Story Powered Schools – cohort 1

Quality assurance site visits and qualitative research report

Report compiled by Nal'ibali Research & Innovation department
in fulfilment of the requirements of Milestone 19
(previous year quality assurance)

Nal'ibali Story Powered Schools Project
funded by USAID

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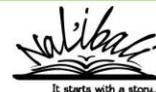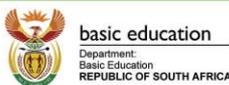
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Executive summary

i. Background
Nal'ibali's Story Powered Schools project seeks to grow a culture of reading in 720 rural schools over three years in the Eastern Cape (EC) and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) provinces. The project focuses on nurturing a love of reading for joy, in mother tongue and English, to spark children's potential and unlock their capacity to learn.

ii. Method and scope
Two members of Nal'ibali's internal research and innovation team visited 10 schools from the 2017 (year 1) cohort: four schools in September 2017 and six schools in March 2018. The schools were selected through a combination of purposive and convenience sampling, to ensure a range of schools from all four project districts were visited. The sample included those that were "flying" and those who were struggling to adopt the programme.

The research employed a combination of semi-structured interviews and observation. The researchers conducted 29 interviews or focus groups with a total of 54 stakeholders, including 7 principals or deputy principals, 32 teachers, 8 community members and 7 Nal'ibali staff members. They also observed a variety of activities at schools, including 5 whole-school assemblies where reading activities took place, 4 classroom activities, and 2 reading clubs.

Interviews were recorded,[1] translated and transcribed, and coded. The activities and learning environment were documented on an observation checklist; these were cross-checked with what stakeholders reported in interviews and with Nal'ibali's M&E data.

iii. Findings

a. Degree and diversity of programme take-up
While the degree and nature of project "take up" and the extent of schools' creativity and initiative varied, all schools described and demonstrated some elements of a reading culture taking root.

Key findings included:

- **Books and hanging libraries:** Each Story Powered School received five hanging libraries, each with 30 books – one each for Grades R through 4. We learned that:

    o Nal'ibali significantly increased and improved the selection of high-quality, mother-tongue reading material in schools.

    o Adults and children love and value the books: they are perceived to be of high quality, visually appealing, largely age-appropriate and in the right mix of languages.

    o Hanging library use was reported at 9 of 10 schools. Books appeared to be well-used at 4 schools, somewhat used at 2 schools, and new or nearly new at 3 schools.

    o Hanging libraries are used in school libraries and in classrooms; they don't appear to move around within schools as much as we envisaged they might.

    o By and large, check-out systems have struggled to take hold: only two schools were able to show evidence of a book check-out system. Many schools said the books do

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[1] Two interviews were not recorded due to lack of a backup recording device; instead, notes were taken in the interview and transcribed.

not leave school property because they are afraid the books will disappear or become damaged.

- o Teachers and principals perceived that Nal'ibali expects schools to use libraries in a certain way. There is a need to showcase different examples of good practice, rather than "one right way", in engagement with schools.

- **Supplement use:** Each Story Powered School received a batch of bilingual Nal'ibali reading supplements, every two weeks during the school term. The supplements included cut-out-and-keep storybooks, activities, puzzles and games, and informational articles. We found that:

  - o Supplements are widely used at schools, and in creative ways. All 10 schools reported using them in class, and we saw evidence of supplement use at every school but two.[2]

  - o Cut-out-and-keep books are by far the most popular.

  - o Supplements are owned and taken home by children: all 10 schools reported or demonstrated that children take supplements home.

  - o Supplements are often used by older children as well, and not all teachers think they are age-appropriate for small children.

  - o Most schools are happy with the number of supplements received.

  - o In contrast to books, teachers did not seem afraid of "ruining" supplement cut-out-and-keep books, and we observed more creativity and initiative in how these were used.

- **Print-rich environments:** Nal'ibali resources were displayed at all schools. We saw print-rich content that was meaningful, relevant, and in children's mother tongue at 8 of 9 schools, and saw children's work displayed at 7 of 9 schools. The reading club showcase in particular motivated schools to create print-rich environments, and to document and celebrate reading club activities.

- **Reading clubs:** We only observed reading clubs at two schools. However, based on what was reported in interviews, we learned that:

  - o Story Sparkers ran clubs at 6 schools, teachers ran clubs at 6 schools, and community members ran clubs in at least 4 schools.

  - o Some clubs were mixed-age, while some were single-grade.

  - o At a few schools, teachers chose which children would participate in reading clubs. At most schools, membership appeared to either be voluntary, or mandatory (where whole classes are enrolled as reading clubs).

  - o Most take place during school; after-school activities are not possible at most schools, due to scholar transport arrangements and safety concerns.

  - o Of 6 schools visited in early March 2018, only two had sustained/re-activated reading clubs in Year 2 of the project.

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[2] At one of these schools, we did not get to see classrooms or the library. At the other, we only saw brand-new supplements stacked on a classroom desk – although this suggests that supplement use was likely.

- **Classroom activities:** Nal'ibali encourages all schools to encourage regular DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) periods. All schools reported that they set aside dedicated reading time weekly, though the time, form, frequency and name of these periods varied. The line between reading clubs and DEAR time is often blurred or unclear.

b. Positive changes reported

Stakeholders consistently reported positive changes in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and skills. The benefits extended to different groups: educators, parents, children and Story Sparkers.

Key findings included:

- **Awareness:**
  - Most **teachers** were aware that reading is important, but some grew more aware of the importance of reading *for enjoyment*. A few teachers grew more aware of the power of *iintsomi* (folktales) specifically.

  - **Parent** awareness of the importance of reading and being involved in their children also increased, through community training and parent meetings. In some instances, this led to parents transferring their children from non-Nal'ibali schools into Nal'ibali schools.

  - **Children's** awareness also shifted, as they have realised that reading can be *fun*.

- **Knowledge:**
  - **Teachers:** Teachers learned new strategies and activities at Nal'ibali training. They displayed sound understanding of what reading for enjoyment is and how to encourage it. Teachers also noted strong links between reading for enjoyment and curriculum objectives, which they saw as a strength of the programme.

  - When asked, most teachers said they had shared what they learned at Nal'ibali training with other teachers and with parents. At most schools, it was not only trained "Big 5" teachers who were active; other teachers were active as well.

- **Attitudes:**
  - A number of **teachers** reported that Nal'ibali has made teaching easier, more enjoyable and less stressful, and reignited their own interest in reading. This was especially noted in trilingual Maluti schools, where having the same resource in three languages was very helpful. One school initially had a negative attitude towards the "extra work", but ultimately embraced Nal'ibali once it saw the programme's benefits.

  - Children are more excited about reading. Some attributed these shifts to the Story Sparkers' presence and energy at schools and to Nal'ibali's high-quality reading materials.

- **Behaviours and practices:**
  - **Reading culture as a school habit:** Nal'ibali has activated or reinvigorated a range of literacy activities in schools, including DEAR/reading period, before-school and during-school assemblies, reading-for-enjoyment in class, and reading clubs. Personally meaningful and satisfying reading and writing is reported to be taking place. In particular, Nal'ibali has turned the "theory" of a reading period or "DEAR time" into practice by reactivating timetabled reading periods that were not happening consistently. These activities appear to be largely habitual, not sporadic or

ad hoc, although in some instances momentum has waned as schools have entered the new year without regular Story Sparker visits.

- o **Independent reading:** Children are reported to read more often, more regularly throughout the school day, and of their own initiative. The range and quality of reading materials provided by Nal'ibali is a key enabling factor.

- o **Increased interest in school:** Excitement around reading has made learners more willing to do their homework, and reduced absenteeism and late-coming.

- o **Parent involvement:** Some schools report that parents have become more involved in their children's education and literacy development. The supplement's bilingual, interactive nature helps build bridges between schools and homes.

- **Reading, writing and storytelling skills**:
  - o Schools consistently report that children's reading, writing, public speaking and confidence have improved since Nal'ibali came to the school. More specifically, stakeholders noted improvements in reading fluency, writing with meaning, English skills, multilingualism, memory skills, storytelling, spelling, vocabulary, and motor skills.

  - o At some schools, researchers also observed children reading aloud, telling and dramatizing stories with impressive fluency and confidence.

  - o Stakeholders attributed these improvements to a number of elements of the programme, including reading clubs; more opportunities to hear and tell stories; dramatizing; books; and supplements.

- **Additional changes:** Stakeholders also reported that:
  - o Relationships between teachers and children are more familial and nurturing.

  - o Through Nal'ibali activities, adults have been able to identify children who are struggling, academically and in home situations, and find ways to support them. Reading clubs also create spaces for learners with difficult home lives to feel free and take a break from stress.

  - o Nal'ibali approaches and reading materials make it easier to support children of differing abilities – including fast learners, shy children, and children with special needs.

  - o Two schools attributed increased enrolment in 2018 to Nal'ibali, as parents in the area have witnessed the reading and public speaking skills of children at these schools. At one school, 232 additional learners enrolled in 2018. Children from non-Nal'ibali schools also attend holiday programmes.

  - o The programme is in high demand at non-participating schools.

  - o Story Sparkers and community members have seen their status elevated in communities, and are greeted with respect and gratitude.

