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Abstract: Models of instruction – from reading towards literacy

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International learning assessment tools have contributed to increased global recognition of a crisis in literacy levels in developing countries. As practitioners, education-focused NGOs are well placed to share learning on models that are effective in improving literacy levels in extremely poor countries. To improve literacy standards at scale it is imperative that the community of practice identifies viable models and essential components of literacy interventions.

This paper consolidates learning from two NGOs – Room to Read and Concern Worldwide – on good practice in improving reading levels of students. Drawing from programme experience and recent data from over 20 education programmes in some of the world’s poorest countries, the authors identify the “non-negotiables” of education supports. A conceptual model of “the simple view of reading” is provided presented, grounded in evidence of improved reading achievement for students. This parsimonious approach strives for low-cost, sustainable solutions while reconciling this with necessities for literacy success. Successful models of engagement with stakeholders are presented, together with lessons learnt.

Complexity is then added. The authors recognise that the “non-negotiables” presented in the paper are true for programmes that strive to improve reading achievement, but that they must be expanded if a wider view of literacy is to be achieved. Communication skills and higher order language competencies are imperative for meaningful learning and personal development. The implications of a wider view of literacy are presented and compared to the parameters established as “non-negotiables”. The authors then present a set of considerations for practitioners striving to improve literacy levels in developing countries.

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