LITERATURE REVIEW: IMPROVEMENTS IN READING AND WRITING ABILITY OF LEARNERS IN SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Teaching children to read and write **is** "rocket science", in the words of a noted American expert (Moats, (1999). In other words, there is a genuine professionalism and high level of skill involved. This is not surprising. The ability to read and write is the very basis for the acquisition of most other knowledge and many other skills. Yet it is still far from clear what the best ways are to teach children to read and write. There are many proponents of the idea that the best approach is to provide a reading-rich environment and children will learn, rather than be taught. Others remain convinced of more traditional teacher-directed methods.

Once you combine the "rocket science" involved in teaching just one child to read and write with the desire to achieve this regularly, on a very large scale, and within stringent cost constraints, the challenge rises to a level at which there are, in fact, few genuinely successful large-scale programmes. This is one of the main conclusions of this literature review that started with the following brief:

> … to conduct a literature search on the experience of other countries[1] that have brought about improvements in reading and writing ability in their schools so as to identify the policies, strategies, resources and institutional arrangements that have been used as well as noting the issues that had to be resolved in the process.

In the course of the literature review more than 70 websites and documents were consulted, many of them already overviews of many programmes. Programmes in 36 countries were considered. These were documents in English only and referred primarily to programmes teaching reading and writing in English as a first or second language. For obvious reasons most such programmes originate in English speaking countries or from speakers of English.

From this material it would be possible to provide a long and confusing list of examples, each more or less successful for very specific reasons. It was not considered that such an approach would be helpful. Rather, a small number of "representative" examples have been selected that illustrate some of the key concerns. These fall into two categories:

o   What core teaching methodology (if any) is prescribed?
o   How is the initiative organised, managed and funded to be effective on scale?

DIFFERENT APPROACHES

The initiatives described illustrate quite different approaches. The National Literacy Strategy in England is a politically-driven initiative; part of the agenda of an incoming, new government; strongly centralised; with a directive teaching methodology.

"Concentrated Language Encounters" (CLE) in Thailand is methodology-driven, succeeding first on a small scale in the field and then being taken up by a government.

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[1] This focus on countries other than South Africa is the reason for no discussion being undertaken of the Business Trust Quality Learning Project, implemented by READ. However, QLP is one of the larger programmes, reaching 957 schools, 12 000 educators and 1 million learners, with 3 million books. Its success is being evaluated and the present writer assumes that the Business Trust and the National Department of Education are aware of the outcomes.

The USA, typically, shows a variety of approaches of which two examples are described: Federally-legislated, locally-implemented programmes; and the private market in literacy programmes as commercial product. From this selection of programmes it will be possible to identify policies, strategies, resources and institutional arrangements of different kinds.

WHY 'LITERACY' AND 'WHY IN SCHOOLS'?

Internationally the term 'literacy', strictly referring to the ability to read has come to include the ability to write at an appropriate level and is used throughout this paper interchangeably with the longer phrase "reading and writing".

The issue of 'why in schools?' requires a more detailed explanation. In the second half of the 1990s Chowdhury at the World Bank surveyed the up-to-date information on 'literacy and primary education' (Chowdhury, 1998). His conclusions include the following:

- The starting place for literacy for most of the world's population is now primary education.
- Improvements in literacy rates in developed and developing countries are therefore directly related to improvements in primary education.
- Low enrolments and wastage in the primary education system are the major causes of persistent youth illiteracy. In turn, low enrolment and dropout are caused by lack of physical access to schools; gender bias (both by parents and the system); illiteracy of parents; inadequate teaching; and other factors related to the usual inefficiencies of schooling systems and/or lack of resources.
- Nevertheless, literacy programmes for children outside the primary school should be considered only when 'a sizable number of students drop out, or fail to be attracted by the formal system, or where formal schools are absent'.
- Adult literacy, aimed specifically at parents at the time their own children are becoming literate can be effective. The outcomes of other adult literacy programmes present a contested and conflicting picture, with no clear pattern of success.
- Programmes at primary schools will be more effective if: the overall quality of schooling is higher; textbooks are provided; teacher absenteeism is reduced; and community support is mobilised.

Many of the conditions for successful literacy in the primary school do exist in the South African system. Access is virtually universal and enrollment very high. There is a complete absence of gender bias – indeed, more girls than boys are found at all levels of the system. It follows therefore, that the most useful approach to improving literacy in South Africa must be through the primary education system, with the possible addition of focused adult literacy programmes related to parenthood, occupational interests or general concern.