  - o The programme has reawakened and invigorated existing reading culture and volunteer activities.

c. Constructive feedback and recommendations

Stakeholder feedback and recommendations from the research team include:

- **Recommendations for project design:**

    o **Review the project resourcing strategy.** Some users reported that the hanging library units are difficult to hang, are not stable and fall down, and make it difficult to find the books you want because books are stored behind one another in pockets. Reading boxes, bookshelves or cupboards for classrooms were suggested as alternatives. Nal'ibali may want to test these and gather more focused feedback before procuring libraries for 2019. Nal'ibali should also seek to provide 42 titles per grade instead of 30 if possible within budget; consider 'top-up' books for schools during the reduced support phase; and support schools to use strategies to keep books fresh and exciting, such as swapping between grades. More stationery and T-shirts were also requested.

    o **Sustain support – face-to-face as well as digital.** Most schools we visited in 2018 pleaded for continued support from Nal'ibali's Story Sparkers, even if less often. Schools also requested refresher training and mentoring visits. There is a strong desire to be 'seen' and 'touched' by Nal'ibali to remain motivated. Though there is interest in SMS and remote support, face-to-face interaction remains critical. Nal'ibali may want to retain its trained, experienced Story Sparkers part-time to provide occasional face-to-face support. It should continue seeking opportunities to link to stipended programmes like the Community Work Programme, to support sustainability of community member involvement, and encourage schools to invite people involved in these schemes to community training from the outset.

    o **Expand the target age group.** The majority of schools asked Nal'ibali to make the programme available to older age groups as well – some schools have already done this, to varying degrees. If the project goal is to transform an entire school's culture of reading, Nal'ibali may want to reconsider the explicit Grade R to 4 focus when communicating to schools (even if these parameters are still used for target-setting and budgeting).

    o **Reduce expectation of after-school activities.** These are rare due to transport and safety issues.

    o **Strengthen incentive programmes.** The reading club showcase was an effective incentive, and a number of respondents said stronger incentive programmes would motivate participation.

- **Recommendations for project implementation:**

    o **Deepen the programme in existing areas in Year 3**. There is already substantial demand in these areas; Nal'ibali already has relationships with district officials; and as a matter of fairness, it should offer the programme to schools which served as external evaluation control schools in 2017-18.

    o **Develop communities of practice for principals and Big 5 teachers**. This can be achieved by incorporating Nal'ibali into existing principals' meetings and circuit meetings, and is a strong strategy to encourage sustainability.

    o **Involve older learners to run reading clubs and activities.**

- o **Make sure books are engaging and pitched to the audience.** A few teachers asked for more short, simple books for Grades R to 2, including books that appeal to children who have not yet learned to read.

- o **Use local suppliers for transportation and catering.** This can otherwise create resentment and ill will towards Nal'ibali.

- o **Improve reading club showcase design and adjudication.** Concerns were raised about limiting participation to 15 learners and fairness of adjudication. The showcase has been redesigned for 2018.

- o **Reduce number of M&E forms**. Teacher use of M&E forms was very low in 2017. In 2018, this has been redesigned to minimise expectations of teachers and volunteers, and rely primarily on Nal'ibali staff to collect programme monitoring data.

- o **Plan ahead, keep our word, and ensure transport money is paid on time.** Last-minute planning, last-minute changes to plans, and insufficient communication with principals has made Story Sparkers' jobs difficult at times. More thorough advance planning has been done for 2018.

- **Recommendations for communicating the programme:**

  - o **Clarify that there is not "one right way" to be a Story Powered School.** While we witnessed creative interpretations of the "Story Powered Schools" concept, in some instances, schools seemed to be waiting for "permission to innovate." In trying to ensure that they ran Story Powered Schools "the right way", they lost some opportunities to deepen reading culture, by integrating Nal'ibali materials into existing ways of working or extending Nal'ibali activities to all grades. Nal'ibali should clarify to schools that they may extend the programme to older learners; that Nal'ibali does not limit the number of reading clubs; and that there is not "one right way" to use hanging libraries. It should share diverse examples of "good practice" with schools in training and ongoing visits, and bring schools together to share best practices and ideas.

  - o **Clarify criteria for "what makes a reading club a reading club."** While many reading clubs take place during class time with full classes of learners, Nal'ibali should continue to stress key reading club principles, such as voluntary participation; and creation of a free space where there are no wrong answers and creativity is encouraged.

  - o **Provide more clarity around what happens in Year 2 of the programme.** Teachers and principals at most schools visited in 2018 expressed uncertainty about what would happen in year 2 of the project. For example, schools were not sure if they could/should continue running reading clubs; if they would continue to receive supplements or receive more books; if community members should keep participating; and whether their Story Sparker would continue visiting in 2018. There was a strong plea for continued support, and two offers to pay for Story Sparkers' transport from school budgets. Nal'ibali should explore opportunities to sustain face-to-face support, even if less frequent or intensive.

  - o **Ensure front-line staff are empowered to answer frequently-asked questions.** This includes questions related to resourcing, school selection and hiring.

d. Conclusion

While there is still plenty of room for improvement, a culture of reading is unequivocally taking root at the schools we visited. The training, Story Sparker support and reading materials provided to schools are of excellent quality. These have spurred changes in knowledge, attitudes and practice, and schools report that children's reading skills are improving as a result.

There is enormous potential for schools to take ownership of and sustain the programme, especially if tweaks are made to project design, implementation and communication, "permission to innovate" is given, and Nal'ibali's contact with schools is sustained.

Community volunteers, our Story Sparker and one of our researchers show off isiXhosa autobiographies written by Grade 4 reading club children in Bizana.

A. Project background

Nal'ibali's Story Powered Schools project seeks to grow a culture of reading in 720 rural schools over three years in the Eastern Cape (EC) and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) provinces.

The project focuses on nurturing a love of reading for joy, in mother tongue and English, to spark children's potential and unlock their capacity to learn. The project is run by Nal'ibali, the national reading-for-enjoyment campaign, in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and with national, provincial and local Departments of Education.

The campaign is based on a significant body of research that reinforces the link between reading for pleasure and improved education outcomes, and identifies the necessary conditions to support children's literacy development.[3] The degree to which children acquire language skills, and become motivated, habitual readers, is a strong predictor of future academic success, educational attainment, employment and income.[4] To support children's development as readers, Nal'ibali seeks to create the following conditions:

- Increase **awareness** that reading for enjoyment is important and powerful, and **knowledge** of how to do it;
- Create more **opportunities** for children to read**,** write, and share stories – alone and with others;
- Inspire, equip and encourage adults to be reading **role models**, who share stories with children, encourage them to read, and model that reading matters
- Increase **access to quality reading material**, especially in children's mother tongue.

This is sorely needed in South Africa, where the majority of children are not reading well. The 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) results revealed that 78% of Grade 4 learners failed to reach the low international benchmark in reading skills, which means they could not locate explicit information or reproduce information from a text.[5] This effectively means they cannot read for meaning.

To tackle this challenge, the Story Powered Schools (SPS) project seeks to give children new opportunities to experience books and stories; to create the conditions where children's literacy development can flourish; and to equip, inspire and nurture educators on how motivation, confidence, and linking reading and writing to children's lived experiences can support curriculum objectives, accelerate children's literacy development, and enable school success. Ultimately, it wants schools to embrace and take ownership of a strong culture of reading for enjoyment throughout the school.

This is achieved through the following activities at each school:

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[3] For example, Krashen, S. (2004). *The power of reading: insights from the research*. Libraries Unlimited: Westport; Evans, M.D.R. et al. (2010) Family scholarly culture and educational success: books and schooling in 27 nations. Research in Social Stratification and Mobility 28: 171-197; United Kingdom Department of Education (2012). Research evidence for reading for pleasure (available from www.gov.uk).

[4] Needu (2013). NEEDU reading study 2013: the state of reading in Grade 5 in selected rural primary schools. National Education Evaluation and Development Unit. Available at https://nicspaull.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/needu-reading-study-2013_28oct14.pdf.

[5] Howie, S.J. et al (2017). *PIRLS Literacy 2016: South African highlights.* Pretoria: Centre for Evaluation and Assessment.

- **Big 5 training,** for 5 educators[6];
- **Community training,** for 10 community volunteers;
- Providing **5 hanging libraries** (once-off) and **15 editions/year of the bilingual Nal'ibali reading supplement** (for duration of project);
- Supporting schools to **register reading clubs**;
- **Weekly school visits** from Story Sparkers;
- Coordinating and supporting **events, campaigns and competitions**, which also engage the broader school community.

Through these, we expect each school to:

- **Support** its Story Sparker;
- Establish at least 3 **reading clubs**, which may be run by Nal'ibali mentors (Story Sparkers), teachers and/or community volunteers;
- Actively implement what it has learned in training – for example, by consistently observing the mandatory "Drop Everything And Read" (DEAR) **reading period**, and using classroom time to give children meaningful, personally satisfying opportunities to read, write and hear stories;
- Organise and participate in **competitions**, including an annual **reading club showcase**, to motivate children and teachers;
- Participate in **national Nal'ibali flagship events**, including World Read Aloud Day and the Story Bosso storytelling competition;
- Engage **parents and the community** around the importance of reading.

Ultimately, we expected to see changes at schools that could include:

- Increased *awareness that* reading for enjoyment (RFE) is important and contributes to children's literacy development, and *knowledge/understanding of how* RFE helps children learn;
- Shifts in *attitudes*: children who are more excited/motivated to read, write and share stories; teachers who view reading for enjoyment as central to learning; parents who are more invested in reading and education;
- Positive *behaviours and habits* that support reading development, such as children attending reading clubs, reading voluntarily in their free time, choosing what they want to read, taking books and supplements home, and reading a wide variety of books and stories;
- Improved *access* to reading materials, with reading materials accessible to children in schools, and children taking books and supplements home;
- Improvements in children's *skills and confidence* – including reading, writing and storytelling;
- Parents and communities more involved in promoting reading.

Research objective

This research report has been compiled to meet the requirements of Nal'ibali's USAID grant requirements for Milestone 19, which requires a quality assurance report on the schools that participated in the programme in Year 1 (2017).

