

**KWENA BASIN PROJECT (2014-2018)**

A Basic Concepts Project for Foundation Phase Teachers in Four Schools

Word Test Results: 2014 - 2017

**Aim**

The project aims to systematically improve the language, cognitive and scholastic functioning of Foundation Phase learners from four multi-grade schools in the Kwena Basin by focusing on the quality of teaching and learning. The Basic Concepts Programme (BCP) is being used as a common approach to develop and extend the prerequisites for learning in English (First Additional Language). The teachers are being trained as mediators of the BCP and are receiving ongoing mentorship and support during the project.

**Measurement and Evaluation**

A number of measures are being used to evaluate the intervention and the project. Learners’ knowledge of basic conceptual systems is being assessed on an annual basis. The results of the *Test of Basic Concepts Knowledge* in Grades 1-3 are being compared with the baseline data on an annual basis. The learners’ literacy knowledge is also being assessed on an annual basis in Grades 3 - 4. The results of the *Word Test* are being compared with the baseline data on an annual basis. The decision was taken to include Grade 4 learners in the evaluation (even though the project is focused on the Foundation Phase) in order to assess the delayed effects of the project. This is particularly important for learners in Grade 4 who are being taught for the first time with English as the language of instruction and learning. The focus of the current report is to compare the data gathered at baseline in 2014 with the data gathered after the first 3 years of intervention (2015, 2016 and 2017). Data is gathered towards the end of the third term every year.

**Test Instrument:** Word Test

The Word Test is a literacy test designed to determine the number of words written by learners in 15 minutes. In this project the words are written in English. Children are encouraged to continue writing until the end of the test, but they are not rushed. Spelling errors and words classified as non-sense words are subtracted from the total number of words written during the test. Non-sense words include words that: i) cannot be decoded, ii) are repeated in the test, and iii) have more than 2 spelling errors. The Word Test is a direct measure of vocabulary development and early word writing skills. It is also reasonable to assume that most words that can be written by a learner could also be read by that learner. The Word Test is based on a similar measure developed by [Marie Clay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Clay) (1985).

**Method:**

Data was gathered from 3 of the 4 project schools in 2014 and 2015. In 2014 data was gathered from Enkeldoorn, Umthombopholile, and Klipspruit, while in 2015 data was gathered from Enkeldoorn, Umthombopholile and Phakama. In 2016 and 2017 data was gathered from all 4 project schools. The data is therefore not entirely comparable particularly when matching the average scores in a grade for different years. Comparative data was gathered from a school in a socio-economically deprived area of Cape Town as well as from a school within the area of operation of the project.

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| Total number of learners assessed at the project schools (2014-2017) |
|   | **Grade 3** | **Grade 4** |
| 2014 | **28** | **28** |
| 2015 | **41** | **45** |
| 2016 | **69** | **62** |
| 2017 | **68** | **68** |
| **Total** | **206** | **203** |

**Results:**

Grade 3

There was a decline (-4.95 points) in the average score for 2017 compared with the baseline assessment in 2014. There was however an improvement (+3.49 points) in the results compared with 2016. The project schools scored on average 16.3 points higher than a comparable group of learners from the province. The word scores for the project learners were approximately 12 months higher than that of the control learners, however approximately 2.1 years delayed in comparison with a group of disadvantaged learners in the Western Cape.

While there have been impressive year on year gains in the average score at one of the project schools since the start of the project (Enkeldoorn: +43.28), there have also been year on year declines in the scores at one of the schools since the start of the project (Umthombophile: -28.65). There were improvements from 2016 to 2017 at the two other schools (Phakama: +2.14 and Klipspruit: +5.59). There was a big difference (39.49) between the average scores at the highest scoring school (Enkeldoorn) and the other schools in 2016. This equates to a difference of approximately 2.5 years. The learners at Enkeldoorn were in fact functioning slightly below the average score (-2.25) expected of a child in Grade 3. See the Figure above.

Grade 4

There was a small increase (+3.19 points) in the average score since the baseline assessment in 2014. The increase in the average scores could be regarded as a word gain of approximately 3 months compared to the baseline learners at the start of the project. There was however an overall decline (-7.94) in the scores since last year. The word scores for the project learners were approximately 1.5 years in advance of the control learners in the area, however, approximately 2.2 years delayed compared to a group of disadvantaged learners in the Western Cape.

The results at Enkeldoorn (+37.63) and Klipspruit (+3.2) were higher than the initial baseline results, while the results at Umthombophile were significantly lower (-20.4) than the initial baseline results. No baseline data had been gathered at Phakama at the start of the project. There were declines in the average scores from 2016 to 2017 at all four of the project schools. The scores had declined by 20.1 points at Umthombophile, 17.95 points at Phakama, 15.95 points at Enkeldoorn and 1.88 points at Klipsrpuit. There was a large difference (33.83) between the average scores at the highest scoring school (Enkeldoorn) and the other schools in 2017. This equates to a difference of approximately 2.1 years. The learners at Enkeldoorn were in fact functioning within 6 months (-9.5 points) of the average score expected of a child in Grade 4. See the Figure below.

**Discussion:**

While the Word Test results might on the surface appear disappointing, there were several positive aspects that could be considered. 1.) The Grade 3 results have improved this year after a decline that started in 2015. 2.) When compared to learners from a school in the area, Grade 3 and 4 learners were found to be 1 – 1.5 years in advance of their peers. 3.) The scores of Grade 3 learners at Enkeldoorn have consistently improved since the start of the project (+43.28 points), while the results of Grade 4 Enkeldoorn learners have also improved significantly (+37.63 points) since the start of the Project, although there was a decline in 2017. The improvements at Enkeldoorn would equate to around 2.7 – 2.4 years respectively of development.

The most concerning aspect of the results appeared to be the decline in the Grade 4 results in 2017. The scores on this test declined on average by 14 points this year. This seemed to be a significant decline, however, need to be viewed in the context of the Grade 3 results from 2016, since the start of the project the difference between Grade 3 and Grade 4 scores has been **16.73 – 21.02** points which would equate to approximately one year+ of development. In 2017 this difference was **17.02** points and so has remained constant. The difference between Grade 4 and Grade 3 scores at the local comparison school was only **+5.34** points.

The learners at Umthombophile and Phakama in Grade 3 and Grade 4 appeared to have the biggest decline (between 38% - 75%) in scores since the start of the project. Both of the multi-grade (2/3) teachers at these two schools resigned during the year (2017). The Grade 2 and Grade 3 learners at these schools received very little intervention during the year. This might therefore also impact on the project results in 2018. It is interesting to note that the school with the highest ‘*Test of Basic Concepts Knowledge’* test results (Enkeldoorn) attained the highest ‘*Word Test*’ scores and conversely schools with the lowest ‘*Test of Basic Concepts Knowledge’* test results (Umthombophile/Phakama) attained some of the lowest ‘*Word Test’* scores.