

**Primary Grades Reading in Developing Countries Activity  
Guidance Document Workshop, October 30, 2007  
Meeting Synopsis**

34

**Participants**

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Dian August, Center for Applied Linguistics  
Larry Lai, Creative Associates  
Sandhya Badrinath, Creative Associates  
Cathy Roller, IRA  
Janeen Haase, IRA  
Jim Wile, IRA  
Kathy Roskos, John Carol University  
Brett Miller, NIH  
Lea McGee, Ohio State University  
Frank Method, RTI  
Dorothy Strickland, Rutgers University  
Teresa Fitzgerald, Save the Children  
Sylvia Linan-Thompson, University of Texas  
Manuel Cardoso, UNESCO Institute for Statistics  
Daniel Wagner, University of Pennsylvania  
Anne McGill-Franzen, University of Tennessee  
Alison Wiener, USAID  
Barbara Knox-Seith, USAID  
Catherine Powell-Miles, USAID  
Rebecca Adams, USAID  
Sharon Mangin-Nwanko, USAID  
Sandra Bertoli, USAID

**Developing Background**

Following introductions and a brief history of the project, the general purpose of the meeting was reviewed. The primary goal was organized around the development of key ideas for a guidance document on primary grade reading education in developing countries.

Three reading experts summarized the research base on primary grade reading education in the United States. Dorothy Strickland outlined factors of curriculum development (e.g., local norms and customs) and elements of curriculum planning (e.g., standards) in the K-3 reading curriculum. Lea McGee described what primary grade teachers need to know about reading development and instruction, teaching skills, and professional dispositions based on current teacher education research (which is relatively slim). Anne McGill-Franzen summarized research on the five essential elements of primary grade reading, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

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Meeting Synopsis**

Participant reactions to this information raised several issues, as follows:

- Language acquisition and the differing orthographies of native, national and 2<sup>nd</sup> languages in school. (The match between spoken and written language in reading instruction).
- Availability of print materials in local communities
- Role of mother's literacy in child literacy
- Content of beginning reading instruction
- Access to *quality* primary grade reading instruction
- Role of literacy in schooling. Is the focus on literacy, per se or on literacy as a pre-requisite for schooling?
- Threshold conditions that afford learning to read in the local context

Next, two small-scale studies on primary grade reading in developing countries were presented. The IRA field study collected survey data from a 9-country sample in the broad categories of policy, teacher education, and classroom reading instruction. In general terms, the study pointed to the gaps between policy and practice in primary grade reading education in the sample. The USAID desk study described basic policy and programs that included a deliberate focus on reading development and skills. The USAID Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) was also described at this time. Dan Wagner shared an article entitled *Smaller, quicker, cheaper: alternative strategies for literacy assessment in the UN Literacy Decade* (Wagner, International Journal of Educational Research, 39 (2003), 293-309).

Participant reactions to this information articulated important issues that USAID is facing, namely *how to*:

- Describe the return on investment in education and reading in developing countries to Congress
- Close the gap between USAID goals and real accomplishments in the field
- Develop ways to document progress and present evidence of success in the field
- Measure reading outcomes as evidence of USAID effort and quality in basic education programs

Ideas for a Primary Grades Reading Guidance document were threaded through the discussion related to the research briefs and small-scale studies. These included: (1) a set of guiding questions for gathering evidence on reading; (2) a set of questions with illustrative case studies; (3) a decision tree for problem solving about reading policy and programs and (4) a set of diagnostic questions in reading.

**Brainstorming in Small Groups**

In small groups participants further articulated their thoughts and ideas about a PGR toolkit. Highlights of discussion are summarized in the chart.

