

IMPROVING LITERACY STANDARDS IN GUYANA'S PRIMARY SCHOOLS CONSULTANCY REPORT

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CONTENTS

	Page no.
Acknowledgements	3
Abbreviations	3
Introduction	4
1. Executive Summary	5
2. Recommendations	7
3. Standards	9
Key Contributory Factors:	
4. Teaching Quality	11
5. Monitoring and Assessment	16
6. Curriculum Policy and Resources	19
7. The Teaching environment	21
8. Professional Development	22
9. School Management and the Role of the Headteacher	24
10. Parents and the Community	25
11. Pre-school Education	27
Appendices:	
1. Examples of standards for reading and writing at 7, 9 and 11 years	28
2. Example of a common literacy lesson structure	31
3. Key features of an effective phonics programme	32
4. Key features of shared reading and writing	33
5. Example of the infrastructure needed to support a national strategy	35
6. Terms of reference	37
References	39

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MORE WAS SAID HERE – SB TO COMPLETE

ABBREVIATIONS

CfBT	Centre for British Teachers
CXC	Caribbean Examination Council
GEAP	Guyana Education Access Project
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCERD	National Centre for Education Resources and Development
SSRP	Secondary School Reform Project

INTRODUCTION

This consultancy originated in a commission to examine issues of literacy in the Guyana Education Access Project (GEAP), funded by UK Government's Department of International Development. GEAP has, as its main focus, the provision and improvement of secondary education in two regions of the country. However, it is evident that the problems of poor literacy, which are profound among many secondary pupils, have their origins in the primary school. For this reason, the terms of reference were modified to focus the main burden of the report on the work of the primary schools - on prevention rather than remediation. That said, much of what is written below about primary teaching, and how it might be improved, will apply with equal relevance to the teaching of literacy in secondary schools. Indeed, the pervasiveness of literacy difficulties across both phases of schooling means that children of different ages are likely to have similar needs and, with the obvious adjustments for age and maturity, will be likely to benefit from similar teaching methods.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Standards of literacy are a source of widespread concern. It is possible that as many as 60 % of Guyana's pupils are at least three years behind their expected levels at age 11 and that, of these, 25% at least, are seriously failing. The consequences of this for the children's and the country's future are obvious.
- 1.2. A number of factors contribute to this. The most important by far is the quality of teaching. Children in most classes are expected to learn by listening, imitating, memorising and copying. The teaching climate is authoritarian and the teaching methods, which are heavily based on drilling and practising isolated skills, inhibit effective learning. These methods perpetuate low expectations and inculcate a sense of failure and fault in many pupils. With some notable exceptions, there are few opportunities in most classes for children to discuss their experiences, express themselves, ask questions or to reflect upon and develop their own ideas. Despite the substantial time devoted to language work - at least 25% of most school days - continuous text reading occupies only a very small proportion, and time for independent text reading is even less. The same, or worse, is true for writing. These traditions of teaching are heavily reinforced by the impact of school culture on individual teachers, especially the 50% of young, inexperienced and untrained teachers, who lack knowledge about literacy and have no strategies for dealing with their classes, other than those learned from their own experience as pupils.
- 1.3. Other factors affecting standards include:
 - the lack of a clearly articulated set of standards to benchmark expectations and guide assessment at key points through the primary and secondary years, and a consequent lack of monitoring and assessment in literacy;
 - the poor levels of book resources which push many teachers towards irrelevant skills teaching in the absence of any worthwhile texts to read;
 - the shortage of adequate professional support through the training agencies or from headteachers.
- 1.4. The evidence in this report is derived principally from observations made on visits to primary and secondary schools over a two week period. Evidence was also collected through discussions with stakeholders including teachers, headteachers, parents, community workers, teacher trainers, regional officers, senior officers in the Ministry of Education, and from scrutiny of available documentation. The evidence reflects almost exactly, a concern expressed six years ago in the Ministry's Education Development Plan (1995). Thus although, in one sense, there is not much new here, the absence of change points to a growing crisis in the teaching of literacy. The children entering primary school in 1995 are now embarking on their secondary education. Too many of them cannot

read or write adequately. In the same period again, they will be young adults, many with children of their own.

- 1.5. These problems are well understood by senior officers of Guyana's Ministry of Education, who are keen to address them through a national strategy for improvement. Against this background, the evidence has been used to recommend some steps towards such a strategy. The recommendations are informed by the writer's experience of directing the National Literacy Strategy in England. Some of the strategies for, improving standards and managing change learned through this work, may be usefully applied to the different contexts and needs of Guyana's schools.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the evidence collected, the following recommendations are offered to the Ministry of Education for consideration as steps towards a national strategy for improving standards of literacy.

Improving the quality of literacy teaching

- 2.1. Take steps, through every means possible to influence the way that literacy is taught in all primary and, as appropriate, secondary classes through (para.4.12):
 - promoting active discussion in all lessons,
 - regular, daily reading to the class,
 - daily independent reading for every child, regularly guided and monitored by the teacher,
- 2.2. develop and test a common literacy lesson structure in pilot regions, for primary schools and, where appropriate, primary tops classes (see paras. 4.13 and 4.14);
- 2.3. Make the provision of more books and resources a continuing and major priority for the foreseeable future (paras. 6.1 – 6.5);
- 2.4. ensure that every school has a clear policy and practices for involving parents and the community in literacy improvement. This should be backed up through a national publicity campaign, and by developing and disseminating practical advice and support packs for schools to use with parents (paras 10.1 – 10.5);

Standards, assessment and target-setting

- 2.5. review and revise the recently drafted standards for literacy, prior to publication, to make them relevant, manageable and more amenable to teacher assessment and data collection (paras. 5.3 , 5.4);
- 2.6. ensure that all teachers are supported in understanding and working to the new standards, (para 5.5);
- 2.7. develop and introduce a national assessment and data collection framework for all schools to enable the standards to be monitored at school, regional and national levels, and use this to establish a national baseline of expectations (para. 5.6);
- 2.8. use this baseline data to set ambitious, achievable national targets for improvement over a defined timescale, e.g. four or five years (para 5.6);
- 2.9. use the existing infrastructure of inspection, curriculum and regional office support to monitor and report on standards (para. 5.7)

- 2.10. review the content, expectations and structure of the Secondary Schools Entrance Examination to align them with the standards (para. 5.8);

Strategic planning

- 2.11. appoint a national strategy director for literacy, with senior officer status, accountable to the executive, to be responsible for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the national strategy (para 8.7);
- 2.12. produce a strategic plan, with a timetable, for improving standards of literacy in primary schools, setting out (paras 4.12 – 4.14):
- immediate priorities for improving literacy for all schools, and how and when these will be implemented;
 - aims, design, training, resources and implementation timetable for a pilot to introduce more effective and focused teaching;
 - how the pilot work will be rolled out to other schools and the timetable for achieving this;
 - the national, regional and school infrastructures which will deliver the pilot and subsequent roll-out;
 - how expert capacity in training and teaching will be increased;
 - the intention to increase reading resources (books and other texts) and how this will be achieved;
 - how the strategy will be monitored, evaluated and refined;
 - the intention to set national targets and the proposed timetable for agreeing, setting and achieving these.
- 2.13. follow the strategic plan through, ensuring that everyone with a stake in literacy understands it and persists with its implementation.

