



Funda Wandé Through the Lens of PDIA: Improving Educational Outcomes via Flexibility, Iteration, and Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Funda Wandé is a non-profit organization founded in 2017 with the goal of ensuring all students in South Africa can read for meaning and calculate with confidence in their home language by the age of 10¹. They develop curricula, videos, and print materials to train teachers in the fundamentals of foundational learning.

Funda Wandé has adopted a “learning by doing” strategy that is similar to the Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) approach to solving complex problems. PDIA is a high-impact process of innovation that helps organizations develop the capability to solve complex problems while solving such problems. It is a step-by-step framework that helps break down problems into their root causes, identify entry points, search for possible solutions, take action, reflect upon what is learned, adapt, and then act again. Its dynamic process and tight feedback loops enable teams to find and fit solutions to the local context².

KEY POINTS

- The case of Funda Wandé, an education-focused NGO committed to overcoming the learning crisis in South Africa, is an illustration of how the principles that underlie PDIA can help practitioners and policy implementers in the education sector create change and improve learning outcomes.
- Developing deep and regular engagements with multiple agents across the education sector, including government at the district, provincial, and national level, can ensure that reforms are viable, legitimate, and relevant.
- Building collaborative, inclusive teams that have local contextual knowledge and bring different perspectives allows for a robust understanding of the problem and improves the design of interventions.
- Flexible and iterative learning approaches facilitate the search for context appropriate solutions to improving learning outcomes.

PDIA is gaining traction in development circles amongst practitioners as well as funders. However, many do not fully understand its components and how they work in concert to produce results in practice. Though the Funda Wandé team did not intentionally deploy the PDIA approach in their work, many features of their journey reflect the principles of PDIA. This case study is an attempt to map Funda Wandé’s learning journey to core PDIA principles and tools to help program designers and implementers better understand the PDIA process and its utility in the education sector.

This case provides a narrative of the Funda Wandé story, illustrating how PDIA principles and tools like problem construction, deconstruction, change space analysis, iteration, and building authorization would have been applied in practice. The sources of this case include a literature review of education in South Africa, related research documents, and conversations with staff at Funda Wandé. We are grateful to the staff of Funda Wandé (Nic Spaul, Nangamso Mtsatse, Nwabisa Makaluza, Julia Maphutha, Permie Issac), Allan Gray Foundation (Natasha Barker), and MSDF (Sean Bastable) for sharing their time with us.

Diagnosing the Problem

Nic Spaul, the founder of Funda Wandé and an economist by training, had been conducting research on the quality of education in South Africa since 2011³. In 2015, he joined a large research project at Stellenbosch University under the Program to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development, a partnership between the South African Presidency and the European Union. The research project was focused on identifying binding constraints⁴ in education and looking at root causes of low educational outcomes⁵ in order to make recommendations for reform.

The most troubling finding of this project was the striking fact that 58% of children in South Africa were unable to read for meaning in any language by the end of Grade 4⁶.

They identified four key binding constraints to progress on improving learning outcomes⁷:

- Low capacity, permanently tenured bureaucrats, and a lack of accountability at the provincial level⁸ led to weak institutional functionality and a lack of administrative efforts towards improving educational outcomes.
- Teacher unions had a stranglehold on power and negotiations within the schooling system, which severely compromised the process of appointing teaching staff and administrators.
- Teachers lacked the knowledge and confidence to teach certain content due to inadequate pre-service and in-service training, which perpetuated a cycle of poor educational outcomes for students.
- Students wasted valuable learning time and had insufficient opportunity to learn due to teacher absenteeism and a lack of monitoring by school and government officials. Related research conducted by this team also found that students needed to have the opportunity to “learn to read” before they could “read to learn.”⁹

The synthesis report that identified these binding constraints included a strong recommendation to the Department of Basic Education to adopt the objective that “every child must learn to read for meaning by the end of Grade 3.”

Problem construction is the first step in doing PDIA. It helps frame the problem and draw attention to the need for change in the social, political, and administrative agenda. After constructing the problem, we move to problem deconstruction. Complex problems need to be broken down into smaller, more manageable sets of focal points for engagement, that are open to localized solution building. PDIA uses the Ishikawa or Fishbone diagram to illustrate this. Below, we illustrate how the first two steps of PDIA, problem construction and deconstruction, can be mapped to the research findings above.

During this stage of exploration, Funda Wandé realized that, despite the disproportionate attention that small scale efforts by NGOs and philanthropic organizations get, the government spends 99 times more money on education every year than

PDIA PARALLEL: PROBLEM CONSTRUCTION FOR FUNDA WANDE

Key questions are used in the PDIA problem construction process. In the case of Funda Wandé, the existing research on educational outcomes helped provide clarity, as well as a compelling narrative, around the problem of poor foundational skills.

