully engage with the text. This

text did not seem to be at the independent reading level of the majority of the learners. This could be the result of the lack of Shared Reading, so that they were reading the text without prior scaffolding. Similarly, with the DBE workbook, the activities were not mediated and the learners' answers revealed some lack of understanding of either the text or the task.

The third activity that was not being implemented as suggested concerned the use of the Homework Sheets, written so that learners could do home reading of the week's target sight and phonic words and to read a piece of connected text based on the big book. In this study, only one teacher (Teacher 6) actually allowed the Homework Sheets to be taken home. The other teachers in the study used the Homework Sheets in class. This happened purely because of security concerns at schools. Although the sheets were not being used as anticipated they were often being used in a productive way. For three teachers, the sheets were used as they would a textbook, with the words and text read through in unison, and it was clear that new learning was occurring as this was a form of Shared Reading (Teachers 1, 5, 7).

For the other teachers, the Homework Sheet was used only as an independent or individual reading text that was read largely unsupervised and without mediation. It seemed to be at the learners' 'frustrational' level of difficulty and the learners often lost interest very quickly (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

The fourth lesson that may have been problematic for some teachers was phonics because workbooks in four of the eight classrooms revealed no written phonics activities and, in lesson observations, the majority of the teachers taught the phonically regular words as sight words. Only three teachers attempted to actually teach the target letter sound for the week and to emphasise the aural or oral link between the oral words and the way they were written. Only two teachers did some blending and segmenting of words although this must have been done in the learners' first language. This suggests that teachers are not comfortable with teaching phonics in English, which is unsurprising given the irregular correspondences between letters and sounds in the English language compared to more familiar languages that have a regular one-to-one letter sound alignment. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, in all eight classrooms implicit phonics was taking place through exposure to the spelling lists and texts.

These four lessons represent aspects of the EGRS programme that currently may not be contributing to the same extent as the first three lessons to the overall effectiveness of the programme. It is concerning that all four are centred around reading development, particularly the reading of connected text. This implies the programme being delivered may not be 'balanced' in that all four skills are not being developed equally (Wren, 2003).

2.4 Curriculum Management and Coverage: Barriers to Improvement

The very high levels of curriculum coverage that are typically reported by participants appear to be more about compliance with departmental and EGRS monitoring than they are about qualitatively improving coverage. In fact, schools also typically report a number of significant barriers to achieving the latter. Most participants eventually agree that formal coverage reports based on the programme trackers are unrealistic; some topics are covered very quickly or in passing ('touching') in order to be able to report that they have been covered; others are simply not taught.

The EGRS materials provide 10 weeks of lessons for each term but this implies no losses of instructional time for any causes over a school year of 40 or 41 weeks. Public holidays remove almost two weeks of this total and school-level participants are often required to attend meetings, or receive training, by the department, as well as by EGRS and other agencies. Along with that must be considered the early end to each term for 'assessment' – at least two weeks per term, much more from October onwards – as well as events like sports and cultural days, union action and bereavements. Each week of this nature is one week of lost classroom instruction according to the EGRS lesson sequence and should not be simply 'dropped' from a cumulative curriculum – especially when the programme intervention itself lays stress on the completion of the whole curriculum; currently, that is not possible!

Catching up, however, is a real problem, especially when the gap between planned and actual coverage becomes too large. Most schools *are* aware of the problem and report that they operate some kind of 'recovery' plan, almost always based on an extra half hour lesson before or after school from Monday to Thursday. However, considering all FP

subjects, a loss of one week represents 25 hours of lost instruction. Providing two extra hours per week would require 12 weeks to catch up just one lost week!

Furthermore, almost all teachers and HODs report there are too many activities in each lesson to be able to cover all of them. Just as many report that there are too many 'slow' learners in each class to be able to cover all the activities while, at the same time, trying to remediate learners who lack the basic skills required to benefit from them.

The interaction between these four factors; no allowance for non-teaching days in the plans, lost instructional time-on-task, the pacing and density of programme activities and the effect of 'slow' learners all contribute to an inevitable shortfall in covering the whole curriculum, irrespective of formal and informal reports of 90% to 100% coverage on trackers.

Future iterations of the EGRS programme need to pay attention to this set of interlinked factors. It is obvious that the more of a high-quality programme or curriculum is delivered, the more likely it is that significant improvements in learner performance will be achieved. Improved curriculum coverage using the high-quality EGRS programme may explain the early results obtained by the study but it does not necessarily guarantee that they will be extended and maintained into the future. It is probable that a ceiling will quickly be reached beyond which it will be difficult to further improve qualitative coverage and, hence, learner performance, because of lost time and because of 'slow' learners.

As far as 'slow' learners are concerned, the interviews confirmed that they were not, in fact, generally learners with psycho-cognitive or sensory learning problems but, rather, learners who had, as a result of national assessment policy, been 'pushed' to the next grade although they had failed to grasp the content of the previous. In practice, this requires classroom teachers to deal with remediating basic skills for some learners while still trying to keep up with the pace required to teach the current content at the correct grade complexity level for other learners during the same lessons. This creates very significant problems for both teachers and for learners from the beginning, and worsens from there, though (in the words of a teacher): *we can do nothing because learners must remain with their age cohort ... many learners are too young for Grade 1 or are not ready for schooling but we must progress them even if they lack the basic skills for Grade 2 ... we cannot re-teach weak learners and the problem just gets worse the next year, we are blamed for failures in the whole system.*

The most basic operational decision to be made by the EGRS is to establish exactly how long schools should take to implement the programme; 40 weeks is unrealistic and does not take into account even public holidays. However, even once that is decided, the next BIG problem is that it is currently impossible to know, in advance, how many instructional days or weeks will be lost annually. In very organised education systems, national, provincial, district and circuit activities which require teachers to leave their classrooms are specified at the end of each year for the next and no deviations are allowed. If this were the case in South Africa, an EGRS programme of a shortened duration – around 34 to 36 weeks – could more realistically be fitted by schools into known days of schooling which will not be disrupted. However, currently uncoordinated provincial, district and circuit plans that are made in advance, and even then only by one term, are changed seemingly at random and schools have no choice but to comply.

Secondly, dealing with the effects of assessment policy ('slow' learners) is exceptionally difficult. Essentially, schools and educational development programmes are caught in a clash between two national policies. On the one hand is a national curriculum organised into grade levels of increasing and cumulative complexity, on the other is an assessment policy through which learners are progressed to the next grade as part of their age cohort almost irrespective of the complexity of the content they have grasped in the previous. Other than some form of 'streaming', itself frowned on as encouraging 'labelling', it is difficult to think of what intervention programmes can do about lessening the effect of assessment policy on teaching and on learner performance.

The only substantive alternative tried by one or two schools is an old OBE nostrum: *divide learners into mixed ability groups and let the stronger learners support the weaker.* While this has some ideological attraction, it does not add up to a workable solution to the problem of greatly mixed abilities in the classroom; the work is done by the stronger learners, who should be working on new content, while the weaker learners look on and learn little, if anything about content they have not grasped.

Dealing with different abilities in one classroom requires, at the least, that some form of differentiated teaching be applied if the activities and pacing in each lesson plan are to be followed faithfully. School or teacher support for

diagnostic methods, differentiated instruction in small, similar-ability groups, and differentiated learner outcomes for set tasks, could be explored. However, because this requires finely tuned classroom management, specialist materials and the development of higher-order teaching skills, extensive revision of the intervention programme may be necessary.

2.5 Coaching Models

Distinct advantages and disadvantages of the two types of coaching were observed but these were almost always case-specific. No overall clear advantage of one type of coaching was evident.

For three of the teachers in this study, the virtual coaching and provision of the tablets was associated with:

- Slightly less careful preparation of, and organised storage of, the flash cards
- A slightly lower level of lesson preparation
- Dependence on the tablet for following the lesson steps and procedures
- Less focus on pacing to complete the term's lessons.

However, they also demonstrated:

- Better pronunciation of the target words, particularly the phonic words
- Better isolation of the phonic sound
- Better use of music for the songs, and pronunciation of the words of the song.

The exception was Teacher 5, the strongest teacher in the study, who showed all the positive features of teachers who had had an on-site coach and of those who had virtual coaching.

For the four teachers in this study who had had on-site or on-site coaches, this was associated with:

- Better use of the tracker and better pacing overall
- Better preparation and storage of the flash cards
- Closer enactment of the lesson steps and procedures described in the Teachers Book, and thus less innovation
- Better classroom organisation and neatness
- Greater willingness to be observed.

With regard to pacing, in all but one school (Teachers 3, 4), there was minimal accountability for delivering the EGRS programme, and some teachers suggested the district officials were only interested in the DBE workbooks and departmental reports. The best example of accountability was in School E where the principal and local district official, as well as the coach, were all aligned in checking the tracker. However, in the other schools, if there was no on-site coaching, it was apparently largely left to the intrinsic motivation of individual HODs and teachers to follow the programme. Interestingly none of the teachers appeared to be very far behind but there was a sense with Teachers 7 and 8 that the programme had tailed off a little in Term 4.

In terms of direct on-site coaching, the four teachers interviewed said the coaches observed lessons and checked the tracker at school visits and that they found the school visits helpful. However the lesson observations showed that there may be opportunities to do more specialised coaching tasks if there was more time with each teacher. For example, a coach could model some of the problematic aspects of the lessons observed. This modelling could include modelling a Group Guided Reading session and demonstrating classroom management during Group Guided Reading (e.g. introducing the work, ensuring all the learners have begun, and checking the work afterwards). The coach could also provide suggestions for using readers or materials already in the classroom, helping to level these readers for use in Group Guided Reading. Coaches may well be doing this currently but this was not mentioned by the teachers. With Teacher 6, the coach's identification of her slower pacing had led to extra visits and an effort to get the principal involved in supporting her implementation.

There is also a role for on-site coaches in situations like those found in School 2, where there was no Grade 2 teacher, or where the district officials use the DBE book as a scheme of work. The coach could have an advocacy or intermediary role with the department. Again, this may very well be occurring but was not mentioned specifically by the teachers.

In terms of virtual coaching, it was evident that for day-to-day pronunciation of English words, English phonemes and the use of rhymes and songs, the tablet was invaluable to the four teachers who had this device. They also found it very helpful seeing videos of other teachers teaching, communicating with the virtual coach, and participating in competitions, for example for the most stimulating classroom. Teachers with on-site coaching, and paper-based lesson plans, did not have access to these videos of other classrooms and so did not see as many examples of best practice.

On-site coaching, personal visiting and monitoring is likely to have a significant motivational effect on participants. Coach visits provide 'landmarks' around which HODs and teachers can prepare and, in ideal cases, track their own progress. If nothing else, coach visits remind teachers that there is a programme running and that they will be monitored; this is likely to improve, to one degree or another, even if through a sort of Hawthorne Effect, their continued adherence to the programme and to its required activities.

On the other hand, virtual coaches have several real advantages, not the least of which is the potential ability of any teacher to ask for assistance or advice whenever it is needed instead of having to wait for the next school visit. Having programme materials in electronic format that can be printed by schools is clearly an advantageous factor. It also appears that having recorded verbal materials for playback to learners is a strong addition to the quality of the programme itself – pronunciation for non-English speakers is an issue for many teachers as well as learners.

What might be an argument against virtual coaches is based on one of its greatest apparent strengths – the ability of teachers to request help and advice on any topic without having to wait for a school visit. This certainly does increase the immediacy of available support but it relies ultimately on the teachers' knowledge of their own shortcomings. As the popular phrase has it, *how do you know what you don't know?* On-site coaches, on the other hand, observe how teachers actually present lessons in classrooms and are ideally placed to recognise problems and solutions to teacher activity. This ability to observe teacher 'dysfunctions' or misunderstandings in action is lost to the virtual coach who instead must rely on self-reported problems.

On the other hand, self-regulation in the EGRS programme is made more likely by the frequent 'competitions' which have been run by the EGRS virtual coach administrator since 2017. When teachers submit videos of their teaching or classrooms on a particular topic other teachers are able to see these lessons, which expose them to examples of good practice. In real terms, these teachers have access to many more examples of effective practices than do the teachers with on-site coaching.

2.6 Monitoring and Programme Implementation

As far as school-level monitoring is concerned, we have already indicated, and the school Case Studies will show, that it is apparently driven primarily by compliance with departmental and EGRS requirements. The most common format reporting summaries of curriculum coverage are based on SA-SAMS and reflect required versus actual completion of assessment tasks. EGRS-specific monitoring in practice at school level is rather more informal; trackers are generally filled in by teachers though many pages or topics are not recorded as complete or else everything is marked as complete – sometimes in the same pen or pencil throughout the year, every day.

Nonetheless, we do not mean to suggest that the use of EGRS trackers is pointless. For a start, they provide a very clear formal record of topics to be covered and when they should be covered. Their structure makes them useful to monitor and manage a programme as structured and organised as the EGRS programme against the one critical factor of coverage. Backlogs should be easy to notice as early as possible and specific note be made of when each missed topic is covered. They could, and probably should, be shortened and simplified, and made more realistic, for future iterations of the programme as it transitions to a purely departmental programme.

While we understand that compliance with reporting requirements is an administrative, rather than educational act, it did appear that schools which made more of an effort to collect information about EGRS coverage were more likely to report improved coverage and learner performance. In other words, teachers were more aware of the need to use the EGRS programme in schools in which greater emphasis was laid on monitoring by the HOD (and principal).

3 Resources

Prior to and during the research, a number of comments were made about a lack of resources, especially readers, to support the EGRS programme. However, it was evident throughout the Case Studies just how much LTSM has been supplied to schools in previous years. Much of this supply now lies unused in piles in storerooms and much of it is visibly disintegrating. Each new iteration of the national curriculum from 1998 with the introduction of OBE through C2005, to the National Curriculum Statement to the Foundations for Learning Campaign and to CAPS, has involved the resupply of schools with materials developed in terms of the current iteration of the curriculum.

Whatever may have been intended, schools have viewed each new set of materials as 'authorised' for use and the previously supplied entirely superseded. Some report that departmental officials reinforce this view and instruct schools not to use the old material. The result is that schools routinely ignore a large stock of text books and readers that could very easily be used in conjunction with any curriculum. Most previously supplied English texts, stretching back for many years, for example, provide multiple opportunities for learners to practise phonics, read, do comprehension and spelling exercises, learn vocabulary lists and so on.

3.1 EGRS Resources for EFAL

Resources are particularly significant in the development of early reading skills (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). All the teachers in the study felt the provision of resources was as important as the lesson plans in the EGRS programme and that it would have been difficult to implement the lessons successfully without them. This aligns with research findings overseas (Hiebert & Morris, 2012; Elley, 1989) and literacy interventions in South Africa, for example, the Living for Learning project (Hiebert & Morris, 2012; Elley, 1989), which did supply resources, and the Foundations for Learning, which did not (DBE, 2008).

It is interesting that no less than five of the eight teachers in the study had additional reading resources in their classrooms even if only two described using the additional resources in some way in the EFAL programme. In these cases, they were used for differentiated Group Guided Reading (Teacher 5) and independent reading (Teacher 1). In the three classes where additional resources were available but not used, this represented a lost opportunity as the additional reading resources were closely aligned to the readers supplied by the EGRS programme and included READ group readers and big books supplied as part of the Rally to READ intervention. This is one disadvantage of supplying materials with an intervention programme as often older but still useful materials are no longer used.

As far as the EGRS supplied word charts are concerned, all eight classrooms in this study had at least three, and often all four, differently coloured word charts displayed. It is likely that these were being used although only two classrooms had words actually displayed at the time of the research visit. Nevertheless, seven of the eight teachers were observed using the flash cards as an integral part of their lessons, and clearly valued this resource, although particular teachers seemed to prepare, organise and store the flash cards more carefully than others. The flash cards were sometimes reinforced with cardboard, laminated, illustrations coloured in and preserved in plastic sleeves in files (Teachers 2, 3, 4, 5). This method was evidently a coach-inspired strategy for preserving the words, and the teachers who did this were very proud of their files. Some teachers cut out the flash cards but they were loosely stored in a plastic bag (Teachers 1, 6, 7, 8).