3. STANDARDS

- 3.1. It has not been possible to find reliable systematic data relating to literacy standards in primary schools. Nevertheless, while the evidence is imprecise, the concerns expressed about the poor standard of literacy in schools are widespread and palpable. A number of perspectives contribute to a common picture of standards including:
- observations of teaching and pupil achievement in schools (see paras. 4.1 – 4.10);
 - the perceptions of education officers, headteachers, teachers, teacher trainers and community workers;
 - a recent survey, in one region, conducted by the Varqa Foundation (1999);
 - the results of the Secondary School Entrance Examination which are used to select pupils for different levels of secondary education;
 - a systematic survey of functional literacy levels among young Guyanese adults, Jennings (1998);
 - a draft statement from a working group on literacy, contributing to the Ministry of Education's revision of the national Education Development Plan;
 - a draft statement on a National Reading Policy from the Ministry of Education.
- 3.2. Taken together, these perspectives suggest a picture of widespread under-achievement. It is possible that about 60% of primary pupils have reading ages more than 3 years behind their chronological ages and that around 25% of all primary pupils may be virtually illiterate. The figures are broadly in line with the estimates of professionals with responsibility for primary education. They are supported by the Varqa Survey (September 2000) which tested approximately 5,000 pupils in 27 schools for word recognition levels. They also seem to be generally in line with the outcomes of the Secondary School Entrance Examination, although these are imprecise in relation to the measurement of literacy standards.
- 3.3. The estimates are further confirmed in Jennings (1998) in a more systematic study of young adults, which indicates that about four out of five pupils in secondary schools have only moderate, or poorer, functional literacy skills with only one in five achieving high levels. For those outside the secondary schooling system, functional literacy levels are significantly worse. Bearing in mind that functional literacy, as defined in this study, comprises the range of basic survival skills needed in a modern economy, the prospects for the great majority of pupils in continuing or higher education look very grim indeed.
- 3.4. In contrast, observations of pupils in primary classes showed them to be attentive, bright, mostly well-motivated and as capable as children anywhere else. Given the opportunity, they were responsive, interested and could think for

themselves. While many have very limited oral skills and lack basic reading, spelling and composition strategies, there is every reason to expect them to be able to develop these skills successfully, given more systematic and sensitive teaching. In practice, however, most children sit passively through lessons and, from the earliest years, develop strategies for keeping out of trouble, and concealing their difficulties. As a result, reading and writing quickly become insurmountable challenges, and fear of failure rather than the rewards of success are the principal source of motivation. These learning strategies, which are fostered in the authority-bearing culture of many primary classrooms, are widespread and counter-productive.

- 3.5. Everyone consulted was clear that the problems of illiteracy are rooted in children's primary school experiences, and that the effective teaching of literacy in primary schools should be a national priority. While this should do nothing to obscure the priority given to improving secondary and adult education, it must be obvious that, without significant improvements in the primary phase, problems with literacy at other levels will persist and continue to soak up effort and resources. In all respects, therefore, literacy education in primary schools presents a challenge - to invest in prevention and sustainable improvement.

KEY CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS

4. TEACHING QUALITY

- 4.1. In all classes visited the teachers worked hard and most prepared their lessons carefully. The children were, almost without exception, well behaved, courteous and anxious to please their teachers. Each class devoted a significant amount of teaching time to language work, on average 25% of each day.
- 4.2. Teachers were hard working and diligent, often under extremely stressful circumstances of heat, noise and over-crowding. They prepared lessons with their colleagues and were generally concerned about the standards and progress of their pupils.
- 4.3. Primary schools tended to share a common culture of teaching, often reflecting the way the teachers themselves said they had been taught. Most of the teaching was strongly rooted in drill and rote memorisation. Children were taught to sit passively, while their teachers read texts or expounded, for example, on grammatical terms or spelling patterns. Interaction with pupils mostly took the form of closed questions to check recall of what they had been told. Individual work was predominantly copying or simple multiple-choice tasks which were rehearsed with the children before they attempted them. With a few exceptions, there was little evidence of active learning, of children being challenged to think for themselves or to work independently. Successful literacy teaching is founded on high quality oral work, on the opportunities it affords learners to discuss, express preferences, ask questions, have their ideas and contributions valued and extended and, above all, to be listened to. In practice, despite the very considerable efforts of many teachers, they ended up doing most of the work while the children sat by watching and listening!

- 4.4. This observation is not new. The Education and Development Plan (1995 p25) notes that:

Many (primary) teachers are of weak academic background. They lack the competency to teach English....The result of this is that most teachers either stick to traditional approaches to the teaching of subjects in a curriculum or resort to providing students with copious notes for memorisation. Opportunities for pupil-initiated questions and the development of thinking skills are severely reduced.

- 4.5. The teaching of reading was often based on the texts found in the Ministry textbooks. In some classes, these readers had to be provided by parents, while in many classes, the books were not available to teachers and children at all. Teachers generally introduced the text and followed this with class reading, then some questions, usually based on recall and literal interpretation. This pattern of class reading allowed the non-readers to conceal their difficulties as they chanted

in unison with the rest of the class. Poorer readers became skilled at hiding their difficulties by miming, and imitating others, as they read. There were few opportunities for children to read independently and, in some classes, none at all.

4.6. Notwithstanding the amount of time devoted to English language teaching in one form or another, most pupils did very little actual reading, either with the teacher or independently. With so little experience of reading, it should surprise few that so many children fail and fail early. The substantial effort devoted to teaching isolated grammar and spelling skills is seldom productive because children cannot understand their relevance or application. Often, when children met problems of decoding or understanding words and sentences, they had no strategies to fall back on. Teachers, by and large, were unaware of the need to teach children a range of basic reading strategies and how to apply them, for example:

- text prediction from context and grammar;
- reading and checking for sense;
- reading ahead and leaving a gap and re-reading;
- error recognition and self correction;
- the application of phonic blending and segmentation skills to decode unfamiliar words;
- other word attack strategies e.g. breaking words into segments of meaning, finding words within words, analogy with other known words using visual skills, e.g. recognising common letter strings, checking critical features, shape, length etc;
- working out the meaning of unknown words and expressions from context;
- skimming, scanning, and the reading of non-sequential texts;
- directed silent reading and reading aloud for presentation or performance.

4.7. A similar pattern was found with writing. While some teachers provided opportunities in the week for independent writing, the greater part of most pupils' writing was in simple exercises where answers were rehearsed in advance, or copying from the chalkboard. Literacy problems were compounded in other curricular subjects where pupils were frequently expected to deal with complex reading from textbooks or the board. Most science and social studies lessons centred on extensive teacher exposition on these texts, followed by laborious and time-wasting copying out. Many pupils could neither re-read nor understand what they had written, including some who had passed the Secondary Schools' Entrance Examination.

