First Principles for Early Grades Reading Programs in Developing Countries

Produced by:
The International Reading Association in cooperation with the American Institutes for Research under the EQUIP1 LWA

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Introduction

The USAID-funded Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) program is an oral assessment designed to measure the most basic foundation skills for literacy acquisition in the early grades. EGRA's purpose is to document student performance on early grade reading skills in order to inform ministries and donors regarding system needs for improving instruction. EGRA is not intended for direct use by teachers, nor is it meant to screen individual students. However, it can be adapted and used to diagnose, remediate, and monitor progress toward student learning outcomes, making it more of an approach than a fixed testing protocol. Many countries have shown an interest in using EGRA as a springboard to improving reading and have gone on to redesign their professional development programs around reading.

In response to the findings, needs, and interest generated in reading and literacy issues by the EGRA program detailed in this report, USAID, under EQUIP1, commissioned the International Reading Association in cooperation with the American Institutes for Research to create a toolkit for education stakeholders to use to improve early grade reading and literacy indicators and programs in developing countries.

First Principles is intended for national policymakers and global education project developers and implementers as a guide to incorporating reading and literacy into new projects and developing effective early grades reading programs. It describes a principled approach to observing core dimensions of effective early grades reading programs, including active teaching and learning in supportive learning environments. Strategies and tools are provided to record evidence of first principles at work in local communities, schools, and classrooms.

Snapshots of Early Reading Success

Ghana. Basic education program activities in Ghana include an innovative initiative to improve reading comprehension by teaching grade 1 children to read in their local language before making a transition to English. To sustain the program, a cadre of trainers has been established to provide district-level training to teachers.

Malawi. The Primary School Support Program (PSSP) is developing a literacy program that takes a balanced literacy approach: one that combines direct instruction with opportunities for pupils to engage in a variety of print-rich learning experiences. PSSP is conducting focused trainings for standards one and two teachers designed to help them develop improved skills for teaching reading. PSSP is working with teachers, students, and community members to develop supplementary reading materials and reading clubs.

South Africa. The Learning for Living project, directed by the READ Educational Trust, demonstrates the effectiveness of a book-based intervention on student achievement in more than 1,000 rural South African Primary Schools. The READ approach to teacher training emphasizes on-site, school-level support for implementation.

Indonesia. A new Indonesian coproduction of the renowned *Sesame Street* television show provides 21st-century programming for young children. Indonesia *Sesame Street*, or *Jalan Sesama*, is one of the largest partnerships between USAID and the Sesame Workshop. Millions of Indonesian children can experience first steps in learning to read.

Latin American and Caribbean Region. The Centers for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT) has introduced a more child-centered, interactive approach to the teaching of literacy in Latin America and the Caribbean. To date, 15,000 teachers in 15 countries have received CETT training. Additionally, through an important alliance with Scholastic Books, CETT has made libraries of children's books available in classrooms.

Learning to read is a fundamental right of children in a changing world. To achieve at school and succeed in the world at large, children need to know how to read and write. Plenty of evidence shows the significant implications of literacy achievement not only for individuals over their lifetimes but also for societies.[1]

Professionals in the service sector bear a responsibility to assist all children in the world to participate fully in literate lives as critical readers and writers. Many of us live in countries that have the physical resources and expertise to support this goal. At the same time, we recognize that many countries do not have the economic resources or traditions that support this goal. Motivated to serve, we want to reach out and help others realize the potential for literacy to support individual and national development. The five introductory snapshots reflect recent efforts to support early

1 Heckman, J. (2002). Human capital: Investing in parents to facilitate positive outcomes in young children. In *The first eight years: Pathways to the future* (pp. 6–15). Washington, DC: Head Start Bureau, Mailman School of Health and the Society for Research in Child Development.

grade reading activities.[2] [3] All of these projects are based on good intentions. But our professional responsibility is to judge these efforts not on intentions but on evidence. We must be prepared to critically examine development projects based on research and theory.

Toward the goal of all children reading worldwide, the Early Grades Reading Project (EGR) promotes effective early grade literacy education in developing countries. In collaboration, the International Division of the International Reading Association and EQUIP1 of USAID developed guidance to help those who must select, implement, and evaluate early grades reading programs for developing countries. In addition, we hope the guidance may be of use to those who are planning projects for the future. We assume that individuals using the guidance may have limited background in reading research, reading development, or the teaching of reading.

It is important in framing this document to acknowledge three important limitations. First, most of the research on reading development and teaching has been conducted in developed countries. We must always be cautious in making claims about what will work based on this research. Second, we focus this document on contexts where the writing system is primarily alphabetic. In other words, the letters, or graphemes, of the written language map to sounds in the oral language system. Third, and finally, we have limited space and therefore we have to be brief in our descriptions. We focus therefore on *first* principles of effective early grades literacy programs and leave room for additional reading on the part of the user based on specific needs.

Challenges of Teaching Reading Well in Developing Countries

It is difficult to generalize to reading instruction and reading practices in all developing countries. The challenges are many. There is great variation within and between even neighboring countries. But we feel it is useful to acknowledge some of the common challenges that educators face in the developing world. No literacy initiative can be successful without addressing these basic concerns.