The big books, despite the size of the text, were seen to be used in the majority of the classrooms and the spiral binding and size made them easy to handle. The group readers were visible in most of the classrooms, organised in boxes. The organisational strategies taught to the teachers as part of the programme will be invaluable as the programme moves into another grade next year.

The EGRS material generally seemed part of the classrooms and was not locked away, which is a sign of their importance and daily use. Allied to this many teachers had made a chart showing the programme routine and displayed this near to their desks. Overall, the classrooms showed a level of neatness and organisation not found in all Foundation Phase classrooms and which facilitated the daily access and use of the EGRS resources. In some cases the classroom environment was exemplary (Teacher 5). This is an important and successful aspect of the programme. The necessity of teaching this to teachers is seen in the way vestiges of older programmes were evident, disorganised and marginalised, in some of the classrooms visited.

The DBE workbook was an existing resource in all the classrooms. Use of the DBE workbooks did not seem to have significant impact on the implementation or success of the EGRS programme. The completed pages in the workbooks analysed were often unchecked and uncorrected and with some teachers, the DBE books had been completed sequentially rather than aligned to the lesson plans.

The EGRS tracker was reportedly used by all the teachers in the study although it was only observed in four of the eight classrooms. Many teachers completed this in pencil so that it could be reused and two teachers commented specifically on the usefulness of the instrument. What is interesting is that the strongest teacher (Teacher 5) used it daily and seemed to be the only teacher to write reflections. Where the tracker was checked by a number of different officials, for example the HOD, principal, and district officials, as well as an on-site coach (Teachers 3, 4, 6), it was meticulously filled in and shown to the researcher. How accurately these trackers reflect actual curriculum coverage is questioned elsewhere in these findings but the fact is that they *were* completed. Where the tracker was not checked regularly, or checked only by the HOD, which was the case with Teachers 1, 7 and 8, the tracker was not shown to the researcher so compliance could not be assessed.

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All the teachers in the study felt the provision of resources was as important as the lesson plans in the EGRS programme and that it would have been difficult to implement the lessons successfully without them.

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4 Summary of Recommendations

All the current programme components – training, materials and coaching or monitoring – are coherently and conceptually linked and mutually supportive around the key outcome and impact objectives of increasing the coverage of lesson plans that constitute an organised course of quality instruction and, hence, should improve learner performance.

All the current participants agree that they will continue to use the EGRS programme as long as they have the required materials. Whether they do so or not will be due to personal and idiosyncratic factors but it is true that once initiated, the EGRS programme is sufficiently detailed to be applied repeatedly and consistently on a routine basis. In purely practical terms, the continuation of the programme is much more certain if the supply of paper-based lesson plans and other materials is continued.

The key to successful replication of the EGRS programme is, in its most basic sense, the institutionalisation of this organised course of instruction, integrated with routine departmental policies and reporting requirements, in the daily routines of each school and classroom. Accept that individual teachers will make adaptations to the lesson plans on the basis of their expertise and experience, and as mediated by coaching and monitoring, but the operational objective is to keep the broad programme standardised, ordered and, of course, consistently applied as it is designed.

The key operational component of institutionalising a course of instruction is the provision of sequenced lesson plans and materials enabling teachers to consistently present instruction at a reasonably uniform level of quality. Formal monitoring of the planned versus actual coverage of these plans through planners or trackers, and learner workbook analysis, is important and should lead to systematic improvement of coverage at the correct content complexity level. The classroom programme should be monitored, in the first instance, by teachers and the HOD. Schools should be monitored by departmental officials.

To prepare for transition to departmental management after withdrawal by EGRS field staff, it would be ideal to directly involve departmental curriculum and subject advisers with EGRS managers and coaches to serve an ‘apprenticeship’ during this early period to prepare them to replace the monitoring and support functions of EGRS coaches.

At the most minimalist and essential level, improving coverage is the central objective of monitoring but we already know there are significant barriers to achieving full qualitative coverage, which cannot be ignored in future iterations of the EGRS programme. Coverage can however be improved as follows:

- Reduce the number of EGRS lesson plans from an unrealistic total of 40 weeks of instruction; allow schools to fit these plans into available periods and have a system for managing missed lessons.
- Increase the time-on-task of schools and teachers to ensure the time available for presenting the full course of lessons is maximised; i.e. increase the number of weeks on which instruction is actually provided.
- Reduce the number of unplanned disruptions to curriculum plans through lost instructional days. All levels of the department, plus the intervention agency, should plan their activity well in advance to allow schools to plan for them. Once made, they cannot be changed.
- Reduce the density and pacing of the activities in the lesson plans. This is only possible once programme designers know exactly how many weeks will be available for classroom instruction. The reduction in complexity should not, in other words, be a response allowing dysfunctions in schools to continue unchallenged but as a realistic and improved fit between what is required and how long it should take.
- Pay specific attention to encouraging the regular use of extra lessons, especially on weekends and during school holidays, for learners who have fallen behind their minimum level of expected competence.

Short of extensive redesign of the intervention programme to allow for effective diagnostic and differentiated instruction at each grade level, the effects of the national assessment policy in producing age-based, rather than attained competency-based, classes are very difficult to deal with at school level.

In terms of language development *per se*, the EGRS programme is evidently successful and should be continued and expanded as all the teachers in the study reported they had personally benefited from the intervention. It is important that this was true regardless of the teacher's initial individual competency or prior training in the teaching of EFAL. This aligns with Beeby's idea that teachers all move on their own trajectory of improvement and it is difficult to skip a developmental step (Beeby, 1966). That this programme caters for teachers at different levels is significant, although, as with any intervention, it was generally the better teachers who made the most gains (Schollar & Associates, 2005).

The programme might consider looking at the aspects of the programme that are less well enacted and adjusting the programme a little to enhance the activities teachers are not currently implementing as envisaged, particularly regarding reading development. For example, the Homework Sheets could be used in a more targeted way as the basis for class Shared Reading. Allied to this, for successful independent reading, learners need to understand 98% of the words in a text (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999) which suggests that either these texts need to be thoroughly mediated or that different levels of independent reading texts need to be supplied.

Group Guided Reading, although recommended in the curriculum, remains a difficult procedure for many teachers because of teacher:learner ratios and the lack of specialised training available in South Africa. Except in specific cases, for example when teachers can demonstrate superior classroom management skills, have help in their classrooms, or where there are sufficient sets of levelled group readers in the classroom (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999), the value of this instructional strategy will be that it provides reading practice rather than developing reading skills.

In the EGRS programme, the learners observed doing Group Guided Reading were often reading at a frustrational level rather than the 'just right' level needed for reading development, and many teachers used the Guided Reading time for testing (in a broad sense) rather than teaching. The importance of Group Guided Reading for differentiated reading and instruction cannot be underestimated but it requires more training and resources than this programme may be able to offer.

Designers of the programme could also consider rationalising aspects of the daily routines so that a day is associated with a skill: oral, reading or writing. A simpler routine was already being followed by four of the eight teachers, who described setting aside whole days for particular language skills and doing one activity rather than three or four on each day. This is not to say that some activities, such as greetings, should be any longer. Three to four minutes seemed perfect for this. However, for some of the activities, the timing was insufficient, for example the five minutes set aside for Group Guided Reading on Mondays is impractical. It took some teachers 15 minutes to set this up and without settling the class with meaningful work, it was very stressful for the teachers to do Group Guided Reading. The teachers did struggle with pacing which is linked to the constraints of a content-rich curriculum, and the ability to work with differently-abled learners in the programme, which has received mention elsewhere in this report.

We have not been able to come to any definite conclusions as to whether a on-site or virtual coach is most effective; both forms have convincing positive aspects, but it is certain that some form of coaching is necessary, especially in the first couple of years of programme delivery.

Virtual coaches and tablets are a successful mode of delivery for the EFAL programme and teachers in this study were unequivocally positive about it. There was a clear link between this form of coaching and better English pronunciation, which is essential for teaching English phonics (Goswami, 2007) and is an area where teachers would appreciate more support. However on-site coaching seemed to be important for improved management, accountability and specialised help in individual cases. It might be worth considering some combination of virtual and human coaches in a cost effective model.

The role of the DBE workbooks may need a little more thought to ensure they are used meaningfully in the programme. Mediation of the activities and even closer alignment to the programme activities should be considered. These workbooks do present multiple opportunities for learners to practise skills newly learned during EGRS lessons and their more extensive and sustained use, even for homework, is likely to increase the ability of the EGRS to achieve significant improvements in learner performance.

We strongly suggest that any future iteration of the EGRS programme be preceded by an investigation of common existing, but unused, books and other materials in schools. Making more use of existing and, in some cases, excellent materials that are stored in many schools is also likely to increase the ability of the EGRS to achieve significant improvements in learner performance on larger scales at a reasonable cost.

5 School Case Studies: Generic Programme Research

5.1 School A (Virtual Coach)

This school is situated 30 km from White River in a large rural village just outside the Kruger National Park. The interviewees were unanimously positive about the EGRS programme and reported that there have been improvements in both curriculum coverage and in learner performance.

There is no real formal curriculum management system. Prior to the EGRS, the school followed the CAPS topic sequence and used DBE workbooks to teach learners in the belief that this would ensure they covered the whole curriculum. Since EGRS, they use the EGRS Teacher Support Tool instead, which includes sequenced planners or trackers and the lesson plans, to direct their day-to-day teaching activities. In this way, a focus on the planning and management of the curriculum essentially translates into the monitoring of the application of the curriculum provided through EGRS.

The school reports that teachers do, in fact, actively monitor the delivery of the provided programme though it was evident that this monitoring can be minimal indeed. Figure 1 is part of the first page of a 'consolidated' coverage report compiled by the HOD; the comments in the last three columns are always the same and are repeated on each succeeding page for the whole of the FP.

Figure 1: Coverage report

CURRICULUM COVERAGE TRACKING TERM 3 OF 2018 GRADES R, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 AND 7 DEPARTMENTAL HEAD : MOKOENTO R. M.							
TEACHER	GRADE	SUBJECT	NUMBER OF WEEKS PER A/FP	TOPICS TO BE COVERED DURING THIS TERM	TOPICS COVERED DURING TWO WEEKS OF RE-OPENING	TOPICS NOT COVERED FOR THE TERM	PLAN TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES
	R	SIWATI	10 weeks	Tenlano. Kufunda nemisindo. Kubhala ngesandiso. Kabhala.	Busy with all four topics because it is a continuous task for the term.	None	Continue repeating all topics until mastered by learners
	R	TIBALO	10 weeks	Numbers operations and relationship. Pullesis (algebra). Space and shapes. Measurements. Data handling.	Busy with all five topics because it is a continuous task for the term.	None	Continue repeating all topics until mastered by learners
	R	LIFE SKILLS	10 weeks	Bungaye bemantfu netrobhala. Buciko bekuticambela. Sifundo sekutivocovoca.	Busy with all three topics because it is a continuous task for the term.	None	Continue repeating all topics until mastered by learners
	1	SIWATI	10 weeks	Tenlano. Kufunda nemisindo. Kubhala ngesandiso. Kabhala.	Busy with all four topics because it is a continuous task for the term.	None	Continue repeating all topics until mastered by learners

The comment in the column 'Plan to address the challenges' is virtually meaningless – *Continue repeating until all topics are mastered by learners* – and apparently redundant given the fact that no topics were reported as not covered for Term 3. Unsurprisingly, all the interviewees reported that over 80% curriculum coverage was achieved – and that they made plans to cover anything that may be missed – difficult to believe given the reporting document above. No other evidence – timetables, lists of learners, topics covered, adjustments to trackers – were available to support the

report and, in any case: *It is difficult to have extra classes before or after school because young learners must go at set times to catch taxis and buses.*

It is apparent that monitoring and reporting are more about compliance than about ensuring the whole curriculum is covered. This view was supported by a random check of planners completed during Term 1 – the tracker itself was dated 2017. The tracker reproduced in Figure 2 records that five of 15 activities for Week 6 were covered on five different dates over a period of a month and no completion date is provided for the other 10 activities.

Figure 2: Tracker

Week 6			Date completed
Day	GAPS content, concepts, skills THEME: THIS IS ME!		
Monday	Activity 1:	Daily Activities • Greeting • Rhyme / Song • Theme Vocabulary • Question of the Day	14/02/18
Monday	Activity 2:	Shared Reading: Pre-Read • DBE workbook p 2-3: Let's play ball!	
Monday	Activity 3:	Phonemic Awareness & Phonics • Same or different	
Tuesday	Activity 1:	Daily Activities • Greeting • Rhyme / Song • Theme Vocabulary • Question of the Day	20/02/18
Tuesday	Activity 2:	Shared Reading: First Read • DBE workbook p 2-3: Let's play ball!	
Tuesday	Activity 3:	Phonemic Awareness & Phonics • Mystery Word /at/	
Wednesday	Activity 1:	Daily Activities • Greeting • Rhyme / Song • Theme Vocabulary • Question of the Day	01/03/18
Wednesday	Activity 2:	Shared Reading: Illustrate the Story • DBE workbook p 2-3: Let's play ball!	
Wednesday	Activity 3:	Phonemic Awareness & Phonics • Stripping Words /at/	
Thursday	Activity 1:	Daily Activities • Greeting • Rhyme / Song • Theme Vocabulary • Question of the Day	16/03/18
Thursday	Activity 2:	Shared Reading: Second Read • DBE workbook p 2-3: Let's play ball!	
Thursday	Activity 3:	Writing • This is me.	
Friday	Activity 1:	Daily Activities • Greeting • Rhyme / Song • Theme Vocabulary • Question of the Day	20/03/18
Friday	Activity 2:	Shared Reading: Post-Read (Act out the story) • DBE workbook p 2-3: Let's play ball!	
Friday	Activity 3:	Phonemic Awareness and Phonics • Picture Bingo	

Certainly, all the respondents argued that there are *too many activities in each lesson and it is very difficult to cover them all*, and it is evident that this points to the more realistic conclusion that the actual qualitative level of curriculum coverage is much lower than that typically reported by the school. The main reasons advanced by schools for believing that there are too many activities are *the numbers of slow learners* in each class, along with *a lack of special schools*, as well as insufficient instructional time.

As far as slow learners are concerned, interviewees agreed that they were not, in fact, generally learners with learning problems but, rather, learners who had, as a result of national assessment policy, been 'pushed' to the next grade although they had failed to grasp the content of the previous grade. This requires teachers to deal with remediating basic skills for some learners while still trying to keep up with the pace required to teach the current content at the correct grade complexity level for other learners during the same lessons. This causes problems for both teachers and for learners from the beginning, and worsens from there, though *we can do nothing because learners must remain with their age cohort*.

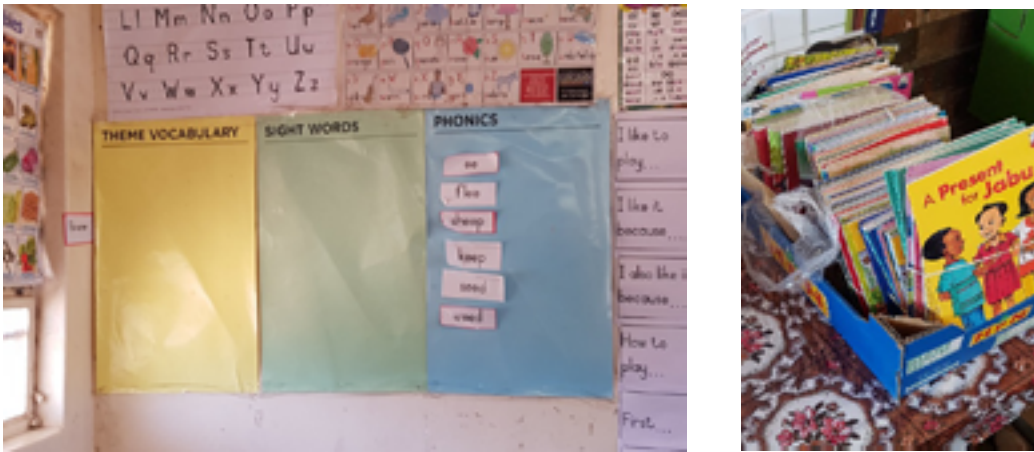
The issue of instructional time is a significant barrier to completing the curriculum. Planners or trackers, and lesson plans, assume that lessons will be presented on every day of all 10 weeks in each term and make no allowance for the fact that this does not occur in any of the schools. Both the DBE and EGRS require teachers to attend training sessions, and there are a host of other unplanned losses of instructional time; public holidays, sports and cultural days, union activity, civil unrest, bereavements and so on. Each time an event of this nature occurs, schools lose teaching time and, unless they can catch up, are forced to ignore topics, or treat them very quickly: *touching the topic*, to appear to comply with the pace required by the trackers and lesson plans.