1. What is the problem? 58% of South African children cannot read for meaning in any language by the end of Grade 4.

2. Why does it matter?

- Poor reading skills hinder children from developing basic comprehension skills and understanding the curriculum in higher grades.
- The ability to read is central to the ability to learn and is therefore a prerequisite to progress successfully through the education system.
- It affects children's future potential and can further entrench them in poverty and weak labor market choices.

3. To whom does it matter? Children who are attending school but unable to read, their parents, the Department of Basic Education, the future generations of South Africans.

4. Who needs to care more? The Department of Education at the provincial and national level, schoolteachers, and parents.

5. How do we get them to give it more attention? (How do we measure it or tell stories about it?)

By creating a compelling narrative using stories as well as data. Learning to read is the most important goal for primary schooling. All other academic skills build upon this foundation.

6. What will the problem look like when it is solved? All children in South Africa can read for meaning by Grade 3.

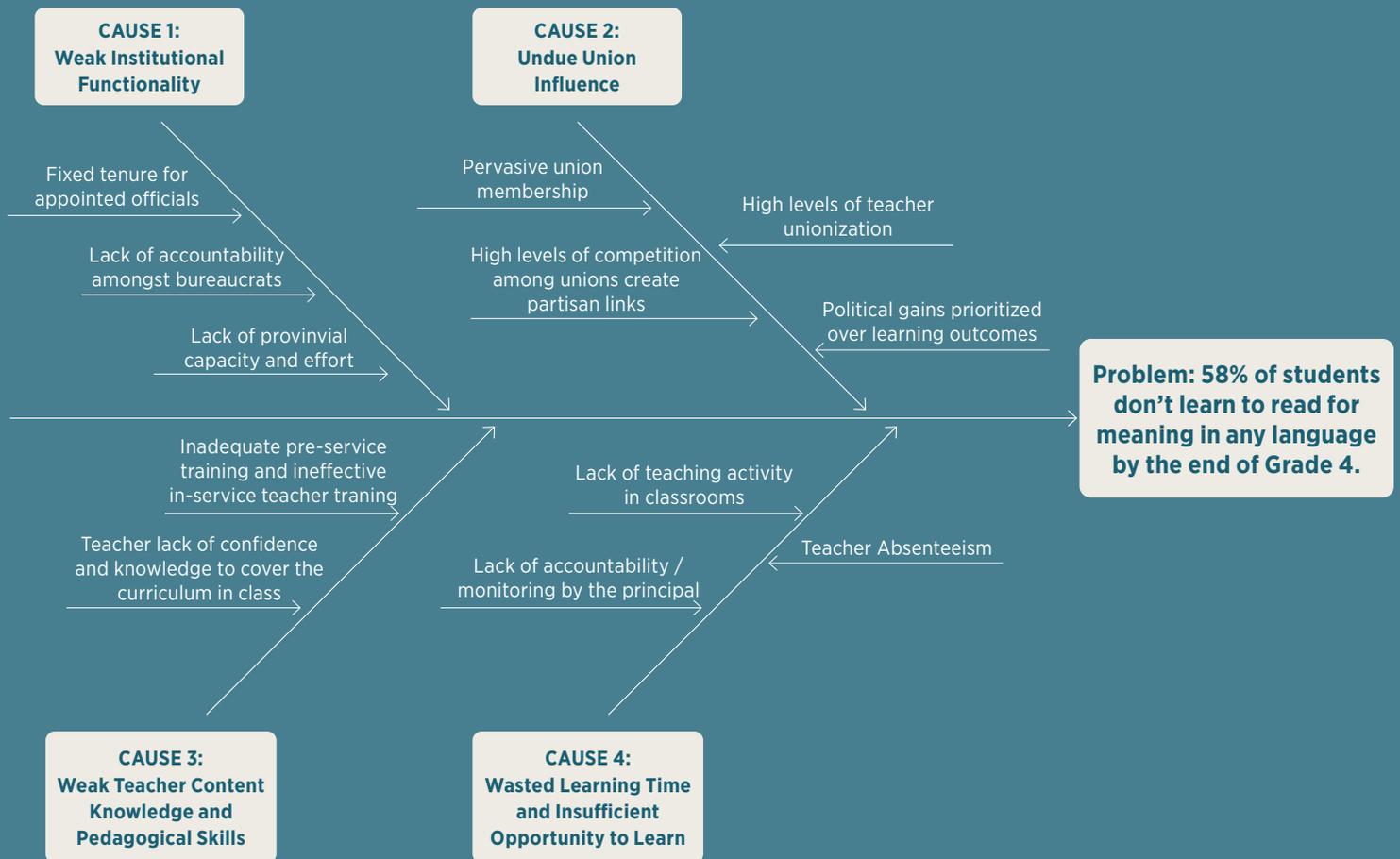
Source: PDIA Toolkit using author's synthesis of literature review and conversations.

Pivoting from Research to Practice

Nic was already well known as an economist in the education sector, but the glaring results of the binding constraints analysis increased his visibility and created the opportunity for him to rally a community of allies around the issue of foundational learning. It also led to many introductions to key stakeholders in the South African education system.