It also served internal goals related to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), as part of ongoing review, reflection, and actioning lessons learned. In August 2017, Nal'ibali undertook a review of its Year 1 monitoring and evaluation data and systems. Through this review, we learned that there were

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[6] In 2017, we trained 3 educators and 2 community volunteers per school at the "Big 5" training. We found a critical mass of trained teachers is needed, so in 2018 are shifting to train 5 educators per school.

a number of gaps in our data collection. Though we knew how many people we had trained and how many reading clubs had been established, we found that our M&E tools were not being used consistently by Story Sparkers, teachers or community volunteers to capture the granular detail of day-to-day activities.[7]

We undertook a first round of quality assurance / qualitative research site visits in September 2017 to deepen our understanding of how the programme has taken root at different schools. We also sought to:

- gather feedback specifically on the books, hanging libraries and supplements, ahead of book selection and procurement for Cohort 2 in 2018;
- gain insights to help us redesign our M&E tools and system for 2018.

While some of the findings were fed into programme planning and reporting in 2017, we decided to conduct a second round of school visits in early 2018, and incorporate both sets of visits into one report. This has also allowed us to understand the degree to which schools are taking ownership or and sustaining the programme on their own during the reduced support phase of the programme, which lasts for the first six months of the following year (for this cohort, January to June 2018).

B. Research scope and methodology

Research scope

Nal'ibali conducted two rounds of quality assurance / qualitative research site visits with its 2017 (Year 1) cohort of Story Powered Schools.

- **Round 1 (4 schools, 27-28 September 2017):** 4 schools were visited over two days – 2 schools in Bizana (EC) and 2 schools in Ugu (KZN).
- **Round 2 (6 schools, 6-9 March 2018):** 6 schools were visited over 4 days – 2 schools in Uthukela (KZN), 2 schools in Maluti (EC), and 2 schools in Ugu (KZN).

This gave us an opportunity to see schools at two different points in the programme implementation cycle: once near the end of Year 1 implementation; and once in early 2018, once schools had entered the exit strategy and sustainability phase of the project.

The schools were selected through a combination of purposive and convenience sampling, to ensure a range of schools from all four project districts were visited (including those that were "flying" and those who were struggling to adopt the programme) in a manner that minimised disruption to implementation. The diversity of project schools visited is illustrated in Table 1 below.

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[7] A full assessment of the M&E system and recommended improvements for 2018 is included in the attached supplementary report, "Supplementary Report for the Nal'ibali Story Powered Schools 2017: Data Analysis and M&E System Review."

Table 1: Profile and Nal'ibali activities recorded for the 10 schools visited

School name (anonymised)	District	Grades	# of children enrolled in 2017	# of teachers in 2017	child to teacher ratio	# of reading clubs registered	# of children registered in reading clubs	# of Big 5 trained	# of community members trained	Events held	DEAR period	Before school activities	During school activities	After school activities
School A	Bizana (EC)	R to 7	309	10	31 to 1	1	22	7	0	3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School B	Bizana (EC)	R to 9	574	16	36 to 1	1	35	5	9	3	No	Yes	Yes	No
School C	Ugu (KZN)	R to 7	193	8	24 to 1	4	115	3	10	2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School D	Ugu (KZN)	R to 7	340	10	34 to 1	3	90	4	6	3	No	No	No	No
School E	Uthukela (KZN)	R to 7	634	18	35 to 1	13	255	2	6	2	Yes	No	No	No
School F	Uthukela (KZN)	R to 7	561	16	35 to 1	0	0	5	0	1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School G	Maluti (KZN)	R to 7	446	14	32 to 1	8	299	0	8	5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School H	Maluti (KZN)	R to 9	473	17	28 to 2	3	90	4	8	4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School J	Ugu (KZN)	R to 7	1103	35	32 to 1	4	94	4	7	1	No	Yes	Yes	No
School I	Ugu (KZN)	R to 7	1105	18	61 to 1	0	0	5	10	1	No	No	No	No

Both rounds of visits were conducted by two members of Nal'ibali's Research, Innovation and M&E team: Katie Huston (Head of Research, Innovation and M&E) and Luleka Bara (M&E Officer). Story Sparkers were present at each site visit. During the second round of visits, additional stakeholders joined at some of the schools, including the Programme Manager, a district official, two Literacy Mentors, and two funder representatives from USAID. A summary of school visit delegates is below (Table 1). Schools were briefed ahead of time, and informed that this was a learning visit, not a compliance visit: in other words, Nal'ibali representatives were not coming to find out "if they are doing it right," but rather, to learn from them and gain honest feedback about the benefits and challenges of the programme.

The team interviewed or held focus groups with a total of 54 people across the 10 schools.

- 7 principals or deputy principals
- 32 teachers at 10 schools (often in groups of 3-5 together)
- 8 community members at 5 schools
- 6 Story Sparkers who work at 8 of the visited schools
- 1 Literacy Mentor

A full summary of people interviewed is below (Table 3).

Table 2: Delegates on SPS quality assurance visits, by school and profile

School (anonymised)	District	Date of visit	Total delegates	Internal research team	Story Sparker	Programme management	USAID reps	District official
School A	Bizana	27-Sep-17	3	2	1			
School B	Bizana	27-Sep-17	3	2	1			
School C	Ugu	28-Sep-17	3	2	1			
School D	Ugu	28-Sep-17	3	2	1			
School E	Uthukela	06-Mar-18	7	2	1	2	2	
School F	Uthukela	06-Mar-18	7	2	1	2	2	
School G	Maluti	07-Mar-18	3	2	1			
School H	Maluti	08-Mar-18	6	2	1	2		1
School J	Ugu	09-Mar-18	3	2	1			
School I	Ugu	09-Mar-18	3	2	1			

Table 3: People interviewed during SPS quality assurance visits, by school and profile

School (anonymised)	District	Date of visit	Total people interviewed	Principals or deputies	Teachers	Community members	Story Sparkers	Literacy Mentors
School A	Bizana	27-Sep-17	7	0	3	3	1	
School B	Bizana	27-Sep-17	5	1	1	2	1	
School C	Ugu	28-Sep-17	4	1	1	1	1	
School D	Ugu	28-Sep-17	4	0	2	1	1	
School E	Uthukela	06-Mar-18	8	0	6	0	1	1
School F	Uthukela	06-Mar-18	8	1	7	0	0	
School G	Maluti	07-Mar-18	3	1	2	0	0	
School H	Maluti	08-Mar-18	2	1	1	0	0	
School J	Ugu	09-Mar-18	7	1	4	1	1	
School I	Ugu	09-Mar-18	6	1	5	0	0	
Total # of schools			10	7	10	5	6	1
Total # of people interviewed			54	7	32	8	6	1

Research methodology

The research employed a combination of semi-structured interviews and observation.

Interviews

Open-ended interview questionnaires were developed ahead of time that sought to probe key areas of interest, including:

- How respondents understand/define what it means to be a Story Powered School, and what it means to them
- Feedback on key components of the programme (training, hanging libraries, books, supplements)
- Types of reading-for-enjoyment activities taking place at the school (e.g. DEAR period, reading clubs), when they take place, who runs them and who participates
- Changes schools have observed since they joined the programme
- Suggestions for Nal'ibali to improve the programme in the future

Additionally, the second round of interviews was informed by the school-by-school reports compiled in October 2017.[8] This enabled the researchers to ask specifically about training attended, number of reading clubs registered and how many were still running, etc. and investigate the degree to which our monitoring and evaluation data was accurate.

At each school, the researchers sought to interview people from each of the following groups:

- Principals (or deputy principals)
- Teachers
- Community members
- Story Sparkers

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[8] These reports and a synthesis of findings are included as part of our Milestone 19 reporting requirements.

It was not possible to interview all these types of people at each school. At some schools, the principal was not present/available,[9] or community members were not present/not active.

At almost every school, the interviews with teachers turned into focus groups, as multiple teachers were asked to meet with the researchers. In some instances, multiple types of stakeholders – for example, teachers and community members – sat in on the same interview session, though they were asked different questions. At most schools, Story Sparkers sat in on at least some of the interviews with other stakeholders. The researchers sought above all to ensure that the Nal'ibali stakeholders being interviewed were comfortable and that the conversations felt as natural as possible, and so deferred to the suggestions of school leadership regarding who should be interviewed. This also allowed us to gather insight from more teachers than we had anticipated, although it may have limited any teachers with diverging views from sharing their thoughts.

Additionally, at one school, the Project Manager and two USAID representatives had a separate discussion with the principal, which was recorded and incorporated into the findings.

Interview questionnaires were developed in English. Interview participants were encouraged to speak in whichever language they felt most comfortable.[10] Researchers reworded questions and translated the questions into isiXhosa/isiZulu in some instances for clarity, and asked additional follow-up questions based on the responses of the participants.

All interviews except for two were digitally recorded, transcribed and translated into English.[11]

Observation

The researchers used an observation checklist to analyse how various features of the programme were used and adopted by schools. The checklist looked at:

- Hanging library use
- Supplement use
- Print-rich environments
- Reading clubs
- Classroom activities

The degree to which the researchers observed each of the above varied, largely due to time constraints and a desire to minimise disruption to teaching and learning. At most schools, reading clubs and/or DEAR periods were not taking place during the visit.

At most schools, schools asked their students to "perform" for the visitors – showcasing reading, storytelling, poetry and dramatization. It was less common for visitors to observe a more 'typical' reading club session, DEAR period or language period. However, what schools choose to "show off" is revealing in its own right. The researchers were also mindful that as delegates from head office, their

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[9] Where possible, deputy principals were interviewed instead.

[10] This is with a few exceptions. One of the two researchers is fluent in isiXhosa and understands isiZulu. She was present for all but two interviews, which were conducted in English. Unfortunately, we were not able to conduct interviews in Sesotho in Maluti district, as our researchers did not speak Sesotho.