Language Diversity. Many developing countries have multiple languages spoken as "mother tongue" or "home languages." Most of these countries have a language policy that encourages the use of home languages in early literacy experiences with some attention to transition to "official" languages. Reading initiatives must be designed in ways that are sensitive to these realities and policies. (See Hoffman, Sailors, Makalela, & Matthee [2009] cited in Appendix 4 for a concrete case of the complexity surrounding language policy and reading initiatives.)

Limited Resources. There is often a lack of physical resources for schools. These resources include the school facility and instructional materials as basic as paper, pencils, and chalkboards. Textbooks and reading materials are in short supply and the quality is often poor.

2 Brunette, T. (2007). *Reading activities in US-aid supported basic education programs* Washington, DC: American Institutes of Research.

3 Sailors, M., Hoffman, J.V., Pearson, P.D., Beretvas, N.S., & Matthee, B. (2007). Learning to read with READ: Testing the effectiveness of the "Learning for Living" project. In C.S. Sunal & K. Mutua (Eds.), *Research on education in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East.* Greenwich, CT: Information Age Press.

Class Size. It is not unusual, in developing countries, for class sizes to exceed 100 learners to a teacher. Even in those countries with some economic resources and a commitment to education, the class sizes are still in excess of 50 learners per teacher.

Health and Safety. No child can be expected to learn well who is not fed or is in a state of physical threat, and yet these conditions are part of the reality in many developing countries. In areas of conflict, we see this most clearly, but the issue is not limited to these areas. For many children, the meal provided at school through a feed scheme may be the only meal they have during the day.

Equity. There are major inequities across the developing world with respect to equity and access to schooling. Gender discrimination is perhaps the area of greatest concern, with girls' education often lagging far behind that of boys in terms of educational opportunities and expectations.

Special Needs Learners. Very few schools in the developing world are able to offer full services to children who have physical and learning disabilities. In many cases, these children are excluded from school or their special needs are ignored in the classroom.

Teacher Education. The majority of teachers, in particular in rural schools, have received only limited preparation to teach. Many of these teachers may have limited knowledge and skills in the subject areas they teach. Moreover, opportunities for ongoing professional development are sorely lacking, which leaves the improvement of teaching practices to chance.

We raise these as conditions of teaching and learning that must be taken into consideration in planning and implementing early grades reading programs. Literacy initiatives may not address or resolve these conditions, but they must at least be designed to respond to these conditions. We recommend that a critical analysis of an existing or proposed early grades reading program begin with an examination of the program in relation to these conditions of teaching and learning.

Foundations of Learning to Read

Language Development and Reading

Spoken language is the foundation of learning to read and write.[4] [5] All languages start with a set of sounds that must be learned and used by young children in families where the language is spoken. All languages include words that are combinations of those sounds. Conversations in all languages involve groups of words put together to express ideas. This is the essence of communication: expressing and receiving ideas in ways that are understandable for all involved. In their homes with their families, children learn the sounds of their language, its words, and how to combine words to form ideas. Early in life, children already know a lot about how language works. They use their knowledge of spoken language as a start point in learning to read.

4 Snow, C.E. (1983). Literacy and language: Relationships during the preschool years. *Harvard Educational Review 53*, 165–189.

5 Watson, R. (2001). Literacy and oral language: Implications for early literacy acquisition. In S.B. Neuman & D.K. Dickinson (Eds.), *The handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 43–53). New York: Guilford.

Written language is harder to learn than spoken language. Why? Reading and writing involve an extra layer of symbols, which means beginners must learn the extra symbols and, in alphabetic systems, how letters represent individual sounds or phonemes. In addition to dealing with extra symbols, beginners must learn that written messages stand on their own. Written language is decontextualized; that is, the sender and receiver of a written communication do not share the same time and space. The writer is not present to tell and explain his or her message to the reader. So the reader must do the extra work of making meaning of the message.

Learning to read takes effort—on the part of teachers and learners. To become fluent, meaning-making readers and writers, children must develop word knowledge at deep and ever more complex levels, as well as decoding skills. They must develop text knowledge to interpret the structures and conventions of literary language. They must understand reading and writing relationships in the broader communication systems of speaking and listening. This only can be accomplished through deliberate practice with hundreds of words, thousands of concepts, and tens of thousands of language and literacy experiences. For this reason, learning to read must start early in childhood. It must involve the development of oral language comprehension along with print knowledge to help young learners eventually read on their own.

The Reading Process

Reading is a complex act. It involves multiple cognitive, emotional, and social abilities, each of which influences the beginning reader's success.[6] No two readers develop in exactly the same way on the same timetable. What's involved?

Fundamentally, the act of reading is an interaction between a reader and the author of a written text—a kind of conversation. To participate, the reader must be proactive, bringing **prior knowledge and emotions** to the interaction. The reader uses different **language systems** to *read* the words and make sense of the printed message. Knowledge of how words work, word meanings, grammar, and text genres are among these systems. The reader brings **motivation** to the reading experience in the form of purpose, interests, and self-regulatory skills (e.g., maintaining attention to print).

How does reading work?[7]

At the print level, the reader rapidly identifies words and phrases by making predictions based on word cues and checking them for accuracy. At the comprehension level, the reader assembles the text into a mental construction of what it means by noting main ideas and details, inferring and connecting to prior experiences. The closer the reader's construction is to the author's intended meaning, the more successful the interaction. Said another way: the reader engages in a meaningful conversation with the author.

What happens over time?