4.8. The greatest casualties of this teaching are, by far, the youngest children, at their most formative stages of learning. They were often required to sit still for long periods while their teachers explained things in language they could not understand and drilled them in practices which they followed but could not apply. Their natural urge to be active, to talk and participate was discouraged and

in some classes there was no reading of books at all. One teacher explained this was because the children needed to learn the skills first and that they would get to read in the next class. Teaching of this kind is counter-productive and sows the seeds of continuing failure for many children. Such perceptions represent a wholly erroneous view of reading development and the reading process, and are a major cause of early reading failure among many primary school children.

- 4.9. It is essentially important that phonic and spelling skills are systematically and explicitly taught. The problem in many schools is that (a) the skills are not learned because the children are too passive (b) the teaching of these skills is piecemeal and unsystematic (c) most importantly, children are not taught to apply the skills effectively in continuous text reading (see para.4.6 above).
- 4.10. The teaching of grammar is more problematic. The language and literacy curriculum is heavily dominated by the teaching of grammatical ‘rules’ and word classes in isolation. Most teachers see grammar as a set of rules for the correct use of English which, if taught by rote to children, will later by transfer of training be applied when they read and write. This kind of teaching is reinforced in the NCERD curriculum guides and in the Ministry’s recently drafted standards. It takes up a high proportion of teaching time, reflects an erroneous view of grammar, is poorly understood by teachers, and is confusing and largely irrelevant for the children. Grammar should be taught mainly through the reading and writing of continuous text, with explicit focus on the way writers make grammatical choices to suit the purpose and organisation of particular texts. This is a more sophisticated view of grammar that can only develop through the effective teaching of shared and independent reading and writing discussed above (also, paras 4.12 – 4.14 below).
- 4.11. There are, nevertheless, encouraging signs on which to build. A minority of teachers did invite questions and comments, encouraged children to try out ideas, showed awareness of the lower achievers and recognised and praised success. The effect of this teaching on the pupils was remarkable. They were more attentive and responsive, willing to try out ideas and more likely to be making progress. There are teachers who understand these general principles and they should be encouraged to be more influential (see para. 8.5 below). Some teachers were receptive to ideas which might help them improve. They were aware of the difficulties they faced and keen to find practical solutions. Much of the current practice goes on simply because it always has but there is no reason to assume that teachers would resist change, especially if it makes their lives in the classroom more successful and enjoyable.
- 4.12. There is an urgent need to change the culture of teaching in primary schools, which seriously inhibits the literacy development of too many children. Teachers need practical help and encouragement to interact more with children in order to stimulate active learning and discussion. The key to achieving is by

helping teachers to modify their classroom strategies. As teachers change the way they work, it is likely that many will change their attitudes to children and come to understand why these changes matter. It is likely that some relatively simple but profound changes could begin to make big differences, for example by:

- expecting all teachers to promote more active discussion and oral communication in all subjects, through paired and group working in lessons;
- expecting every primary teacher to read from a quality text to their class every day, including fiction, non-fiction and poetry for at least 20 minutes. The aim of this work should be to read for interest, pleasure, and enrichment, and to provide a context for class discussion. These experiences should be seen as an ends in themselves and not as opportunities for teachers to set more exercises, drills or copying tasks;
- expecting every child to read independently every day, and for teachers to regularly guide and monitor their progress. This could easily be achieved by grouping children so that, for example, only one group was reading at any time while others did other independent work, allowing the teacher to concentrate on the independent reading in the group and to monitor and assess their progress;
- involving parents and the community in supporting literacy through a national publicity campaign, and by developing and disseminating advice and support packs for schools to use with parents.

Strategies such as these could rapidly be expected in every class, - e.g. from the start of the school year in September 2001 - under the management of the headteacher who should be trained to lead, monitor and support the teachers and to work effectively with parents.

4.13. At the same time, a more focused model of teaching, adapted from the National Literacy Strategy in England, could be developed in a sub-set of schools nationally. This might involve a common lesson structure for all teachers designed to promote active teaching and learning through:

- the daily, systematic teaching of *phonics and spelling* with a clear progression, and based on simple games and activities which require pupil participation. Consideration should be given to acquiring an existing and properly developed teaching programme for this purpose;
- *Shared Reading or shared writing* using enlarged texts, which encourage pupil interaction, enable teachers to teach key concepts and strategies for reading and writing and cover a wide range of text-types including stories and poems, information, instructions, reports and persuasive writing;
- *independent reading or writing*, developed from the shared work and differentiated to enable every child to practice and apply the skills of reading and writing for themselves, under the guidance of the teacher.

Further brief details about these are provided in appendices 2 to 4.

4.14. A model of effective teaching of this kind might be developed in Guyana, and piloted over, say, a year to refine it and generate training and support materials. If successful, it could then be systematically rolled out to other schools on a defined timetable. Developing the model and getting it implemented in the first instance would probably require support from outside the country to plan and deliver the training but should draw extensively on existing expertise within the country. The pilot should provide curriculum development and teaching support directly to teachers in classrooms and aim:

- through training and materials development, to intervene in the teaching of literacy in classrooms, to bring about significant improvements in a defined number of schools;
- to test and refine a common model of effective literacy teaching for wider dissemination;
- to create a cadre of experienced and capable teachers who can disseminate good practice through demonstration teaching and other training courses within and possibly beyond the region;
- to create training materials, including videos of successful teaching for use in initial and post-initial teacher training
- to assemble or create texts, activities and other resources aimed at promoting more active learning and suitable for wider production and distribution;
- to develop strategies and materials that inform and encourage parental and community involvement
- to monitor and evaluate the progress of pupils in the pilot and modify the strategy accordingly.

Appendix 5 sets out a typical infrastructure needed to manage and deliver this work.

5. MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. Most schools expect teachers to monitor progress in their classes but, in practice, records were often cursory. More importantly, there was very little attempt to assess children's progress, whether recorded or not, and very few teachers had a clear picture of the attainment and literacy needs of the pupils in their classes. One reason for this is the absence of agreed age-related standards for literacy at school, regional or national levels. Without clear assessment criteria, teachers are forced to make them up as they go along or not to assess at all - many opted for the latter. A further limitation on assessment was the paucity of opportunities, in most classes, for children to interact with the teachers and for independent, self-directed working, where teachers could observe and evaluate learning.
- 5.2. The absence of systematic monitoring and assessment in most classes needs to be addressed at every level. Many teachers are unaware of the range of learning needs in their classes and make no effort to differentiate in their teaching to support children. Schools cannot be held accountable, nor advised and supported effectively in the absence of clear expectations against which to diagnose problems and set targets for improvement. At a national and regional level, there is urgent need for clarification of expectations which are visible to all stakeholders and which inform and direct the work of regional officers and the inspectorate whose job it is to monitor evaluate and support schools consistently
- 5.3. The Ministry of Education has drafted some detailed statements of standards for teachers to use. These statements are written to go alongside a set of revised curriculum guides also in draft and in the process of distribution to schools. The draft standards are still under discussion. However, the current drafts are too detailed and the progression of learning too slow. There is still too much emphasis on the teaching of isolated skills, especially in grammar, which is likely to reinforce rather than change and improve the prevailing methods for teaching literacy. In their present form, they will be very difficult for teachers to use as instruments of assessment. Although the format and some of the content is different from the curriculum guides, the standards statements look and read more like curriculum guides than standards.
- 5.4. It would be wise to take stock before proceeding further with the publication of either of these documents. Teachers are likely to be helped by a much simpler, briefer set of standards which describe observable reading and writing skills and against which teachers can make straightforward holistic assessments. Such statements could be drafted initially for years 7, 9, 11 and 14, in the first instance, as a progression towards the expectations set out in the CXC examination. This examination is appropriately demanding for 16 year-olds and has international comparability. As such, it should be the main point of reference for plotting a progression of expectations for all children. Some examples of the kinds of

statements that might be appropriate are provided in appendix 1. The issue of standards should be settled first and precede any further development of curriculum guidance which will need to be designed to deliver the standards. In summary, the design of these standards should take account of:

- the need to work towards benchmarking against equivalent standards internationally¹;
- their potential use by teachers for diagnostic and formative assessment;
- their amenability to simple recording and data collection at a summative level;
- their impact on the curriculum, as teachers teach to the standards.