[11] Two interviews during the first trip were not recorded because a backup recording device was not available.

visit was viewed as a momentous occasion by schools, and sought to be respectful and appreciative of the activities schools had prepared.

Analysis

Observation checklists were consolidated and corroborated between the two researchers and captured in an Excel template, which was cross-checked with interviews and Nal'ibali M&E data and analysed.

Interview transcriptions and notes were coded to look for activities, outputs and outcomes related to the four key pillars of Nal'ibali's theory of change, and to shifts in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and skills. The researchers also looked for for 'unanticipated changes'; and for constructive feedback.

These findings were consolidated according to theme and analysed.

C. Findings

The findings are organised around three key research questions.

1. To what degree, and in what ways, did schools "take up" and use the different aspects of the Story Powered Schools programme that Nal'ibali had provided?

2. What types of changes have stakeholders observed in their schools, in relation to the programme?

3. What can be done to improve or strengthen the Story Powered Schools programme?

1. Degree and diversity of programme take up

We analysed observations and interviews to see the extent to which the 10 schools engaged with and used the resources provided, and implemented reading for enjoyment activities.

a. Summary of visit activities

In addition to conducting interviews at each school, we observed the following (summarised in Table 4 below):

- 4 instances of before-school activities (such as reading aloud, storytelling, songs and games and/or drama performances at morning assembly)
- 4 classrooms during a reading session
- 5 classrooms where children were asked to read/perform for us
- 2 reading clubs
- 1 assembly during school, where children read, told stories, and performed poems.

Our opportunity to observe activities and environments first-hand at schools was limited by factors including time of day; availability of principal and teachers; school timetables; and limited time to spend at each school.

Table 4: Activities conducted and observed at each school

School name (anonymised)	# of people interviewed	Before school activity	Classroom: observation	Classroom: performance	DEAR time	Assembly (during school)	Reading club
School A	7	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes
School B	5						Yes
School C	4	Yes	Yes				
School D	4						
School E	8	Yes		Yes			
School F	8			Yes			
School G	3		Yes	Yes			
School H	2					Yes	
School J	7	Yes					
School I	6		Yes	Yes			
Total # of schools		4	4	5	0	1	2

As we observed the school environment and activities listed above, we reflected on the degree to which project take-up had occurred in relation to the five dimensions below. These were developed based on key project indicators, as per project documentation; on existing M&E tools, including a reading club observation snapshot used in the national Nal'ibali campaign; and on observation of a refresher training session in late August where the elements below were emphasized.

Table 5: Areas of inquiry related to project take-up and implementation

When observing/asking about…	…we looked at:
1. Hanging library use	- Where are libraries kept? - Do books look used or brand new? - Is there evidence of a book check-out system? - Is there evidence that children take out books? - Is there evidence of books being used by teachers in the classroom?
2. Supplement use	- Is there evidence of supplements at the school? - Is there evidence of supplement use? What does it look like?
3. Print-rich environments	- Are Nal'ibali resources on display? (e.g. posters, supplements, hanging libraries) - Do schools/teachers have their own homemade materials on display to support / promote reading? - Is children's work on display? - Is print-rich content meaningful/relevant? - What language(s) are used?
4. Reading clubs	- Who runs the reading club? - How many children in the club? Are they all from the same grade? - In what language(s) does the club take place? - When does the club take place? - How long does the reading club last? - How often does the reading club take place?

	- Which resources are used? How? By whom?
	- Which activities are done?
	- What is interaction like between adults and children?
5. Classroom activities	- Which activities are done? By whom? In what language(s)?
	- Which resources are used? How? By whom? In which language(s)?
	- What is interaction like between adults and children?

b. Hanging library use

Each Story Powered School received five hanging libraries: one each for Grades R through 4. Each library was stocked with 30 high-quality, age-appropriate, locally relevant storybooks[12], in a mix of the Foundation Phase language(s) of learning and teaching and English.

On our visits, we learned that libraries are used in different ways at schools, depending on the space available, volunteers available, and the culture of book use at the school. Overall, we found:

- **Nal'ibali significantly increased and improved the selection of high-quality, mother-tongue reading material in schools.** While all schools had books before Nal'ibali, some had very few.[13] The majority of schools had received books, including mother-tongue books, either from the education department/ELITS[14] or from a project called READ that ran in the mid-2000s. Overall, Nal'ibali significantly increased the number and quality of books available to children, especially in their mother tongue. As stated by one principal:

  > *"The reading materials were scarce before, unlike now. The school has to buy these reading materials before. We've got very [little] money, so it was not easy for the school to buy these things." – Teacher, School A*

  > *"Yes, we did have books [before Nal'ibali. But the ones you have supplied us with are user-friendly to the kids. They are at their level. It's much better. They are of good standard." –* Principal, School C

- **Adults and children love and value the books.** Stakeholders reported that the books are high-quality and largely considered age appropriate. We noticed at least two schools that had 'rules for handling books' posted in their libraries, and one school performed a skit for the visitors about how to take good care of books. This sometimes translates into books that are not well-used by children, as noted below.

- **Libraries and books are used, to varying degrees.** Library use was reported in interviews at 9 of the 10 schools.[15] Books looked well-used at 4 schools, somewhat used at 2 schools, and

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[12] While the majority were storybooks, libraries included a few non-fiction and poetry books. It did not include any readers or textbooks.

[13] In particular, School A had a library room that was almost empty, save a few dictionaries and Nal'ibali cut-out-and-keep books.

[14] Education Library Information and Technology Service

[15] Library use was corroborated by more than one interview subject/group at 5 schools. Because interviews were semi-structured, in some instances we did not ask about libraries – for example, if a previous interviewee had

appeared to be nearly new at 3 schools. (Two of the schools whose books appeared largely unused were visited in 2018, nearly a year after schools received the books – suggesting that books were not used extensively at these schools throughout all of 2017.).

- **Hanging libraries are used in school libraries and in classrooms; they don't appear to move around as much as we envisaged they would.** We observed libraries at eight schools. Of these:
    - 6 schools kept hanging libraries in a library or dedicated reading club space;
    - 4 schools kept their hanging libraries in classrooms;
    - 2 schools kept some libraries in a common library area and some in classrooms.

At two schools, we did not have an opportunity to see the libraries at all. Both of these schools reported that the libraries are kept in classrooms (though one initially kept them packed away). While some schools move their libraries around – for example, between multiple classes in the same grade, or between a library and classrooms – many keep their libraries in one place.

In classrooms, the libraries were generally hung from desks or chalkboard ledges. In libraries/reading club rooms, libraries were proudly displayed, with much care was taken in the setup of the rooms, as shown in the photographs below.

At School A, the Story Sparker said the hanging libraries were not always displayed, so she puts them out when she arrives.

We observed children in an unsupervised classroom gravitating towards the library, choosing books, paging through them and discussing them (until their excited chatter was promptly 'shushed' by teachers).

The books appeared to be well-used.

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shared extensively or if we had seen evidence of practice, and we were running short on time. Thus, a lack of corroboration does not necessarily point to inconsistent answers.

At School F, books and libraries were in a crowded room full of non-working computers. The books were carefully displayed, alongside boxes of cut-out-and-keep books and story-related arts and crafts.

However, the books did not look to be used – even in March 2018, a year into the project. The school is struggling with dedicated reading club space due to increased enrolment in 2018.

School I had all 5 hanging libraries strung in a row in its dedicated library/reading club space. The Nal'ibali books had pride of place next to less-organised metal bins of older books donated by a READ project that ran in the 2000s.

The room was carefully decorated with cut-out-and-keep books, children's own books and drawings, homemade posters, and photographs of reading club activities. The school took first place in its 2017 reading club competition.

At School J, the school had a library, but it was full of thick, old, English novels. The Story Sparker used the hanging libraries to cover the old books to create a more appealing space for children.

Community members at School B proudly display their homemade hanging library – made from cardboard and plastic sheets, which they use to store children's work.

It is kept in the "Nal'ibali library," a room dedicated to reading clubs, along with reading material, puzzles and games for children in Grades R to 4. The school also had a "main library" with a checkout system and a small but good quality assortment of books.

- **By and large, book check-out systems have struggled to take hold.** Only two schools were able to present evidence of a book check-out system.

At School E, the checkout system has been running since 2013 or 2014, when a SETA-funded programme had placed library interns in the school. More than half of a 180-page A4 notebook was filled with records of check-outs, dating back to 2014. At School B, the main library had a checkout system, but Nal'ibali books were not part of the scheme. It was not very active, with gaps between periods of activity.

At School E, book check-out records were shared dating back to 2014. The Story Sparker explained that children often ask to check out books before school, while the feeding scheme is running. She said the library works well because children know they can ask any adult to sign out a book to them, including the school's CWP participants - this relieves the burden on any one person to manage a book check-out system.

School H said it tried a checkout programme, but the responsible teacher did not follow through. School C school said it allows only some children (the responsible ones) to take books home. School I said that when children want to borrow books, they make a copy of the book and allow the child to take the copy home (and we observed photocopied books in use at this school). School F reported that children borrow books from the library to use in classrooms (but not to take home).

At a few schools, teachers or the Story Sparker reported that they let children take out books, but were unable to show evidence of it when asked or said they did not write it down. Quite a

few schools explained that they do not let the books leave school property, because they are afraid that the books will disappear or be damaged.

- **Reflections:** One explanation for low rates of book lending may lie in a divergence between project planning and implementation on Nal'ibali's side, and subsequently in unclear expectations at schools. Book check-out sheets were included in project planning documents, but were only delivered to schools in September. Training covered how to select and use books, but did not cover how to manage/run a (mini) school library. More clarity of plans and expectations may be needed, both within the project team and in communication with schools.