During one such meeting with the Allan Gray Foundation¹⁰ in which Nic presented the binding constraints to foundational learning, something unexpected happened. The board of the foundation invited him to join them in putting his recommendations into action. Nic's first instinct was to decline; he wanted to focus on his research and had no team in place. But the Allan Gray Foundation was persistent. They thought he had a novel perspective on a persistent problem and believed that he had the potential to make meaningful progress on this issue. They promised to provide him with all the resources needed to continue his research while leading this new initiative at the foundation. Ultimately, Nic agreed, and Funda Wandé was born.

PDIA PARALLEL: PROBLEM DECONSTRUCTION (FISHBONE VERSION 1.0)



Source: PDIA Toolkit Worksheet 3 using author's synthesis of literature review.

Building the Funda Wande Team

Nic founded Funda Wande in 2017 with two trusted colleagues. During his previous work in the sector, he had observed that most researchers working in education and particularly in literacy were neither native speakers of the local languages, nor had any experience with the public school system in deprived areas. He recognized that he needed to build a competent and well-rounded team – one that had local contextual knowledge, understood the culture, and looked like the population he planned to work with.

He began to bring together a representative and diverse group of motivated professionals who were excited about finding solutions to the problem of poor foundational skills. By the end of the year, they onboarded two black African women - Zaza Lubelwana (currently heading the pilot in Eastern Cape province) and Nangamso Mtsatse (now the CEO of Funda Wande). Over time, Nic and the team leveraged their networks to bring on more native speakers of local languages to their core team. He recruited, trained, and invested in people who were committed to staying within the broader education ecosystem and ensured that leadership and decision making was distributed. His approach to building his team has been intentionally focused on being inclusive, bringing more diverse voices to the table, and ensuring local contextual expertise.

Working in collaborative teams is an essential part of doing PDIA. Solving complex problems cannot be done by individuals. It requires involving many different stakeholders who may not usually work together, as they bring different perspectives and tacit knowledge that allows for a more robust understanding of the problem and, thus, more purposeful and relevant ideas to act upon.

Engaging New Voices in the Problem Diagnosis

Funda Wandé set an ambitious goal: all South African children should be able to read for meaning by the end of Grade 3 by 2030. They knew that success would require training teachers and equipping them with the necessary tools to teach their students to read for meaning. However, before attempting to design any intervention, the leadership team spoke to pedagogical experts, universities, teachers, researchers, and government officials to get their perspective on the root causes of poor education outcomes and to brainstorm various ways to build teaching skills and capacity. Through these conversations, they were able to gain key insights into the issues on the ground. First, there was a stark difference in the quality of teachers, quantum of funding, and quality of reading material across schools in different neighborhoods. South Africa's widening fiscal deficit and cuts in the education budget were furthering the inequality amongst schools. Second, quality learning materials in local languages were not available to schools. Children did not have access to appropriate print material needed to build a strong foundation for education. Third, there was no specific pre-service training course for teachers on foundational skills. Teachers simply did not have a meaningful learning opportunity to acquire these essential abilities. Across the board, training content was in English – while classroom instruction was often in local languages. Additionally, in-service training courses did not emphasize practical knowledge of pedagogical skills. Many teachers noted that the 1- or 2-day training sessions were insufficient for them to master pedagogical tactics in order to successfully implement them in the classroom.

FIGURE 1. FUNDA WANDE OVER THE YEARS¹¹



Identifying Entry Points to Intervene

Funda Wandé continued engaging with stakeholders for the next year and a half to ascertain what was feasible for a new organization entering the South African education ecosystem. Many questions still needed to be answered:

What is already being done? What has worked, and what hasn't? Why? How can Funda Wandé add value?

Funda Wandé needed to be innovative, but not reinvent the wheel.

What is the government already trying to do? How supportive are they?

Funda Wandé needed to align with the goals and constraints of the government to successfully intervene in the government school system.

What capabilities exist? What capabilities did Funda Wandé need to build?

Funda Wandé needed financial resources and skilled individuals to lead and expand their initiatives.

What does it look like to work in a less resourced province? Where would Funda Wandé see the maximum impact of their intervention?

Funda Wandé needed to be strategic about where to start the pilot and how to eventually scale up

What is immediately possible?

Funda Wandé needed to achieve some “quick wins” to establish legitimacy for their ideas.