5.5. Standards, in this form, could be disseminated to all schools with advice and training on how they should be used for assessing and recording pupils' progress. Exemplification material could then be developed to help teachers understand what the standards should look like in practice and how to make appropriate judgements based on their observations of children's speaking, listening, reading and writing. Teachers should be expected to assess and record pupils' progress towards these standards at least every half term and, under the guidance and direction of the headteacher, to take action to identify and support children who are falling behind.

5.6. At the same time, the Ministry should develop and implement a national assessment and data collection framework for all schools to enable the standards to be monitored at school, regional and national levels, and use this to establish a national baseline of expectations and a system for monitoring and analysing progress and attainment in literacy. This baseline should then be used to set ambitious but achievable national targets, translated down to regional and school level over a defined period, say four or five years.

5.7. When this is in place, the existing infrastructure of inspection, curriculum and regional office support should be used to ensure that:

- teachers are helped to use the standards to promote more active learning in all areas of the curriculum;
- each child's progress is regularly assessed and appropriate action taken;
- schools' literacy standards are regularly monitored and moderated at regional level;
- a regional report of standards across all primary schools is submitted to the Ministry to compile a national picture from which to assess progress towards the national targets.

¹ There is an extensive literature on standards internationally. Two sources worth consulting are:

- The National Curriculum in England, where standards are set out in descriptive statements for each of 10 levels;
- The Framework and Specifications for PIRLS: Progress in International Reading Study (2000)

5.8. The impact of the Secondary Schools Entrance Examination is also a matter of continuing concern. It bears down on the primary curriculum, reinforcing poor teaching as teachers try to teach to the test, and it discourages assessment by teachers, some of whom said they did not need to make judgements about their pupils because the test would do that, and there was no point in trying to 'second-guess' it. The review of the Ministry's Education Development Plan (Macrae Mason 2001 p.27) draws attention to the 1995 Development Plan's intention to reform this examination to make it more relevant to literacy:

Whereas the 1995 EDP looked forward to a SSEE that would test literacy, prose writing, numeracy and critical thinking, it would appear that the examinations system is yet to meet these aspirations.

The test, in its current form, reinforces the teaching of unrelated skills based on out-dated conceptions of grammar and comprehension. The standards expected by the test do not represent an appropriate stepping stone, at 11 years old, towards the standards expected by the CXC at 16 which, in the medium term, should be the horizon of expectation for the majority of children. It discriminates poorly by allowing many pupils with low literacy levels to pass, and it is of no diagnostic value to either primary or secondary teachers.

Assuming that it needs to remain, in some form, for the immediate future, it should be redesigned so that it assesses against the newly developed standards for literacy (paras. 5.3 and 5.4 above). As far as possible, the multiple-choice structure of the current paper should be replaced by questions which require pupils to respond in sentences and which emphasise reading for meaning, and inferential comprehension using fiction and non-fiction text types. Restructured in this way, the test would also serve to promote more appropriate teaching.

6. CURRICULUM POLICY AND RESOURCES

- 6.1. The National Council for Educational Resources and Development has produced curriculum guides for the national language and literacy curriculum. The curriculum guides are intended as a basis for planning and are linked to the use of textbooks and readers, for example *Fun with Language* or the *Timheri Readers*. Some of the recommended texts, for example the *Nelson New West Indian Readers* were only available in classes where parents had been persuaded to buy them. None of the materials are published or distributed in quantities sufficient for all teachers to have copies for themselves and their classes. Given that the curriculum guides are frequently based on these texts, much of it is rendered unusable by the absence of the relevant texts. The curriculum guides have just been updated and distributed. One of the schools visited had been sent the materials for one year while another had those for two years. No-one appeared to have a complete set, nor to know its status e.g. whether it was for information, comment or a mandate to be implemented.
- 6.2. Nevertheless, many teachers make an effort to use the curriculum guides and most are totally dependent on the textbooks, which provide the only source of material for the teaching of reading. The evidence speaks for itself: despite the systematic use of these materials, over several years, their impact on teaching quality and standards of achievement has been minimal. The textbooks are of very limited quality in relation to presentation and content. The texts for reading are limited in range and depth, and the associated exercises do nothing to enhance the children's independent reading and writing skills. The books are frequently used in ways that reinforce the authoritarian and transmission styles of teaching described in section 4 above.
- 6.3. A few teachers recognise these problems and have made efforts to supplement the texts with a wider range of reading through encouraging parents to provide books or by providing them from their own resources. Good quality reading material is the first and most basic requisite of successful literacy teaching. Trying to teach reading without it is like trying to build a wall without bricks. With better books, the chances of better teaching are greatly increased. It should be possible for teachers to read to their classes from good quality stories, poetry and non-fiction texts every day to widen and enrich their experience and to enliven their understanding of the written word – which is different in many significant ways from speech. The absence of these experiences in most classes contributes very significantly to the poor levels of reading and writing among so many children, who simply have no experience on which to draw.
- 6.4. This will cost but need not be hugely expensive. Books are needed but there are ways, with careful planning, in which schools can pool books. For example, six Primary 1 teachers from different schools could each have enough books for half

a term, say one per week, and share them on a rota, providing enough for every class for a year. One copy of each could provide material for a read-aloud text to the class and for extracting key passages for shared reading, which could also be used to provide models and themes for shared writing. With a little photocopying (copyright permitting) there could be extracts for children to use for independent reading as well. The absence of quality, commercially published books and other text material is a formidable obstacle to the improvement of standards, and should be addressed with as much funding as can be mustered. However, anything less than books for all needs very careful co-operation and determined management to ensure the sharing works. The evidence of schools being able to do this is not encouraging.

- 6.5. Published books should not be the only source of reading. Primary pupils should be reading for information from other sources such as newspapers, magazine articles, brochures, instruction manuals, forms, directories, recipes, advertisements, letters, menus etc. all of which are readily available at minimal cost and highly relevant to the development of functional literacy. Such texts could be reproduced easily and cheaply. They could be annotated for teachers with teaching points and prompts. There are numerous possibilities of providing for and enriching reading which would be more productive, relevant and practically useful than ploughing on with the current available materials. One strategy, developed some years ago in New Zealand, might be to publish nationally a short journal of reading materials with guidance for primary and secondary teachers, at regular intervals, say each term or half term. Such materials, which could be developed to reflect local and wider cultural interests, might also prove helpful in working with parents.