Within this framework we look at different approaches to the effective delivery of literacy in the primary school, starting with recent initiatives in England.

THE NATIONAL LITERACY STRATEGY FOR ENGLAND (NLS)

The NLS is the only recent example recorded in the literature search in which a central government has acted directly to improve literacy achievement, through the existing schooling system. It is a programme that could hold lessons for South Africa.

The NLS was planned by the Labour Party in 1996/7 and launched in September 1998 within a year of the party coming to power. It is aimed at the entire primary school population, i.e. the age group 5-11 years. The first quantifiable outcomes were set for 2002 and these are reported below. Subsequently the NLS has been extended to 2004, with more ambitious targets. It is briefly described here under the headings: objectives, targets, implementation,

teachers, community involvement and evaluation. (A full set of documentation is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/literacy)

Objectives

The NLS aims to implement a uniform programme of instruction in reading and writing to learners in the age group 5–11, in (effectively) every primary school in England. It is strongly centralised, with political leadership from the central government, and is designed to achieve 'steady and consistent' progress over a 5-10 year time scale. It has public quantified targets.

Targets

The initial target for June 2002 was that 80% of all 11-year old learners should achieve the reading and writing levels expected of their age group in the National Curriculum Assessment. (The level of achievement when the NLS began was 65%.) In 2002 75% of 11-year olds reached the required level, with 80% achieving the reading level and 60% the writing level. At that point the programme was extended to 2004 (at least) and higher targets were set, namely: 85% of all 11-year olds to achieve the national levels in reading and writing; 35% of the group actually to achieve a new higher level (level 5 in the National Curriculum Assessment); and every Local Educational Authority to achieve an internal success rate of 78% pass at Level 4.

Implementation

A highly directive programme of implementation is being used. Every primary school class teacher is supplied with the 'Framework for Teaching' that sets out teaching objectives for each term for each class. The document also indicates how the teacher should structure and manage each literacy class. And in a major innovation, the programme introduces an obligatory daily 'literacy hour' to be accommodated in all school timetables. This innovation is discussed below.

The Framework document also provides guidelines to the teacher on how to link reading and writing to other learning areas in the curriculum and how to provide additional opportunities for reading for pleasure and (for 9-11 year olds) writing for pleasure.

The NLS methodology favours an explicit and direct teaching approach to learning to read and write. There is a strong emphasis on teacher attention to individuals and to time spent on text, within a supportive school environment. This approach is illustrated in the guidelines provided for the literacy hour. Each day the hour is divided into four components: shared reading and writing by the whole class supervised by the teacher (15 minutes); whole class work on word and sentence level tasks (15 minutes); guided reading and writing in small groups (20 minutes); and a review session by the teacher and the class on progress toward objectives (10 minutes).

Head Teachers (principals) are closely involved due to the restructuring of the daily timetable required to accommodate the literacy hour.

Teachers

Every teacher is provided with a Literacy Training Pack at the start of each year and an almost bewildering quantity and variety of supportive material during the year. Summer Literacy Schools are held for professional development of teachers. Each school district has permanent access to an appointed Literacy Consultant to provide ongoing professional support.

Community support

Considerable resources are invested by government in media campaigns to promote the NLS in all communities and in explanatory meetings with parents. The first year of the programme was designated as a National Year of Reading giving the NLS a distinctive profile in the country.

Evaluation

At least three levels of evaluation have taken place. The NLS itself commissioned a formal evaluation from a panel of British experts. The Department for Education and Skills funded a 'friendly critical' evaluation by a Canadian educational research institute. And numerous bodies and individuals independently evaluated components of the programme.

All the evaluations are broadly favourable, with the exception of those starting from positions that reject teaching literacy directly. The Canadian evaluation identifies six areas of success: scale of impact – the NLS reached virtually every school and every learner in the appropriate age group in the country; depth of impact – affecting LEAs, head teachers, teachers, learners and parents; clarity of vision and policy coherence during implementation; successful acceptance of the institutions created; achieving a good balance between pressure for improvement and provision of adequate support; and cost effectiveness – in four years a 23% improvement in literacy at the end of the primary school cycle was achieved for less than 5% of the overall cost of primary education.