However, even if Nal'ibali had provided checkout sheets and training and emphasized a book-lending culture from the start, the conviction that books need to be kept safe at schools is strong and is not easy to shift. This is rooted in the fact that teachers value books and believe they should be treasured, and it is likely that many of the principals and teachers we met have not seen a successful culture of book lending take root in a rural South African school. However, the experience of School E demonstrates that this is both possible and beneficial.

While this was not true of all schools, some schools seemed to understand that Nal'ibali expected them to use the libraries in a certain way – for example, that Nal'ibali wanted them to be used only by Grades R to 4, that Nal'ibali wanted the books for Grade 1 to remain only with Grade 1 children (instead of swapping between grades), or that Nal'ibali wanted the "Nal'ibali books" to be kept separate from an existing school library. We had the sense that, with some exceptions, teachers felt like they needed permission to deviate from whatever they understood to be project parameters or guidelines.

Follow-up discussions with the project team have identified the need to showcase *different* examples of good practice – both when training project staff, and when introducing the project to schools. Nal'ibali should strive to demonstrate not "one right way", but a spectrum of good principles and practice around using storybooks in schools. It may also be necessary to place more emphasis on the fact that the books are for children to use, that it is actually a good thing if they become dog-eared and well worn, and that Nal'ibali will not punish them if a book is damaged or lost.

c. Supplement use

Each Story Powered School received a delivery of bilingual Nal'ibali reading supplements, every two weeks during the school term (15 editions per year, beginning in January 2017). The number of supplements distributed to each school was roughly half of the total number of children in Grades R to 4.

The supplements include a number of sections, including:

- Cut out and keep books
- Story Corner stories
- Get Story Active (activities to go with stories)
- Nal'ibali Fun (puzzles and games)
- An informational article with tips for teachers and caregivers
- Nal'ibali news, Story Stars (profiles of network members), competitions, etc.

We observed overwhelming, varied and creative evidence of supplement use.

- **Supplements are widely used at schools.** We observed evidence of supplement use at every school but two.[16] In addition to observing supplement use directly, we noticed a number of examples where drawings of supplement story characters were posted on the walls and names of supplement story characters written on the chalkboard.

  When and where? All 10 schools reported using supplements in class. Most schools also reported using them in reading clubs. We observed:
  - 6 schools that kept supplements in their libraries;
  - 4 schools that kept them in classrooms;
  - 2 schools where children pulled piles of supplements out of their own backpacks; children clearly owned and carried around their own supplement libraries.

  This only describes what we witnessed during our visits; it is possible that additional schools keep supplements in classrooms or have given learners their own libraries.

- **Supplements are used in creative ways, and are owned and taken home by children.** Supplement use varied – some of the most creative and inspiring examples we witnessed are described below.

School A had a library room, but had not yet procured library shelves. In the meantime, it used this innovative approach to store cut-out-and-keep books.

Cut-out-and-keep books, story corner stories and Nal'ibali Fun activities were also displayed in a classroom story corner.

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[16] At one of these schools, we did not get to see classrooms or the library. At the other, we only saw brand-new supplements stacked on a classroom desk – although this suggests that supplement use was likely.

At School G, we saw dog-eared piles of supplements in multiple classroom corners, with children's names on the books.

The principal (also an isiXhosa teacher) showed us a spelling test written on the board, where she had taken the isiXhosa vocabulary from the supplement.

At School H, we attended a whole-school assembly where at least 6 children read aloud from cut-out-and-keep books. As they read, we watched children around the hall pull thick stacks of supplements from their school bags, kept inside bread wrappers? to protect them from the rain. Children preparing to read sorted through a dozen or more cut-out-and-keep titles to find the books they wanted to read.

As their peers read, some children fished the corresponding supplement out of their bags and followed the story. Others entertained themselves during the hour-long gathering by reading supplement books of their choice, instead of watching the children onstage.

These personal libraries were well-worn, and children appeared to be familiar with and to hold preferences about a wide range of titles.

- **Supplements are often used by older children as well, and not all teachers think it is age-appropriate for small children.** Several schools reported that they are using the supplements with Grade 5-7s, even though they understand that the project focuses on Grades R to 4. Others said that they would like to use supplements with older children, but either they do not receive enough copies, or they do not believe they are allowed/supposed to do so. Some teachers said that the supplement font is too small for Grades R and 1, or that it's too difficult for young children to make the cut out and keep books.

- **Cut-out-and-keep books are by far the most popular.** We saw these stored in shoebox libraries, classroom reading corners and school libraries; displayed on walls; piled on tables; and whipped out of children's backpacks! After this, we observed Nal'ibali Fun (games and activities) displayed/stored at several schools; teachers at a few schools also reported that children enjoy these. A few examples Story Corner stories and informational articles were also seen mounted on cardboard and displayed on walls or stored in boxes.

- **All ten schools reported or demonstrated that children take supplements home.** Some schools reported that these have increased parent engagement and awareness.

- **Most schools are happy with the number of supplements received, with a few exceptions.** One Story Sparker reported that the school only uses 200 of its 320 supplements. Another school had a build-up of back issues from 2017, when it did not have a Story Sparker due to HR issues. However, for the most part, schools seemed to be using the supplements they were receiving.

- **Insights:** In contrast to books, teachers did not seem afraid of "ruining" supplement cut-out-and-keep books, and we observed more creativity and initiative in how these were used. This affirms that supplements are a powerful way to entrench reading culture at schools. They are cost effective. They provide a running stream of new stories and activities that helps make reading a regular habit. There are more of them to go around, so they can actually be "owned" by children. And they are strengthening bridges between schools and homes.

d. Print-rich environments

In this section, we have excluded one school from analysis where we did not get to see the library or any classrooms.[17]

At these nine schools:

- **Nal'ibali resources were displayed at all schools**. This included posters (such as the Literacy Calendar and Children's Literacy Rights poster), books, parts of the supplement, and banners.

- **Print-rich content was meaningful, relevant, and in children's mother tongue.** At 8 of the 9 schools, we observed environments where print-rich content was meaningful and relevant – that is, it was evident that there were links between posters and learning aids on the walls, children's interests and experiences, and books and stories that they had shared. At six schools, we observed materials created by teachers, Story Sparkers or community members. There was only one school where the posters and teaching aids we observed appeared to be haphazardly assembled – for example, old government posters about road safety or knowing one's HIV status – and we only saw materials that were in English.[18] That said, at many schools, there were still many bare or nearly-bare walls, especially in classrooms – an opportunity.

- **Children's work was displayed**. At 7 of the 9 schools, we saw children's work displayed. Children's work was clearly linked to stories they had read or told, or to their personal experiences, and included things like children's own autobiographies and books, drawings based on books from the supplement and/or the hanging libraries, and drawings of people, places and things that are important to them in their personal lives.

- **The reading club showcase influenced schools to create print-rich environments and document the activities and achievements of their reading clubs.** The showcase took place in August/September 2017. To prepare for participation and adjudication, schools made efforts to document and celebrate their reading clubs' activities. At a few schools, teachers or community members proudly presented a lever arch file with a portfolio of evidence, including completed M&E forms, photographs and children's work. The showcase appears to be a powerful and

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[17] At this school, we arrived after school had let out early for the day and conducted our interviews in an office.

[18] This is not to say such posters do not belong in schools – however, they are not sufficient for sparking children's literacy development.

effective piece of the Story Powered Schools model, in that it creates an incentive for actions that Nal'ibali considers "best practice" and wants to see at schools.

Some examples of the print-rich environments we observed are below.

School A's Grade 1 reading corner included supplements, children's drawings and children's writing.

At School B, Grade 4 reading club members wrote their own autobiographies in isiXhosa. When we asked the community members what they were most proud of, they grabbed the piece of cardboard where these autobiographies were mounted.

Many schools made significant effort to prepare for the reading club showcase. This work paid off, as it enhanced the print-rich environments at schools.

Many of these drawings (displayed in the library at School F) were related to cut-out-and-keep books from the supplement. Others depicted children's own experiences and lives.
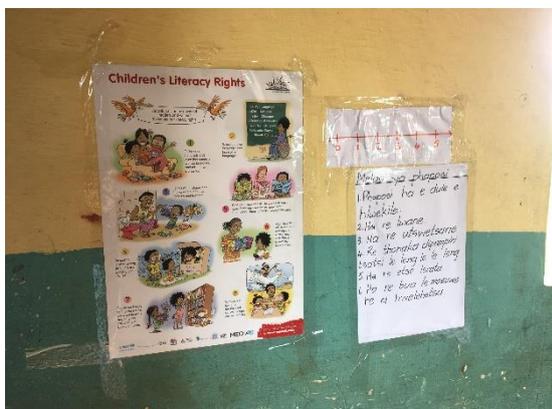
Nal'ibali posters were spotted at most schools, whose walls usually had plenty of space for more content, and often had posters that were 10 years old or more. This suggests that Nal'ibali should continue creating attractive, colourful content that is likely to live long-term on school walls.

Some schools shared their portfolios of evidence depicting reading club activities and children's work, like this collection from School I. The photos show storytelling, a before-school activity, and children lying on the floor reading books of their choice.

e. Reading clubs

We only observed reading clubs at two schools, and so it is difficult to report about the nature of reading clubs at Story Powered Schools first-hand.

The two reading clubs we saw were fairly typical, in comparison to other reading clubs observed by the research team in the past. One took place in a classroom with a full Grade 1 class, during the school day; the other took place in a library with a self-selected group of children, near the end of the school day and continuing after the bell rang. Both included singing; reading aloud; discussion about stories; and related activities (drawing for the Grade 1s, writing for the Grade 4s). In the Grade 1 group, a child read around from a book (Iqanda elinguMangalisayo), but did not finish the story.