Schools do collect assessment records, always in the format of SA-SAMS, but there is no other use made of these records besides reporting to the department and for promotion or repeat decisions; and, even then, there is a constant pressure to promote as many learners as possible virtually irrespective of their actual attained competency levels.

There is no doubt that the school does regularly and consistently use the EGRS programme materials during daily lessons. These materials are regarded as an authorised way to teach CAPS and are regarded as more detailed than CAPS. The EGRS materials, and especially the lesson plans, provide the content and methods that should be used to cover the topic sequences specified by CAPS that are used as the basis of the EGRS materials: *EGRS has unpacked CAPS and made it easy for us to follow the curriculum*. DBE books are used in the EGRS materials and lesson plans.

The photographs reproduced in Figure 3 illustrate this point. On the left, posters on a classroom wall reflect EGRS methods and content and, on the right, readers provided to schools.

Figure 3: EGRS evident in classrooms



On the other hand, the school argues that there are too few reading materials for all the learners although there are large numbers of unused LTSM provided in previous years to them. These materials are typically poorly stored and deteriorating rapidly despite the fact that many of them provide multiple opportunities for learner reading and teacher use (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Unused and deteriorating reading materials



The EGRS programme is very popular at this school and none of the interviewees were prepared to offer any critique of the programme. Training is popular because it explicates what is required of teachers and provides practical materials for them to do what is required. The materials are, as we have said, very popular. Readers, flash cards, word lists, posters, and so on, are all reported as very useful and the school really loves the lesson plans – *we do not have to spend a long time planning and preparing lessons but we can just teach again.*

The virtual coach is also very popular, not least because of the supply of a tablet. The school uses the tablet to print learner and teacher materials and it is especially commended because it has recorded versions of songs and sounds to be used during teaching; teachers do not have to struggle with English pronunciation. Also very commended is the ability of the school or teacher to seek personal assistance from EGRS as soon as it is needed instead of waiting for a one-on-one visit. What the virtual coach cannot replace is the monitoring and motivational effect of a human coach. The school itself evidently has little idea of how to effectively monitor coverage or how to respond to problems when they occur.

In summary, the school presents an organised course of instruction through the lesson plans that is enriched through flash cards, reading books, lists of phonemes and words, and so on. Teachers have little idea of the theoretical basis of the programme but they do consistently present it during lessons. Teachers do not feel constrained by standardised lesson plans, nor bemoan any lost creativity. Instead, they actively welcome materials that allow them to teach the curriculum without worrying about planning and lesson preparation.

5.2 School B (On-site Coach)

School B, located in a rural village, is 18 km from White River. The principal was sick and was absent from school for the day. There is now no Grade 2 teacher; the teacher trained by EGRS was paid by the School Governing Body (SGB) and has subsequently left the school. In addition, the IP teacher who was appointed FP HOD has not received any training from EGRS and knew very little about the programme.

Nonetheless, the HOD reported that the EGRS programme was very useful for the school though he had no real details: *Grade 1 and 2 learners' English speaking and writing has improved in my experience and to my knowledge.*

The HOD reported that the school did plan and manage the delivery of the curriculum in general and believed that about 80% coverage was achieved by the school in FP. Any requests for examples of reports or other formal documents resulted in the HOD leaving for long periods – once for 20 minutes – to find them, or for long periods of paging back and forth through huge lever arched files in which documents appeared to be filed entirely at random. Eventually it became uncomfortably obvious that the HOD did not know where reports were to be found or whether they existed at all.

What documents could be found were all either not filled in or were derived from the DBE, rather than EGRS. The photographs reproduced in Figure 5 illustrate the point. The first, on the left, was produced when the HOD was asked for trackers, or records of curriculum coverage. This is a departmental document that certainly could be filled in using EGRS trackers but is not, itself, an example of an EGRS tracker. The second, on the right, is another departmental monitoring form on the use of DBE workbooks.

Figure 5: DBE forms

CIRCUIT WHITE HAZY 02 FOUNDATION PHASE DISTRICT: BUKHARIB

Assessment Task/Curriculum Coverage Tracking Report sheet (SCL/Primary School)

HOD's name: _____ Signature: _____
 Educator's name: _____ Signature: _____
 Date: _____
 Term: _____ Term Start Date: _____ Term End Date: _____
 Month report: _____

MONTH	Subject	Assessment Task Coverage		Curriculum Scope Coverage	
		Actual number recorded assessment task completed for the month	Assessment Task Completed (marks to 100/100%)	Actual number of tasks completed for the month	Actual number of tasks completed for the month as a percentage of scope
SEP	Home Language Eng. Additional Language Mathematics Life Skills				

Section B: Utilization of workbooks (Conditions for the Educator To be completed by Schools)

1. Utilize workbooks in line with the Department's policy on workbooks (SCL/1-14)

2. Utilize workbooks in line with the Department's policy on workbooks (SCL/1-14)

3. Utilize workbooks in line with the Department's policy on workbooks (SCL/1-14)

4. Utilize workbooks in line with the Department's policy on workbooks (SCL/1-14)

5. Utilize workbooks in line with the Department's policy on workbooks (SCL/1-14)

6. Utilize workbooks in line with the Department's policy on workbooks (SCL/1-14)

7. Utilize workbooks in line with the Department's policy on workbooks (SCL/1-14)

8. Utilize workbooks in line with the Department's policy on workbooks (SCL/1-14)

9. Utilize workbooks in line with the Department's policy on workbooks (SCL/1-14)

10. Utilize workbooks in line with the Department's policy on workbooks (SCL/1-14)

School B had made an effort to produce a formal annual school plan (Figure 6), reportedly at the behest of EGRS, but what was provided at this point clearly made very little sense, nor could the HOD explain how it worked: *we are trying*.

Figure 6: Form produced by School B

SCHOOL & CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT PLAN (2018)

	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
1	NEW YEAR DAY	MEETING HOD'S CLERK VISIT	MEETING HOD'S CLERK VISIT	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY
2	SATURDAY	MEETING	MEETING	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY
3	SUNDAY	MORNING MEETING	MEETING	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY	SCHOOL HOLIDAY
4												
5												
6	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	SUNDAY	SUNDAY	SUNDAY	SUNDAY	SUNDAY	SUNDAY	SUNDAY	SUNDAY	SUNDAY	SUNDAY
7	SUNDAY	EXAM	EXAM	EXAM	EXAM	EXAM	EXAM	EXAM	EXAM	EXAM	EXAM	EXAM

The school, like School A, did not, in fact, plan or manage the curriculum at all – except insofar as monitoring the application of the EGRS lesson plans is concerned. Staff are convinced that using these plans will result in coverage of the CAPS curriculum and departmental officials support this view; it is regarded as an 'official' programme endorsed by the DBE. The EGRS coaches are strongly commended because they explain and demonstrate how to deliver the lesson plans in the classroom while responding to individual requests for advice as needed.

The school had received support from three different programmes in the past, including Penryn and Pearson (no details). Until 2017 the school participated in the Rally to READ (RTR) programme, an extensive intervention across the primary grades that lasted for an extended period and included the provision of a large amount of materials. The photographs reproduced in Figure 7 show, on the left, a set of boxes with readers for each grade level. On the right are shown resource files and teacher manuals for a number of the components of the READ Primary Schools Programme; all these materials have evidently been kept in use by trained teachers after the withdrawal of READ – at the end of 2017, according to the HOD.

Figure 7: READ materials



The READ and EGRS programmes are compatible and the two programmes share a number of components like Shared Reading and Group and Guided Reading. They also provided similar materials. Figure 8 shows, on the left, a phonetics chart from READ and, on the right, vocabulary and sight words charts supplied by EGRS; READ provided very similar materials.

Figure 8: READ and EGRS materials



However, like School A, School B has a great deal of material that was provided in previous years but is currently stored and unused; much of this material could still be used today to support and extend classroom instruction (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Unused materials in storage



In summary, this school presents an organised course of instruction to the degree to that it works its way through the lesson plans, which are enriched through flash cards, reading books, lists of phonemes and words, and so on. The EGRS lesson plans are supported by Rally to READ materials, especially in the form of readers.

Overall coverage and usage of the programme at this school is difficult to judge, given the turnover of trained staff and the untrained HOD, and it is certainly not closely managed in any formal sense. It is certainly used consistently in Grade 1. However, it is possible that the extended exposure of the school to RTR and then to EGRS, has established an approach to FP EFAL that has become 'routine', to one degree or another, as the 'normal' method; crudely, phonics plus reading.

5.3 School C (On-site Coach)

School C is located in a rural 'township' around 20 km from White River. It has a good reputation and many learners have been enrolled here instead of at other local schools; there are currently 746 learners. The school has also been exposed to Penreach and Rally to READ, as well as to Molteno, in recent years. Since RTR worked across all primary grades and supplied a great deal of reading and other materials for them, interviewees agreed that their materials were still in use and were compatible with the EGRS programme.

School C, like both of the previous schools, reports that the EGRS programme is valuable to the school and has resulted in more confident learners whose oral language and reading have improved across the FP. Five participants have been trained; two teachers at Grade 1 and Grade 2 levels each plus the FP HOD.

Direct monthly coaching is reportedly very useful and is appreciated by the teachers in providing support to applying the EGRS programme or lesson plans, as well as providing support and advice on specific issues as they arise. The planners or trackers and, especially, the lesson plans are all used to 'flesh out' the departmental plan – both are directly based on CAPS. Prior to the EGRS, the school made use of the DBE workbooks for the same purpose.

It was again apparent that the school did not formally plan the delivery of the curriculum; it monitored the application of the programme materials which, it reported, did satisfy departmental requirements.

Asked for formal reports or summaries of curriculum coverage, the principal and HOD produced a summary of planned versus actual completion of assessment tasks (Figure 10) for submission to the department.

Figure 10: Summary of assessment tasks

CURRICULUM COVERAGE											
TERM 2											
GRADE 2 A											
EDUCATOR: MTHEMBU C E	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	TOTAL
WEEK	2	3	3	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	26
DAILY ACTIVITIES	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	26
PHONEMIC AWARENESS	5	5	5	3	4	5	5	5	5	5	47
GROUP GUIDED READING	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	19
SHARED READING	2	2	-	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	17
WRITING											

Not all the EGRS trackers were completed (Figure 11) and there is no evidence that uncompleted days were ever made up. Consequently, it is difficult to confirm whether the reported 95% coverage is qualitatively realistic.

The principal reported that the HOD regularly collected learner workbooks and checked to see which topics were up to date with trackers and which were behind. A 'recovery plan' was then required from the teacher in order to remedy the situation. The HOD agreed that this was the case but neither principal nor HOD could produce any formal evidence of a system tracking backlogs and their resolution. It appeared to the researcher that whatever was agreed was purely informal and might well occur though it was impossible to say how systematically. The 'recovery plan' always consisted of extra lessons in the afternoon from Monday to Friday, always a difficult proposition when one considers that, say, two days lost means five hours lost per day for all FP subjects. Half-hour extra lessons supply two of those hours in a week; it would take five weeks to catch up assuming all delivery remained on track during that time. Of course, EFAL does alone does not occupy five hours every day but one assumes it is not EGRS policy to recommend that teachers ignore missed content in numeracy or Home Language to catch up on backlogs in EFAL.

The point, as we note in the discussion of School A above, is that the planners or trackers and lesson plans assume a full five-day instructional week for 10 weeks each term and schools are subject to a range of reasons for missing days of instruction. Meetings and training days can easily take up a week, at least, in a term, losing 25 hours of instruction which must be made up before curriculum coverage can possibly be complete. Eventually, both the principal and HOD agreed that it was necessary to use 'strategies' to be able to report covering the whole curriculum: cutting activities out of lessons, only 'touching' some topics and leaving some untreated.

None of this is meant as a criticism of the school itself – participants are basically aware of the problems of coverage and do make genuine, albeit informal, efforts to resolve them within the limitations of their context. The principal, in particular, is explicitly and actively concerned about improving the quality of the school and, hence, improving learner performance.

The school, like both the previous ones, had already been supplied with all the DBE learner workbooks and stationery packs provided by the department for 2019 (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Learner workbooks and stationery packs



The photographs in Figure 14 show the operationally compatible nature of the RTR, Molteno and the EGRS programmes. On the left is a RTR book box with some readers from READ, some from Molteno and some from the DBE. Storage is not good but, at least, previously supplied materials are still used and are available to support the intended outcomes of EGRS. On the right is a vocabulary wall established during RTR that is still used for the same purpose.

Figure 14: Previously supplied resources



In summary, this is a school in which management tries consistently to improve the quality of the schooling it provides. It certainly has a long way to go but at least it is actively trying to make the best of its circumstances, and to use more of its resources. The training and materials it has received in the past and, especially, the current EGRS programme have enabled staff to present a relatively consistent and organised course of instruction to learners. The principal has a strong personality and appears to have the support of his staff; he is key to the positive ethos of this school.

5.4 School D (Virtual Coach)

Established in a rural 'township', School D is 17 km from White River. All the school participants agree that EGRS is very useful and relevant to the school. They report that demands for learning in English are very high in the area: *many parents take their children from these schools and send them to schools in town (ex-model C) or to private schools where they must pay fees so that they can learn English.* This is a significant factor in the positive attitudes that this school holds towards the EGRS programme.

School D currently participates in the Penryn and Marang (Wits) programmes (no details besides the fact that Marang works in mathematics), as well as Molteno in the past.

The school reports that learners enjoy EGRS lessons and that their confidence has improved in both the oral use of English and in reading; the school assessments of learners in Grade 1 already show improvement on the past. As in all the previous schools, the lesson plans are seen as especially useful because they mean that teachers do not have to plan the curriculum and develop their own good quality lessons; curriculum planning and delivery is essentially carried out by using the EGRS materials and monitoring of their use.

Again, coverage is automatically and immediately reported to be almost 100%, though extended discussions confirm that is largely a matter of compliance with both EGRS and DBE reporting. Teachers do try to cover the whole curriculum but it is impossible because of the loss of instructional time and the number of required activities; topics reported as complete on trackers are sometimes touched on briefly and others are simply left blank. Recovery and catch-up plans cannot work once the gap becomes too large. Nonetheless, the school is convinced of the need to improve curriculum coverage and has made some improvements although it is almost impossible to entirely resolve it.

The interviewees at this school all agreed that assessment policy was a significant barrier to improving both curriculum coverage and learner performance: *many learners are too young for Grade 1 or are not ready for schooling but we must progress them even if they lack the basic skills for Grade 2; we cannot re-teach weak learners and the problem just gets worse the next year; we are blamed for failures in the whole system but it is very unfair, teachers are demotivated and many would leave teaching if they could.*

The school does take assessment seriously beyond the minimum required by the department through SA-SAMS, and the HOD encourages teachers to use the reflection sections of the trackers to improve performance on specific topics.

Figure 15 reflects the results of an assessment exercise in spelling a list of 10 Siswati words in Grade 4; one-third of a class of 45 learners could not get one word correct and just under half got four or less correct. According to the HOD and teacher, these words should all be easy for a Grade 4 learner.

What was noteworthy at this school was the quality of the classroom and the work presented by the Grade 2 teacher. Her classroom was beautifully decorated with stimulating and colourful displays, many self-made, and kept in meticulous order (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Stimulating classroom



She made a conscious effort to use other existing materials to enrich the EGRS-supplied materials and stored them effectively; protected, accessible and regularly used. She was enthusiastic about the EGRS programme and reported that the training and coaching have allowed her to present the lessons effectively; the provision of recordings on the provided tablet of songs and words in English was particularly appreciated in ensuring that learners learned the correct pronunciation of English words. Using the examples provided by the EGRS, she had developed a big book in Siswati and was in the process of producing others. Figure 18 shows just one of the resource corners in the classroom.