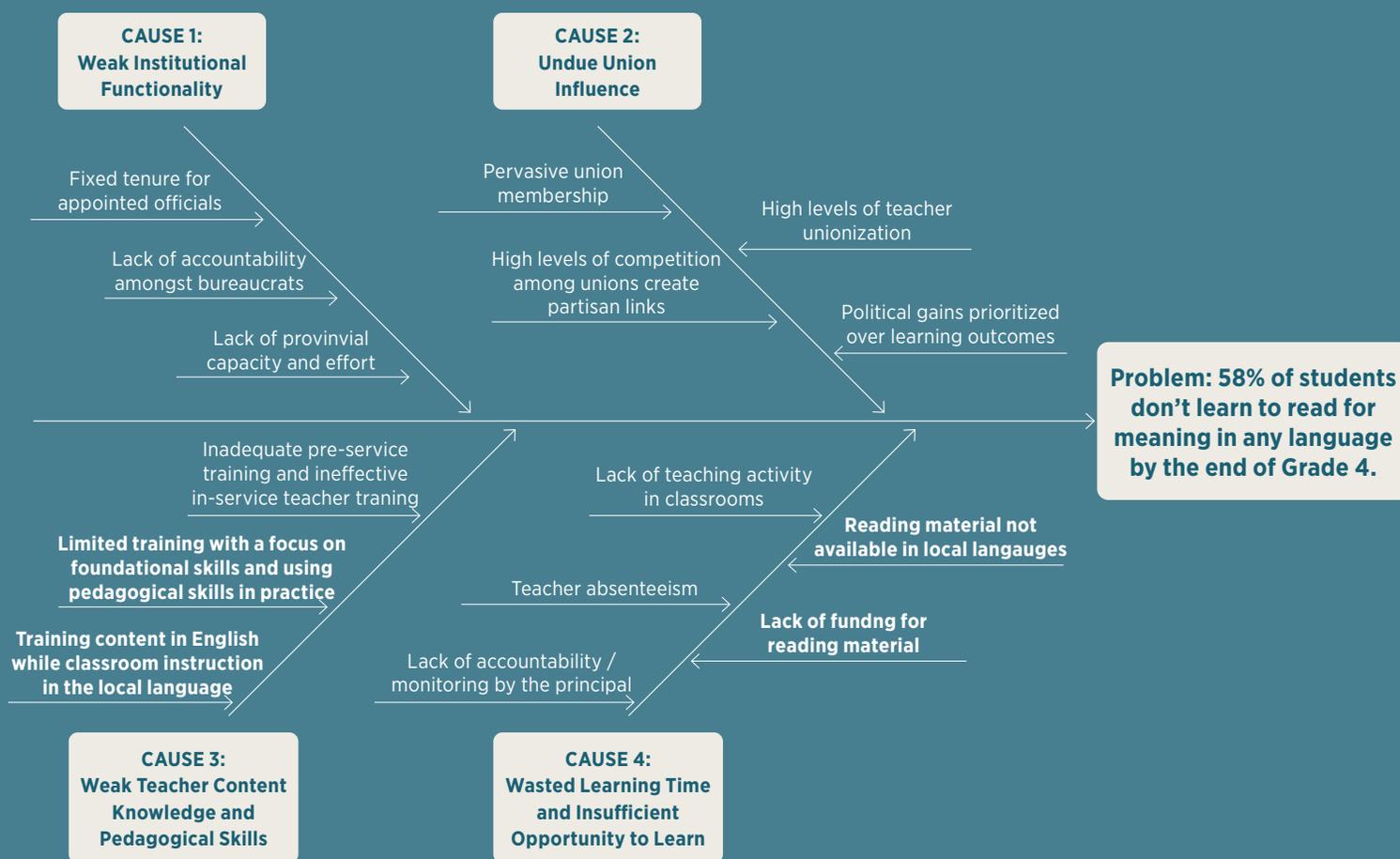
all local and international organizations working in the country combined. This made them realize that it would be foolish to circumvent the government. Instead, their time and donor funding would be best spent influencing how the government could better spend its own education budget. This early insight helped Funda Wande focus on establishing partnerships with the government and not spreading themselves too thin by trying to do everything alone. They knew engaging with bureaucracy at the district, province, and national level would be critical for their success.

The stakeholder engagement undertaken prior to the design of the intervention helped Funda Wande identify opportunities for action and key agents who could take their mandate forward. Two entry points were selected:

- Limited training with a focus on foundational skills and using pedagogical skills in practice
- Reading materials are not available in local languages

These two sub-causes of the problem (as identified on the updated fishbone diagram) are areas in which Funda Wande felt they had sufficient authority, acceptance, and ability to act and pursue change. In PDIA, this is what we call triple-A or change space analysis, the third step of PDIA. Change space analysis is used to evaluate the best timing and staging of your engagement, given your contextual opportunities and constraints. Each cause and sub-cause of the fishbone diagram is essentially a separate point of engagement and offers different opportunities for change. This tool helps determine whether you should try an aggressive new policy intervention or start with something smaller and grow your change space first.

PDIA PARALLEL: ITERATED VERSION OF PROBLEM DECONSTRUCTION (FISHBONE VERSION 2.0)



Source: PDIA Toolkit Worksheet 3 using author's synthesis of literature review.