Discussion

The NLS is regarded as an important potential model for action in South Africa. Learning to read and write effectively in English in school must be our number one option for dealing with national literacy levels in the future. We cannot allow the number of non-literate adults to increase, as the costs and difficulties of adult literacy are much greater than those involved in dealing with the problem at school. Serious consideration should be given to a study of the NLS before its possible termination in June 2004 so that an informed decision can be taken about its relevance to the South African situation. Even if the direct teaching methodology used is not suitable the effective organisation of the national programme will be useful information.

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL CLE LITERACY RPOGRAMMES (CLE)

The acronym CLE refers to the method of teaching reading and writing that forms the core of this virtually worldwide initiative. "Concentrated language encounters" describes the presumed most effective way in which children learn to read and write, in 'occasions of high concentration on making themselves understood'. The method was developed in Australia for teaching English to native Australians in the 1970s. However, its first large scale application was in Thailand from 1985. (A full set of documentation is available at www.cleliteracy.org)

The Thai Department of Education at the time had a reasonably successful literacy programme in its primary schools, but there were groups of schools in which it was completely unsuccessful. Coincidentally Rotary International decided to include literacy in programmes it would fund and under its auspices CLE was tried out in the unsuccessful primary schools in Thailand. It was instantly successful and within two years had expanded to all primary schools in four provinces. Two years later it was extended to the entire primary school system.

From Thailand CLE has expanded to Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Egypt, India, Kenya, Mexico, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, Tanzania and Turkey. The scale of implementation is huge. In Bangladesh alone a five-year trial period has seen CLE

implemented in 550 schools, reaching 368 000 learners. On the basis of success of this 'pilot' project, agreement has been reached to extend the programme to all 102 285 primary schools, with 7,5 million learners.

Materials have been developed in Afrikaans, Arabic, Bangla, English, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, Turkish and Xhosa. CLE has a pilot project with the Western Cape Department of Education and interest has been expressed by Gauteng.

The international programme is discussed under the following headings: launching and developing an operational project; classroom methodologies; and training and technical support provided.

Launching and developing a project

CLE is always implemented as a partnership between various stakeholders, the two most important of which are the Rotary Club(s) in the area (backed by Rotary International) and the appropriate education authority. Other agencies may join the project committee if they have an interest in the programme. CLE requires an initial commitment from all stakeholders to develop the programme to the point of implementation and then to sustain it for at least 2 years.

In the first year the Grade 1 programme is implemented in 3 schools only, known as 'pathfinder schools'. In the second year the Grade 2 programme is implemented in the 3 original schools and the Grade 1 programme in a larger number of new schools, known as 'lighthouse schools'. This work is managed by a Technical Coordinator, a local person who is given training – usually in Thailand – in CLE teaching methods and in management of the programme.

CLE and Rotary provide support in logistics, training, budgeting and financing while the project is being developed. From its previous experience CLE advises on all aspects of the programme and monitors the degree to which seven basic criteria are met to enable the project to go ahead. Diagram 1 shows how a project could grow from 3 to more than 500 schools over a 4-year period in favourable circumstances.

Diagram 1

GRADE LEVEL	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
Grade 1 (Stage 1)	Pathfinder Schools (3)	Lighthouse Schools (40)	Extension Schools (100)	Extension Schools (200)
Grade 2 (Stage 1)	Pathfinder Schools (3)	Lighthouse Schools (40)	Extension Schools (100)	Extension Schools (200)
Grade 3 (Stage 2)		Pathfinder Schools (3)	Lighthouse Schools (40)	Extension Schools (100)
Grade 4 (Stage 2)			Pathfinder Schools (3)	Lighthouse Schools (40)

Governance of the project is the responsibility of a management committee, the composition of which is set by CLE. There is also an education committee of people involved in the implementation of the literacy programme itself.

Classroom methodologies

The 'close learning encounter' methodology is created in the classroom in two ways that complement each other. Diagram 2 shows how the unit based on a text is developed through five stages and Diagram 3 shows the same process based on an activity performed by the

teacher. In both cases the teacher and learners working together generate a piece of writing that is entered into a 'big book' as a record of achievement and as the basis for further reading and writing activities.