Figure 18: Resource corner



There was no doubt that this teacher was providing a genuinely ordered, organised and properly resourced programme of quality instruction to her learners. There is equally no doubt that she has received significant support from EGRS in doing so. The main ingredient in her success is idiosyncratic and based on personal motivation – she provides a good example of what can be achieved by a ‘good’ support programme for a ‘good’ teacher.

That said, this school, like the previous ones, has an absolute mountain of used materials that the rest of the teachers could use (Figure 19). Very few show the initiative of the Grade 2 teacher who has actively sought out materials that support her teaching to be used alongside those supplied by external agencies. The reproduction on the left of Figure 19 shows one of the ‘dumping areas’ to which old or unused materials are relegated. That on the right shows an effort by the SMT to use more of these materials: a number of newer books had been retrieved and a library was started though it was poorly arranged and maintained, and barely ever used by the teachers or the learners.

Figure 19: Unused materials

In summary, the school suffers from the same problems as the others in making efforts to improve coverage and learner performance. It is, however, making conscious efforts to deal with them even if the context – chiefly loss of instructional time and assessment policy – make it very difficult to do so. Nonetheless, the EGRS materials are regularly and consistently used in the school and to a high degree of quality in Grade 2.

The virtual coach is commended because it is always available and teachers can seek advice whenever necessary. However, participants report that they also like on-site coaching in principle *because it is more individually based, the coach can see and help teachers in context.*

5.5 School E (On-site Coach)

School E is a small school located between Secunda and Evander on the grounds of a now-closed gold mine. The EGRS-trained HOD has since retired and there is currently no HOD at all; the principal will attend all EGRS training in future.

The principal and teachers welcomed the programme, in the first place, because the school has opted for using English as the LoLT in the school. The operational programme *is easy to use and is very relevant for us.* The (on-site) coach is, again, very popular because of the combination of programme content review and reinforcement combined with individual situational support provided when requested.

The principal and teachers at School E report that the EGRS programme has improved both teacher and learner confidence and has significantly strengthened the ability of the school to use English as the LoLT for poor learners.

Physical conditions at the school are difficult, given its location, and the more highly paid parents or caregivers have already removed their children to enrol them in fee-paying ex-Model C schools in nearby urban areas.

There is no one home African language at the school and learners are from Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele, Sotho and Tswana backgrounds. Since the principal, teachers and parents all believe that comprehension of English is the critical requirement for personal and social development, and since there is no one home African language, the SGB has opted for a 'straight for English' policy.

The photograph reproduced on the left in Figure 20 illustrates the location. One side of the school is flanked by derelict hostel housing stripped down to its walls and floors. The other side is flanked by derelict family housing; the overall impression is one of desolation. On the right, the school Vision and Mission sign is reproduced.

Figure 20: School E



In common with all the other schools, School E 'manages' the planning and delivery of the curriculum through the use of the EGRS lesson plans. These lesson plans make CAPS easier to teach because these plans have: *done all the work for us and we can just teach them; they are paint-by-number so we can paint the CAPS picture.*

The HOD reportedly used to check teacher coverage of EGRS against the ATP contained in the planner or trackers but the principal does not know where they are and cannot retrieve them. Nonetheless, the school must still report curriculum coverage to the department and does so, like the other schools, in terms of assessment topics tasks completed for SA-SAMS. The principal also checks learner workbooks for all subjects against the ATP and makes plans to deal with backlogs in coverage as well as for very poorly performing learners. Extra lessons are held every day for Intersen in the mornings and FP in the afternoons; one hour each, adding two hours to the school day as against the more typical half hour.

The principal reportedly starts her management and monitoring cycle by holding meetings with individual teachers *to review their performance and to agree goals* (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Meeting schedule

PROGRAMME OF EDUCATORS ONE ON ONE TALKS WITH THE PRINCIPAL

CLASS GUARDIAN	NAME	DATE	TIME	ROOM
1. GRADE 1 EDUCATOR	Ms MALAT B T.R.G.	13 MARCH 2018	13:30	
2. GRADE 2 EDUCATOR	Ms KUNENE J.P.D.	14 MARCH 2018	13:30	
3. GRADE 3 EDUCATOR	Ms MASELLA M.C.	15 MARCH 2018	13:30	
4. GRADE 4 EDUCATOR	Ms METHULA S.L.	16 MARCH 2018	14:30	
5. GRADE 5 EDUCATOR	Ms NCANYWA I.N.	19 MARCH 2018	14:30	
6. GRADE 6 EDUCATOR	Ms MANQELE S.M.	20 MARCH 2018	14:30	
7. GRADE 7 EDUCATOR	Ms MOKOSINA K.R.	22 MARCH 2018	14:30	
8. GRADE 8 EDUCATOR	Ms SEKALA P.	23 MARCH 2018	14:30	

PROGRAMME OF SUPPORT STAFF ONE ON ONE TALKS WITH THE PRINCIPAL

POSITION	NAME	DATE	TIME	ROOM
1. ADMINISTRATION	Ms CHLADIRA I.S.	20 MARCH 2018	14:30	
2. GENERAL WORKER	Ms JONIA I.	20 MARCH 2018	14:30	
3. HELPERS	Ms BANGANA A.	27 MARCH 2018	14:45	
4. HELPERS	Ms MOKHELE E.	27 MARCH 2018	14:45	

There is no formal evidence of any subsequent reviews but there is evidence that a learner remedial programme is implemented (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Remedial schedule

MORNING / REMEDIAL CLASSES IN THE INTER-SENIOR PHASE 2018

TIME	GRADE:4	GRADE:5	GRADE:6	GRADE:7
MONDAY	MANQELE B.M (ENG)	MANANA P.E. (L.S)	METHULA S.L. (ZULU)	NCANYWA I.N (ENG)
TUESDAY	MANANA P.E. (MATHS)	METHULA S.L. (ZULU)	NCANYWA I.N. (ENG)	MOKOENA K.K (MATHS)
WENSDAY	NCANYWA I.N. (SS)	MANANA P.E.	MANQELE B.M. (N.S. TECH)	MOKOENA K.K. (ZULU)
THURSDAY	METHULA S.L. (ZULU)	NCANYWA I.N. (ENG)	MOKOENA K.K. (MATHS)	MANQELE B.M. (NS TECH)

Like the other schools, School E staff report that they are affected by assessment policy and by unplanned loss of instructional time. Both factors make it very difficult to complete what is already a fast-paced programme of instruction. They also report that near-automatic progression leads to teacher frustration and learner indiscipline: *even the young ones know they will pass anyway and many learners do not worry about working hard or studying for assessments.*

The school does not appear to have as many unused materials dumped in storerooms as the other schools, but it has started to make an effort – driven by the principal – to collect and store existing materials for use in a nascent library. Figure 23 illustrates one of the five or six shelves that have already been set up; a long way to go but, at least, an awareness that existing materials should not be simply abandoned and left unused.

Figure 23: Nascent library



In summary, this is a very basic school but with a principal who is apparently determined to improve the performance of both teachers and learners. Again, the application of the EGRS programme does result in the presentation of an organised course of instruction to learners – the most basic requirement of all schooling. The personality of the principal as school leader is central to the operations of this school.

5.6 School F (Virtual Coach)

School F is a large ‘township’ school just outside Leandra. The principal was absent when the researchers arrived and the school, apparently, was not expecting us and there was no recognition of the name of the EGRS programme – until we mentioned that it was concerned with FP training and teaching. An EGRS-trained teacher was summoned and was unhappy about being observed as she had had a *message from the principal this morning to say there would be a visit next Friday*. Eventually, she was convinced that we were mere researchers and evaluators of the programme, not departmental inspectors of her work, and agreed to the observation.

During an interview with the HOD, it became apparent that she was not the HOD at all but rather a Grade 1 EGRS-trained teacher. Eventually three people were disputing over who was the HOD responsible for EGRS. No resolution was reached and eventually the deputy principal was instead interviewed but she had almost no knowledge of EGRS and could talk only in general terms about curriculum management: *we follow the CAPS and plan lessons based on that; we monitor assessment tasks completed and report to the department; coverage is 100%*. She could offer no reports on the effects of, or barriers to, the EGRS programme.

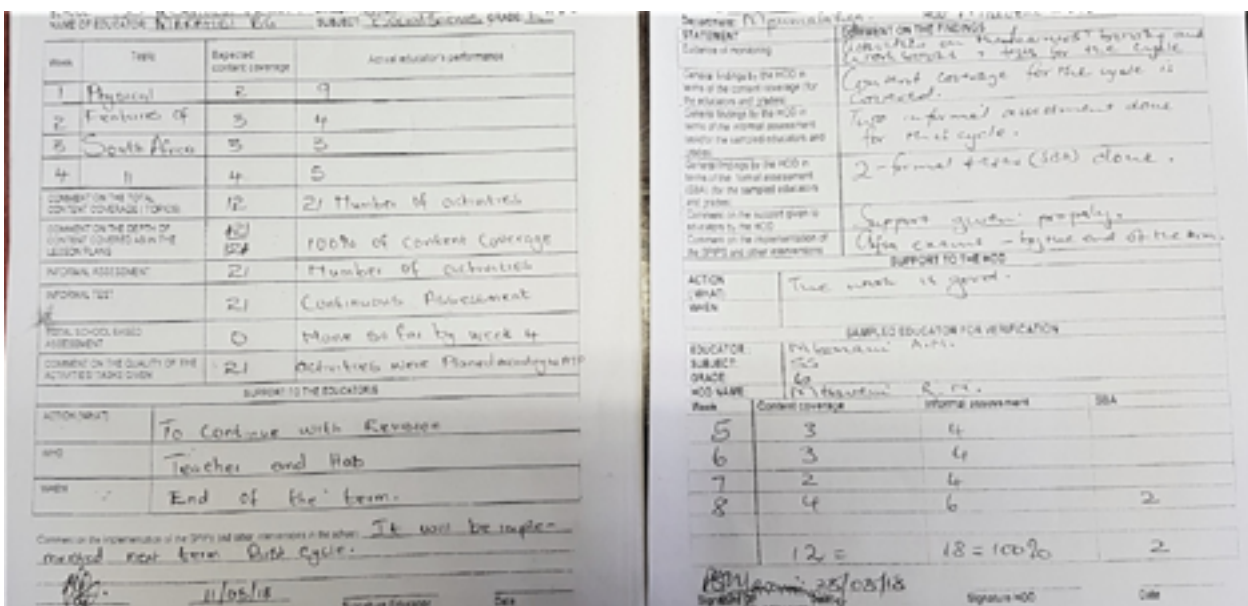
The principal arrived mid-morning. He reported that the EGRS programme was very effective and had led to an improvement in Grade 2 learner English performance. Again, management meant keeping to the EGRS programme without any formal planning: *in other subjects teachers have to develop work plans and lesson plans but in EFAL EGRS does all of this for the teachers*. The EGRS programme and the departmental or CAPS ATP are very similar so there were no perceived clashes between them: *EGRS is really just a more detailed version of CAPS*.

The virtual coach was strongly approved of because: *they make it easier to access information; teachers can seek assistance whenever they need it; when lesson plans are damaged we can print new copies*.

The same barriers to improved coverage and learner performance were reported: the pace of the materials, lost instructional time and assessment policy, along with a lack of cooperation, teaching skills or professional discipline by some teachers. The principal did report that teachers were asked to make plans to catch up missed content, and did so, but it was evident that this was purely informal. Departmental and EGRS reports are based on compliance. There was no evidence of catch-up or ‘recovery’ plans and no reason to assume that coverage reports of close to 100% were, in any qualitative sense, realistic.

Monitoring and reporting were all in the departmental format – two examples are reproduced in Figure 24. EGRS monitoring was evidently more informal and left entirely to the individual teacher; no summaries or reports were available.

Figure 24: Examples of reporting



Like almost all the other schools, School F has a large supply of existing resources supplied in previous years that could be used to support current schooling in general, and the EGRS programme in particular.

At some stage in the past, many of these books had been collected and shelved in what could be a resource room or even a library, but they were still not used (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Shelves of unused books



Figure 26 shows materials dumped in a storeroom, also unused and deteriorating rapidly.

Figure 26: Deteriorating materials never used



In summary, this does not appear to be a strongly educationally functional school aligned around the delivery of the EGRS. The EGRS programme is limited to a couple of isolated people and the rest of the school seems almost unaware of their activity. The principal knows that there are problems in coverage and in performance but feels unable to do much about them. This is essentially common to most of the principals interviewed, but some genuinely still do try to make an operational difference to problems and are actively engaged, even if to varying degrees of effectiveness, in generating the alignment of school staff around attempted solutions such as running more meaningful catch-up programmes.

6 School Case Studies: EGRS Language Programme Research

6.1 School A (Virtual Coach)

6.1.1 Teacher 1

The Grade 2 teacher showed a little reluctance to have an EFAL lesson observed as she said she had only just received the EGRS material for the term. This was her first day of teaching the new Term 4 material. She was concerned that she was already one week behind. Siswati was her primary language and she had taught for over 30 years, principally at this school. She was 61 years old and would soon retire.

Classroom

The classroom contained an unused smart board, projector and sliding white board but instead the teacher used an old-fashioned, large chalkboard balanced on two chairs. The unused equipment contrasted with the state of the classroom where floors were cracked and in disrepair with a single storage cupboard.

The classroom walls were print-rich with multilingual materials. There was a variety of posters in Siswati and English, from different publishers. Some of this was clearly older material, e.g. 'Molteno' phonics charts, 'Lectio' discussion posters (Figure 27).

Figure 27: Classroom of Teacher 1



Organisation of the materials in the classroom was evident and was a direct result of advice from the EGRS virtual coach according to the teacher. All the sets of exercise books were neatly stacked and sorted into cardboard boxes, which were clearly labelled. The EGRS material was in one corner of the classroom. This comprised:

- Different charts (yellow, green and blue) on the walls
- EGRS teacher materials in three shallow boxes, one box for each term
- Two boxes of sets of reading books
- One box of EGRS group readers
- One box of books from other publishers, previously acquired.

This good organisation (Figure 28) would make all lesson delivery easier, and EFAL lessons – and the EGRS programme – easier to manage.

Figure 28: Teaching materials well organised



There were some indications that the materials were not always used. Some of the EGRS readers were still in plastic wrappings and not sorted systematically, per title, so it seemed unlikely Group Guided Reading was taking place. This was confirmed by the teacher later. By contrast the other, older, published books were well used. The EGRS teacher boxes contained the EGRS Teacher Support Tool (Trackers) but the teacher said they *were for the teacher* and no-one (principal, HOD, DOE officials) asked to see them. Also, when the teacher used the EGRS word charts which were pinned up at the back of the class, the learners had to turn around and some had to change places. This was obviously a fairly uncommon event. Learners sat in pairs at old-fashioned desks and there was no ability grouping. On the teacher's desk was the EGRS tablet and materials for Term 4, Week 1, but in the plastic bag provided for new materials. The flash cards had been cut out but not pasted on cardboard, laminated or with pictures coloured in, as suggested in the lesson plans. They were also unsorted and the teacher shuffled through them all to find the flash cards she needed. This contrasted with the classroom organisation.

Lesson Observation

Daily Activities

Greetings

The teacher asked some learners their names and ages. When a learner didn't answer she prompted him or her in Siswati. Most were able to answer in English. After about five learners had answered she told the class they were doing *Term 4 Week 1*, revealing that the learners were aware of the sequence being followed in EFAL lessons.

Song

The teacher told them to listen to the song which she played on the tablet, walking around so that everyone could hear the music and words. She played it three times and then asked the learners to sing it. The words were fairly indistinct

and very fast and the learners could not say the words from listening but did copy the tune. Realising this, the teacher then said each sentence in the song slowly, and they repeated the words three times before she played the song again. This time, more learners joined in. The learners would definitely know the song if she repeated this routine each day and they enjoyed learning it.

Vocabulary

The teacher introduced the vocabulary by asking the learners what they were scared of. She said this in English and Siswati and acted out the word, 'scared'. The learners gave interesting individual answers: *a monster, a snake, a spider*, and then various animals, *a lion, a tiger, an elephant, a rhino*, etc. They all seemed keen to answer in English.