7. THE TEACHING ENVIRONMENT

7.1. Many primary teachers work in unsatisfactory conditions. Most primary schools are open plan with classrooms divided from each other by screens or chalkboards. Noise levels in many of these classes are unacceptably high for the effective teaching of literacy, which depends on carefully structured oral work and clearly articulated and audible language. Conditions in many schools are too cramped and some classes are too large to allow children to do anything but sit still at their desks. These conditions can be stressful for teachers and children, particularly the youngest children. They reinforce poor practice as teachers struggle to manage the class and make themselves heard. One such primary school worked very effectively and had created a quiet, attractive and industrious atmosphere. Three features of this school are worth noting:

- it was well led by a headteacher who motivated teachers, worked hard with his staff to make the classrooms attractive and stimulating and established co-operate practices that enabled teachers to work alongside each other without disturbance;
- it had fewer pupils in more space than the more disturbed schools;
- it was in a recently refurbished building.

7.2. The national programme of primary school refurbishment is clearly beneficial and is contributing to the improvement of teaching and learning. However, pupil numbers are equally important. There is a point where increasing the number of pupils in an open plan building reaches a threshold of difficulty that makes effective teaching impossible. This is probably around 30 pupils per class in an average sized teaching space. Resources will determine how far targets of this kind can be met but there is a price to be paid for over-crowding in teacher morale, increased stress and the quality of learning.

8. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 8.1. Approximately 50% of primary teachers are untrained i.e. they have not been awarded qualified teacher status. The initial training of teachers in full-time pre-service and part-time in-service courses is a national priority but the absence of qualified teacher status should not be seen as a major obstacle to the improvement of literacy teaching in schools. Indeed, if effective literacy training were to be a major focus of these pre-service programmes, it could add significant value.
- 8.2. While these teacher training programmes do much to raise awareness about literacy in the curriculum, they offer too few effective strategies of the kind outlined in section 5 above, to have a significant impact on the quality of teaching. If a more effective model of literacy teaching were developed along the lines suggested, this could readily be incorporated into the teacher training programme, with accreditation for teachers based on their classroom performance, to the value of, say 25%, and a proportionate increase in pay to motivate and retain them.
- 8.3. Professional development and training are at the heart of any effort to improve literacy teaching. No amount of exhortation about the value of literacy or theoretical discussion is likely to make a difference to the way it is taught in classrooms. For most teachers, sustainable change will come through simple, practical support that helps them change their teaching behaviour. These should include:
- having an expert colleague who can work alongside them, from time to time, and demonstrate good practice;
 - focused training courses to introduce them to practical strategies and provide resources;
 - sustained monitoring and support within the school from the headteacher.

Experience in the GEAP and SSRP initiatives shows that teachers respond well to opportunities of this kind, where they are available.

- 8.4. The National Council for Educational Resources and Development is nominally responsible for the planning and delivery of continuing professional development for teachers but the organisation is badly under-staffed and, while the available staff could be usefully employed in support of a strategy to improve literacy, they have insufficient expertise by themselves to effect change, as experience to date has demonstrated.
- 8.5. The major obstacle to successful professional development for literacy is the lack of expertise and skilled trainers. These are those with a strong interest in, and responsibility to provide literacy training, for example the GARLAND network,

and a group of 30 or so teachers recently trained by Jean Bovell (August 2001). These are skilled colleagues who should have an important role to play. But their skills alone will not be sufficient to carry forward a national improvement agenda. To kick-start this process, some outside support will be needed from an experienced trainer with a strong background in developing the core literacy teaching strategies. That person should work with a very able group of trainers, who would direct subsequent training at regional and school levels.

- 8.6. The existing regional infrastructure provides a managed framework for professional development. It is potentially useful but, in its present form, inadequate to support improvements in literacy teaching. Each region has a network, where teachers meet each month in year groups for primary and subject groups for secondary. Additionally, Regional Education Officers have regular and extended meetings with headteachers. These agendas focus mainly on business and administration but these too could be used to bring literacy into focus and to train headteachers in what to expect from teachers, and how to monitor and support their work. These networking arrangements are better organised and more consistently attended in some regions than in others. They could provide an important forum for training and development in literacy but, at present, the work of these groups is poorly coordinated. The infrastructure could be used as part of a national strategy but would need much clearer direction and accountability to make it effective.
- 8.7. An illustrative model of an infrastructure to support a national strategy is given in appendix 5. The model assumes that the strategy would be led centrally by a national director with a team of regional managers working to him or her. Details of these two roles are also sketched out in appendix 5.

9. SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE HEADTEACHER

- 9.1. International evidence always points to the quality of leadership and management of the headteacher as a key factor. In the schools visited this was strongly borne out. In schools where the working atmosphere was positive and teachers were working successfully, the presence of the headteacher was felt. It was reflected in the attitudes and behaviour of the children, the quality of the classroom environments, the teachers' skills and confidence and, above all, in the progress and achievement of the children. Such schools, however, were the exception rather than the rule.
- 9.2. In most schools the heads saw their roles as administrators rather than curriculum leaders and most of their time was spent on these duties rather than on monitoring and improving the teaching and learning in the classes. These practices tended to be reinforced by the demands of the regional officers whose priorities focused more on administrative than educational matters.
- 9.3. Any national effort to improve standards will need to address this with headteachers. They will have to manage, moderate and promote the national standards. They must know what effective literacy teaching looks like and be accountable for the progress and achievement of all the children in their care. This will require training and a clear regional agenda focused on literacy which supports head teachers in managing and leading school improvements. This, in turn, will be only achieved by carefully balanced pressure on, and support for, schools at regional and national levels. Of the two, support will be by far the most important and just as the quality of teaching will depend on the leadership of the head, so the quality of the schools will be greatly influenced by the leadership of Regional Education Officers and their teams. Accountability should go up the line with defined responsibilities at school and regional levels for the delivery of improved standards.

10. PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

10.1. All schools report to parents on a regular basis, mainly through parent meetings of two kinds:

- parents' associations - used to inform parents about school policies and organisation;
- parents' evenings or afternoons - used for teachers to discuss individual children's progress with the parents or carers concerned.

Schools often complained that the parents they most wanted to influence did not attend. No written reports were seen during the visits to schools but it appears that practices vary and, given the absence of clear standards and assessment, the criteria for reporting are unlikely to be standardised. Individual teachers certainly varied widely in their ability to make informed judgements about children's achievement and progress.

10.2. There appears to be very little systematic effort to inform parents about how literacy is taught in schools or to provide clear practical guidance for them on how they might support their children. Parents, on the whole, are not welcome in classrooms and most would not see it as their role to come into the schools except for the formal informing and reporting occasions. Many parents never attend. Moreover, there is a strong tendency for teachers to 'explain' children's low attainment in terms of poverty, home background and parental disinterest. This is invidious. It alienates parents, insulates teachers from the pressing need to improve teaching, which is the main cause of the low attainment, and reinforces and leads to discriminatory practices which associate ability or the perceived absence of ability with socio-economic factors. By and large, the more able children are seen as those from the more supportive and literate homes, while many from more impoverished backgrounds are pre-judged as the less able. Such distinctions, which are widely drawn, are groundless, divisive and serve only to reinforce school culture and undermine the learning potential of large numbers of children.