Based on what interview subjects reported about reading clubs, we can share that:

- **Who runs clubs?** Of 8 schools with reading clubs, Story Sparkers ran clubs at 6 schools; teachers ran clubs at 6 schools; and community members ran clubs in at least 4 schools. Most schools had more than one type of person running reading clubs.

- **Are they mixed-age or single-grade?** Three schools reported that reading clubs have children from a mix of grades, while two schools reported that reading clubs are largely classes that have registered as clubs. Two schools did not have clubs and for three schools this was unknown/not discussed.

- **Who selects children for reading clubs?** We did not discuss this at all schools – however, one school mentioned that the Big 5 chose children to participate. One school said initially teachers selected children, but when more children volunteered to join, they formed a fourth reading club. Another school reported that the Story Sparker had chosen children, but the teachers said they wanted to choose children because they knew the children better. At most schools, membership appeared to either be voluntary (children elect to be part), or mandatory (whole classes are enrolled).

- **When do they take place?** Only two schools reported that reading clubs take place after school. Most take place during school.

- **How often do they take place?** Four schools reported that reading clubs meet once a week, and two said they meet twice a week. Two schools did not specify, and two did not have reading clubs.

- **Are they still active in 2018?** Of the five schools visited in 2018 that had registered reading clubs,[19] three had not yet re-started their reading clubs in early March.[20] Two had sustained reading clubs into Year 2 of the project; however, at one school, the 3 clubs run by community members had lapsed, as the community members were no longer involved, and only the 5 teacher-run clubs continued.

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[19] 1 school visited in 2018 did not have any reading clubs; it did not have a Story Sparker in 2017 due to HR challenges.

[20] In the words of a teacher at School I: "We have not started, we are waiting for the Sparker."

Though not all schools provided this information, in Table 6 below we also compared the number of children registered in reading clubs in 2017 (according to Nal'ibali's monitoring and evaluation data)[21] to the number of children reported to be in reading clubs at the time of the visit.[22]

Table 6: Number of children in reading clubs – registration vs reported

School	Visit date	# RC children registered	# RC children reported	Difference
School A	Sep-17	22	23	1
School B	Sep-17	35	40	5
School C	Sep-17	115	90	-25
School D	Sep-17	90	0 (Reading clubs not active)	-90
School E	Mar-18	255	Unknown (but all 13 RCs reported still active)	n/a
School F	Mar-18	0	30	30
School G	Mar-18	299	Unknown	n/a
School H	Mar-18	90	Unknown	n/a
School I	Mar-18	94	45	-49
School J	Mar-18	0	0 (no reading clubs)	0
Total – all schools		1000 (all)		
Total – schools with comparable figures		266	228	-38

As shown above, there was quite a lot of variation between these two figures, though numbers were more consistent in 2017 than in 2018. This suggests that more regular check-in with reading clubs to update membership would be beneficial, as numbers become more outdated with time. In 2018, all 2017 reading clubs have been invited to re-register and update their details, and a new M&E tool was developed and distributed – a poster where reading clubs can log their sessions, activities and attendance, which should assist in improving the accuracy of our data.

Insights: Most schools reported that after-school activities were not possible, due to existing scholar transport arrangements and/or concerns about children's safety. Schools with a thriving reading culture appeared to achieve this before school, during school hours, and by allowing supplements to go home with children. The "before, during and after" framework may not be the most useful way to document or evaluate programme activities, as before-school activities appear to be relatively homogeneous (usually consisting of reading activities at a whole-school assembly), and after-school activities do not occur at most schools. The greatest variation happens in how schools use their time during instructional hours. Different ways of classifying activities, such as class time / break time / DEAR time, may be more accurately representative of activities.

f. Classroom activities

With regards to classroom activities, we also asked schools about DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) period. DEAR is an international campaign, which was launched locally as the "Drop All And Read

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[21] 2017 reading clubs were registered in April/May 2017.

[22] These were provided conversationally, not based on reading club membership lists, and so were most likely estimates.

Campaign" by Basic Education Minister Angie Motshegka in 2015. Minister Motshegka has encouraged schools to observe a minimum of 30 minutes per week of mandatory reading, and stated that "our ultimate prize is to make Drop All and Read Campaign a regular established part of both children and parents' daily routine".[23]

Unfortunately, we did not have an opportunity to observe a DEAR period at any of the schools. However, all schools reported setting aside dedicated time to reading weekly, though the time, frequency, form and name of these sessions varied. At some schools, the line between reading clubs and DEAR period is blurred, and they are considered one and the same.

In more detail:

- One school holds a DEAR period four days a week; it has been doing this for a while, since before Nal'ibali arrived.
- Three schools reported that they hold DEAR period once a week.
- Another two schools reported it, but did not specify how often it happens.
- Additionally, three schools reported dedicated Nal'ibali time every week, though they did not call it DEAR, and a fourth reported it at an unspecified frequency. Two of these allowed Nal'ibali activities in an assembly weekly; one other allowed the Story Sparker to work with different groups of children throughout her day; and one set aside time for all children to read.

Insights: Promoting adoption of regular DEAR periods is a powerful strategy, because it is endorsed by the Department of Education and by-and-large it is understood by principals. Recent workshops with the project Literacy Mentors have endeavoured to distinguish between DEAR time and reading clubs, so that this clarity can be strengthened at school level.

2. Positive changes reported by Nal'ibali stakeholders

In addition to evaluating the degree and diversity of "take-up" of programme resources and activities, the researchers also coded and analysed interviews for reports of positive changes taking place at schools in relation to reading culture.

In some instances, these changes were directly attributed to Nal'ibali; in others, they were jointly attributed to Nal'ibali and other initiatives and efforts; and in others, attribution was not specified. However, on the whole, interviews demonstrate that stakeholders find the Story Powered Schools programme to be overwhelmingly beneficial and impactful on a number of dimensions.

Below, in line with rubrics used for understanding behaviour change,[24] we will examine reported changes in:

- **Awareness** that RFE (Reading For Enjoyment) is important and powerful

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[23] Department of Basic Education (2015). Minister Angie Motshekga: Drop All and Read Campaign. Speech delivered by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, at the Drop All and Read Campaign held in Mamelodi, Gauteng. Available at https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-angie-motshekga-drop-all-and-read-campaign-6-sep-2015-0000.

[24] Behaviour change theory often points to AKAB – awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour – as key domains where shifts are required. A number of configurations of this are employed in social science research and behaviour change work - for example: "AKA" (Atittudes, Knowledge and Awareness" or "KAP" (Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice). We have used the framework of awareness, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, and extended this to include skills.

- **Knowledge** about what RFE looks like and how to support it
- **Attitudes** towards reading and reading for enjoyment (of adults and children)
- **Behaviours** and practices that support development of readers and reading culture
- **Skills** (reading, writing, storytelling and teaching)
- Other shifts identified

a. Awareness that reading for enjoyment is important and powerful

In interviews, stakeholders described increased awareness of the benefits of reading for enjoyment, storytelling, and community involvement in education.

Teachers

While most teachers were already aware that reading is important, many reported that they became **more aware of importance of reading <u>for enjoyment</u>.**

Several specifically noted that through the programme, they grew more aware (or were reminded) of **the power of stories and *iintsomi*** (folktales).

> "[The main things I learned at training included] the importance of storytelling in a child's learning. When a child [hears] a story, they are able to listen attentively and concentrate on what you are telling them." – Teacher, School F

> "That's how we learn in our culture, before education, was traditional stories. Now, I think that is being revived through this programme." – Principal, School B

Parents

A few stakeholders mentioned that **awareness has increased among parents** about the importance of being involved in children's education, and the fact that reading can and should be fun:

> "With the involvement of communities in schools, [parents] are being enlightened on how important" it is to support with homework, and how important it is to inculcate reading. – Principal, School C

> "The parents told me that they didn't know that schools are this interesting. Back in their days, they didn't have things like Nal'ibali – it was only the education stick that was around." – Story Sparker, School D

This was attributed both to community training and to parents' meetings. In some instances, these shifts in awareness even led to parents transferring their children from non-Nal'ibali schools to Nal'ibali schools, as described below.

Children

Awareness is also shifting for children – who are increasingly realising that reading is FUN. As one Story Sparker described:

> "**Before I joined this school**…the children loved to read but there was no one to encourage and "spark" their love of reading, and that is why we are here. Teachers try to do this as well but they have to do so within the curriculum. Now **children [did] not know that they can read for fun, they think they have to read to be tested**." – Story Sparker, School C

b. Knowledge about what reading for enjoyment looks like, and how to support it

Teachers

Teachers overwhelmingly reported that they had **learned new things about reading for enjoyment** (RFE) at Nal'ibali training, including **ways to use books and stories** to make reading and writing meaningful and exciting for children, such as specific teaching and read-aloud techniques, songs, games and activities.

They also displayed sound understanding of what RFE is and how to encourage it. Some specific points mentioned by teachers included:

- Understanding that **children must want to read**, not be forced to read, and must **be able to choose** what they want to read.

  > *"Learners are the ones who decide the books that they want to read. We cannot decide for them what book to read." – Teacher, School A*

- Understanding that **children learn and remember things more easily when learning is fun** and they feel relaxed.

  > *"Before we read, we must play so that we open the children's minds." – Teacher, School D*

  > *"[At training], the way of presenting, of teaching them how to read – using songs, using games - … was exciting. It helped me because when you are teaching them, it makes them remember for a long period." – Teacher, School A*

- Understanding that **it's important to read frequently and regularly**.

- Understanding that **becoming a reader is a process**, and it's possible to encourage children's reading development at any stage:

  > *"Even if they can only read three lines, they will improve their reading, discussion and analysis skills." – Teacher, School E*

- Understanding that **"reading is everyone's responsibility"**, and that all teachers need to be involved in promoting reading.