'Question of the day'

The teacher then asked the 'question of the day' about spiders and snakes. *Are you scared of spiders or are you scared of snakes?* There was initially no response to the oral question so she repeated the question, translated it, and then wrote *snake* and *spider* on the board. She asked who was afraid of spiders and repeated this four times until three learners stood up. A '3' was written on the chalkboard under *spider*. Then she asked who was afraid of snakes, miming *afraid*. The rest of the class stood up. She did the sums in her head and wrote 34 on the board. She asked if there were more or fewer learners who were afraid of spiders. She asked this again but the learners didn't understand the question and there was no answer.

Overall this section of the lesson worked very well. The learners were engaged and the teacher very confident and both seemed to enjoy the familiar procedure. The tablet was used effectively as a prompt and to ensure the learning of the song. Code-switching was used to ensure understanding of the new words and repetition was used for reinforcement. The procedure followed was a simplified version of that in the lesson plan but despite this, perhaps because of the reinforcement, this part of the lesson took nearly 20 minutes although only 10 minutes is allocated in the lesson plan.

Sight Words, Phonemic Awareness, Phonics

The next part of the lesson began with the teacher and one learner handing out plastic sleeve books filled with the EGRS Homework Sheets. The handing out was not streamlined.

The sight words were on the Homework Sheet. The teacher read all the sight words and the learners repeated the words after her in a way that sounded more like a rhythm than a meaningful activity. Few finger-pointed to the words on the sheet and there was no explanation of the meaning of the words. The learners repeated the words in unison three times but it was aural rather than visual recognition of words. (The teacher pointed out to me that on her tablet there was no mention of sight words, and this was probably an error in the lesson plans. She also looked for the sight word flash cards in the plastic packet, but couldn't find them.) She asked a few learners to read the sight words on previous pages, but not all the learners could read them.

The phonically regular words were not distinguished from the sight words and were dealt with similarly to the sight words. Pronunciation was not entirely accurate (*seedy, weedy*). The words were repeated three times in unison from the Homework Sheet. The teacher then placed the phonic flash cards one by one on the labelled blue chart. Each time a word was placed onto the chart it was again repeated three times by the teacher and the learners. After doing this with four words, the teacher explained, *We are doing the ee sound* and repeated the sound in isolation four times.

This section was not as well taught as the first section and should have taken five minutes but lasted approximately 15 minutes. The problem may have been that there were too many words provided, too much rhythmic repetition and a lack of prior lesson preparation. The procedures described on page 20 of the *Teacher's Book* were approximated but there was no attempt to define the words or use them in sentences. However, the learners were exposed to both sight words and phonically regular words and some learners evidently assimilated the new learning.

Shared Reading

The 30-minute EFAL 'Monday' lesson had by then taken 45 minutes but the teacher said she would like to show me Shared Reading, which is a Tuesday lesson. The EGRS big book used was more a Read-Aloud book than a Shared

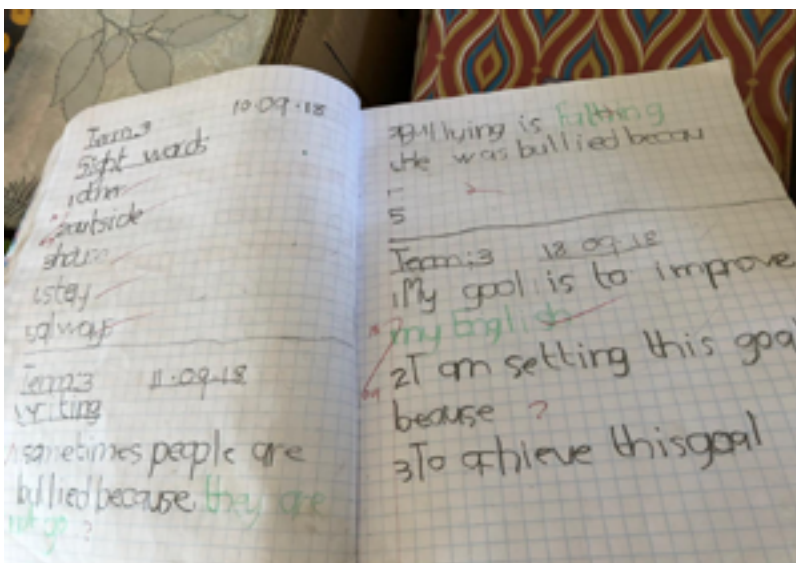
Reading book because of the size of the print. The teacher read it aloud sentence by sentence but because of the level of the language, the learners weren't able to follow the story aurally. The teacher made good use of code-switching and by walking around the class could show individual learners the cover, and some pictures, but it was unclear if the learners understood the story, and certainly no reading skills development was taking place. The lesson lasted 15 minutes rather than the prescribed 10 minutes.

Book Analysis

Learners' Workbooks

Three sample workbooks were seen, and, unusually for this level, the paper was squared. They were up to date and had between 25 and 29 pages written on, all dated, with headings, and all marked. There were between 64 and 68 completed exercises. This quantity of writing was remarkable for a Grade 2 class. The sentences were very similar across the three books but the learners illustrated the sentences meaningfully. Figure 29 shows a unique sentence, only in this learner's book, so the writing was not copied from the board. There were also weekly spelling tests which had been marked. There were no phonics activities in the books but the phonics words formed part of the spelling tests so had been memorised.

Figure 29: Learner's workbook



DBE Workbook

The learners had begun on page 1 and worked page by page through the book. Approximately 21 pages had been completed sequentially, and there were approximately 24 exercises completed. The answers to the exercises showed individual knowledge and errors. They had all been marked and dated by the teacher. However, by working sequentially, the vocabulary and themes did not align with EGRS. The teacher said that the District Official was interested in the work in these books and had commended her for using the books systematically.

The Programme from the Teacher's point of View

The teacher was extremely positive about the EGRS programme. She said she *knew what to do each day* and that it *saved time* and *added quality* to her teaching. She said it made lesson preparation much easier than before, when lesson plans had been difficult and time-consuming to develop using the EFAL CAPS document and then the DBE books.

The teacher appreciated that the programme came with all the materials she would need to implement the EFAL lessons. She said all she had to do was *cut the flash cards out*. She also mentioned the usefulness of the colour-coded charts. Regarding the group readers she said she only used them for independent reading, and did not do Group Guided Reading. Independent reading was only for the learners who finished their work early so was used as a differentiation strategy.

The teacher was very enthusiastic about the tablet as a mode of delivery. She had learned to use it quickly and easily, despite not having used a tablet before. She had also attended all the training workshops and found them very useful. She mentioned a problem with assessment and how it had been addressed at the last workshop. The EGRS virtual trainer was mentioned as being very helpful and approachable.

Overall the teacher felt the learners were reading, writing and speaking *more English than before*, when she had used the DBE books to structure her EFAL programme. She said the DBE books contained *too much grammar* and didn't *tell you how to teach*. More importantly, she felt the learners looked forward to English lessons now and participated enthusiastically, which they hadn't done before.

Analysis

The teacher was an experienced and competent teacher, with a good level of English, who managed the learners well. She used the EGRS programme to deliver a rich EFAL programme in a systematic, cumulative way despite a number of adaptations. She had clearly learned new teaching skills from using the programme.

The tablet was used constantly and effectively as a prompt to guide her EFAL lesson and to teach the English song. However, there were signs that her preparation for the EFAL lesson was minimal and the tablet relied on heavily.

The two aspects of the programme which were privileged seemed to be the daily activities and writing frames. Group Guided Reading, Shared Reading and homework reading were not taking place and there were no written phonics activities although class reading and independent reading were evident, so some teaching of reading was taking place. The sight words and phonic words were being learned as spelling words, which meant the phonic pattern was being learned incidentally rather than explicitly. Although the meaning of the vocabulary words was carefully explained, the meaning of the phonics and sight words was not provided.

The procedures in the lesson plans had all been simplified or adapted and some steps were left out, but even so the teacher seemed unable to complete the activities in the time allocated because of the number of activities and number of words to be taught. This may lead to less coverage of the curriculum overall.

The materials supplied by EGRS were all being used, but not always as intended. The teacher used the big book as a read-aloud text, which increased the learners' oral vocabulary and knowledge of English sentence patterns but not their reading. The group readers were used as independent readers for early finishers, and the Homework Sheets for class reading. The teacher was using the DBE workbooks as a separate programme.

Some good organisational skills had been learned from the EGRS programme regarding classroom management, but some needed more development, e.g. preparing and keeping flash cards filed and handing out books.

6.2 School B (On-site Coach)

6.2.1 Teacher 2

Although a very well-kept, outwardly well-organised school, it was clear that there was a serious problem. The principal was absent and our visit 'unexpected'. After talking to the HOD, who was new to the school, we were referred to the Grade 1 teacher. The Grade 2 teacher had been on sick leave since January and a substitute teacher, paid by the SGB, had been teaching the Grade 2s until recently when the funds to pay her ran out. Since then the Grade 2s had been split between the Grade 1 class and the Grade 3 class.

The substitute Grade 2 teacher had attended the Term 1, 2 and 3 EGRS training but the Grade R teacher had attended the Term 4 training the previous week. She was given the Grade 2 materials for Term 4, which she brought back to the school and gave to the principal, unopened where they still lay, unused, in her office.

The Grade 1 teacher who had half the Grade 2 class had Siswati as a primary language and had taught for over eight years, after a three year teaching qualification. She was Intermediate Phase-trained but was given a Grade 1 class when joining this school. She had attended the EGRS training the year before. She now taught a combined class of 44 Grade 1s and 22 Grade 2s.

Classroom

The Grade 2 classroom was empty (Figure 30) because the learners were in other classes but it was somewhat organised, presumably the work of the substitute teacher. The workbooks were sorted into clearly labelled cardboard boxes and the walls were print-rich with a variety of posters in Siswati and English.

Figure 30: Classroom of Teacher 2



The EGRS Grade 2 EFAL material was a little disorganised, which was unsurprising given that there wasn't a teacher. The group readers were in loose piles. There was an additional Rally to READ box of group readers, big books and *Teacher's Books* on a READ stand. These books had clearly been used. The EGRS *Teacher's Books* for Terms 1 and 2 were in the pile of books, but not the trackers, although a NECT tracker was visible on one pile (Figure 31).

Figure 31: Materials in the classroom



For the lesson, the 22 Grade 2 learners from the teacher's class were brought in. The teacher brought her own vocabulary charts from the Grade 1 classroom. She put the *Teacher's Book* on the desk together with a beautifully organised file of vocabulary flash cards.

While she prepared, the learners sang *Five Little Pigs* with actions. One learner explained what a pig was and what mud was (related to the song) showing that they had had exposure to English. Most were able to give their names and ages, but some could not.

Lesson Observation

Daily Activities

Greetings

The teacher greeted the learners as in the lesson plan procedure and asked other questions: *Hello, How are you?* and mentioned learners by name. After greeting about six learners she read the theme, *In the garden* on a flash card and placed it on one of the vocabulary charts. She ran her finger underneath the words as for Shared Reading.

Song

The teacher told the learners to listen to the first line of the song about a goat and then sing it. She said the words, rather than sang the song, and did actions. This was repeated and the second time the learners were able to join in. This was repeated with the second line. The teacher then abruptly stopped and said she would teach them the next two lines the following day, which is the procedure described in the lesson plans.

Vocabulary

The teacher asked for examples of vegetables. A few examples were provided by the learners after some prompting. The teacher put up pictures of tomatoes and potatoes and worked with the two words, reading them and asking learners to read them. She used the words in sentences, *This is a ... ; That is a ...* and asked individual learners to come to the front and say the sentences.

'Question of the day'

The teacher said it was time for the 'question of the day' which was *What do you like to eat?* She wrote the question on the board, acted it out and then drew two columns on the board as in the lesson procedure. She called six learners up to choose which they liked to eat. Each had to come up, say the sentence and then tick a column. The class had to repeat: *He likes ...* As per the lesson plan, the teacher then asked if there were more or fewer learners who liked one of the vegetables. The teacher was obviously familiar with the procedures in the daily activity part of the lesson plans and implemented each step exactly as described in the *Teacher's Book*. The lesson was conducted in the time prescribed. Using the programme the previous year had made her teaching seamless and efficient. The teacher used English throughout the lesson with no code-switching except when disciplining a learner. However the teacher was clearly frustrated with the situation, teaching Grade 1 and Grade 2s together. She stopped the lesson before moving on to phonemic awareness.

Book Analysis

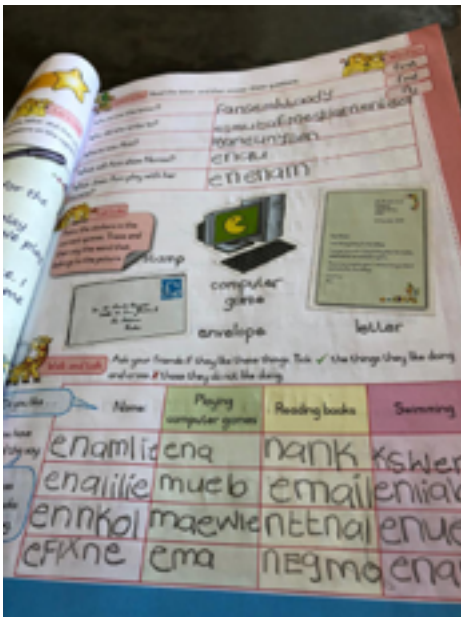
Learners' Workbooks

The workbooks were up to date to the end of Term 3, when the substitute teacher had left, and had 23 or 24 pages written on, all dated and with headings, and most marked. There was approximately one exercise per page. Some additional pages were used for assessment sheets – taken from the EGRS lesson plans – and pasted into the book. These showed what assessments the learners had done. The work showed that the substitute teacher had been working through the Grade 2 lesson plans systematically and thoroughly, and included written phonic work (the phonic 'flowers'), spelling tests, and Writing Frame work. The sentences in the three books were similar but there were appropriate individual illustrations showing that the work was meaningful.

DBE Workbook

This work had been started on page 1 and the learners were working page by page through the book. Approximately 49 pages had been completed sequentially rather than following EGRS directives. The answers to the exercises were evidently not copied from the board, and showed individual knowledge and errors. One learner had written Siswati words in many exercises (Figure 32). There were few signs of marking and it seemed these books were seldom checked but frequently used.

Figure 32: Learner's workbook



The Programme from the Teacher's Point of View

The Intermediate Phase-trained Grade 1 teacher was extremely positive about the lesson plans and said that before the lesson plans, EFAL had been a *disaster* to teach as she didn't know where to start or precisely what to do, particularly regarding oral lessons. She had used the DBE book as a scheme of work.

The teacher had been to the EGRS training and said this was very useful. Importantly, she said she also attended cluster meetings twice a month, with teachers from NECT schools and the district officials, and that any further queries were dealt with there. It was evident EGRS and NECT were aligned. A community of practice group is not part of the EGRS programme and was not seen in the other schools. The affirmation of having a community of practice group was interesting.

She explained that coach visits to the school had mainly consisted of the teacher presenting a lesson. She was not sure what she had actually learned on these visits but the coach had checked her tracker. The teacher said the materials and resources that had been provided were as useful as the lesson plans and that one without the other would not have worked.

Overall, she felt the learners' oral English was at a higher level than in previous years. More than that, she said the learners really enjoyed English lessons now.

She used the DBE book as suggested in the EGRS programme, which contrasted with the substitute teacher who had been using the DBE book page by page.

The teacher said she did not do Group Guided Reading but did do Shared Reading. She said the size of the writing in the big books was problematic and she would have preferred to use the READ big books.

The teacher's main problems with the programme were the prescribed times in the routines and the routines themselves. She said the time allocated was insufficient. She suggested that only one skill be focused on each day, rather than a number of short segments. She felt this would have been more realistic, for example 'oral' on one day, 'reading' on another. Despite her suggestions, her own use of time was excellent in the lesson.

The teacher had found the tracker useful and had pencilled in the ticks in 2017 so that she could reuse it in 2018. She also found the assessment aspect of the EGRS Programme plans very helpful.

Analysis

The evaluation of the implementation of the Grade 2 EFAL programme was difficult because of the absence of a teacher but from the Grade 2 workbooks, it seemed the programme had been followed systematically for the first three terms. The learners were doing almost daily written exercises including phonics exercises, writing lists of spelling words, or completing Writing Frames. The learners had been assessed through regular spelling tests and other assessments prescribed by EGRS. The quality and quantity of work was very good for this EFAL level.

