Developing an Inclusive Literacy Attainment Strategy for Maltese Learners

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Malta

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Literacy Support in Malta

- Early 1990s – Complementary Education teachers in schools to provide out-of-class literacy support to struggling learners
- 1996 – Literacy Unit with University of Malta to provide external support to schools to review resources and have stronger early intervention programmes
- 1997 – central SpLD Service to address learners with dyslexia
- 2001 – Foundation for Educational Services to provide out-of-school literacy and parental involvement support with special reference to at-risk and vulnerable families
The NWAR Programme: General Aims

- Set up in 2002 within the Foundation for Education Services
- To support the basic literacy skills acquisition of learners at risk of educational failure aged 7 to 13
- To support schools in the application of Multi-Sensory methodologies
- To actively involve and support families in the learning support process.
- To support the adult in life-long learning journey
NWAR Parameters & Methods

- Referral from schools, Statementing Moderating Panel, other entities and by parents
- Basic phonic instruction that research shows to be critical to reading success.
- Logical, success-oriented, sequential instruction.
- The use of all the learning pathways: sight, sound and touch.
- The mastery of letter/sound relationship so learners can successfully read and write
Methodology cont/…

- Initial Assessment
- Individual learning plan is discussed
- Short term targets are identified
- A Learning Contract is signed
- Families are active participants
- Review of Learning Contract at the end of one semester
- Continuation/Termination of service
NWAR Development

- External evaluation by Profs. Sheila Wolfendale in 2004
- Significant improvement in decoding and encoding by the children. Need to consolidate other skills
- Led to whole-school approach, the Language Acquisition Programme (LAP)
- By 2007, LAP was in 30% of Maltese state primary schools
Key Elements of LAP

- Phonemic Awareness
- Systematic, explicit phonics instruction
- Sound symbol relationships
- Decoding
- Word attack skills
- Spelling instruction
- Comprehension instruction
- Independent reading of high-quality books
Training

Prior to the commencement of LAP, teachers are provided with:

- PD sessions
- Classroom Demonstrations
- Relevant resources/literature
- In-service training
Implementation

On commencement of LAP, the school is provided with:

- Parental meetings
- Ongoing classroom support
- Classroom demonstrations
- Resources
LAP Assessment Parameters

- LAP approach in 2005-06 in 9 schools, 20 Year 1 and 20 Yr 2 classes
- 80 randomly selected pupils, equal number of Years 1 and 2, boys and girls
- Assessment in the form of 4 ‘games’ about 15 mins in all
- Carried out in June 2006 by FES staff
- Full school co-operation
# Test Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1</strong></td>
<td>recognition of the alphabet</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Section 2</strong></td>
<td>reading of words with selected phonemes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Section 3</strong></td>
<td>reading of selected sight words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 4</strong></td>
<td>Reading and comprehension of 5 sentences</td>
<td>Reading and comprehension of short paragraph made up of 6 sentences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LAP Assessment: Yr 2 Sentence Reading Scores

LAP Y2.4: Reading or Decoding of Each Word

Mum to fish the shop. fish fresh. were a and other were a plate. was man the He a smile. got fish she them then a
Discussion of Results

- Year 2: Attainment targets were fulfilled.
- Year 1: Attainment Targets were not fulfilled; however, given Yr 2 results, the Yr 1 results may mean that:
  - The targets were unrealistic for the Year;
  - The LAP needs to be reviewed, perhaps starting earlier.
- Year 1: LAP decoding skills may have given a reading advantage of 15.1%.
- Year 2: As expected, need to resort to decoding diminished to 5.4%.
- No significant difference in scores between boys and girls
- No significant difference between learners of different ages within the same cohort.
- The indications are that the LAP approach compensates for these known variances. This mirrors findings in international studies on the effectiveness on the multi-sensory approach in literacy acquisition that is very similar to the LAP approach.
Cost per Child using Multi-sensory Approach
PREVENTION vs REMEDIATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series 1</th>
<th>Remediation Cost through Nwar</th>
<th>Prevention Cost for 3-Yr programme</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>164</td>
<td>30</td>
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547% increase in costs
Limits to Literacy Attainment Approach up to 2008 (1)

A LOT OF EFFECTIVE SERVICE WAS GIVEN TO LEARNERS WHO WERE PREVIOUSLY FORGOTTEN, AND MANY LEARNERS ACHIEVED BOTH MASTERY AND INTEGRATION. HOWEVER...