PDIA PARALLEL: TRIPLE-A OR CHANGE SPACE ANALYSIS

Below is our interpretation of Funda Wandé’s change space analysis for one of the sub-causes highlighted in yellow on the iterated fishbone: Reading material is not available in local languages.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION	ESTIMATE OF: AUTHORITY, ACCEPTANCE, ABILITY (low, mild, large)	ASSUMPTIONS
Sub Cause: Reading material is not available in local languages		
Overall, how much Authority do you think you have to engage?	Large	Given the high acceptance of the issue amongst academic experts and funders, there will be support from these actors in addressing the problem.
Overall, how much Acceptance do you think you have to engage?	Mid	Many provinces recognize the need for this; however, creating quality materials is expensive and they have financial constraints.
Overall, how much Ability do you think you have to engage?	Large	There is large ability amongst academic and linguistic experts to create reading materials.
What is the change space for the sub-cause?		Medium change space

Source: PDIA Toolkit Worksheet 4 using author’s synthesis of literature review.

Learning from Iterations of the Foundation Phase Teacher Training Program

To address these identified entry points, Funda Wandé decided to pilot two programs

- 1. A practical teacher training course on foundational skills**
- 2. Low-cost high-quality learning materials in the local language**

These interventions would be piloted and evaluated in schools to determine their effectiveness. They decided to begin the pilot phase in provinces that had particularly low literacy levels. This would hopefully attract the attention of other provinces and help secure their buy-in. At the time, the two low-performing provinces were Eastern Cape and Limpopo. They were able to gauge more support and excitement from the former and hence decided to begin the pilot in Eastern Cape.

Funda Wandé began piloting a formal teacher training program in partnership with Rhodes University in 2017 to ensure that all Foundation Phase teachers in the country knew how to teach reading to address this problem. The training

course was prepared in isiXhosa (the local language spoken in the Eastern Cape) and English as a first additional language. The pilot was launched in 30 government schools in the Eastern Cape province. The intervention includes teacher training, learner and teacher support material and coaching for targeted schools.

The team envisioned the in-service training being largely video based to showcase the practical components in action, with on-site coaches visiting teachers in their classrooms once every two weeks.¹² Funda Wandé started filming professional in-classroom videos, creating animations, infographics, and other multimedia to teach the major components of reading and writing in practice. The in-classroom teaching videos were seen as a critical value add to the training program as they would show teachers how to use various teaching methodologies in live classrooms and serve as a guidebook post in-person training sessions. All the materials were tested by groups of teachers before finalizing them.

“The two-day scoping trip was designed to give our team an important chance to prepare for our first wave of filming that’s coming up in October. Before diving into filming the real videos for the course, we wanted to “practice” a bit, and make sure of a number of key things: Would the scripts that our academic partners have been writing run smoothly? Would the teachers be camera shy? Would grade 3 learners be able to cope with the camera?”

—Blog entry by Funda Wandé in 2018¹³

This experimentation helped Funda Wandé devise strategies to better fit the local context. They continued testing for about six months. A key insight from testing was that the videos didn’t mimic the environment of a target classroom because they were shot in a private school. Funda Wandé knew that teachers would only find these videos valuable if they could identify with the context and see it working in a classroom that looked like theirs. Learning from this iteration, the final videos were recorded in public schools with a class size of 40-60 students and with school resources that most targeted teachers would have access to. Another piece of feedback from teachers was that they found it hard to remember all the training components, and referencing the videos would interrupt their workflow. In response to this, Funda Wandé decided to supplement the videos with a written manual containing more visuals than text to serve as an easy reference for teachers in the classroom.

Funda Wandé’s literacy work and training is largely led by native speakers of local languages in the organization. They are the face of most videos and content uploaded on Funda Wandé’s website and YouTube channel. This representation is highly appreciated by schoolteachers who trust and identify with those who are aware of their culture and context. Funda Wandé distinguishes good teaching practices in targeted schools by featuring teachers on their YouTube channel. This creates recognition among teachers for their efforts and additional buy-in for Funda Wandé’s teaching videos.

After finalizing the design of the pilot program, Funda Wandé partnered with a local university to conduct a randomized controlled trial of the intervention to understand whether the pilot program is achieving its goals. The pilot is currently ongoing and is expected to end in 2022.

PDIA PARALLEL: DESIGNING AND LEARNINGS FROM ITERATIONS

Iteration is a key step in doing PDIA, where multiple solution ideas are identified and put into action. Iterative steps progressively allow locally legitimate solutions to emerge and foster adaptation to the idiosyncrasies of the local context. The initial steps are highly specified, with precise determination of what will be done and by whom in relation to all chosen ideas and predetermined start and endpoints that create time boundaries for the first step. Action learning is embedded into the iteration process. Check-in points help gather lessons to inform what happened and why, and next steps are designed and undertaken based on what was learned in prior steps.

Funda Wandé took six months to test what works and doesn't work while developing the in-class training videos. The iterations provided immense learning about the location of the video recordings, the person doing the training, and the creation of a supplemental manual to accompany the training videos. This learning helped them revise their strategies to better fit the context and to ultimately achieve their objective.

Source: PDIA Toolkit Section 6 and author's analysis.