The teacher presented the daily activities in a confident, well-paced way which could be because this was her second year of implementing the EGRS programme. She used English throughout, followed the steps of the core methodologies accurately and seldom needed to look at the *Teacher's Book*. This suggests that the implementation of the programme could improve year by year.

The circumstances of the school suggested additional roles for the coach, apart from lesson observations. The coach might have helped the teachers integrate the READ reading materials into the EGRS programme and could also have alerted district officials to the problem of no Grade 2 teacher (although this may indeed have been done).

A final observation is that it is interesting that the teacher found the NECT-led communities of practice useful for implementing the EGRS programme.

6.3 School C (On-site Coach)

6.3.1 Teacher 3

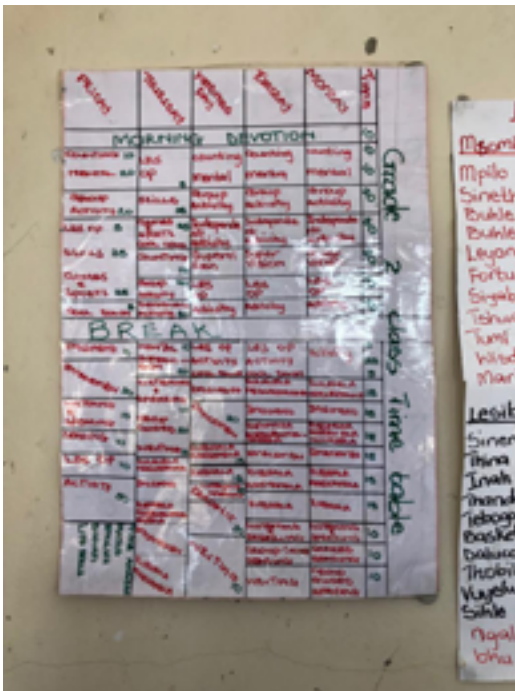
The school was clearly well run, with the principal present and expecting our visit. The impact of a hands-on principal and HOD on the implementation of the EGRS programme was evident. The principal accompanied us to the Grade 2 classrooms. Both teachers had Siswati as a primary language. Teacher 4 was older than Teacher 3 and far more experienced but both seemed very excited to demonstrate a lesson, possibly because demonstrating to their coach had been a positive experience. Both were Intermediate Phase-trained teachers.

The younger teacher did a lesson demonstration first. She told me the coach demonstrated lessons at the workshops every term and she was clear about the procedures. She was beginning Week 2 of the Term 4 programme and so this was a 'Monday'.

Classroom

The teacher's classroom was fairly well organised. Near the teacher's desk was a complicated timetable without EFAL listed (Figure 33) but there was a smaller, separate, EFAL timetable near her desk.

Figure 33: Timetable



On the desk was the EGRS *Teacher's Book*, open at the correct page, a file containing the illustrated vocabulary theme words from Terms 1, 2, and 3 in plastic sleeves, and the EGRS tracker, completed up to date. There was a roll of sticky tape ready to stick the flash cards onto the chalkboard. In other words, this teacher was prepared for the lesson.

Three EGRS charts were on the wall. The charts showed the previous week's picture vocabulary theme words, the phonics words for the week and the Writing Frame. There were three shallow, labelled boxes for EGRS sight words, phonics words and the vocabulary words. Workbooks were in neat piles and there was a Rally to READ book box. The EGRS big books were kept in this box together with the READ big books and the sets of group readers from READ and EGRS (Figure 34). This indicated some integration of the programmes as all the books were well used. The overall organisation suggested that the EFAL programme was implemented regularly and systematically.

Figure 34: Classroom of Teacher 3



Lesson Observation

Daily Activities

Greetings

The teacher did the greeting as described in the lesson plans. Most learners could answer well and were eager to participate. She also asked one learner about the weather. The greeting took approximately three minutes, which was the recommended time, and the learners loved participating.

Song

The teacher had written the week's song on a piece of paper which was displayed on the board, but the font was too small for the learners to read so the purpose of this was unclear. She read the sentences aloud line by line: *take a deep breath in*, saying the line twice with the learners joining in. She did actions and the learners copied her. The pronunciation was not always correct (beath instead of breath) and there was no tune (it was learned as a poem), but the learners were introduced to all seven lines and this took about five minutes. The learners would have remembered the words if they were repeated daily as suggested.

Vocabulary

The teacher referred back to the previous week's words and reread them, which was good practice, before introducing the new vocabulary words. She misunderstood *cry* (more like 'scream') and *shake* (shake hands instead of shake with fear). The latter was a materials error as the picture supplied, of two hands shaking, would have caused this misunderstanding. The teacher focused on aural or oral recognition of words, rather than the written words, but used the words in oral sentences. Each word had an action and the learners enjoyed the new learning and copied the actions.

'Question of the day'

The teacher later commented that the learners got very excited about the 'question of the day'. The learners recited the words 'question of the day' when the teacher announced it. The question was, *What happens when you feel afraid?* The teacher had written the question and three options on the board: *cry*, *shake* or *scream*. This was in line with the lesson steps.

One row of learners was brought up to answer the question and gave the answer in the first person. Each made an X to indicate their choice under the teacher's guidance. This was repeated by the learners in the second row, and so on. The meaning of *shake* had now changed to 'shiver', which was closer to the intended meaning. The lesson revealed the importance of quality control of the materials supplied. The class grew a little restless with the constant repeats of each learner's choice in the third person. The teacher ignored their restlessness. The teacher then asked what *most* learners did and the class counted the X's written by the learners. The learners enjoyed counting and calculating the answer.

The teacher began the lesson at a good pace but the lesson dragged a little towards the end and, determined to do every step, she was unable to stop when the learners became disengaged. This revealed a disadvantage of following scripted lesson plans rigidly, without responding to the learners. The last part lasted 15 minutes, rather than the 10 minutes allocated. However, some learning was taking place even though it was evident that the teacher's own English skills were lacking.

Sight Words and Phonemic Awareness or Phonics

The learners were a little tired as it was getting closer to break and the teacher struggled to hold their attention. She introduced the *oo* letter sound but called it /*au*/ rather than /*oooo*/. She asked the learners which words they knew with the sound but no-one knew any words. She then taught a number of words with an *oo* spelling pattern by showing a flash card and saying the word. Generally, the *oo* was mispronounced in all the words except for *moon*. The teacher didn't explain the meaning of the words except for *moon* and *pool*. *Pool* was misunderstood as *pull* and the

teacher did actions to show *pull*. Some of the words were difficult to explain, e.g. *loop* and *soon*, but others would have been easy to show, e.g. *tool*, *stool*. This phonic pattern was only learned incidentally and the correct pronunciation not taught. This lesson was less successful than the earlier one and the teacher's lack of English phonic knowledge and pronunciation evident.

Shared or Group Reading

The 30-minute EFAL 'Monday' lesson had focused on oral language. The teacher now handed out flip files containing the Homework Sheets, which she explained do not go home and are used in class for independent reading. She told the learners to read the sheets independently. The handing out was very slow and the learners were talking and seemed to open their homework books at random pages. Few learners attempted to actually read the Homework Sheets.

The teacher had a handwritten list of four learners for group work. She spread a blanket on the tiles at the front of the class, took the big book (not Group Readers) and began to read to the four, rather than letting them read. She read for 15 minutes to these learners, who, even though they were sitting close to her, could not see the text, owing to the size of the font. The learners were asked questions but did not really seem able to answer. This lesson was not successful as it was neither Shared Reading nor Group Guided Reading. By then the rest of the class was making quite a noise, making it difficult to hear the responses.

This was less successful than the oral lesson and little reading took place by the learners, either in the class or in the group. The number of learners in the group was problematic for a large class (four out of 50) which meant that the majority of the class would not have exposure to the big book in each theme. It was also unclear if the teacher was doing Shared Reading, Group Guided Reading or reading aloud.

Book Analysis

Learners' Workbooks

The notebooks in this school were Irish lined and 39 or 40 exercises had been completed, taking 23 to 26 pages, again showing almost daily writing, significant for Grade 2 EFAL. The writing was well organised, always dated and headed with the day of the week, and always marked and corrected. The work showed that it had been written on the board and copied, but it had been done carefully, the handwriting was very neat and there were individual illustrations. Spelling tests were written at the back of the book, also dated and marked and there seemed to be a test for every week of school.

DBE Workbook

All the pages up to page 21 were completed showing that this was used sequentially to some extent but, encouragingly, further particular pages were completed in all three sample books. These pages were related to the themes in the EGRS and were recommended in the lesson plans. They included pages 24–25, 26–27, 33, 35–36, 43, 55.

The Programme from the Teacher's Point of View

The teacher was extremely positive about the programme, particularly with regard to her own English competence. She said she had spoken little English before the programme and using the EGRS programme had improved her language skills.

Before, her EFAL teaching had been based entirely on the DBE workbooks. Now she followed the EGRS *Teacher's Book*. The teacher filled in the tracker each day and completed every lesson as directed. She could not say that any one aspect of the programme was more or less important: the lesson plans, coaching and resources were all helpful. She said the programme had impacted positively on the learners and they looked forward to English lessons and even reminded her when it was time for English. Parents had also commented on their children's improved English skills. She said the learners read more now and sometimes read in assembly. Her only difficulty with the programme was keeping to the prescribed times.

She explained that when the coach visited, she observed EGRS lessons and also checked the trackers. The DBE officials who visited the school also observed lessons and checked the trackers, as did the HOD, who attended the EGRS training with the teachers.

Analysis

This depth of accountability regarding the programme was unique at this school and this may account for the almost rigid way in which the EFAL lesson procedure was followed, even when the learners had become restless. The programme was being followed faithfully and all activities tracked.

Because of her background, the teacher's level of English was low, which led to some misdirected aspects of her teaching. However, the oral activities and writing activities were done very well, with written phonics activities, spelling lists and tests done regularly. Homework reading was not being done and Group Guided Reading or Shared Reading was not done effectively. With the new words, neither the teacher nor the learners had much understanding of what all the words meant.

Regarding resources, the word charts were evidently being used regularly. Management and organisational skills could have improved the EFAL programme, e.g. keeping the class meaningfully occupied during group reading, handing out books efficiently, and keeping the classroom tidier.

Overall, however, the learners were being taught phonics patterns, albeit implicitly; they were writing English sentences and they were learning English spelling. The learners were also speaking some English and doing activities in English daily and an EFAL programme was being delivered.

6.3.2 Teacher 4

The second Grade 2 teacher at this school also had a problem with English. She had taught Siswati as a subject for six years in the Intermediate Phase before joining the FP, and this was the language she knew best. Like the first teacher, she felt that the programme had improved her English. She also had an EFAL timetable near her desk; her groups, given the names of fruit, were displayed; her *Teacher's Book* was open; her flash cards prepared, and her EGRS word charts were displayed (Figure 35). Her vocabulary theme word file was beautifully organised and the tracker up to date.

She had been teaching for 18 years and was clearly an experienced teacher who was able to manage her class very well, which contrasted with Teacher 3.

Figure 35: Materials on display



Classroom

This was an exceptionally organised classroom with very little clutter. There was a corner set aside for EGRS material. The walls were print-rich with various vocabulary posters. Exercise books were covered and sorted into labelled boxes. There was a Rally to READ box containing both the READ and EGRS big books and group readers. There were also shallow, labelled boxes with the laminated flash cards for phonics, sight words and vocabulary for the term.

Lesson Observation

Daily Activities

Greetings

The teacher did the greeting, which took approximately three minutes. She had excellent control and managed the class well.

Song

The teacher made the song fun, like the first teacher not singing it, but saying it as a poem, doing actions and using expressions. It was neatly printed onto an A1 size sheet of paper and the learners could see the words because of the size of the print. In effect it was Shared Reading. The learners said each line three times after her as echo-reading.

Vocabulary

The teacher had well-prepared, laminated, flash cards and introduced the theme vocabulary words *shake* (with the same error of a 'handshake' picture), *scream* and *frown* (pronounced frone). Her pronunciation was better than the first teacher's and she acted out each new word. The emphasis was on understanding, rather word structure of these words.



'Question of the day'

The teacher explained it was 'question of the day' and repeated, *What is it?* to which the learners answered, 'question of the day'. She wrote the question on the board in beautiful handwriting and then read it with the learners. She also explained the three options clearly, acted out the words and got the learners to join in when she read the words.

Her groups had the names of fruit and the 'oranges' were called up to do the activity. The teacher insisted on sentences as they answered the question and their answers were reported by the others ('she said that ...'). This took about 10 minutes so the learners became a little bored as they had in the classroom next door. What caused a lot of excitement was when the teacher asked *How many? Count and write the number.* Again full sentences were expected.

The daily activities were efficiently and very well done by this teacher and the learners evidently enjoyed the lesson. The pacing was good and new learning was meaningful.

Phonemic Awareness

The long *oo* sound was dealt with, mainly by sound, and also mispronounced as /au/. The words were repeated after the teacher, and she taught the phonic pattern implicitly by showing flash cards. She also explained many of the words through demonstrations or by using them in sentences, rather than code-switching.

This lesson was also taught at a good pace, and the steps of the lesson plan followed precisely. The teacher did struggle with pronunciation but the lesson went well and the learners participated actively.

Group Guided Reading

A rolled up mat was produced and laid out in the Reading Corner, which was a labelled space near the Rally to READ box. The class was settled with a DBE exercise. The learners had to read a text and complete a comprehension piece about an invitation to a party. This was unrelated to the EGRS theme but was suggested in the lesson plan book as an additional activity. The teacher made sure they had all got the correct page. It took 15 minutes to prepare for Guided Reading, whereas Group Guided Reading on a Monday is allocated five minutes.

The seven learners who comprised the 'oranges' group were called out again. While the teacher settled the class, the learners began reading their EGRS book in pairs (*Sally's Bike*, a READ book). They read very well on their own. They appeared to be good readers and this was confirmed by the teacher who said it was her top group. The teacher then came to the group and with a long pointer began pointing to some of the previous week's sight words, which were on charts high up on the wall (necessitating the pointer). A shallow box of sight words was nearby and she picked out some of these to revise too.

The learners first read the book in unison and then each read a page one by one. As the learners read, the teacher commented on words left out and on the volume of their reading (*Read louder*). Some lost their place when it was time for them to read. The teacher then worked with the text calling out words for the learners to find. They loved being asked to find words in the text and matching them to the word chart by using the pointer.

Meanwhile the class – learners with a variety of pens and pencils – was clearly uninterested in the DBE activity and could definitely not work independently of the teacher. No-one was able to do the set work although a few did fill in random pages after 10 minutes with prompting from the teacher in the Reading Corner. No meaningful learning appeared to be taking place.

This Group Guided Reading lesson was well done compared to the first teacher's group reading and in the group real learning and reading practice was taking place. The group read the book and also revised sight words. The teacher's focus in Group Guided Reading was purely on reading fluency and not on understanding but the learners were getting individual attention, one of the purposes of Guided Reading.

Book Analysis

Learners' Workbooks

These notebooks were wide-lined and about 38 to 40 exercises had been done, taking 26 pages, showing almost daily writing. The writing was well organised, always dated, with the day of the week, and invariably marked and corrected. The DBE had stamped the books and the HOD had signed them. The writing was often very similar but there was some individuality and the learners' own words had sometimes been used to complete sentences in the writing frames. There were lots of drawings, neatly done and showing that the writing was understood. The handwriting was neat and mirrored the teacher's own, neat writing. Spelling tests were written at the back of the book, also dated and marked and there seemed to be a text for every week. All the books were exemplary.

DBE Workbook

All the pages up to page 21 were completed showing that this was used systematically but mainly sequentially. However particular pages had also been completed. These single pages related to the themes in the EGRS.

The Programme from the Teacher's Point of View

The teacher was very proud of her programme implementation. Before EGRS, she said she had worked from the DBE book only and there was little English spoken in the class. Now she spoke English, the learners spoke English and the EFAL lessons were very productive. She believed the learners were communicating better, reading and writing more English and this had been commented on by the parents and principal.

The teacher felt she had also learned two new instructional strategies, shared and Group Guided Reading, and had learned to organise and preserve her resources. She used the EGRS resources daily and said she looked after them so that she could use them the following year.