The strategies and skills needed for reading develop over time. Six stages of development have been identified that mark growth from beginning reading to mature reading.[8] Reading in the early grades spans stages 0 through 2.

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6 Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

7 Anderson, R., & Pearson, P.D. (1984). A schema-theoretic view of basic processes in reading comprehension. In P.D. Pearson, R. Barr, M.L. Kamil, & P. Mosenthal (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 255–291). New York: Longman.

8 Chall, J. (1996). *Stages of reading development* (2nd ed.). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt-Brace.

Figure 1. Stages of Reading Development

Stage	Name	The Learner
Stage 0 Birth to G1	Emergent Literacy	Gains control of oral language; relies heavily on pictures in text; pretend reads; recognizes rhyme
Stage 1 Beginning G1	Decoding	Grows aware of sound/symbol relationships; focuses on printed symbols; attempts to break code of print; uses decoding to figure out words
Stage 2 End of G1 to end of G3	Confirmation and Fluency	Develops fluency in reading; recognizes patterns in words; checks for meaning and sense; knows a stock of sight words
Stage 3 G4–G8	Learning the New (Single Viewpoint)	Uses reading as a tool for learning; applies reading strategies; expands reading vocabulary; comprehends from a singular point of view
Stage 4 HS and Early College	Multiple Viewpoints	Analyzes what is read; reacts critically to texts; deals with layers of facts and concepts; comprehends from multiple points of view
Stage 5 Late College and Graduate School	A Worldview	Develops a well-rounded view of the world through reading

Reading as a Social Practice

We often describe reading and "knowing how to read" in psychological terms. But it is important to recognize that reading, as with the other language processes, has fundamental social dimensions.[9] The texts we read have been created in a social context with a social purpose. Some of these texts and purposes may be regulatory, as in the signs on the road or the laws that are posted. Some of these texts and purposes may be informational, as in the newspaper articles that report on daily events or the website that offers information of some content. Some of the texts and purposes are recreational or aesthetic, as in the novels we read or the poetry we seek out. These texts and these purposes create social contexts that surround the developing reader. The models for texts and text use are available for the developing reader to explore.

In the developing world, where texts and traditions for the uses of texts may be limited, the opportunities to observe and engage in literacy practices may be limited. Literacy events that only exist inside of schools and classrooms and are not connected to literacy lives outside of schools may have limited impact. Literacy initiatives that strive to connect literacy practices in schools to literacy practices outside of school are particularly important. Further, literacy initiatives that focus on bringing existing literacy practices in the community into schools, or literacy practices in schools out into the community, are particularly effective and important. Without models and without real-life connections the prospects for literacy learning are limited.

9 Gee, J.P. (1997). Thinking, learning, and reading: The situated sociocultural mind. In D. Kirshner & J.A. Whitson (Eds.), *Situated cognition: Social, semiotic, and psychological perspectives* (pp. 235–259). Norwood, NJ: Erlbaum.

The Basics of Learning to Read

Research on learning suggests the importance of positioning the learner as active and engaged.[10] Learning to read involves the development of reading skills and strategies that promote independence. Active learning in reading is

Focused:	on particular learning outcomes but open to other learning opportunities
Cognitive:	knowledge is constructed by the learners
Metacognitive:	the learner self-monitors and reflects on learning
Social:	mediated by language and talk with others, including the teacher and other learners
Physical:	physical responses (fine and gross motor) often support engagement and learning

Through repeated opportunities for active learning, children reach milestones in reading that lead to reading success in the early grades.[11]

Milestone One

Note: Print referred to in these milestones can be locally written or commercially published and, ideally, should include both.

- Familiar with the uses and structures of print
- Know the format of books and other print resources
- Familiar with how print works at the sentence, word, and sound level
- Demonstrate phonemic awareness
- Write most letters of the spelling system
- Show interest in book experiences

Milestone Two

- Recognize some words at a glance
- Know connections between phonemes and spellings accurately and fast
- Familiar with comprehension strategies, such as predicting, drawing inferences, and summarizing the main idea
- Understand the uses and purposes of books and print
- Compose fairly readable drafts with some correct spellings; increasingly comfortable with a variety of writing formats
- Engage in a variety of literacy activities voluntarily

Milestone Three

- Show automatic word recognition, spelling skills, and reading fluency
- Familiar with structural analysis of words
- Use comprehension strategies to understand texts
- Monitor own reading comprehension for understanding
- Familiar with many different print resources, such as dictionaries, atlases, and reports
- Learn from texts
- Produce a variety of written work, such as essays, reports, and personal "published" books
- Read voluntarily often

10 Bransford, J., Brown, A., & Cocking, R. (Eds.). (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience and school* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

11 Burns, M.S., Griffin, P., & Snow, C.E. (Eds.). (1999). *Starting out right: A guide to promoting children's reading success* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

The Basics of Early Grades Reading Teaching

Research on teaching suggests the importance of the active teacher in promoting learning.[12] Some of the elements of active teaching are presented in Figure 2.[13] The elements of active teaching are not specific to a particular type of lesson, although certain elements may have more emphasis in certain kinds of lessons. For example, in a direct instruction lesson there may be greater emphasis on teacher-explicit explanations than in a lesson where the learners are engaged in a problem-solving activity.