- Lack of coordination and holistic coverage by the different services.
- Each service highlighted one approach, that was perceived as a ‘magic bullet’.
- Schools expected to ‘put the jigsaw pieces together’ to make one whole picture – often the sum of the parts did not make a whole.
- Literacy needs of learners with Statement still under-served
Limits to Literacy Attainment
Approach up to 2008 (2)

- ‘External support’ programmes were not from central educational authorities. They were therefore ‘allowed’ rather than championed / embraced / adapted. They did not effect official curriculum guidance.

- In LAP, some teachers were not sufficiently trained or did not understand the whole process, leading to superficial application, negative results after schools were weaned off, and charges of ‘same old phonics’.

- Services did not sufficiently engage schools and teachers in the literacy attainment debate and in considering whole-school and school-community comprehensive approaches literacy attainment
The Challenge…

- How do we preserve the strong elements of present services, especially trained staff, whilst
  - synergizing resources
  - coordinating services
  - empowering, supporting and responsabilizing schools
  - ensuring entitlement for all?
A National Policy and Strategy

- This was part of national reform programme that included:
  - decentralization of state compulsory education
  - removal of streaming in state primary schools
  - removal of end-of primary competitive exams in state and non-state sector, thus greatly reducing social inequalities
  - integration of 3 types of secondary schools towards a comprehensive-type system
  - reform of special needs provision to enhance further inclusion
The Literacy Strategy

- First focus on bilingual literacy attainment.
- Rationalization and coordination of four different literacy support services into a central comprehensive service.
- Literacy Strategy used as entry point for upskilling of curriculum leadership at school and class level through the School Development Plan process.
## Strategy Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School-based Provision</th>
<th>Community-based Provision</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Identification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
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</table>
In the context of a multi-faceted, phased school/College Strategy
But it WORKS only if…
National Strategy

- Reliable data that drive review and planning
- Entrenching diagnostic tools and profiling
- Involving parents and community
- Literacy attainment entitlement
- Developing Resources
- Empowering Schools
- Empowering Teachers
The Great Literacy Attainment Debate…

- Synthetic Phonics
- Look-and-Say
- Oxford Reading Tree
- Read-Write Inc
- Jolly Phonics
Making the ‘Right’ Choice

1. **Investigate:**
   - How are your Yr 1-3 and complementary teachers going about literacy attainment?
   - What do your ‘believe’ in?
   - What do they feel competent in?
   - What is the reading attainment success rate of each Yr 1-3 teacher?
   - What reading preparedness do your learners come to school with?
   - What resources are available?
   - What does the Literacy Support Teacher recommend?
   - What does comparable international research and best practice say?

2. **Select and Commit**

3. **Implement fully, with appropriate investment**

4. **Evaluate and Review**
Strategy Highlights

- Uniform upskilling of support staff
- Fully support for schools to develop programmes for early support, effective inclusive pedagogy, parental involvement
- Schools report number of identified learners and their progress at the end of Year 1, 2, 3
- Struggling learners at the end of Year 3 must have a literacy action Plan for Year 4
- School self-reporting counter-balanced by yearly testing of 10% random sample to give national picture in October of Year 3.
- External reviews include focus on literacy strategy.
The Way Forward...

Maximize literacy attainment by:

- Continuous training of Inclusion Coordinators and LSAs
- Continuous upskilling of teachers and Heads
- Enhancing IEPs of statemented learners to— pilot project underway
- Enhancing collegial planning and provision e.g. triads
- Promoting, supporting and expecting school ownership through SDP process
Thank You !