10.3. As a national literacy strategy is developed, all schools should be expected to:

- make their literacy teaching policies and practices known to parents;
- provide parents with information and practical advice about how to support their children at home
- report regularly and specifically on children's progress in reading and writing, and
- work closely with parents of children whose literacy attainment is falling behind.

- 10.4. Headteachers should be responsible for making these things happen but most will need practical support and encouragement to do so. It will probably require policies, practices at national and regional levels, and materials to be produced for schools to enable them to work more effectively with parents. There may be schools where these practices are successfully established, and worth disseminating.
- 10.5. A variety of voluntary groups and individuals also work to support literacy for children and adults. Discussions with volunteers in two regions revealed a high level of commitment and concern. Because these groups worked outside the school system, some had developed alternative, and more pupil-orientated, practices with some success. There is certainly untapped potential in these groups to provide additional literacy support to schools more widely. Most of the individuals were untrained but keen to know more and some of the individuals had very clear and reflective insights into the teaching of literacy. Those with a parental perspective, either directly or through contacts with parents, reinforced strongly the points made in the two preceding paragraphs.

11. PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

It was not possible to visit or appraise pre-school education in the time available for this consultancy. However, it was noted that Guyana has close to 100% provision of nursery pre-school places to children between the ages of 3 and 5 years. This is a powerful asset. It means that literacy education could begin early and that parents can be engaged early and constructively in supporting their children's development. There is invaluable potential here for the early enhancement of literacy directly and for influencing practices in the first two years of primary schools where all children would benefit from a more enriching and active experience of learning in general and literacy in particular.

APPENDIX 1

EXAMPLES OF STANDARDS IN READING AND WRITING AT 7, 9 AND 11 YEARS²

7 YEARS OLD

RANGE:

Fiction: stories with patterned language; traditional and fairy stories; fantasy stories

Poetry: poems with clear rhyme and rhythm patterns; poems about familiar or favourite themes

Non-Fiction: recounts; instructions and procedures; lists and notes

independent reading level:

- regularly selects books independently from class collections for interest and enjoyment;
- reads at other times in the school day and out of school;
- reads simple, predictable texts with varying sentence length, tracking text visually and only finger pointing for difficult parts;
- reads aloud, with sufficient pace to hear the grammatical sense;
- recognises some of own reading errors and attempts self-correction;
- independently applies phonic and word recognition strategies to decode unfamiliar words and re-reads to check for sense applying strategies learned through shared and guided reading to attempt self-correction;
- can re-read own writing;
- can read a variety of texts covering the identified range for the year group.

Independent writing level:

- writes own simple stories, using some examples of story language learned from reading;
- writes or contributes to the shared writing of simple recounts, instructions, captions and labels;
- can write single simple sentences independently, demarcated by capital letters and full stops;
- demarcates some sentences correctly in story and other writing;
- begins to break up narratives with a range of connectives in addition to *and*;
- begins to use question marks;
- segments and spells simple regular words independently using phonic strategies;
- forms lower case letters correctly in a style that makes the letters easy to join later.

² NB These statements are drawn down from the National Literacy Strategy in England and included for illustrative purposes only. They are not necessarily the appropriate levels at which to set standards for Guyana's primary school children.

9 YEARS OLD

RANGE:

Fiction: stories with related themes; stories from other cultures; adventure and fantasy stories

Poetry: poems with particular structures: jingles, couplets, limericks, haiku, humorous and nonsense poems; riddles, tongue-twisters and other word-play poems; acrostic and concrete poems

Non-Fiction: instructions and procedures; non-chronological reports; explanations; dictionaries, indexes, glossaries

Independent reading level:

- has a repertoire of favourite texts and can recall and discuss these;
- reads independently from self-chosen books and discusses the content;
- reads at other times in the school day and out of school;
- reads for meaning with secure reading strategies for prediction self-monitoring and self-correction, using phonic, spelling and word recognition cues while predicting and checking from grammar and context for sense;
- beginning to read more extended fiction e.g. short novels in chapters written for the age range ;
- reads aloud with pace and expression appropriate to the grammar, punctuation and meaning, and gaining confidence with reading silently;
- understands the difference between fiction and non-fiction, and the key features of recounts, instruction and procedural texts, and non-chronological reports;
- can use reading to seek and locate information.

independent writing level:

- writes narrative with a build-up, a complication and a defined ending, using a paragraph for each;
- writes instructions, non-chronological reports and explanations, based on topics from experience or other curricular subjects, and using the appropriate language features and organisation for each text type;
- selects nouns, verbs and adjectives e.g. the *poodle* instead of the *dog*, *whispered* instead of *said*, to interest the reader and add precision to writing;
- writes simple and compound sentences and uses some co-ordinators e.g. *if*, *so*, *while*, *since*
- uses 1st or 3rd person and tense consistently;
- punctuates sentences correctly in the course of writing using capitals, full stops, question and exclamation marks, usually correctly;
- uses commas correctly to separate items in a list;
- attempts to spell unfamiliar words using known conventions and rules and a range of strategies including phonemic, morphemic and etymological;
- spells all the words in the high frequency word lists for P3 and P4
- uses the apostrophe for omission e.g. can't;
- makes and uses notes;
- rehearses sentences and re-reads them in the course of writing to ensure sense and cohesion;
- writes legibly with joined handwriting maintaining consistency in size and punctuation and writes with sufficient speed and accuracy to maintain sense.

11 YEARS OLD

RANGE:

- Fiction:** classic fiction and stories by the same author; stories from other cultures; science fiction
- Poetry:** poems by significant children's poets; poems from different cultures and times; ballads and longer narrative poems
- Non-Fiction:** recounts, persuasive texts; discussion texts; notes and summaries; revision of non-fiction text-types

independent reading level:

- confident and independent reader who turns readily to written texts for information and pleasure in and beyond the school;
- is developing informed preferences e.g. for genres, books in series, particular authors;
- reads fluently for meaning with automatic decoding skills taking up very little attention – uses inference and deduction to go beyond the literal interpretation of texts;
- can read texts at the appropriate level silently, fluently, accurately and with understanding;
- has read a range of fiction and understands significant ideas in fiction: themes, events and characters and can evaluate texts giving reasons for preferences;
- understands the main features of a range of non-fiction text types and has strategies for seeking and locating information in hard text and on screen.

independent writing level:

- shows awareness of reader e.g. through use of settings and characterisation in stories, attention-grabbing or amusing openings, the use of rhetorical questions to address the reader directly;
- writes recount, persuasion and discussion texts, using the linguistic and organisational features appropriate to the text-type;
- makes and uses notes for retrieving information and for planning;
- uses paragraphs to structure and sequence writing;
- adapts writing to be clear, concise and writes in an impersonal style;
- secures grammatical agreement, using tense and person consistently;
- uses pronouns consistently for cohesion, notices and avoids problems of ambiguity;
- spells unfamiliar words using known conventions and rules and a range of strategies including phonemic, morphemic and etymological, and can use a dictionary to check spellings and meanings;
- uses a wide range of connectives to organise and sequence writing;
- punctuates at least 75% of sentences correctly using a full range of punctuation;
- uses a variety of ways to plan writing;
- reviews and edits writing to produce a final form, suited to the needs of an identified audience.