Figure 2. Active Teaching Elements

Teaching Element	Descriptors
Enthusiasm	Energetic interactions; dynamic activity
Positive Learning Environment	Clean, safe, learning-focused
Challenging, Appropriate Content	Evidence-based
Responsive Instruction	Organized, interactive, adaptive
Student Engagement	Active, respectful, learning-focused
Variety	Range of methods and resources
Assessment for Learning	Ongoing, authentic, useful
Active Language Arts	Reading, writing, speaking, listening

What does active teaching in early grades reading look like? It is evident in these ways:[14]

- Creation of a **supportive instructional environment** where time is used wisely. Instruction reflects effective planning and preparation framed by standards that set goals for continuing progress for all students. Smooth, time-efficient transitions contribute to many opportunities to learn. Teachers focus on instructional objectives in a variety of ways through teacher-directed instruction and independent practice, cooperative learning groups, and opportunities to apply skills and strategies in authentic situations. Students share responsibility for classroom management and routines. Teachers and students respect one another.
- Attention to **skills and strategies** necessary for reading success, including decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension. Teachers provide explicit instruction in essential reading skills. They engage children in opportunities to apply these strategies and skills in a variety of meaningful contexts and content areas for a variety of purposes and with varied types of print materials. Reading instruction is intentionally connected to listening, speaking, and writing and is applied in strategic ways according to context and purpose.
- Use of **scaffolded instruction** to engage all learners in active learning. Instruction is structured so that learners "experience" a strategy or skill, much like a rehearsal as they (a) observe modeling by the teacher, (b) participate in guided practice, and (c) try out

12 Brophy, J. *Teaching* Brussels, Belgium: International Academy of Education; Geneva, Switzerland: International Bureau of Education. Retrieved January 2009 from www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/archive/publications/EducationalPracticesSeriesPdf/prac01e.pdf

13 Hoffman, J.V., & Sailors, M. (2009).*Children's Book Project evaluation instruments* (Unpublished data collection instrument). Dar es Salaam, Tansania: Children's Book Project.

14 International Reading Association. (2004). *Preparing reading professionals* (chapters 2–4). Newark, DE: Author.

new strategies and skills on their own. Teacher modeling involves teacher self-talk and demonstrations of how to do the cognitive work of reading.

- Intentional **connections to the language arts and disciplinary content**. Students are given many opportunities to respond to material that is read aloud to them or that they read on their own. Response may take many forms, including discussion, writing, art, and drama. Reading materials include narratives, informational texts, and functional materials that require learners to follow directions, read maps, and interpret other graphic materials that involve a variety of media. Learners are taught to view reading as a tool for learning about their world.
- **Ongoing, informal assessment** to gauge reading progress. Informal assessments are frequently integrated with and collected during typical daily activities. These may include anecdotal records, checklists, and the collection of student work. Informal assessments are used regularly to provide a cross-check on where a particular student is in relation to him or herself, where a student is in relation to the group, and information about the need for adjustments in the curriculum. Information collected through informal assessment is used to monitor student progress and make appropriate instructional decisions.
- **Family involvement** is sought and encouraged, offering a welcoming and collaborative relationship with families about the goals and activities of the reading program. The teacher is responsive to family inquiries and concerns, extending opportunities to family members to visit the classrooms to observe activities and inviting family members to support instruction at home when possible.

First Principles of Early Grades Reading Programs

We list *First* Principles that guide the development and implementation of successful early grades reading programs and initiatives. We regard these as essential to quality beginning reading experiences. All are important and all must be attended to in any program development and implementation plan.

Principle 1: Oral language is the foundation of learning to read and write.

At the initial stages, reading builds on an oral language. Any reading program designed to build early reading skills must offer support for and connections to an oral vocabulary in a spoken language. In multilingual environments, consideration must be given to building connections between the home language, the language of instruction, and written language.[15] (See Appendix 4 for professional resources that address this challenge.) However approached, reading instruction should cultivate a concept of word in print that is the basis for learning how to transform written words into sounds (reading by sound) and/or how to retrieve the meaning and reference of printed words from a vocabulary (reading by sense).[16] For this reason, writing instruction is introduced along with reading instruction to aid in mapping spoken to written language. To support the learn-to-read process, reading instruction is also coordinated with the other language arts: writing, speaking, and listening.

15 Lipson, M. (2009, March). *Beyond access: Reading for all* (Report from the Sixth Annual Global Perspectives on Literacy). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

16 Dehaene, S. (2007). *The neurons of reading* New York: Penguin.

Principle 2: Books and texts are varied in genre and form; they are plentiful.

Children need access to quality books and print to develop and grow as readers.[17] This seems obvious, but it is not simple. The tipping point is abundance. Children thrive in learning to read when the environment contains ample books and print. In real terms this means a large supply of books organized for instruction as well as for independent reading in a classroom library.[18] Trade books by local authors and published by local industries can contribute to a growing supply of books for independent and recreational reading.[19] For purposes of instruction, books must be of high quality at a range of reading levels for instruction. To foster reading independence, the ambitious goal is 5 to 8 books per student that represent different genres, such as information books, traditional stories, and poetry. A classroom library is a special place to enjoy books and book-related activities. It need not be large, but it should be inviting, providing a quiet setting for reading and sharing books.

Principle 3: The learning environment contains abundant print of many kinds.