Learning How to Create High-quality, Low-cost Reading Material

The Funda Wandé team knew that public school systems, especially in the poorer provinces, faced financial constraints and lacked good quality textbooks in the local language. They felt that training teachers without quality learning materials would have a limited impact on learning outcomes.

“Providing books and teaching teachers how to teach reading isn't sexy, but neither is plumbing. Both are necessary for improvement – even in the ‘digital revolution space.’”

—Nic Spaull, 2019

Funda Wandé saw that organizations like Room to Read (a non-profit) and Molteno (an institute of language and literacy) had created storybooks in isiXhosa, but production was financially unviable due to the lengthy design of the books and the lack of economies of scale. Furthermore, they were not on par with the quality of private school textbooks and were visually unappealing. Funda Wandé understood that only a cheaper set of materials would help them gain widespread readership. They collaborated with Molteno to redesign and repackage existing VulaBula reading materials into anthologies. By combining discrete story books into a single large book, they lowered the cost of printing significantly.

“One innovation was to convert the separate “skinny books” of graded readers into anthologies with 24 stories per book. By combining these texts into a single book, and because they are Creative Commons licensed materials, we can provide them at an extremely low cost. Once they are printed in large volumes the cost of a full-color anthology of 24 stories is about R15/ book (\$1/ book). Due to our collaboration with the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDOE), the province printed 824,345 isiXhosa and Sesotho anthologies for every Grade 1, 2 and 3 children in the province fully at their expense. These were distributed and used in 2019 and have again been printed and distributed for 2020.”

—Funda Wandé Annual Report 2019¹⁴

Today, all children attending Grades 1-3 in public schools of Eastern and Western Cape provinces have a copy of these anthologies. The digital version of these stories is also accessible free of cost to anyone on Funda Wande's website.

“One of the ongoing mandates of Funda Wande is to find high-quality Open Access materials to use in our early literacy and early numeracy training. Where these do not exist, we create them.” —Funda Wande Annual Report 2019

PDIA PARALLEL: CRAWLING THE DESIGN SPACE FOR IDEAS

This fourth step of doing PDIA allows you to look for and experiment with multiple alternative solutions. Solutions to complex problems come in the form of many small solutions to the numerous causal dimensions of the problem. These solutions must be found within the changing context through active engagement and learning. Identifying multiple solutions, whether through existing, latent, and external best practice or positive deviance yields positive and negative lessons and results in new hybrids or locally constructed solutions that are administratively and politically possible in the target context.

Funda Wande identified the need for creating textbooks in the local context. The existing content created by another organization was appropriate but not administratively feasible due to the high cost of the printing. They improved the designs and helped bring down the cost of the textbooks. This is an example of latent practice, understanding the key barriers with existing practice (too expensive, visually unappealing, etc.) and focusing attention and resources on trying to address these barriers to foster success. By collaborating with other organizations to support development of local language content, Funda Wande was able to make learning materials accessible to every child, a necessary precondition for building strong foundational skills.

Source: PDIA Toolkit Section 4 and author's analysis.

Building and Maintaining Authorization to Ensure Legitimacy in the Eyes of the Government

Funda Wande understood that building administrative and political support for their interventions would be critical for their adoption in public schools. In the early days, they had a set of ideas that they wanted to pilot in partnership with the Eastern Cape province as described in previous sections. Funda Wande created a compelling problem statement to capture the attention of government officials. It took several meetings and consistent engagement to get the government on board, but what sealed the deal was the series of high-quality anthologies of VulaBula stories they had created.

“During one of the initial meetings, we started handing over the Funda Wande anthologies. The officials were surprised by the quality of it, and all of them wanted it for their children. They know we are very serious about creating high-quality material at a low cost. We didn’t have enough copies to give it to everyone. We created this excitement in the room about what we are trying to do.” —**Nwabisa Makuluza, Funda Wande Head of Limpopo Province**

The pilot in the Eastern Cape started off on a promising note, but it was nearly derailed a few months in as the top leadership of the Eastern Cape suddenly changed. Funda Wande was caught in the middle of this reshuffle, as the incoming director had new priorities and was determined to cancel the program. Funda Wande scrambled to meet the new director and convince him of the importance and potential of the program. After a series of unsuccessful attempts, they finally secured a meeting with the new director. Funda Wande pitched their program again, skillfully incorporating learnings from their previous engagement with the government. Other senior-level officials working in the Department of Basic Education also relayed the efforts of this collaboration and impact seen on the ground. Luckily, the pitch worked: the new director was impressed by Funda Wande’s professionalism and the trust conveyed by other bureaucrats. The pilot was back on track.