APPENDIX 2

Example of a common literacy lesson structure

All times are approximate and will vary according to the flow of the lesson but all elements are essential.	
5 minutes	brief lesson introduction: to bring children together and explain what they will be learning
15 minute whole class work	phonics and spelling with a clear progression, and based on simple games and activities which require pupil participation. Consideration should be given to acquiring an existing and properly developed teaching programme for this purpose;
15 minutes whole class work	shared reading or shared writing, using enlarged texts, which encourage pupil interaction, enable teachers to teach key concepts and strategies for reading and writing and cover a wide range of text-types including stories and poems, information, instructions, reports and persuasive writing;
20 minutes group and independent work	independent reading or writing, developed from the shared work and differentiated to enable every child to practice and apply the skills of reading and writing for themselves, under the guidance of the teacher;
10 minutes whole class work	brief time for all the class to pull learning together and discuss what has been achieved, share work and recognise success; focus on discussion and presentation by the children.
Additionally: - teachers should be expected to be reading to the class from quality texts for approximately 15 –20 minutes per day, using this time for enrichment and discussion - there should be regular handwriting teaching and practice to build up speed and fluency, accuracy and legibility for all children	

APPENDIX 3

Key features of an effective phonics programme

A SUMMARY PROGRESSION FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING OF THE PHONIC CODE³

Phonics

- first and final phonemes:
 - to hear and say phonemes in initial end positions in CVC words,
 - to know phoneme-grapheme correspondences:
 - s,m,c,t,g,h,
 - l,n,d,k,sh.ch; ss, ck,
 - a, e, i, o, u, f, qu, b, r, j, p, th, ng,
 - v, w, x, y, z,;
- medial phonemes
 - to hear and say phonemes in medial position: / a / e / i / o / u / in CVC words,
 - to segment words into phonemes to spell CVC words,
 - to blend phonemes to read CVC words;
- consonant clusters
 - to hear phonemes within consonant clusters e.g. / st / cl / dr / etc.
 - to segment phonemes to spell words containing consonant clusters in initial CCVC (e.g. flap, stop) and final CVCC positions (e.g. rest, milk),
 - to blend phonemes to read words containing consonant clusters in initial CCVC and final CVCC positions;
- 'long' vowel phonemes
 - one spelling of each of ten vowel phonemes, the digraphs: / ai / ee / ie / oa / oo / or / ar / ir / oi / ou /,
 - to spell the bigraphs and trigraphs: / ay / a-e / ea / igh / y / i-e / o-e / oe / ew / ue / u-e / oy / ow / er / ur / aw / air / ear / oo
 - to segment (for spelling) and blend (for reading) words containing these phonemes (e.g. pain, sort, bird, card),

Alphabetic knowledge

- learn alphabetic order and distinguish between letter names and letter sounds (NB: sounds are phonemes, letters are used to talk about the spellings of words).

The progression above sets out both an order of teaching and the expectations for what children should achieve by the end of each stage. Children should be expected to master this in the first two years of primary school but many older children in Guyanese schools will need to cover this work as well. It is essential to practise and apply these decoding skills in shared and guided reading, but they must also be taught separately through carefully structured activities which help children to:

- hear and discriminate the regular phonemic patterns in speech
- to learn how each of the phonemes is commonly spelt using one or more letters,
- to blend separate sounds together into words for reading, and
- to segment sounds in words for spelling.

³ Source: Progression in Phonics available through the National Literacy Strategy, England

APPENDIX 4

Key Features of shared reading and writing

Shared reading is a whole-class activity in which all children should participate, using a common text e.g. a ‘big book’, poetry poster, text extract. Through shared reading, children should be able to see and hear the text simultaneously. Teaching should focus on demonstrating reading strategies standards and developing comprehension skills. Texts for shared reading should be pitched at a level which is above the independent reading level of the majority of children in the class to extend their experience and to teach ahead of their existing skills level. Through shared reading, teachers should:

- enable children to join in text reading with the teacher to build fluency, interest, success and confidence;
- reinforce and apply the word-level skills taught in the first part of the lesson;
- demonstrate the reading strategies expected by the Standards e.g., how to tackle unfamiliar words, how to predict, check and correct for sense while reading, how to skim a text to find information quickly;
- help children to think about and articulate their own reading strategies through the use of appropriate technical language e.g. word, sentence, verb, past tense, question, paragraph etc.;
- teach children to practise, discuss, remember and apply these strategies;
- develop the range of their reading and their response to literature through exploring key literary concepts e.g. character, setting etc.;
- extend and develop their understanding of non-fiction text types drawing attention to the key characteristics of language and organisation linked to the purposes of the texts.

Shared writing: as with shared reading, shared writing is a whole-class activity designed to teach children the skills of composition. Most children find learning to write harder than learning to read. While a reader has to decode, understand and interpret a text that someone else has written, a writer has to invent it. Many children find independent writing a struggle because they are faced with too many hard things to do at once. They have to plan what they will write, think of which words and sentences to write, work out the spellings and transcribe all these decisions on to the page. Often, most of their attention will be taken up with spelling and scribing, leaving too little mental space to concentrate on what they are writing about. Typically, for these children, their writing loses pace and coherence, and they become more and more reluctant to write for themselves. These difficulties often arise because children are expected to write independently with insufficient ‘scaffolding’ support from the teacher. Shared writing is designed to focus children’s attention on basic aspects of written composition, which are frequently obscured by the effort to concentrate on the problems of transcription. It also focuses the teaching at the point of writing, where, as a writer, children are faced with decisions about, for example:

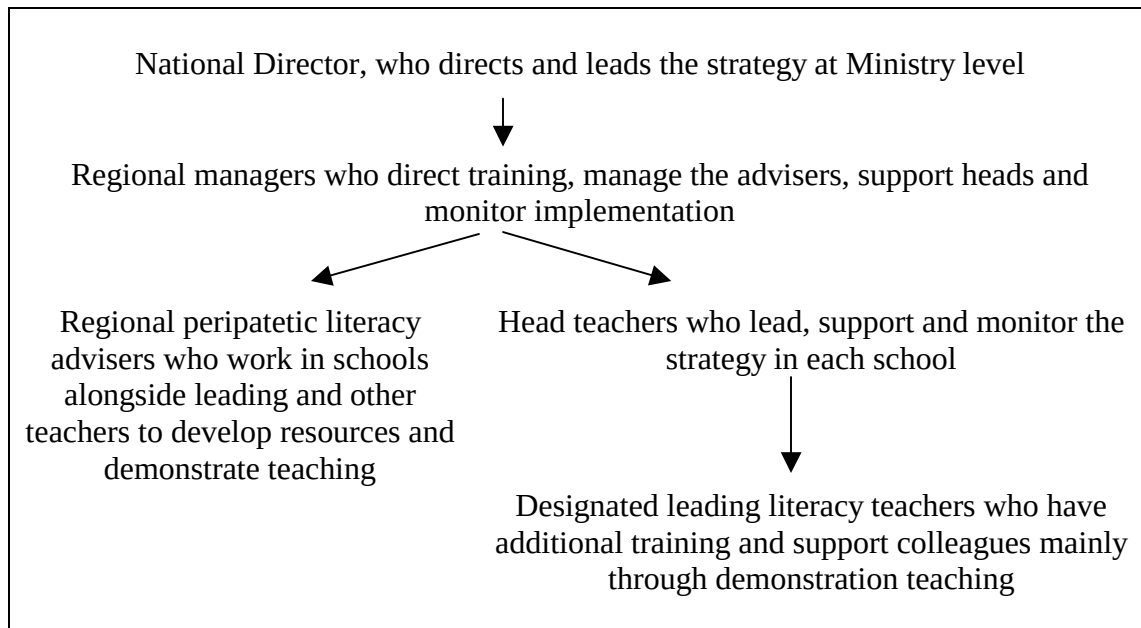
- the choice of words and phrases to be used;
- the ordering of words in sentences;
- how a sentence should be punctuated;
- the style and voice of the text;
- the need for agreement, sequence and cohesion between sentences and paragraphs;
- the particular characteristics of different types of text.

Through shared writing, teachers should:

- use texts from shared reading, to provide models and themes for emulation, elaboration and structure;

- enable children to join in text writing, knowing clearly what they are collaboratively writing about, who will be reading it and for what purpose;
- link writing decisions to the purpose and style of the particular text or text-type they are composing - e.g. a simple descriptive caption, a suspense story, a recount of a shared experience, and instruction about how to do something - and use this to check that the writing still means what it set out to mean;
- demonstrate as they write, and as appropriate to children's ages: language choice, sentence construction and punctuation, sequence and cohesion between sentences;
- teach children how to rehearse whole sentences, prior to writing them, as a matter of habit, and to re-read and check work frequently in the course of writing;
- reinforce and apply the word-level and handwriting skills;
- help children to think about and articulate their own writing strategies through the use of appropriate technical language e.g. word, sentence, verb, past tense, question, paragraph etc.;
- develop the range of children's writing by drawing on their first hand experience, their work from other subjects, and through the systematic use of texts or text types and themes from shared reading used as models for writing;
- scaffold the steps towards independence and provide independent continuation work for the next part of the lesson, which enables children to work from the shared writing successfully and confidently.

APPENDIX 5: EXAMPLE OF INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENT A NATIONAL STRATEGY



A National Director should:

- be a senior Ministry appointment with accountability and access to the executive;
- be able to lead and promote the national strategy publicly, drawing on strengths, working with stakeholders and achieving the co-operation of critics and dissenters;
- have expertise in, and commitment to, improving the teaching of literacy;
- be capable of strategically planning, managing and monitoring a complex implementation programme;
- be knowledgeable about training and able to develop effective training materials for teachers and headteachers;
- be data-literate and able to contribute to the design of standards for literacy and the development and analysis of a data-base for target-setting, monitoring and analysing the effects of the strategy;
- be capable of building and managing an effective team across a wide geographical area.

A Regional Director should:

- be responsible directly to the national director but work from the regional office, working closely with those colleagues;
- be committed to literacy improvement and able to lead the strategy publicly at local level;
- have expertise in literacy teaching;

- be able to plan and monitor a training and implementation programme for schools;
- be an experienced trainer and committed to working with teachers;
- be able to direct, manage and monitor a team of literacy advisers;
- be committed to changing practice, rather than to reinforcing it;
- be able to work alongside teachers to demonstrate and support effective teaching;
- be able to develop text resources, especially for shared and independent reading.

A Literacy Adviser should:

- be an able, experienced and credible teacher of literacy;
- be committed to changing practice, rather than to reinforcing it;
- be willing to learn and improve;
- be able to work alongside teachers to demonstrate teaching;
- be an experienced trainer, able to organise courses and work with teachers;
- be positive, persuasive and practical in offering support;
- understand the basic methodologies of literacy teaching, in particular how to teach shared reading and writing;
- be able to monitor and report on implementation in a group of schools.

APPENDIX 6

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This consultancy originated in a commission to examine issues of literacy in the Guyana Education Access Project (GEAP), funded by UK Government's Department of International Development. GEAP has, as its main focus, the provision and improvement of secondary education in two regions of the country. However, it is evident that the problems of poor literacy, which are profound among many secondary pupils, have their origins in the primary school. For this reason, the terms of reference were modified to focus the main burden of the report on the work of the primary schools - on prevention rather than remediation. That said, much of what is written below about primary teaching, and how it might be improved, will apply with equal relevance to the teaching of literacy in secondary schools. Indeed, the pervasiveness of literacy difficulties across both phases of schooling means that children of different ages are likely to have similar needs and, with the obvious adjustments for age and maturity, will be likely to benefit from similar teaching methods.

The original Terms of Reference, most of which have been met under the renegotiated arrangements, were:

In the two GEAP PARs, the consultant will:

- familiarise himself through visits to schools with the general literacy situation;
- hold a workshop session with Regional Officers and selected school staff on the formulation of a ***policy*** for literacy development in the Regions, to include (at least) the following elements:
 - methodologies for literacy development and maintenance,
 - handling literacy issues at the different phases – nursery, primary and secondary
 - methodologies for compensatory work and remediation,
 - integration of literacy across the curriculum,
 - plans and modalities for staff development activities in the area of literacy
 - record keeping and methods of assessing pupil performance;
- facilitate a one-day programme for a selected cohort of teachers and regional staff, the focus of which will be to begin the process of:
 - developing a school literacy policy,
 - developing and managing school-based literacy resources,
 - training non-specialist teachers in different aspects of literacy development;

At the Central MoE level, the consultant will:

- meet key MoE officials, in particular the Strategic Planning Group focusing on literacy;

- hold a workshop session with the above on key issues related to a Literacy Strategy in line with the current state of that group's work and recommendations;
- hold a one-day open lecture / question and answer session with interested education professionals from the Public and Private sectors looking at broad issues relating to literacy and increasing the awareness of Guyanese professionals of the challenges posed by initiatives such as the UK Literacy Hour.

*Section 4 - **Outcomes for the Consultancy:***

- draft literacy development plans for each of the PARs;
- enhanced capacity of schools to develop literacy policies and enact strategies to address literacy problems in their institutions;
- a draft outline to guide the National Literacy Study for the IADP loan;
- enhanced capacity of the Literacy Strategic Planning Group to develop and implement changes to address literacy at all levels within the education system.

*Section 5 - **Report & recommendations***

A draft report, produced within three weeks of the completion of the consultancy visit, will:

- report on the overall consultancy, schools visited, workshop and discussion sessions held;
- make recommendations at both School, Regional and National level for (a) further work & research on Literacy issues and (b) how best to proceed with implementation of Literacy policies and plans especially in light of the upcoming Literacy Study proposed by MoE in October and November of 2001;
- recommend ways in which MoE can access resources on literacy approaches and materials which will be useful in the Guyana context.

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