In addition to books, the learning environment is resourced with high-quality reading materials, with variety—including the use of electronic texts in relevant languages and in sufficient quantities for practical use.[20] All of the physical reading materials necessary for reading instruction, including charts, journals, and work displays, are available in the classroom setting. These include texts created/authored by the learners and the teacher. The learning environment also reflects the psychological environment of the classroom that values all forms of reading and writing and supports risk-taking as the learners explore new literacy practices. Classrooms display print on doors, entries, and walls. Sources of print include community information, directions, labels, student work, posters, and charts.

Principle 4: An evidence-based curriculum guides reading instruction.

In most countries today, including developing countries, there is a prescribed curriculum. Reading programs should be designed to support the literacy goals and other learning outcomes in the curriculum. They should be evidence-based, developing concepts, strategies, and skills found to be essential in learning to read (e.g., orthographic factors). The curriculum can serve as an important source of support in focusing early grades reading instruction on what students need to know and be able to do. Knowledge of the curriculum should be used as the basic framework for instruction and as the basis for making informed decisions to alter the framework, when indicated, in order to address curricular gaps and to meet student needs.

17 Neuman, S.B., Celano, D.C., Greco, A.N., & Shue, P. (2001). *Access for all: Closing the book gap for children in early education* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

18 Sailors, M., Hoffman, J.V., & Condon, M. (2008). The challenges of developing leveled texts in and for developing countries: The Ithuba Writing Project in South Africa. In E.H. Hiebert & M. Sailors (Eds.), *Finding the right texts: What works for beginning and struggling readers*. New York: Guilford.

19 Prouty, R. (2009, March). *Education for all fast track initiative* (Report from the Sixth Annual Global Perspectives on Literacy). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

20 Hoffman, J.V. (2009, March). *Literacy in developing countries* (Report from the Sixth Annual Global Perspectives on Literacy). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Principle 5: Teachers are prepared to teach the reading program well.

There is no substitute for the teacher who is knowledgeable, flexible, and strategic in helping children learn to read.[21] This includes skill mastery to organize early grades reading instruction under the conditions of large class sizes and limited resources.

Ongoing support for the teaching of reading is critical. Effective support cannot be delivered in training workshops alone. Teachers must be actively supported through coaching in the implementation of programs. Teachers must be encouraged to work together to adapt programs to local conditions. Teachers must be treated as professionals and encouraged to take charge of their own learning and development.

Principle 6: An assessment system is in place.

Teachers must be responsive to learners as they teach and as they plan to teach. Assessment guides both ongoing and long-term decision making. Tools and strategies for assessment must be provided as part of any program and should be aligned with instructional goals. Teachers need to become systematic in gathering data, recording data, and interpreting data to inform instruction. They need to be skilled in the use of multiple assessment tools to guide instruction.

Principle 7: Family involvement is an integral part of early grades reading.

Any initiative that focuses on reading must attend explicitly to fostering home-to-school and school-to-home literacy connections. The literacy practices outside of school must become part of the curriculum in schools, and the literacy practices in school must spill out into the community. This is a huge challenge and one often avoided in literacy initiatives, but it is critical. Developing a sense of school community is a start point for building relationships with parents as partners in supporting the learn-to-read process. Regular school events and celebrations provide a social context for connecting with parents, showcasing children's accomplishments, articulating educational goals, and explaining assessment outcomes. Committees, councils, and advisory groups offer opportunities for collaboration and joint problem solving—key ingredients of successful schools. Time honored, the home visit is one of the surest ways to build relationships with families and engage their support in helping children learn to read.

Principle 8: Evaluation is a tool for change.

There is no perfect program for literacy, no silver bullet solution to challenges we face. All programs must be open to adaptation and modification to local contexts. Programs must plan for ongoing data collection that informs program revisions based on what is working and what is not.[22] This kind of evaluation must be in the control of those who are implementing the program. This is important in two ways. First, this kind of evaluation ensures that the program is constantly adapting to changing conditions. Second, this kind of evaluation encourages ownership and sustainability within the local community.

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21 International Reading Association. (2007). *Teaching reading well: A synthesis of the International Reading Association's research on teacher preparation for reading instruction*. Newark, DE: Author. Available: www.reading.org/Libraries/SRII/teaching_reading_well.sflb.ashx

22 Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2007). *Schooling by design: Mission, action, and achievement* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Take a Walk Into a School

In a second-grade classroom in Malawi (Africa), Prudence is just finishing her school day. It has been a fun day at school. Mr. Gai, her teacher, organized a competition at the school around storytelling. Mr. Gai worked with the learners during school and after school to prepare them to do well and they did. Their class earned the most medals out of all the classes in the school. Now Prudence has finished all of her assignments and looks about the room for something to do. There are more than 100 learners in her classroom with only enough chairs for 50. Mr. Gai tells her often that she is a clever student, and if she continues to work hard she may someday be able to go to a secondary school. Prudence loves to read, but the problem is there are very few books in the classroom. The books are in a small shelf in the far corner of the classroom, and Prudence has read them all many times. Today Prudence picks up a book called *On Their Way*. Prudence likes to read this book because it helps her practice her English. Prudence speaks Chichewa as do the other children in her community. No one speaks English in school—at least at her grade level. Prudence would like to learn English, but she struggles with the stories in the book. The stories are all about America. There is so much she does not recognize or understand. Do all of the people in America live in such beautiful houses? What is "father's briefcase"? Are cats and dogs allowed into their houses? Prudence knows that in high school there will be only English, so she works to learn the words and practices reading out loud. What Prudence does not know is that these books were brought to Malawi on a boat and offered to schools and classrooms. Mr. Gai is always trying to find books for the learners and thought that these were better than nothing.