The teacher said the role of the coach was crucial and that the coach's teaching demonstrations had been important to the development of her practice. She valued the coach's ongoing support and feedback. The coach always checked her tracker and she filled in her tracker daily, *so I don't forget*, and this, like the first teacher's, was checked by the HOD, the principal and district official.

The teacher's only concern was with timing. Although she commented that *time was short*, she moved her own lessons along at a good pace and was up to date with the programme.

Analysis

The teacher was very competent and was implementing the EFAL programme thoroughly and faithfully. The EGRS programme seemed to have given her confidence in delivering good EFAL lessons and the programme was definitely showing results in the learners' language skills. It was the integration of the lesson plans and resources, together with school-based and coaching support, and the teacher's own industriousness, which ensured this success.

The Homework Sheets were only used in class, for class reading, meaning that there was no homework reading but that reading development was taking place, and so this was the most 'balanced' of the programmes seen up to this point as all four language skills were being developed. The DBE book remained a 'filler' rather than being used for serious work in this class, but the additional material in the classroom, the READ group readers, had been integrated successfully.

The teacher would have benefited from some pronunciation help but had clearly benefited from organisational help because her classroom was bright and print-rich and everything she needed was to hand.

6.4 School D (Virtual Coach)

6.4.1 Teacher 5

This school was well maintained and the principal was present. The Grade 2 teacher was excited to see us and very enthusiastic about the programme. She was an experienced teacher, having taught for 30 years, and said that the EGRS programme was *the best thing that had happened in her entire career*. She spoke excellent English and was confident and professional in her approach.

The teacher had been to the EGRS workshops and is an active part of a virtual group created by Gina, the virtual coach. She had won one of Gina's competitions, for the best classroom, and posted videos of her teaching for other teachers to see.

Classroom

The classroom was beautifully organised, neat, tidy and clean, but more than that, it was full of stimulating materials and not 'window dressed' as everything had a purpose.

The learners sat in groups, the only school at which this happened. On each group's table there was a colourful picture with the group's name, all common flowers. There was also a 'ruler holder' made from a yoghurt tub and containing six rulers; a crayon-filled ice-cream box, a pencil tin with six sharp pencils in it for each group and an eraser and sharpener in a tub. Each group had the same equipment (Figure 36).

Figure 36: Classroom of Teacher 5



The group members' names and the day on which they did group reading were displayed on charts near the group readers. The book box showed EGRS and other group readers sorted and displayed. The teacher said she had found the other books by looking in all the old storerooms and classrooms. She integrated them with the EGRS-provided books. She explained that they were all used as the learners were reading well and wanted more and more to read. The organisation and thoughtfulness were exceptional (Figure 37).

Figure 37: Exceptional organisation



The walls contained the supplied EGRS charts and other colourful charts. Learners' artwork was also put up, and this was the only school where this was seen. Mobiles made by the learners hung from the ceiling and artwork hung from lines across the class. All the exercise books were in boxes or in neat piles on homemade shelves made from planks and bricks (Figure 38). Furniture, doors and windows were labelled and the EGRS word charts easily accessible near the door.

Figure 38: Colourful walls and neat shelves



The front of the class had been arranged to allow room for a carpet where all the learners could sit for carpet work, again the only sample school where this was seen. Overall this was a classroom that would not have been out of place in any more privileged, urban school, anywhere in South Africa.

Lesson Observation

Daily Activities

The learners were sitting on the carpet but went back to their desks in a quiet and orderly way.

Greetings

The teacher greeted three of the learners in the prescribed way. The learners responded enthusiastically.

Song

The teacher then revised the word *breathe* (correctly pronounced) and sang the song, using the tablet as background music. She sang it again, with the learners this time, doing actions with them. They all loved the music and joined in enthusiastically. This took two minutes.

Vocabulary

The teacher referred to the big book read the previous week. She asked learners if they remembered the little boy and why he was worried. The learners had evidently understood the story, and understood the question, and many put up their hands to answer. Those who answered were praised and called 'stars' although the teacher needed to correct some *he/she* confusion. All corrections were done in a gentle way. She then introduced the new vocabulary, prepared on laminated cards, with coloured in illustrations (Figure 39). The teacher showed the words *cry*, *frown*, *scream* and *shake*. With *shake* she explained that the picture on the card was only one meaning of shake (the shaking hands picture) and that there was another, to shake with fear. She had identified the error in the resources. Each word was acted out, spelled, linked to a picture and repeated. Pronunciation was excellent.

Figure 39: Thoughtful preparation



'Question of the day'

The teacher then asked the 'question of the day' which was written on the board already and the learners read it together as Shared Reading. She wrote the possible answers on the board and called the 'roses' to answer. They had to say *I ... when I am scared*. Each learner was given positive reinforcement when they answered, corrections were sensitively made, and the class invited to repeat the sentence in the third person. The pace was good and the reinforcement meant the learners stayed involved.

Overall this section worked very well, the learners were engaged and the teacher was very confident and used positive reinforcement liberally. The learners were clearly in a safe space and were not afraid to try. Timing and pacing were exemplary and her teaching of the vocabulary theme words, aurally, visually and in a meaningful context, was excellent.

Sight Words, Phonemic Awareness, Phonics

The next section began with the sight words and phonic words being introduced in a similarly thorough way. Only two sight words and five phonic words, of the many supplied, were taught, whereas the other teachers had gone through all of them. This showed clear knowledge of pacing and the ability to select the most useful words. Each of the five phonic words was read, spelled and shown on a flash card, then used in a sentence, showing the aural, oral and context link. The target pattern letter sound was drawn out from the learners and had been underlined in a different colour. Learners were invited to use the words in sentences and were complimented if the sentence was reasonable. The teacher finally played a game where the learners had to find a word on the board, where the teacher had placed the words, and put it on the chart.

This was an example of 'quality first teaching' of the words to teach the words and the phonics pattern. The teacher had enough knowledge of phonics in English, and of teaching vocabulary, to make this thorough, focusing on quality rather than quantity.

Group Guided Reading

The teacher called the 'sunflowers' to the carpet and instructed the other group leaders to hand out the Homework Sheet flip files for their groups. They were told to turn to Term 4, Week 2, Day 1. The teacher supervised the handing out and reminded the learners to speak in *inside voices*. She checked they all had the correct page and then said they

could *mix*. The learners moved to work with a partner and were excited by this. They were told to sound the words on the page and then read the sentences underneath.

Meanwhile the teacher had the group readers entitled *My Family*. The teacher explained later that this was her weakest group. The teacher sat on the carpet with the learners at their level. She first revised some letters and sounds and then gave them little packets of small flash cards with sight words written on them. They each read the words they had and then showed their words to the others. They then opened their books and the teacher read while they listened. Elements of the pictures were discussed. Finally the group read together as a group, and then alone, page by page. The thorough scaffolding had been done so well they could read the book without difficulty and this will have increased their confidence as readers.

The paired work in the class was fairly successful but might have become disruptive. However, because pacing was perfect the group work finished after 15 minutes and the homework books were collected before the learners became bored.

The teacher is gifted and controls the class without shouting. She evidently prepares meticulously and takes great pride in her teaching. With group reading, she had ability groups and selected group readers to match reading levels. This is not EGRS policy but she explained that her top groups have finished all the EGRS group readers and she has moved on to Molteno Bridge readers. Similarly her weaker groups needed books at a lower level than those supplied. The teacher was the only one of two teachers in this sample to do Group Guided Reading with real insight and her matching of books to ability is the classic way of enacting this methodology (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

Book Analysis

Learners' Workbooks

The notebooks at this school were A3 sized and had been covered by the teacher in matching, colour-coded covers per subject. The workbooks were up to date and had between 49 and 56 pages written on, all dated and with headings and all marked. There were between 76 and 80 exercises. The quantity and quality was remarkable. The sentences in the Writing Frames were all individually answered with 'real' sentences composed by the learners. Corrections had been done in some cases. Everything was marked in an affirming way (Figure 40).

Phonic activities were done regularly. The spelling tests covered sight words and phonics words. There was a Departmental stamp in the books but no school stamp. The learners also had a Homework Book where they wrote their spelling words for the week.

Figure 40: Learners' marked work



DBE Workbook

Pages had been completed as required by the EGRS lesson plans, but some books had more work than others. The teacher confirmed that she used the books for extension work, and so quicker learners would complete more pages.

The Programme from the Teacher's Point of View

The teacher was extremely positive about the programme and explained that it had changed the way she taught. She said she had been *waiting 20 years for a programme like this* and had used it to draw up a similar programme in Siswati. The routine also inspired her to develop a weekly routine for numeracy. She had a timetable for each subject on her wall.

The parts of the programme she most valued were the lesson plans and her *darling*, the tablet. She also valued the pre-printed flash cards and other resources which helped her deliver the lessons. Using the tablet, she prepares over a weekend for each two-week theme, cutting out, laminating and filing the flash cards, colouring the pictures and learning the songs and pronunciation of words. She looks up meanings she is unsure of and practises the phonics. She said she likes the tablet because everything she needs is in one place and she can use it in class as a prompt. The teacher is in daily communication with the 'tablet group' of teachers and the virtual coach and finds this helpful and inspirational.

Previously, she had used the DBE books and OBE lesson plans and *scouted around* for ideas for EFAL but hadn't used a routine or the instructional strategies she uses now. She had never had regular spelling tests either. She explained that the learners write the phonics and sight words for spelling in special homework books. She checks their spelling and then they take them home each Wednesday to learn for Friday. The teacher said the improvement in phonics, spelling, vocabulary and writing was significant compared to previous years. She used the Homework Sheets in class for pair-work rather than homework.

The teacher said her own and the learners' English has improved and the learners love speaking English now. Her favourite part of the lesson is Group Guided Reading each day as she likes this time together with a small group of learners, and the learners all look forward to 'their' day with her. She does slightly different things with different ability groups, with more silent reading with the better groups. This is significant as most of the other teachers did Group Guided Reading in a perfunctory way, if at all.

Analysis

This teacher was, and is, an exceptional educator. She has fully engaged with the EGRS programme, and her comment reveals that she had always wanted to be a better teacher but was not sure how to go about it. She is the ideal candidate for the implementation of a structured, systematic programme such as EGRS, which includes new instructional strategies, assessment, resources and strong content. It has clearly empowered her and increased her confidence.

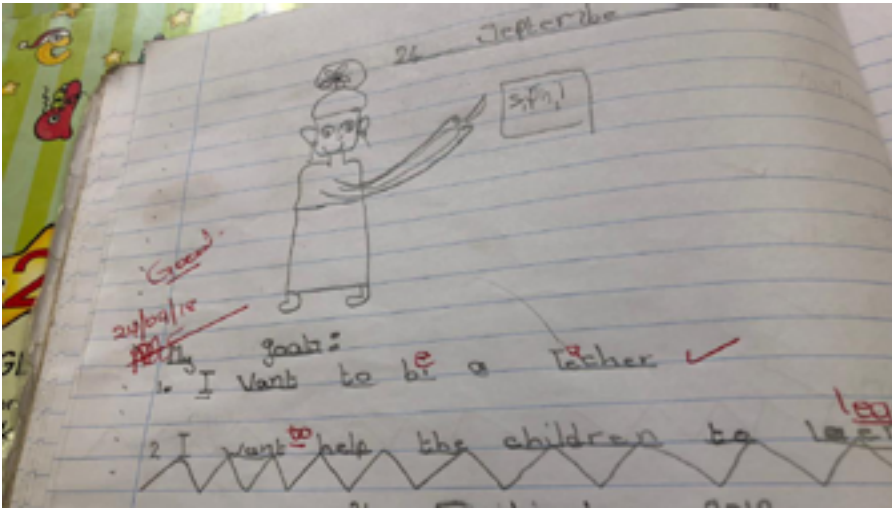
The virtual coach suited this teacher extremely well as she was a self-starter, but I suspect she would have done equally well with on-site coaching.

The content of the programme was being followed systematically, the routine had been understood and applied to other subjects, and the programme had revealed new organisation strategies. In her implementation, this teacher, like the previous one, seemed to be delivering a balanced programme and developing all four language skills in an integrated way.

All the materials supplied by EGRS were being used, but were integrated with other readers. The DBE books did not interfere with the programme but were used as an added resource. The tracker was used daily and this was the only teacher who filled in the Reflections section each day. Interestingly, the principal knew little of the programme and so there was little accountability. The teacher was evidently self-motivated.

It is not surprising that she had inspired at least one of her learners to follow in her footsteps. (See the illustrated sentence, *I want to be a teacher*, in Figure 41.)

Figure 41: Inspired by the teacher



6.5 School E (On-site Coach)

6.5.1 Teacher 6

This small school was located in a disused industrial complex. The principal had been recently appointed and was very hands-on but not au fait with the details of the EGRS intervention.

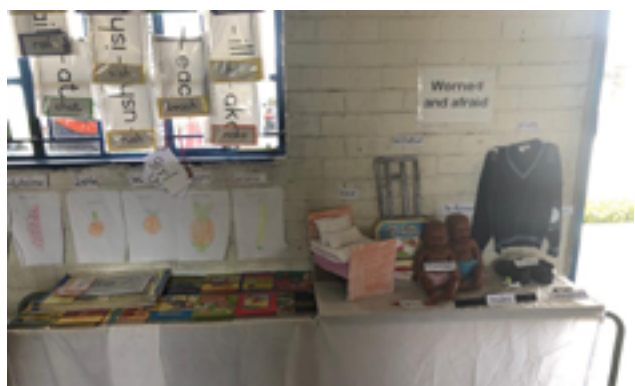
The Grade 2 teacher was very reluctant to have a lesson observed. She later explained she was Intermediate Phase trained and had been transferred to the school because of an incident at her previous school, in another province, and she was suffering from PTSD. Her class was the smallest in the sample, with only 27 learners.

The coach had been to her classroom twice in the last month as she was worried about the teacher's pacing. The teacher had missed the first EGRS workshop and the materials had been delivered to the wrong school so she had begun the year at a disadvantage. The principal said the coach had shown concern and helped the teacher catch up.

Classroom

The classroom was a little bare but there were security concerns at the school. The front wall held the chalkboard and the word charts, with words on them, but little else. However, near the teacher's desk on the side of the classroom there were sets of word family charts stuck onto the windows and a very interesting display table set up. The articles on the table related to the big book story. There was a jersey, a doll and a few other objects (Figure 42).

Figure 42: Classroom of Teacher 6



The exercise books were kept in the learners' school bags, again for security reasons, and, because of this, were not in good condition, with folded corners. There had been a number of arson attacks on the buildings in the past few months.

The EGRS material was organised into a file placed on the teacher's desk, but the lesson plans and flash cards were in the teacher's carry bag. A tracker wasn't seen although the teacher said she had one and the coach checked it but not the principal. She said the district official was mainly interested in the DBE workbook. The reading books were not visible but one set of group readers (the current set) had been placed on the teacher's desk. The learners sat in rows.

Lesson Observation

The learners had their school feeding scheme meal in the classroom and then went out to play. After 50 minutes the teacher called them back in and they sat at their desks.

Shared Reading

The teacher read the big book as a read-aloud. She attempted to do some Shared Reading activities but this was difficult given the size of the text. It had to be done by showing the book to two or three individual learners at a time and asking, *What is the first word? Second? Third?* Obviously no other learners could see what was happening. It became clear that the learners were not able to follow the story although the teacher tried to explain the main points without code-switching. This took 10 minutes.

This lesson had kept to the time allocated. The learners were learning but it was not clear if they had fully understood the story. It was difficult for the teacher to follow the steps in the lesson plan with the big book provided but she tried very hard.

Writing Frame

The teacher wrote the date and the sentence *I worried about _____* on the board. She asked the learners for their ideas. When none were forthcoming, she said, *not having [sic] new shoes*. She wrote a second sentence, *Zweli was worried about a new jersey*. The teacher said, *Remember this is my own ideas*. She asked, *What was Zweli worried about?* Learners gave various suggestions, based on the story, e.g. school fees, food, pencil, clothes, shoes. The teacher wrote these down. She said, *say it like a tortoise*, a reference to sounding out or encoding words written in the *Teacher's Book*.