Several educators also noted the **strong links between reading for enjoyment and curriculum objectives**, which they saw as a positive thing:

> *"Nal'ibali goes hand to hand with the curriculum. Whatever we do with the programme, it links to the curriculum." – Teacher, School A*

When asked, most teachers said they **shared what they learned** at Nal'ibali training with other teachers and at parent meetings. At most schools, it was not only trained "Big 5" teachers who were active; other teachers were active as well. As a principal noted:

> *"We did not say, no, this is the programme for the foundation phase teachers. Everyone is responsible. You cannot single out any person." – Principal, School H*

c. Attitudes towards reading and reading for enjoyment (of adults and children)

Teachers

Teachers reported that **Nal'ibali has made teaching easier, more enjoyable and less stressful**, and reignited their interest in reading themselves:

> *"This kind of teaching [the Nal'ibali way] is motivating us. It's not difficult now for us to teach these learners, because they have that curiosity to go and learn things and read for themselves.... It's easy to do the work now because of these Nal'ibali styles [of teaching]." – Teacher, School A*

> *"Teachers are more confident than before. When they teach, **they now teach with enjoyment** – not stressed like before." – Principal, School I*

> *"These books bring back the interest in reading, even though we are adults." – Teacher, School F*

This was particularly true at the schools we visited in Maluti, where the language of learning and teaching in the Foundation Phase was both isiXhosa and Sesotho. Teachers explained that having the same story in all three languages (isiXhosa, Sesotho and English) made it much **easier to teach in a trilingual classroom**, because it reduced the need for teachers to use code-switching and translation, and it helped the children to learn one another's languages. School C in KwaZulu-Natal also noted that Nal'ibali materials helped isiXhosa-speaking children who had migrated from the Eastern Cape to learn isiZulu.

While most schools welcomed Nal'ibali from the start, at one school, the principal and teachers all shared that when Nal'ibali arrived, they **initially had a negative attitude** because they thought the programme would mean more work and would detract from important instructional time. Several Story Sparkers mentioned that they encountered this attitude from some schools at the start. However, **seeing is believing**: the school we interviewed soon discovered that the programme was helping to improve reading in the school:

> *"At first I had a negative attitude, because it brought a lot of work and a lot of activities. I thought it was deviating us from the normal routine of teaching and learning in the class. But as time goes on, I noticed that no – it's something that's really helping us, helping the children." – Principal, School G*

Children

Teachers consistently reported that **children are more excited about reading**. A few of these comments are included below; we heard many more:

> *"The children fell in love with the programme… They have shown so much interest in reading, to the point where they have such confidence… The arrival of Nal'ibali has brought us so much joy within the school." - Teacher, School C*

> *"They like to participate in reading. They like to participate in everything, ever since Nal'ibali started last year." – Principal, School J*

> *"In the school, the culture of the children, [they] know that reading is their thing. Not because they are forced to do it; they enjoy it. They read. It's not like before." – Teacher, School E*

> *"It's very exciting, even for the younger ones who are not yet able to read. They listen attentively when the older ones read for them." – Teacher, School H*

Some **attributed shifts** in learner attitudes to the **Story Sparkers' regular presence and energy** at schools. For example:

> *[The most helpful part of the SPS programme is] …the Story Sparker. It brings excitement on the part of learners, and when people are excited it's easy for them to learn and understand what is being taught." – Principal, School C*

Teachers also pointed to Nal'ibali's **high-quality reading materials** as a catalyst that sparked learners' interest.

> *"[Children] listen more attentively when they see you use these hanging library books. The textbooks seem to be boring them. This seems to be more fun." – Teacher, School D*

> *"Some learners used to see their parents reading newspapers. When they come to school, they have that 'oomph' – 'we are at the same level as our parents.' The font is small… they are excited to read that kind of a font." – Teacher, School A*

> *"The way our library looks, they love that. When they see the colours of the books they become excited, and they even borrow books that they will read at home." – Story Sparker, School I*

> *"Books' drawings are an eye-catcher. Because of the drawings, the children become interested [in] the books and end up reading them." - Story Sparker, School A*

Respondents also noted that the reading materials shifted learners' attitudes to **place more value on African languages**. For example:

> *"Learners had a problem with reading Sotho and Xhosa because they had this idea that if you read well, it must be in English. I encourage them to read in English, Xhosa and Sotho so that they know the other languages are also important." – Teacher, School H*

d. Behaviours and practices that support development of readers and reading culture
The degree to which schools are using project resources and implementing reading for enjoyment activities is documented thoroughly in section 1 above.

Teachers
Reading culture as a school habit
 Through regular DEAR time and reading periods, school assemblies (before and during school), class sessions with Story Sparkers and reading clubs, children are reading independently, hearing and telling stories, drawing and writing for personally meaningful reasons, and having fun.

Descriptions of these activities by and large confirm that **they are habitual**, not sporadic or ad hoc, although in some instances momentum has waned as schools have entered the new year without regular Story Sparker visits. For example, one school explained that:

> *We do storytelling and reading in the supplements, once a week in the assembly for 15 to 30 minutes. Sometimes we also use the supplements in the classrooms. The storytelling and reading in the assembly did not happen before Nal'ibali. – Teachers, School D*

In particular, interviews suggest that Nal'ibali has **turned the "theory" of reading time into "practice"** at a number of schools, or **reactivated timetabled reading periods that were not happening consistently**. As described by a Story Sparker and a principal:

> *"Even though they had been instructed by the Department to introduce DEAR time, some [schools] had not done so. But when [Nal'ibali] got into the schools, they had no choice but to do it. … Some have even gone beyond the requirements, which are that DEAR time should be for Grades R to 4, and have extended it up to grade 7." – Story Sparker, School C*

> *"Four days a week, we have 30 minutes on our timetables set aside for reading. We had it even before Nal'ibali, but we were not that active in it. But **since we have things that we can read to them** and that they can read, [now] we use it [the reading period]." – Principal, School J*

> *"The manner in which we revive DEAR period in schools…it's good, because it connects well with what the school or the curriculum says. …DEAR is an official time." – Literacy Mentor, School E*

Reading and writing for meaningful, personally-satisfying reasons

Descriptions and our observations suggested that **school practices promote reading and writing "for real reasons"** – in other words, writing about personally meaningful and satisfying things. For example, we observed Grade 4 children's "autobiographies" written and illustrated in isiXhosa. Another Story Sparker reported:

> *"I give them the opportunity of writing their stories, the fairy tales that they are told by the old people they are staying with in their homes." – Story Sparker, School D*

Children

Self-motivated, independent reading

A number of people attributed increased reading activity to the influx of reading materials in the school, which has enabled learners to **read more regularly throughout the school day**, and to **take their own initiative to read**. Stakeholders report that:

> *"It's useful for them [the books] to be in the class, because books are always available. You don't have to refer learners to the library when you need some books. They just pick books from the hanging library and utilise them." – Deputy Principal, School H*

> *"When children finish doing their work, you don't have to tell them to get a book. They just grab one and read." – Teacher, School D*

> *"When kids are without an educator, they can occupy themselves by reading supplements."*
> *– Principal, School C*

By many accounts, **learners are becoming voracious readers**, in and out of schools. People generally described this as a change, in comparison how learners behaved previously. For example:

> *"Our children have become very interested and love reading. … They read everything, like road signs, reading in class, at the library or newspapers." – Literacy Mentor, School E*

> *"They have that curiosity to go and learn things and read for themselves. Even if you are not in the class, you find them busy reading. … These kids have developed this through Nal'ibali. Before, there were no such things." – Teacher, School A*

> *"Our learners, they like reading too much now. We had a problem with reading before. [But now], even if you are busy with something else, they will come in and read, reading everything that is written on the wall." – Teacher, School A*

Increased interest in school overall

At a more basic level, several schools reported that learners were more interested in school overall. At one school, teachers reported that the children were now washing their uniforms and taking more pride than they used to. Another teacher reported that:

> *"Those who were lazy to do their homework are now encouraged and willing to do it." – Teacher, School C*

A few schools also reported reduced absenteeism and late-coming, which ultimately has a positive impact on learning in the school:

> *"They come to school on time at 07:45am, they don't come in at 9 or 10, late. They know that if they come in early, they will have time and listen to the folktales we will tell them." – Community member, School A*

Parents

Teachers also report that parents are now more involved in their children's learning:

> *"We give [learners] homework to create stories, and they come back showing us how the mother had helped her. You see that the parent didn't write it, but it shows that they helped, which means a lot." – Community member, School B*

> *"Parents are fully involved, because we give them work to do at home, they come with that work done." Previously, this was not the case. – Teacher, School A*

At one school, the community members reported that parents are taking action to support children's participation in reading clubs:

> *"Some parents organised with the transport drivers to pick up the child after they attended a reading club, or some will make alternative means to collect the child. They make sure that children participate in reading clubs." – Principal, School C*

Some parents also reported that the programme shifted their behaviour. For example, a community member reported that after attending Nal'ibali training, she reignited her own interest in reading, and began playing more with her children:

> "My mind has been revived, because I have also been a child before and become interested in things. When we become old we don't do a lot of things, especially reading books. [But now] we end up keeping ourselves busy by reading books. … Now I even go out to play with my children and play all of these games they enjoy. It encourages you as a parent to assist your child when they are doing their homework." – Community member, School A

In addition to training, two schools **pointed to the supplement and its bilingual, interactive nature** as a catalyst for parent involvement, and a tool that strengthens bonds between parents and children:

> "Supplements help when it comes to parents. … Some parents are unable to read in English, but they are able to read with their child in isiZulu, and the children can then read for their parents in English." – Story Sparker, School E

> "Supplements…play a major role in making sure that parents are able to work with their children. [When] a parent does cut out and keep with the child and reads together, they are able to bond during that time." – Story Sparker, School I

e. Skills (reading, writing, storytelling and teaching)

Reports abounded of children improving their reading, writing and storytelling skills, as well as their confidence and public speaking.