**Primary Grades Reading in Developing Countries Activity  
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Meeting Synopsis**

Group	Highlights
1	<p>Need a policy, curriculum, classroom instruction diagnostic                      Need a system level assessment                      Need to make what we know about reading available                      Need to specify reading skills                      Need to focus on the deliberate teaching of reading                      Need a strategy to expand assessment of reading                      Need key assessment tools: policy assessment; teacher prep &amp; in-service assessment; curriculum assessment</p>
2	<p>Collect literature (country-specific) for use by the donor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language policy</li> <li>• Curriculum and Materials</li> <li>• Teacher ED and PD</li> <li>• Instruction</li> <li>• Instructional &amp; Institutional Supports</li> <li>• Assessment</li> </ul> <p>Series of questions that result in a diagnosis of policy, curriculum and instruction in the country.</p>
3	<p>Diagnose the print environment for access to print in and out of school.                      Diagnose extent of instructional resources, i.e., availability of textbooks, allocation of time for reading instruction, and teacher expertise.                      Diagnose if reading performance is measured                      Diagnose information available to teachers                      Diagnose government policies that create conditions for use of technology                      Diagnose teacher preparation in learning how to create a print environment; how to create instructional materials for diverse learners, etc.                      Diagnose the quality of textbooks (e.g., structure, accuracy, age-appropriateness)                      (See small group work sheet in appendix 1.)</p>

**Toward Consensus**

Participants re-assembled as a whole group and responded to ideas and thoughts generated in the small group sessions. Discussion led to common agreement on several points.

- A diagnostic toolkit for assessing primary grades reading is essential. It can serve a twofold purpose: to inform USAID education officers in the field and to serve as the basis for USAID discussion with Ministries of Education and program heads.
- The toolkit should clearly and explicitly state best practices in teacher education and classroom reading instruction.
- The toolkit should clearly and explicitly benchmark reading development in the primary grades based on current research in language acquisition and reading.
- The toolkit should inventory access to print in the local environment.
- The toolkit should provide guidance for metrics that measure impact from baseline to full implementation of USAID program goals. (See possible approaches in appendix 2.)
- The toolkit should guide alignment in primary grade reading education between policy and practice; it should inform USAID program design.

**Primary Grades Reading in Developing Countries Activity  
Guidance Document Workshop, October 30, 2007  
Meeting Synopsis**

37

- The toolkit should offer a clear definition of what reading is and emphasize the time it takes to develop effective reading skills.
- The toolkit should indicate pre-requisites for the teaching of reading at the pre-service level; it should provide guidelines for professional development in reading.

A tentative outline of the toolkit's content emerged, as follows.

- Introduction
- Promoting Primary Grade Reading Success
- Milestones (or Benchmarks) in Primary Grade Reading Development
- A Strong Primary Grade Reading Program
  - What to Look For
  - What it Looks Like
- Best Practices in Primary Grade Reading Instruction
  - What to Look For
  - What it Looks Like
- Best Practices in Preparing Teachers of Primary Grade Reading
  - What to Look For
  - What it Looks Like
- Access to Print
  - What to Look For
  - What it Looks Like
- Aligning (USAID) Program Design and Monitoring Progress
- Glossary of Terms
- Additional Resources

**Suggested Action Steps**

Based on the day's discussions, the group suggested: (1) the formation of a **Writing Team**, consisting of reading experts and USAID representatives, to draft the Primary Grade Reading Diagnostic Toolkit and (2) **field-testing the toolkit** in a sample of USAID offices for purposes of revision and refinement for large-scale use.

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Guidance Document Workshop, October 30, 2007  
Meeting Synopsis

Appendix 1

Sample Formats for Assessment Tools

From: Wiggins, G & McTighe, J (2007). *Schooling by design* (p225;p236). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

What Are the Desired Results of School Refo

Figure 9.4

Essential Questions for Educators

**VISION AND BELIEFS**

- To what extent do we (our team, school, district, community) share a common vision?
- What educational beliefs about teaching and learning do we all hold, if any? What do the answers imply?
- What assumptions about learning guide our instructional and assessment practices? To what extent do our policies, priorities, and actions reflect these beliefs?
- How might we better actualize our beliefs?