The teacher instructed the learners to get out their books. She rubbed out the words and the date and wrote Writing Frame, leaving the sentence starters in place. Some learners didn't have their books, some didn't have pencils and some had blunt pencils. There was some noise and confusion and pencil sharpening before most of the class settled down. The teacher walked around and reminded them to underline the words they wrote.

The lesson was drawn out and the learners didn't seem to be sure of what to do with the writing. They had hardly begun writing when the teacher told them to put their books away and take out their flip files and read silently.

With writing, the teacher seemed to be following the lesson steps somewhat but lacked a deep understanding of the purpose of each step in the lesson plan. Her own English was not well developed and she struggled with her explanations of the vocabulary words.

Group Guided Reading

Because the teacher had begun silent reading the Group Guided Reading session could begin. However, the learners were all reading out aloud from different pages of the Homework Sheets or talking. Six learners were called up for Group Guided Reading. They stood in a row at the teacher's desk. They each read a page of the supplied reader, which unfortunately was at their frustrational level, so was halting and laboured. There was no scaffolding, they didn't listen to each other at all and they were not reading with comprehension. The teacher corrected them by asking them to reread a word and didn't help as they attempted to sound out a new word, making the reading very disjointed and slow. Unsuitable words, that should have been provided, were sounded out.

The teacher was trying hard but hadn't fully understood aspects of the Group Guided Reading lesson. The learners didn't enjoy the lesson. Reading at the learners' frustrational level and reading in a mechanistic way contrasted with some of the other Group Guided Reading lessons seen, showing how the same methodology can be implemented with more or less underpinning knowledge, and with different results.

Book Analysis

Learners' Workbooks

The teacher explained that some of these workbooks were the learners' second workbooks and the first ones were at home. Between 26 and 43 pages had been written on, beginning in June or August. They were all dated, with headings, and all marked. There were between 64 and 68 exercises. Writing Frames had been used each week but with little variation in the sentences. There were also weekly spelling tests comprising phonic words but no written phonic activities.

DBE Workbook

The learners had completed between four and 10 specific pages suggested by the EGRS programme. The answers to the exercises were evidently not copied from the board, and showed individual knowledge and errors. They had all been marked and dated by the teacher. The teacher said that when district officials came to the school, it was this DBE book they wanted to see.

The Programme from the Teacher's Point of View

The teacher was positive about the EGRS programme even though she had begun the programme late, had fallen behind, and found aspects of the lessons difficult. But she said she knew what to do each day in EFAL and that the lesson plans were better than her own plans which had been based on the DBE workbook. She was trained at Intermediate Phase level and had little English so found the lesson plans very helpful.

The teacher said she appreciated that the EGRS lesson plans came with resources. She said she cut the flash cards out and stuck them on the cardboard provided and that the resources were at the right level. Although there were word family charts on the wall, an organised file of vocabulary theme words was not evident.

Regarding the coach she was more ambivalent and said a coach was probably only needed initially, perhaps a response to the additional visits she had received which may have put pressure on her. She felt she would teach better the following year without a coach.

Overall the teacher felt the learners spoke and wrote English better than before.

Analysis

There were signs that the teacher had misunderstood aspects of the procedure and was struggling to keep up with pacing. This may be because she was following the lesson steps fairly rigidly and slowly but without much depth of knowledge. However, overall it seemed most aspects of the programme were being followed.

The Group Guided Reading was done in a mechanistic way and the independent reading of Homework Sheets largely unsupervised, which showed that reading was not prioritised. However the learners were writing regularly, and doing spelling tests, so implicit learning of the EFAL was taking place.

I believe that, for whatever reasons, this was not a strong teacher who was not comfortable in a Grade 2 classroom. Without the EGRS programme the learners' learning would have been further compromised, so EGRS was essential for EFAL learning to take place at all. The learners did not seem fully engaged but did do daily writing, and the teacher felt they were learning more English than before.

6.6 School F (Virtual Coach)

6.6.1 Teacher 7

This was a very large school with big classes and few facilities. The vice principal, principal and HOD were present, but seemed to know little about the programme. There were a number of Grade 2 classes. The first teacher observed was a very experienced Foundation Phase teacher but she said she hadn't been told about the visit. Nevertheless she agreed to demonstrate her lesson, giving the other teacher, who was less experienced and Intermediate Phase trained, *time to prepare*. This suggested that EFAL was not done every day.

Both teachers had the Term 4 lesson plans downloaded but it was not clear exactly where they were in terms of pacing and both gave 'Monday' lessons even though it was a Wednesday. Both teachers used their tablets with confidence and said they were in touch with the virtual coach.

Classroom

The teacher's classroom was prefabricated and in good repair but there was little storage. The walls contained many posters, going up to the roof, mobiles, handwriting charts, isiZulu phonic charts and word charts. Some of this was clearly older material, e.g. the phonics charts. Organisation was evident. The exercise books and worksheets were sorted into cardboard boxes as shown by EGRS.

The chalkboard was at the front and board work exceptionally neat with beautiful printing (Figure 43). The lesson had already been prepared on the board by the time I reached the classroom after talking to the HOD.

Figure 43: Classroom of Teacher 7



The EGRS charts were stuck onto the windows, which had been painted so that learners could not look out or the sun shine directly inside. There was a desk set aside near the teacher's desk which contained EGRS material (Figure 44). One box was labelled Photocopied Worksheets. The previous term's materials and books were not visible and there were no books, either EGRS-supplied or others, visible.

Figure 44: EGRS material on a desk



On the teacher's desk, cut out and prepared, were the sight words and phonic words for the term. The tablet was also on the desk, as was tape for sticking up the words. Learners sat in pairs at desks with attached seats, and because of the nature of the desks and large number of learners, there was no attempt at grouping. The learners turned sideways when the new words were put on the charts.

Lesson Observation

Daily Activities

The teacher asked, *What are we doing or What do we start with?* and then played the song on the tablet. In such a large classroom it was barely audible and the learners stood and sang half-heartedly as if they did not know the words. This showed an incorrect use of the tablet.

Vocabulary

New vocabulary theme words were written on the board. This was the only time in this sample that new words were written on the board, and may reflect the teacher's initial training. Despite the tablet a few were mispronounced (*uggles* for *ugly*). The meaning, rather than the structure, of the words was emphasised, and the teacher used code-switching extensively to explain.

'Question of the day'

The teacher then asked the *this or that* 'question of the day' which was, *If I call you ugly how would you feel (angry, worried or sad)*. This was a slight innovation on the question in the lesson plan but was not successful as the answers didn't fully apply. The teacher had shown initiative regarding the content, but had not thought it through thoroughly. The columns were on the board as suggested. The class seemed very excited to participate. Ten learners were called up to put their X on the board and say what they would feel. This took 15 minutes and the rest of the class became a little distracted although the teacher ignored this. The teacher ended the lesson by talking about what fewest and most learners felt.

Overall this section worked fairly well, and the teacher seemed confident but it was evident she hadn't always thought through the language she would use. The procedure seemed familiar to the teacher and the learners.

Sight Words, Phonemic Awareness, Phonics

The next section was done after break when about 25% of the learners had received their meal of pap and milk and eaten it in the classroom.

The teacher used the phonic word flash cards. She told the learners, *We are going to start with phonemic awareness and phonics and you have to pronounce words with the or [pronounced /au/] sound, like fort.* Each word was held up and said twice. There were a lot of words and they were each put on the chart one by one. It became evident that the learners had learned some phonics before and were learning the pattern aurally and visually. This was also clear when the teacher began to segment words sound by sound although there were errors (s-h- or-t) but better with *c-o-m-f-or-t* and *cork*.

This was the only teacher in the sample to emphasise segmenting and blending and this might be related to the teacher's own training as a Foundation Phase teacher. The teacher was confident teaching English phonics but the lesson could have been enhanced by selecting fewer words to teach, as again, the class grew restless.

Group Guided Reading

The teacher then handed out the Homework Sheets for the week and told the class to read with their *inner voice*. There was no attempt to model the reading. The teacher was a good manager and the sheets were handed out by row monitors with no fuss or noise but there were insufficient worksheets and because of this, and the lack of scaffolding, little reading actually took place.

One group came to the teacher's table as with School E. There were six learners in the group which meant it would be two weeks before they read again, if groups read each day. They had to read in unison and point to the words as they read. The books were at the correct level and this very simple form of group reading meant it was done quickly with minimal disruption. However, there was no attempt to check comprehension or the correct reading of individual sight words.

The teacher managed the class firmly and the group reading was efficiently enacted and although little new learning was taking place, the learners were practising their reading. The overall impression was that the teacher was slightly unprepared and did not follow the daily routine in the lesson plans on a daily basis.

Book Analysis

Learners' Workbooks

The workbooks at this school were A3 size and lined, and were kept by the learners in their bags. Between 25 and 30 pages had been written on, all dated and with headings and all marked. There were between 59 and 61 exercises. Phonics had only been done until May but the writing frames had been used weekly and learners' illustrations were evident. Some variation was also shown in their sentences. They seemed to write down phonic and sight words but their spelling tests were in a separate book.

DBE Workbook

These learners had begun on page 1 and worked page by page through the book. Approximately 20 pages had been completed sequentially, and there were approximately 24 exercises completed. This meant the EGRS recommendations had not been followed. The answers to the exercise were evidently not copied from the board, and showed individual knowledge and errors. They had all been initialled but not marked by the teacher.

The Programme from the Teacher's Point of View

The teacher was positive about the EGRS programme. She found the programme thorough and liked the tablet which told her what to do although she had adapted parts of the lesson plans, e.g. by having her own questions. The teacher found the videos posted by other teachers very useful –something the other teacher in the school also mentioned. She said she particularly found the assessment in the EGRS programme very helpful and that it works well. As some

of the other teachers also said, she believed implementing the programme would be easier the following year.

Regarding resources, she said they were very good but it was time-consuming to prepare them. She explained the school did not have a laminator and she was disappointed about this because *these flash cards have to last forever*. She also commented on the amount of preparation required to deliver the lesson plans which she felt was excessive. She had begun to label boxes for storage but currently her resources were not sorted.

Overall she felt the learners were reading, writing and speaking more English than before, when she had exclusively used the DBE books to structure her programme.

Analysis

The tablet was used throughout the observed lesson to prompt the teacher. Although the teacher seemed happy with the virtual coaching, her preparation and filing was behind those of the teachers with on-site coaches. I also believe on-site demonstrations would have helped with the methodology in the lessons, especially the Group Guided Reading.

The learners were familiar with the oral lesson procedure and their workbooks showed systematic writing activities, but it was hard to ascertain if all aspects of the programme were being taught routinely. Shared Reading would have been difficult given the size of the class and the big books, there were no written phonics activities and there weren't enough Homework Sheets. However, the Homework Sheets were being used for independent reading, phonics was being taught orally and Group Guided Reading was taking place, providing reading practice.

This teacher did not find the flash cards as useful as the other teachers, preferring chalkboard work and finding the cards meant additional preparation.

It was unclear if the tracker was being used consistently and if it was being checked. There appeared to be little external accountability. Organisational and management skills and the print-rich classroom could not be linked to EGRS training but rather to the teacher's own background experience.

The amount of written work was less than with other teachers and the sense was that this teacher was only using aspects of the programme that suited her, but this was not problematic given her evident experience in the field.

6.6.2 Teacher 8

It was immediately evident that the two teachers at this school were at different points in the programme and worked independently, not collaboratively. This teacher's English was less fluent than that of Teacher 7 and she said, *we are the barriers when it comes to EFAL* – meaning that it is often the teachers' lack of fluency that hinders EFAL learning. Because of this she particularly valued the EGRS programme, and the tablet, which she said helped with her own English. Like Teacher 7, she appreciated the videos of other teachers giving lessons. She was initially reluctant to teach a lesson, saying she was unprepared and hadn't been notified. The worrying conclusion is that EFAL is not taught every day.

Classroom

The classroom was prefabricated and in good repair but contrasted with Teacher 7's classroom in that the walls were very bare. EGRS charts were stuck onto the painted windows with Prestik but no flash cards were stuck onto them (Figure 45). There were no signs of EGRS materials or any materials in the classroom, although there was a single cupboard at the back which may have contained materials. On the teacher's desk was the tablet and a few papers. There were also laminated flash cards which the teacher said she had laminated at home.

Lesson Observation

'Question of the day'

The teacher went directly into this part of the lesson, referring to the story in the big book. She asked, *Why was Zweli worried?* Before they could answer she said, *You see a new teacher. How do you feel? Do you feel happy?* The learners were uncertain. She then said, *Show me an angry face.* Interestingly the teacher had varied the original question and asked, *How do you feel? If you like a new teacher?* The idea was innovative but the teacher could not phrase the question in a way that made sense, was understandable to the learners, or that used the words they had been taught. So some learners incorrectly answered 'angry' or 'sad'. This reinforced the importance of having models of the questions and writing frames in the lesson plans as the teachers may not have the language structures or knowledge of the language to do this themselves.

The columns were on the board as suggested but although the class, like all the others observed, seemed very excited to participate, they were confused by the question and did not know how to answer.

Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Sight Words

The teacher taught the *oo* sound, and compared it to the isiZulu *o* sound which was good practice. She checked the shape of their mouths, helped the learners segment the words and taught the meaning through translating the word into isiZulu. This was good practice. With the two sight words, she repeated them twice as look and say words. The different techniques showed her familiarity with the difference between phonics and sight word teaching, which was not observed with all the teachers in the study.

Reading

One set of Homework Sheets had been laminated to be used in class but there were insufficient copies for all the learners. The class read the sheets in unison, very well, but the teacher's voice was absent, she was listening and walking around checking that the learners were reading. It would have been a good opportunity to do Shared Reading, with the teacher setting the pace and modelling reading with expression. However, the learners were all reading, and this was the best example of class reading and the systematic use of the Homework Sheets that was observed.

The teacher was fairly experienced, a trained Foundation Phase teacher, and the class was quite well managed. The phonics and reading lessons were being done adequately. However, with the oral work, the teacher's own level of English was a barrier when she attempted to innovate on the content, as she herself had diagnosed.

Book Analysis

Learners' Workbooks

The workbooks were up to date and had between 25 and 27 pages written on, all dated and with headings and all marked. There were between 50 and 55 exercises. This was less than the other teachers in the study but more than her colleague. Phonics and sight words had only been done until June. The writing frames had been used but some of these were unfinished and there was much blank underlining.

DBE Workbook

These books were not seen.

The Programme from the Teacher's Point of View

The teacher really liked the tablet because of its audio possibilities and videos of lessons, and she felt it helped her to speak English, teach English and learn the songs. The teacher was very positive about the programme and felt it was a great advantage over using the DBE book, which she had done before.

She liked the flash cards and had laminated them at her own expense but overall, as with Teacher 7, there wasn't a lot of evidence of materials being filed or organised. The written work had diminished after June and this may show that

the programme was not being implemented daily in the second half of the year.

Overall, the teacher felt she and the learners were reading, writing and speaking more English. She did not comment on the routine, the pacing of the programme, or the tracker.

Analysis

Overall this teacher seemed very happy with the virtual coaching but I believe her preparation and filing was behind those of the teachers with on-site coaches. The lack of accountability at this school may have exacerbated this.

The contents of many aspects of the programme were being followed and the teacher knew the programme well enough to innovate on it, but implementation had tailed off, as it had with Teacher 7. Shared Reading was done with the Homework Sheets and constituted the only example of class reading seen in the sample schools. The learners were familiar with the oral lesson procedure but their understanding of English was limited.

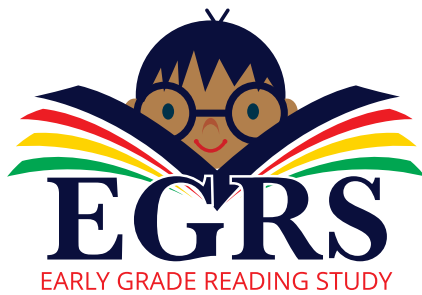
There was no sign of the readers or the flash cards that had been used previously and it was unclear if the tracker was being used at all or if it was checked.

I believe the teacher was a reasonable Grade 2 teacher who taught her large class adequately. My sense was that the intervention had definitely given her EFAL lessons structure and improved the quality of EFAL in her classroom, given her own English language level.

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