“While working with the government, building buy-in at every level of the bureaucracy is critical to deal with sudden changes in the system. Patience and art of talking to the government are needed.” —**Nwabisa Makuluza, Funda Wande Head of Limpopo Province**

On another occasion, the government suggested that the ongoing model of support offered by literacy coaches, one per five schools, was not a financially sustainable model that could be scaled up. Acting on this feedback, Funda Wande started exploring different models to continue maintaining the government’s interest and authorization for the intervention. Funda Wande settled on leveraging Presidentially-endorsed Youth Employment Service (YES) campaign to explore how youth can be productively employed in improving literacy and numeracy. Addressing the high youth unemployment rate (66% in 2019)¹⁵ is a top priority of the South African government, so the proposal to employ young people aligned with existing government priorities and was instantly popular. As such, the administration quickly approved it.

The efforts to engage with bureaucracy didn’t stop there. Funda Wande is encouraging Subject Advisors at the district level to enroll in the training program on foundational learning offered by Rhodes University. Subject Advisors are responsible for designing training curriculums and providing pedagogical support to schoolteachers. Funda Wande sees building their capacity as a critical step in ensuring the program’s sustainability going forward. They also persuaded the Eastern Cape Department of Education to offer bursaries to 21 foundation phase Subject Advisors to enroll in the program.

Funda Wande is continuing to build a strong narrative around the problem through meetings and advocacy with officials at the provincial and national level and backing that narrative with evidence and emerging solutions in order to make “reading for meaning” a priority countrywide. These continuous efforts have resulted in the inclusion of this topic in the Eastern Cape Department of Education’s Reading Plan¹⁶ as well as an acknowledgement of foundational literacy as a national goal by the President of South Africa.

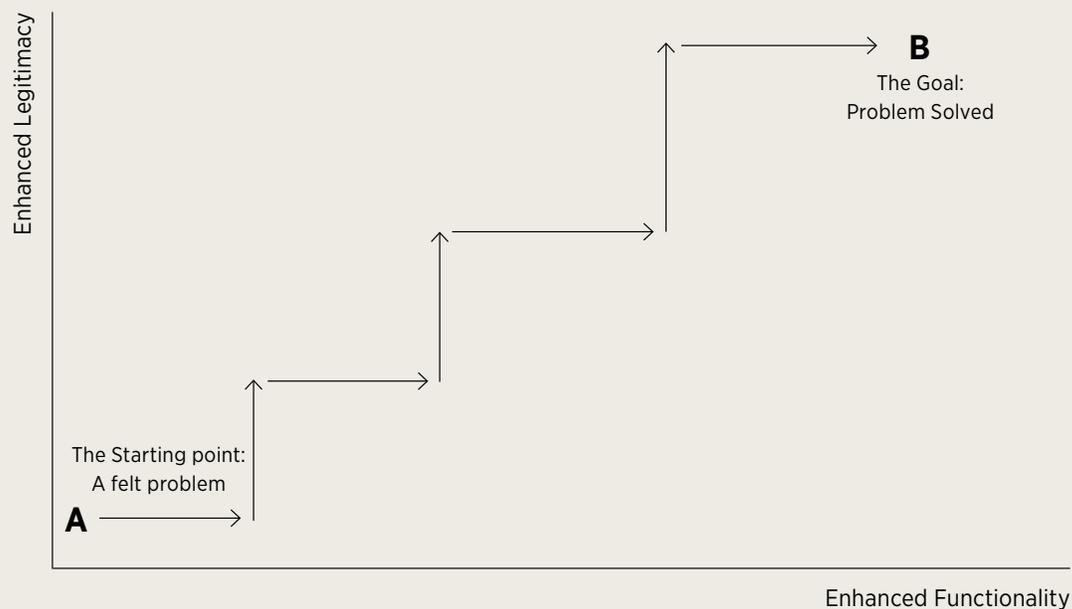
“We agree on five fundamental goals for the next decade... (3) Our schools will have better educational outcomes and every 10-year-old will be able to read for meaning”

—**President Cyril Ramaphosa’s State of the Nation Address, 2019.**

This endorsement has created new opportunities for Funda Wandé to collaborate with other provinces and has provided legitimacy to their mission.

PDIA PARALLEL: IMPROVING FUNCTIONALITY AND LEGITIMACY ONE STEP AT A TIME

In PDIA, trying small steps and learning to become more functional in your context allows you to gain the necessary legitimacy to iterate again, trying something bigger, learning again, and gaining even more legitimacy from these initial quick wins.



Source: PDIA Toolkit Section 6, figure 5

Building a Community and Strengthening Existing Capabilities in the Education System

Besides targeting various levels of the bureaucracy, Funda Wandé also values collaborating with other stakeholders (researchers, experts, NGOs, and future leaders) to advance the goal of every child being able to read for meaning.

Funda Wandé organizes a literacy conference, the Lekgotla Conference, in South Africa. This event gathers all the stakeholders working on literacy. It provides funding for experts from other organizations, teachers, and district officials to attend the event and share their experiences. These conferences provide Funda Wandé with the opportunity to revisit the root causes of poor foundational skills, build consensus on what needs to be done next, share learnings, and find opportunities to collaborate.