Diagram 2

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Read the Starter Book to the students, making sure that they understand the story - who is in it and what they do.	**Read the Starter Book,** role play, and talk about what happened in the story, until the students understand and can talk about what happened and in what sequence.	**Negotiate a group text** in which the students tell what happened (or should be done) and in what sequence.	**Make a group Big Book**	**Use the Big Book** in language activities for further (more specific) learning

Diagram 3

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Demonstrate a structured activity, naming what you are using, and telling what you are doing. Make sure that the students understand every step of what you do.	**Students recount** what happened, step by step (if practicable repeat the activity several times) until all students can talk about what to do and in what sequence.	**Negotiate a group text** in which the students tell what happened (or should be done) and in what sequence.	**Make a group Big Book**	**Use the Big Book** in language activities for further (more specific) learning

Teachers are provided with very explicit directives for using the methodology. This constitutes a major change for most teachers and makes extensive training essential. A CLE document describes this change as follows:

> In traditional classrooms, the interaction between teacher and students is teacher-dominated, virtually all interaction is between the teacher and one child (or a group of children who must answer as one), and the normal procedure is for the teacher to initiate each instance of interaction and then to indicate which child is to respond. Deliberate abandonment by the teacher of domination of the classroom language interaction represents a fundamental change in the teacher's classroom role, requiring a different kind of classroom management.

Training and technical support

CLE provides specific types of training for participants. The Technical Coordinator undergoes extensive 'immersion training' in an existing CLE project and then organises similar programmes for teachers joining the new project. A similar methodology to that used in the literacy programme itself is used in the training of teachers.

Once the project expands leadership training is provided for those responsible for managing it on a larger scale.

Many booklets and other materials are available for information and guidance on specific aspects of CLE.

Discussion

There is already evidence from the Western Cape that the CLE approach does work in South Africa (Donald, Condy and Forrester, 2003). In the first year of the programme itself (2001) it was implemented in Grades 1-3 in 85 schools and assessments show that learners in these schools outperformed learners in other schools on all of six performance measurements tested.

Issues to be considered are:

o   Structures for cooperation between an education department, private agencies and individuals on a programme to be implemented in departmental schools
o   Availability of educators for extensive periods of training
o   School management of a sufficiently high quality to support educators
o   Recruitment of sufficiently competent and motivated technical coordinators
o   Specific issues related to multi-linguilism

DISTINCTIVE APPROACHES IN THE USA

In the USA very different approaches are followed to improve literacy in primary (elementary) schools. These differences arise from the specific social and political history of the US, as well as the politicisation of literacy methodology over the past 40 years. Nevertheless there are lessons that will be useful in the South African context.

This section of the paper deals with the consequences of politicising literacy; attempts to improve reading and writing in individual schools through Federal legislation and funding; and the proliferation of alternative programmes to achieve improved literacy, many of them copyrighted and made available as commercial products – in essence, a free market approach to the provision of literacy teaching.

The Reading Wars

In the late 1990s longstanding differences of opinion about how to teach children to read flared up into a genuine political conflict that affected electoral patterns in three large states (California, Florida and Texas), and probably played a part in the narrow victory of Bush over Gore, with all the global consequences this has had.

The 'reading wars' that caused all the trouble involved a conflict between the supporters of the traditional method (most conveniently called 'phonics') and a newer method, generally known as 'whole language'.

To simplify dramatically, supporters of phonics favour teaching children to read by directly instructing them in component parts of the symbols involved (individual letters, syllables and parts of long words) and then teaching them to put these together in increasingly complex ways. The usual analogy is with learning to recognise individual symbols for notes in music and the conventions linking them into phrases etc. so that eventually you can 'read' the tune and even compose one yourself. 'Whole language' on the other hand is based on the assumption that children learn to read much as they learn to speak, by being surrounded or immersed in reading and then picking it up by being motivated rather than specifically taught.

Historically whole language dominated American education from the late 1970s until the mid 1990s. Then national assessments showed that as many as 75% of children in poor schools

could not read or write at the level set for the grade they were in. Many were leaving school functionally illiterate. Even in better resourced schools up to 25% of learners were not succeeding at the required level. As the learners in the poor schools were primarily African and Hispanic Americans, the failure of literacy was rapidly seen to be a political issue and the whole language approach, together with a disinclination to test or examine learners at the conclusion of some grades, was seen to be responsible.

Failure to teach literacy became a symbol for more conservative Americans of everything that was going wrong in the society: pursuit of faddish theories, reluctance of teachers to teach, school leavers who would not be able to get or hold a job and would end up on welfare paid for by the taxes of those who could read. Clinton responded to this pressure by passing the Reading Excellence Act in 1998, but this was too late to show any improvement in the literacy statistics before the 2000 election.