Building On and Setting Priorities Guided by *First* Principles

While we know very little about the literacy development and literacy levels in Prudence's classroom, even this brief introduction suggests that there is a lot to build on here. There is a valuing of oral language and storytelling in the competition. Did this storytelling lead to written texts? Or scripts for dramatization? Did the learners write their own stories? Did the learners gather stories from the community?

Clearly, Mr. Gai is active in his teaching. How does he connect his work to the curriculum goals? How does he collaborate with other teachers to improve the school program? These are positives that a literacy program can build on in the future.

What are the priorities for change? Of course, answering this question would require conversations with Mr. Gai and the other teachers and the learners. Clearly, if Prudence had a vote it would be for more books and more books that are relevant to her interests. Prudence might appreciate some bilingual texts that scaffold her into a second language. Mr. Gai might be looking for better ways of assessing literacy: Did the work with storytelling promote literacy learning? How? What is the evidence?

First Principles in Action: What to Look For and What to Ask About

We live in a world of limited resources, and this is particularly true when we look at educational aid to developing countries. We must work in collaboration with host country partners to make difficult decisions regarding resource allocations. There is not enough money to fund all of the good program proposals out there, and there is certainly not enough money to waste on the funding of programs that have little potential for immediate or sustainable impact on early grades reading teaching and learning.

We offer a core set of tools that can be used to envision and critically examine early grades reading programs that are proposed and implemented. These tools are as follows:

- First Principles Guide
- Active Teaching Rubric
- Active Learning Classroom Indicators

In addition to this core set of tools, other means of documenting, tracking, analyzing, and assessing *First* Principles at work toward the goal of more effective early grades reading programs are provided in the appendixes.

First Principles Guide

This resource provides a set of questions and sample indicators. The set of questions may be used as part of an analytical framework for evaluating a proposal. It may be used to interview program developers and implementers. It may be sent to developers and implementers to respond to in anticipation of a conversation around the proposal. The questions are starting points for deeper discussions around critical areas. Anyone using this document should extend the questioning as needed.

The set of indicators highlights what to look for as evidence of the principles in action. The set is not exhaustive. It is intended to guide the description of evidence that supports a proposed or an intact program. Those who use the set should detail and extend it as needed.

Active Teaching Rubric

This is an observational tool that assesses the extent to which a reading program reflects elements of active teaching. Active teaching is a broad construct used to describe teachers who are successful in scaffolding student learning. Active teaching is rooted in the core learning principles of learning with understanding.[23] Students learn best when they are socially interactive in learning activities that are purposeful, authentic, and appropriately challenging. The elements of active teaching find support in research on the relationship between teaching processes and learning outcomes. Active teaching spans curriculum areas and developmental levels. Active teaching is not a "performance" or "show" that foregrounds the teacher. Rather, active teaching foregrounds the learners as special and successful.

23 Bransford, J., Brown, A., & Cocking R. (Eds.). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Active Learning Classroom Indicators

This continuum identifies observable indicators of active learning in the classroom. It attempts to answer the question, What do we expect to see and hear when visiting classrooms that apply *First* Principles in the early grades reading program? The tool attempts to represent the big ideas contained in the principles. Take note of the format. The left-hand column describes specific, observable indicators of a principled approach to early grades reading instruction. The right-hand column identifies indicators of practices that do not reflect *First* Principles. The center region provides a continuum that allows users to pre-assess and develop an action plan based on the results. The tool also functions as a means of monitoring program progress along the way. It can be more detailed to guide program development and implementation suited to local needs and desired results.

Focusing on What Matters

Learning to read is more similar than different throughout the world and across countries and cultures. The *First* Principles are meant to provide general guidelines for early grades program policy and practice. Each principle addresses essential elements of early grades reading instruction to be examined independently. Yet each is interrelated with and affected by the others. Together they inform what matters in early grades reading programs from the start. For example, the learning environment must be considered when attempting to enact strong curriculum with the aim of developing successful young readers and writers. Taken together, the *First* Principles provide a framework for the skills and strategies that will be taught and the instructional methods used to teach them. The best use of *First* Principles will require thoughtful consideration of how they map onto the local contexts in which they are used.