Funda Wandé is also promoting research on early foundational skills and local languages in South Africa by funding PhD bursaries for African home-language students at Stellenbosch University and sponsoring research on benchmarks in African languages and the analysis of PIRLS data. They are actively aligning research priorities with those of the Department of Basic Education to further improve the intervention design and content creation in local languages.

Building capabilities across the education system is an important way in which Funda Wandé advances their own objectives. They believe in hiring and training people that are going to stay in the South Africa Education system. They realize that the problem cannot be solved by them alone or with the current capacity in the government. Thus, when recruiting, they place an equal emphasis on required skills as well as future goals work within the education ecosystem. Funda Wandé invests time, effort, and money in preparing future leadership by helping them gain necessary experience and skills to do the job.

“Increasingly we see this as one of Funda Wandé’s comparative advantages; giving promising young African scholars the opportunity to develop the skills and networks they need to succeed. This includes project management skills, developing relationships with key stakeholders, writing proposals, giving presentations, managing relationships with funders, delivering to a deadline, managing a team and a budget, and most importantly, learning how government processes and politics work in the real world. To do this, we are supporting our staff to study part-time while they work at Funda Wandé, as well as for deciding what opportunities and relationships people need to get to the next step in their career. Of our staff of 30 people, 10 are currently furthering their studies in some form or another with the majority paid for by Funda Wandé.” —Funda Wandé Annual Report, 2019

PDIA PARALLEL: IMPROVING FUNCTIONALITY AND LEGITIMACY ONE STEP AT A TIME

Authority to act on solutions is necessary for programs and policies to work effectively. Programs and policies typically cross over multiple domains of authority in which many different agents and processes act to constrain or support behavior. Authorizing structures often vary vertically as well, with agents at different levels of an organization or intergovernmental structure enjoying control over different dimensions of the same process. Authority is dynamic and, with well-structured strategies, it can be influential in expanding change space.

Funda Wandé engages multiple agents and organizations across the sector to ensure that reforms are viable, legitimate, and relevant. Building, maintaining, and expanding authorizations amongst various stakeholders has cultivated trust and a safe space for iteration and learning.

Advocacy and Relationship Building within the Government System

NATIONAL

Advocating for reading for meaning, recognized as a national priority in 2019.

PROVINCE

Partnering to create educational plans for next 5 years, encouraging concerned government officials in the education department to enroll in the course for foundational learning.

DISTRICTS

Encouraging and finally supporting subject experts to partake in course for foundational learning.

SCHOOLS

Training teachers followed by regular coaching support.

Providing Platform and Resources to External Agents to Advance Existing Capabilities

RESEARCHERS

Promoting research on early foundational skills by facilitating publications and sponsoring research.

EXPERTS

Sponsoring to attend Literacy Lekgotla Conference hosted by Funda Wandé to share learnings and resources.

FUTURE LEADERS

Sponsoring staff internally to study part time, build skill and knowledge for the next step in their career as future leaders.

FUTURE TEACHERS

Providing accredited university course focused on foundational learning at the local universities.

Source: PDIA Toolkit Section 5 and author's analysis.

Conclusion

“Everything we do is about prioritizing and thinking whether this will lead to all children learning to read for meaning and calculate with confidence by age 10 by 2030.” —**Funda Wandé**
Annual Report, 2019

Funda Wandé continues to tenaciously pursue their vision to transform basic education in South Africa. Today, Funda Wandé is developing content in other African languages and building partnerships with additional provinces. After seeing the effectiveness of the pilot program, Eastern Cape government officials came back to Funda Wandé with a request to include a numeracy program, which they have called Bala Wandé. Building on the learnings from their existing literacy program, they have collaborated with other organizations to create cost-effective videos and learning materials for this program.¹⁷

They are currently running interventions to improve early grade reading and mathematics in 30 schools in the Eastern Cape, 80 schools in Limpopo, and 50 schools in Western Cape. These interventions include using a combination of workbooks and teacher guides with different types of support: specialist teacher-coaches in the Eastern Cape; teacher assistants in Limpopo; and subject advisors in Western Cape. Nic has left Funda Wandé after five years, and Nangamso Mtsatse, one of Funda Wandé's first team members, now serves as CEO designate.¹⁸

Funda Wandé's iterative, learning focused approach allowed them to gain rapid traction on a long-standing problem.¹⁹ In just a few years, they have managed to create and maintain space for action within the government education system and to design and implement solutions innovatively, leveraging the capabilities that exist in the South African education sector. Education practitioners around the world can look forward to learning many more lessons and insights from their example.

Endnotes

- 1 To learn more, visit <https://fundawande.org>.
- 2 See PDIA Toolkit for details <https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/PDIAtoolkit>.
- 3 See Spaul 2011, 2013, 2015a,b,c.
- 4 The binding constraints approach they used can be found in this paper: Hausmann, R., Klinger, G., & Wagner, R. (2008).
- 5 The problem of low quality was around and known. See Case 1999; Chisholm 2004; and Crouch 2006.
- 6 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), 2011.
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