**STANDARDS**

- How would people know that we are a “standards-based” school/district? A learning organization? Honoring our mission well?
- What are observable indicators in the classroom? School? District?
- To what extent are we “walking the talk” and using mission-related standards and criteria to guide our work (in, for example, curriculum, assessment, instruction, professional development, staff appraisal)?

**CURRICULUM**

- How should curriculum be planned to better achieve the mission and overcome bad habits of coverage? To what extent do textbooks function as a resource (rather than as the syllabus)?
- To what extent is our curriculum coherent and aligned?
- To what extent does our curriculum highlight and elicit understanding and to what extent does it unwittingly impede learning for understanding?

**ASSESSMENT**

- How are we doing? What evidence is needed to answer this question?
- How will we know that students really understand the “big ideas”?
- Are we assessing everything we value (or only those things that are most easily tested and graded)?
- Is anything important “falling through the cracks” because we are not assessing it?
- How might our assessments better promote learning, not simply measure it?

**INSTRUCTION**

- To what extent is our instruction engaging and effective?
- To what extent does current instruction reflect research and best practices?
- To what extent are we engaging students in “doing” the subject—what percent of the time?
- Are we effectively reaching *all* students? *All kinds* of students? Who isn't learning and why?

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- To what extent do our professional development practices reflect the research on adult learning?
- How does our staff view professional development?
- To what extent are our professional development practices “results oriented”?
- Is our professional development appropriately differentiated?

**CHANGE PROCESS**

- What do we believe about educational change? To what extent are these shared beliefs?
- To what extent are various initiatives seen as connected and coherent (as opposed to being seen as separate things or add-ons)?
- How might we work smarter and more effectively?

**POLICY, STRUCTURES, CULTURE**

- To what extent do our policies, structures, and culture reflect our beliefs about learning?
- How might we restructure to enhance learning?
- What messages do our policies send?
- Is our staff appraisal process working?
- To what extent do we have a culture of continuous improvement?
- What existing factors support this reform? What factors resist change?
- How do our leaders receive the honest feedback they need to improve?
- To what extent does our grading and reporting system communicate clearly and honestly?
- Are resources (such as time, money, facilities, technology) being used optimally to advance learning?
- Would you want *your* child to attend *our* school? Why or why not?

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Schooling by Design: Mission, Action, and Achievement

Figure 10.3

**Continuum of Observable Indicators**

<b>Understanding by Design Elements: Assessing Your School</b>		
<i>Use the continuum to analyze the classroom practices in your school according to the following UbD reform elements.</i>		
<p>1. Learning activities clearly address established content standards.</p>		<p>1. Learning activities do not typically address established content standards.</p>
<p>2. The textbook is one resource among many used in teaching to the standards.</p>		<p>2. Textbooks serve as the primary teaching resource. (The textbook functions as the syllabus.)</p>
<p>3. Instruction and assessment are focused on exploring big ideas and essential questions.</p>		<p>3. Instruction consists primarily of content coverage, doing activities, and/or preparation for high-stakes standardized tests.</p>
<p>4. Student understanding of the big ideas in content standards is assessed through complex performance tasks using the six facets.</p>		<p>4. Assessment consists primarily of quizzes and tests of factual knowledge and discrete skills.</p>
<p>5. Teacher evaluations of student products/performances are based upon known criteria, performance standards, and models.</p>		<p>5. The students do not know (cannot explain) how their work will be evaluated. They are typically not shown models of exemplary work.</p>
<p>6. The students regularly self-assess their work based on the established criteria.</p>		<p>6. Students do not regularly self-assess their work according to established criteria.</p>
<p>7. Teachers regularly pose open-ended questions with no obvious right answer. The questions are designed to direct and deepen inquiry and understanding.</p>		<p>7. Most teacher questions are convergent, leading questions, pointing toward the knowledge students are expected to learn.</p>
<p>8. Students are given regular opportunities to rethink and revise their work based on feedback from ongoing (formative) assessments.</p>		<p>8. Formative assessments are not routinely used. Students are rarely given opportunities to rethink and revise their work based on specific feedback.</p>