First Principles Guide

***First* Principles**	**What to Ask**	**What to Look For**
Oral language is the foundation of learning to read and write.	• How does the program support language development in both home and target languages? • How is the program considerate of any special linguistic features of the home languages? • How does the program support the development of reading as one strand of the language arts?	• Supports for the language of school and home • Supports for different language abilities • Reading instruction connected with the other language arts
Books and texts are varied in genre and form; they are plentiful.	• Is the quantity of materials sufficient for the full implementation of the program? • Are reading materials of quality relative to learner background, language, interests, and instructional needs? • To what extent are reading materials an outgrowth of the program?	• Sufficient books and materials for instruction • Variety of quality reading materials in different forms and genres for independent reading
The learning environment contains abundant print of many kinds.	• How does the program lead to the development of texts that enrich the print environment of the school and classroom? • How would a classroom print environment look different in a classroom using this program and one that is not?	• Ample materials for reading instruction (e.g., books, charts, writing supplies) • Classroom library • Environmental print • Displays of student work
An evidence-based curriculum guides reading instruction.	• To what extent is the program coherent and aligned with national, provincial, and local standards? • To what extent does the program support learning for understanding? • How should the curriculum be planned better to meet learner needs?	• Access to evidence-based content standards in the language arts • A written curriculum aligned to standards for early grades reading achievement • Developmentally appropriate scope and sequence of learning activities • Curriculum evaluation process
Teachers are prepared to teach the reading program well.	• How does the program support teacher learning? • How does participation in the training for this program lead teachers to be more knowledgeable, strategic, and adaptive in instructional decision-making? • To what extent are professional development activities "results oriented"?	• Sufficient training prior to program implementation • Ongoing professional development focused on student learning • Adequate time for teacher planning • An appraisal process of teaching performance.
An assessment system is in place.	• How are we doing? What evidence is in place to answer this question? • How will we know students really grasp essential reading concepts and skills? • Are we assessing what's vital? • To what extent does the program support teachers in using assessment data to help students learn?	• An assessment schedule • Informal assessments embedded in instructional activities • Guidance to interpret and use assessment information in instruction
Family involvement is an integral part of early grades reading.	• In what ways does the program connect literacy activities in school with literacy activities in the home or in the community?	• Description of a family involvement program • Log or diary of periodic meetings that provide information and instruction for families
Evaluation is a tool for change.	• To what extent is there a culture of continuous improvement? • To what extent does our grading and reporting system communicate clearly and honestly? • Are resources being used optimally to advance learning? • Would you want your child in this program? Why or why not?	• Annual evaluation plan • Shared results of annual evaluations with teachers, families, and the community

Active Teaching Rubric

The Active Teaching Rubric is an observation tool. It describes the extent to which a program emphasizes and supports each of the active teaching elements.

Active Teaching Rubric	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The teacher displays **enthusiasm** for the content the students are studying.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. The teacher creates a **positive learning environment** (climate)—more than just the absence of negativism and criticism—and a safe and positive space for learning.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. The teacher presents the learners with **challenging but appropriate** learning goals and materials.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. The teacher is **clear and accurate** in the presentation of the material to be learned.	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. The students are **engaged** (attentive and motivated) in the instruction.	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. The teacher organizes time, space, movement, and learner behavior to achieve "**flow**" within a lesson.	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. The teacher **moves** around the classroom (rather than remaining at his or her desk or at one place in the classroom).	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. The teacher **invites responses** from students with questions but also opens spaces for students to initiate talk.	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. The teacher **listens carefully** to the comments and responses of learners and **builds on** their ideas.	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. The teacher **adapts instruction** for special needs learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. The teacher uses a **variety** of instructional methodologies.	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. The teacher **assesses** and uses data to **adapt** teaching and inform future instruction.	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. The teacher uses **instructional aids** effectively to support teaching and learning.	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. The students have opportunities to engage in **discussion** about the content (concepts and skills).	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. The teacher helps the students to **connect the learning** inside of school to the uses of knowledge outside of school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. The students have opportunities to write/**author texts** for themselves and the others that support learning.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Overall Active Teaching Rating				
None	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
1	2	3	4	5

Active Learning Classroom Indicators

(Adapted from Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2007). *Schooling by design: Mission, action, and achievement* [p. 236]. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.)

1. Large supply of books (5–8 per student) that reflect a variety of topics and genres	**********	1. Low supply or no books available for students to read
2. A classroom library with ample space for 4–5 children and an ample supply of books	**********	2. No classroom library
3. Print-rich environment that includes displays of student work	**********	3. Little or no print displayed in the environment
4. A daily schedule that allows ample time for reading instruction and independent reading[24]	**********	4. A daily schedule but irregular times for instruction and independent reading
5. Reading activities that address established literacy content standards	**********	5. Reading activities do not reflect literacy content standards
6. Instruction and assessment that focus on key concepts and skills for reading success	**********	6. Instruction focused on doing activities and testing isolated skills
7. Evaluation of student performance based on known criteria, standards, and models	**********	7. Students do not know how their reading will be evaluated
8. Active engagement of all students in reading	**********	8. Few students have opportunities to read

24 At least 1 hour of reading instruction and 10 minutes of independent reading are recommended.

Appendix 1

Conditions for Learning and Teaching

Conditions	What to Ask
Language Diversity	• What is the language of the school and the home? • How is the program supportive of language abilities and language policies?
Limited Resources	• What are the resources available to support and sustain the program for initial implementation? And for the long term?
Class Size	• What are the class sizes in the targeted schools? • How will the program meet the needs of these learners in these numbers?
Health and Safety	• Are the children being cared for in the school in terms of physical needs (e.g., food, water, sanitation) and psychological needs?
Special Needs Learners	• Have special needs learners been identified? • How does the instruction offered accommodate their needs? • How does the proposed program meet the needs of these learners?
Teacher Education	• What level of preparation for teaching is there in the faculty for the school? • How will the program support teachers in learning to use the program effectively?

Appendix 2

Foundations of Early Grades Reading

Foundations	What to Ask
Language Development and Reading	• How does the program build connections between oral language and written language? • How are writing, listening, and speaking supported in the program in ways that link back to the creation and use of texts? • How are the principles of modeling, exploration, and support in language development encouraged through this program?
The Reading Process	• What are the components of reading that are the focus for the program? • Is the focus for the program isolated from reading or is it always brought back to authentic acts of reading and writing?
Reading as a Social Practice	• What are the literacy practices that will result from the implementation of this program in the classroom? • What is the potential for these literacy practices to find their way (or do they already exist) in the community outside of the school?