There are clear messages in this for us. Literacy acquisition in the early years of schooling is far too important to be left to politicians. However, it can fall into their hands if literacy teachers and researchers are themselves in conflict, especially if they espouse exclusive attitudes as to the only right way to teach literacy.

The conflict was so acute that the International Reading Association issued a statement in 1999 supporting multiple methods of teaching children to read:

> There is no single method or single combination of methods that can successfully teach all children to read. Therefore, teachers must have a strong knowledge of multiple methods for teaching reading and a strong knowledge of the children in their care so they can create the appropriate balance of methods needed for the children they teach.

Nevertheless, the issue is not dead. Selection of a method or methods remains one of the key issues in any national literacy programme, with potential for political conflict.

Legislating literacy

The Reading Excellence Act of 1998 is a characteristic American way of dealing with a social issue, in this case the apparent failure of the conventional education system to provide universal literacy:

o   Enough political pressure is generated to have legislation passed at the Federal level. This authorises a definition of acceptable levels of literacy, sets certain standards to be achieved but does not prescribe specific ways of teaching reading and writing.
o   This legislation is not binding on individual states as they are autonomous in respect of education. However, the legislation is accompanied by huge Federal grants that make it very attractive for the states to comply. In this case in the first two years 27 states reformed their systems sufficiently to apply for and receive funding under the REA.
o   However the states themselves generally do not implement reading and writing programmes. They divide the federal finding among smaller education authorities, in terms of proposals these make in a competitive bidding process. Applicants have to show how and how effectively they will use the funds.
o   Implementation takes place in schools districts or individual schools, three of four levels of authority below the Federal level at which the funds were initially authorised. An elaborate report back and evaluation system is created from a certain percentage of the grants to monitor implementation and assess whether the funds did have the intended impact.

Clearly, this is a completely different approach to improving reading and writing in schools than those adopted in England and Thailand. It lacks the direct control from the centre and introduction across the system all at once that characterises the NLS. And it does not

prescribe a specific methodology that spreads incrementally across all schools as is the case in Thailand.

Nevertheless, the American approach can succeed. There is a detailed account of how this happened in two schools in the state of Virginia (Mesmer and Karchmer, 2003). The conclusion to this account is important:

> Several people have voiced the concern that the REA would demean and 'disempower' teachers. From a policy standpoint, we understood how this could have happened. However, it did not occur as we implemented the REA. Ironically, we found that our work with the REA actually positioned us to empower teachers. As we talked with teachers about their practices we learned of the very concrete curricular dilemmas they faced … On several occasions we advocated for teachers with administrators to relax certain requirements in favour of best practices. Thus, although the REA had the potential to be imperious, we did not find this to be the case.

Multiple Programmes

The National Diffusion Network, an agency promoting educational programmes, lists over 500 private literacy programmes in the USA. This abundance of choice is so great that books are written to help schools and parents choose between different programmes all claiming success (Slavin and Fashola, 1998). Individual schools reach a contractual agreement with the developers of a programme and pay a fee to implement this at the school. An example of such a programme is given below.

A SPECIFIC LITERACY PROGRAMME

Success For All (SFA) is a set of reading and writing instructional programmes that covers pre-school, 'kindergarten" (Grade 0) and Grades 1-6 in the primary school. It has consistently been used for 12 years in over 1 000 schools annually in the USA. In 2001 it was in use in 1 800 schools in 49 states and reached more than 1 million learners. It has been successfully modified for use in Australia, Canada, England, Israel and Mexico and a Spanish version is widely used in parts of the USA. (A full set of documentation can be found at www.successforall.net)

Principles

SFA is based on eight principles:

o   research-based, modern curriculum and teaching methods
o   combination of phonic and "meaning-based" approaches
o   pre-school component to improve literacy readiness
o   an emphasis on regular assessments, followed by interventions with weaker learners
o   writing in 'writers workshops'
o   extensive professional development for teachers
o   a family and community involvement programme
o   Spanish and English second language adaptations

Method
The key component of SFA is 90 minutes of intensive daily reading instruction, with teachers using methods that have been well-researched and tested. Puppets, sounds, class chanting and other involving methods are used, together with partner and individual reading and writing. This compares in some ways with the Literacy Hour of the National Literacy Strategy. An added feature is individual tutoring, on a daily basis if a learner is experiencing difficulties.