Appendix 3

First Principles Self-Review Tool

Principle	Focus	Element	Indicator			Evidence
1	Foundations	Connecting Instruction	☐ oral language foundation			
			☐ language arts			
			☐ subject matter			
2	Environment	Access to Books and Print	☐ > 8 books per student	☐ 5–8 books	☐ < 5 books	
			☐ paper/pencils			
			☐ classroom library			
3	Environment	Abundant Print	☐ environmental print			
			☐ displays of student work			
			☐ various forms of text			
4	Active Teaching	Knowledge of Expectations	☐ policy documents			
			☐ written curriculum			
			☐ curriculum planning			
			☐ developmentally appropriate instruction			
		Skills and Strategies	☐ explicit instruction			
			☐ follow-up practice			
			☐ integration with language arts			
		Scaffolding	☐ goal oriented			
			☐ teacher modeling			
			☐ guided practice			
			☐ independent practice			
			☐ individual needs			
5	Teacher Development	Knowledge Base	☐ learn-to-read process			
			☐ reading approaches and methods			
			☐ organizing for large groups with few resources			
			☐ assessing reading progress and achievement			
		Appraisal	☐ demonstrates content knowledge in reading			
			☐ demonstrates pedagogical knowledge and skills			
6	Assessment	Tools and Strategies	☐ assessment system			
			☐ curriculum-based assessment			
7	Home–School	Family Involvement	☐ regular program			
			☐ classroom connections			
8	Learner Success	Student Progress in Reading	% below:	% at:	% above:	
		Student Motivation to Read	☐ personal reading log			
		Student Wide Use of Reading	☐ effective use of instructional time			

Appendix 4

Professional Resources for Literacy Programs in Multilingual Environments

Akinnaso, F.N. (1993). Policy and experiment in mother tongue literacy in Nigeria. *International Review of Education*, *39*(4), 255–285. doi:10.1007/BF01102408

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Lipson, M.Y., & Biggam, S.C. (2005). *Final report (phase III) of the IRA/UNCESCO/Tanzania MOEC Literacy Project: Capacity building for literacy policy development in the United Republic of Tanzania and Dares Salaam cluster countries*. Burlington: University of Vermont.

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Glossary

Achievement Tests: A test of knowledge of or proficiency in something learned or taught; especially, a test of the effects of specific instruction or training.

Alphabetics: The assumption underlying alphabetic writing systems in which each speech sound or phoneme of a language has its own distinctive graphic representation.

Anecdotal Records: Descriptions of behavior; reporting of observed behavioral incidents.

Assessment: The act or process of gathering data in order to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of student learning, by observation, testing, interviews, etc. *Note:* Some writers use the term *assessment* to refer also to the judgments or evaluations made after data are gathered.

Assessment System: System that uses the screening process, progress monitoring, diagnostics, and outcome measures to assess and monitor students' reading achievement.

Checklists: In assessment, a list of specific skills or behaviors to be marked off by an observer as a student performs them.

Comprehension: In reading, the construction of the meaning of a written communication through a reciprocal, holistic interchange of ideas between the reader and the message in a particular communicative context.

Curriculum: The overall plan or design of institutionalized education, including the actual opportunities for learning provided at a particular place and time.

Decoding: Analyzing spoken or graphic symbols of familiar language to ascertain their intended meaning.

Decontextualized: Literally "taken out of context," as in the content of many workbook exercises.

Environmental Print: Print or other graphic symbols, in addition to books, that are found in the physical environment (e.g., street signs, billboards, television commercials, building signs).

Explicit Instruction: Approach to teaching in which topics and contents are broken down into small parts and taught individually. It involves explanation, demonstration, and practice. Topics are taught in a logical order and are directed by the teacher.

Family Involvement Program: Planned literacy efforts or activities involving more than one generation. *Note:* A family literacy program generally has three components—literacy for children (including study skills), literacy for parents (e.g., GED instruction), and instruction for adults on how to foster literacy in their children or other young relatives.

Motivation: The forces within an organism that stimulate and direct behavior (e.g., internal sensory stimulation, ego needs); internal motivation for reading and learning in general.

Oral Language: Communication through speech with arbitrary, accepted symbols and meanings.

Phonemic Awareness: The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds—phonemes—in spoken words.

Scaffolded Instruction: Learning assistance that is adjusted to the learner's potential level of development and gradually withdrawn as the learner gains greater autonomy.

Skill: An acquired ability to perform well; proficiency.

Standards: Statements about what is valued in a given field, such as English language arts, and/or descriptions of what is considered quality work.

Strategy: A systematic way of responding to recognizable contexts, situations, or demands.

Student Work: Authentic student products that, when evaluated with standards-based rubrics, lead to a richer understanding of standards and an increase in teacher expectations regarding the work students can produce.

Systematic Instruction: Carefully thought out, strategic lessons that build on previously taught information, from simple to complex, with clear, concise student objectives that are driven by ongoing assessment.

Sources of Definitions

Harris, T.L., & Hodges, R.E. (1995). *The literacy dictionary: The vocabulary of reading and writing.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association

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