Implementation

The process of implementing SFA in an individual school or school district is stringent. The programme cannot be implemented unless 80% of the teachers in the school(s) involved vote in favour of it in a secret ballot. This ensures teacher commitment in implementation, something which is necessary as the demands on the teachers are substantial. Once the decision has been taken to acquire the programme the head teacher (principal) of the school and a teacher designated as the "lead teacher" have to undertake a week long training programme. This takes place in April/May for courses to be started in September. Then a full time Facilitator is appointed for the school. Shortly before the school year begins all teachers attend a 3 day training programme. During the school "year" (actually 9 months) teachers undertake three more training courses of two days each. Finally, selected teachers attend a four day programme on the tutoring component and the family support programme. This massive emphasis on professional development of teachers reflects the fact that the training they receive (or received) at universities and colleges is entirely inadequate to equip them as competent literacy teachers. This is clearly one of the main policy issues involved in literacy programmes everywhere.

In respect of assessment, SFA is firmly on the side of the conservatives in the 'reading wars'. Learners are formally assessed every 8 weeks as well as at the end of each grade.

Evaluation

By general consent, SFA is the most comprehensively evaluated of all US reading programmes. The programme has been evaluated formally in 13 statewide surveys and many city-wide studies. The American Institute of Research surveyed all evaluations for SFA and 23 other reading programmes and found that only SFA and one other (smaller) programme met all requirements for the highest standards. Among the key data in this respect is the following:

o By the end of Grade 1 SFA learners are on average 3 months ahead of control groups.
o By the end of Grade 5 SFA learners are a year ahead.
o Learners based in SFA from Grades 1-6 continue to be a year ahead of other learners in Grades 7-9
o SFA has its most beneficial effect on the lowest quartile of learners.
o Evidence exists that SFA increases learner attendance and decreases retention in a grade for a second year.
o Teacher attitudes are more positive.

Costs

The costs of SFA are about $160 per annum per learner for the first year, declining to $56 in the third year. Schools generally finance the programme by re-allocating to SFA funds due to be paid to them for general instruction in reading and writing in each grade.

Discussion

SFA demonstrates another viable approach to literacy teaching. Rather than the government prescribing a programme and administering it centrally (NSL), or private institutions linking with government to introduce new programmes in schools (CLE), we have schools (or districts) contracting with a private supplier to purchase a total package by re-allocating part of its government grant. There are some obvious advantages in this model. Schools and teachers exercise some discretion and have more positive attitudes as a result. The product has a proven track record, with extensive research behind it. Teachers and the principal receive valuable professional development. A portion of the programme specifically involves family and community support.

There are also some potential negatives, typical of market transactions. The product may not be as reliable as claimed. The department has little control over the process of teacher development. The programme may embody educational approaches that are inconsistent with those used in the department's pre-service training, setting up confusion or even conflict. In the South African situation, school management may not be up to the task of implementing a sophisticated literacy programme.

CONCLUSIONS FOR DEBATE

This review of a few reading and writing programmes for primary schools – selected from a much larger group surveyed – directs us to the following conclusions:

1. In a modern state literacy (i.e. the capacity to read and write at a level consistent with the minimum demands of society) in a first and /or second language must be achieved through the primary school system. This is the most cost effective point to achieve literacy and is important for the acquisition of any sophisticated knowledge or skills. Adult literacy may have to continue for historical reasons, but in due course should be limited to exceptional cases of individuals who are denied primary schooling for one or other reason.

2. International experience shows that even in the most developed countries in the world it cannot be assumed that primary education will routinely achieve even 80% literacy among learners. Virtually every country has had to launch campaigns or special initiatives to achieve a higher literacy rate.

3. In the past the major controversies about literacy programmes have related to the methodologies used. This is a mistake. Any one or a combination of several methodologies will succeed provided that teachers are involved and that the programme is effectively implemented, with frequent learner assessments.

4. Governments can choose methods of implementation as well as methodologies. There is evidence of success across the spectrum from highly centralised and uniform procedures to a decentralised provision of funding with which individual schools decide which programmes to follow.

5. However, a clear strategy is essential and there appear to be certain indispensable elements of successful national strategies. These include a high profile for the campaign, clearly announced targets, creation of family and community support of children actually in schools, stimulation of a wave of public opinion in favour of the programme and regular publicity.

6. For programmes in schools teachers (educators) are the key to success. A reading and writing strategy should be seen by them as an opportunity for personal development and earning greater recognition. This perception must be built on genuine opportunities for teachers and public recognition of results achieved.

Dr. Robin Lee

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