Improved reading, writing and confidence

A number of people contrasted children's poor reading skills before Nal'ibali arrived to vastly improved skills now. They overwhelmingly attributed these improvements to Nal'ibali. These changes were typically described in broad terms, and shared with conviction and appreciation.

A selection of this feedback is shared below – although we have left a lot of it out:

> "In senior phase we have a problem of children who doesn't know how to even spell a word, but since Nal'ibali started here the children are now active." – Teacher, School J

> "We have had a challenge… where you find that this learner has finished the foundation phase, but she can't read. And also, writing – where you find learners that passed Grade 3, but when you ask them to write... But now, their writing skills…are not only moulding letters. I mean, writing something with sense. You can see that, oh, they're saying something." – Principal, School B

> "When we started working here, the children struggled to read, but now there is a lot of improvement. Even the teachers notice and mention to me the difference Nal'ibali has made, especially in Grade 1." – Story Sparker, School C

> "When I came to the school, some children could not read, even in Standard 2 [Grade 4]. But now you hear children asking to borrow books so they can go read at home, and when they come back and I ask them to read aloud, they read with confidence." – Community member, School I

> *"Some of the children who were struggling in class, their parents will come in and say they see the difference, they see an improvement. It's not like last year. At least now I can see an improvement in my child. This thing [Nal'ibali] is helping. Even if the child can't read the words, they can tell a story by looking at the pictures." – Teacher, School F*

Some people pointed more specifically to **improvements in reading fluency**, as well as **English language skills**, such as this principal:

> *"[I've seen changes in] reading fluency. … I even had to pinch myself. … Every time I ask a question [in Grade 7 Social Science], there are those who are able to answer my questions in [English]. Two of the nearby high schools, they keep on saying, 'Just call us, when you have a slot. We have seen some of your learners, what they are doing in the high school… [for example], in debate, a Grade 8 learner facing a Grade 12 learner." – Principal, School F*

Others pointed to improvements in children's **confidence**, for example:

> *"There has been a lot of improvements. We have even discovered storytellers among them. … Nal'ibali has boosted the confidence in the children. Now they can even read the Bible during assembly in front of everyone." – Story Sparker, School B*

At some schools, the researchers also observed children reading aloud, telling and dramatizing stories in English, isiXhosa, isiZulu and Sesotho. In many instances, children showed impressive fluency, expression and confidence. Although it is possible that teachers asked the most skilled readers to show off for visitors, these observations give some credence to the reports shared above. The researchers also observed situations where a Story Sparker or teacher asked children to volunteer to read, and though some children displayed more skill and expression than others, all children who read aloud far surpassed the poor oral reading fluency averages we saw in the Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRAs) conducted as part of the external evaluation baseline.[25]

Attributing the changes
While the changes reported above were broadly attributed to Nal'ibali, some respondents pointed to specific activities in the SPS programme that they felt had contributed to improved reading skills. These included:

> **Reading clubs:** *"Some teachers compliment the improvement they see within the children… They tell the children to come to the reading clubs because they can see how helpful it is to the learners." – Story Sparker, School B*

> **Hearing and telling stories:** *"Now we realise these iintsomi are important, and it's good for them to memorise." – Teacher, School A*

> **Dramatising:** *"When they dramatise, they are encouraged to be active and to recall, so it helps improve their memory skills." – Teacher, School E*

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[25] The external evaluation baseline, carried out by NORC at the University of Chicago, was shared with USAID at the second 2017 Story Powered Schools steering committee meeting.

Teachers and principals also reported that **supplements were key drivers of change**, on a number of fronts. As high-quality reading materials, they improved children's spelling and vocabulary, supported delivery of the language curriculum, and even improved motor skills:

> *"It's easy for them to understand, and to get more vocabulary, when they are reading stories. And then those words, the vocabulary, helps them in their subjects when they are being assessed." – Principal, School J*

> *"We discovered that …in our classrooms [we can just] treat these supplements like normal books, because they have the language. Spelling is there, reading is there, stories are there." – Teacher, School G*

> *"When they cut supplements, it helps them to be able to use scissors. Motor skills are improved. they learn colours." – Teacher, School F*

Some people specifically credited the **bilingual nature of supplements** and the increased presence of **African language material** as contributing to improved reading and language skills:

> *"Supplements are so useful. They help a lot, especially with multilingualism. Since we have them in the mother tongue and then again in English. They learn to read, write and speak in different languages." – Literacy Mentor, School E*

> *"Those who know they are not good with English, they know they can start reading with the Zulu version [of the supplement]. If you have learners with barriers, they can benefit." – Teacher, School D*

f. Additional changes

In addition to the reported shifts discussed above, interviews surfaced some additional positive outcomes and project dynamics that we will call attention to here.

More familial, nurturing relationships

Teachers also reported that the programme **shifted the quality of teacher-child relationships**, to be more familial and nurturing:

> *It brings closeness between (us) teachers and children. When we do reading for enjoyment you find out children are free to participate because it is a relaxed atmosphere. It gives us time to get to know children better. – Teacher, School F*

In a few instances, this was attributed to the use of *iintsomi* (folk stories) in the programme:

> *"The youth of the new generation, no one is available to tell iintsomi [folk stories]. Now we realise these iintsomi are important… It takes us back to this situation where we used to gather by the fire and tell stories. … It enables. It shifts teaching activities to become a family thing, whereas you sit together and tell stories – you do it in a family way." – Teachers, School A*

Able to identify and support children who are struggling

We heard several stories where Nal'ibali activities and the relationships they created **helped adults identify children who were struggling**, academically and in home situations, and to find ways to

support them. For example, the Story Sparker at School C shared a story about a child who used to hide from reading clubs, but whose reading has improved once he was allowed to draw instead of write:

> *"We have a learner at one of our schools who is repeating Grade 4. When he first joined the reading club, he used to go and sit in the toilets every time they had to write something. One day I asked what the problem was. He informed me that he struggles to write and is better at drawing. After that conversation, I now allow him to draw instead of writing, but sometimes he tries to write, even though it's difficult for him. You can now see that he is enjoying being part of the club and reads well, even though he still struggles to write. Being in the club has helped a lot." – Story Sparker, School C [telling a story about a different school]*

Other schools shared similar stories. At one school, a community member who ran a reading club noticed a child becoming quiet and distant. When she visited the family, she found out the child was staying with an ailing, bedridden grandfather and there was no food in the home. The school started sending meals to the family, and alerted social workers and the police. At another school, a social worker referral took place when community members read about difficult home issues in a child's isiXhosa autobiography. As respondents noted:

> *"You hear a lot of stories from the children about their backgrounds and what happens in their homes. ... Some of them are going through a tough situation at such a young age. … We can communicate with the teacher and alert them about the problems we pick up." – Community member, School B*

> *"[The Nal'ibali programme] also helps with drug issues – when you can identify at an early age that a learner is no longer into reading." – Principal, School C*

More broadly, Nal'ibali reading clubs create spaces for learners with difficult home lives to feel free, have fun and take a break from the challenges they cope with:

> *"Some children are from difficult homes, and that makes them…become stressed at times. But after we meet with them, you see some difference in the way they behave. They become stress-free and have fun with other children. Even if a child was sad, we make sure that by the time we part ways with them, they are happy. … When they see us again, they remember what we did with them, and that gives them a new mindset. They end up sharing with others the stories they have learnt with us." – Community member, School A*

Easier to support children of differing abilities

Related to this, several stakeholders reported that Nal'ibali has helped them to **better cater to children of different abilities** – whether the brightest learners, those who are struggling, or those with special needs.

As one Grade 7 teacher shared, freely-available materials help faster learners to make the most of their time at school:

> *"I use [the puzzles] for my language lessons. They use [them] for the high flyers in the class – they finish their work first, then run for the supplements." – Teacher, School J*

It also helps slower or shyer learners to engage with books and stories without being left behind:

> *"It gives a chance to those who are shy, so at his or her own time, he or she can pick up his own book and read at his own pace." – Teacher, School A*

> *"I have a child that is very shy. But when he came back with the supplements to make his own books, he asked me to read with him. Now he is the one who informs me that Nal'ibali has these certain books, and we sit and check whether I have them; then we will read to each other. That changed his character." – Community member, School C*

It has helped teachers and Story Sparkers recognise that shy or misbehaving learners are not necessarily "slow", and may simply need different opportunities to shine.

> *"Nal'ibali has taught me something that I didn't know. There are those… learners [who] are not able to raise up their hands when you ask questions…but when you read a story for them, they are good in listening, and they are able to [give] the correct answers." – Teacher, School G*

> *"I always thought that when you are a teacher you have to just stand there in front, tell the students what to do, and if they don't, you shout at them and kick them out. I never thought by doing that, there is … a talent you are hiding [in] the students. Maybe the students keep talking because they don't get the chance or opportunity…to express themselves in front of people." – Story Sparker, School D*

School E, an inclusive school, mentioned that Nal'ibali has helped learners with special needs or disabilities:

> *"Since [our school] is an inclusive school, the teachers…appreciate that Nal'ibali has come and worked with two languages. The teachers notice that those students who are disabled are now more confident to speak about stories." – Story Sparker, School E*

Increased enrolment; demand from other schools

Two of the six schools visited in 2018 reported increased enrolment this year, which they attributed to Nal'ibali and the positive reputation it had helped the school gain in the community. School H reported that 232 learners had transferred from other school in 2018, after parents saw the performances given by their learners during the 2017 school prize-giving. (This sometimes had negative consequences for the programme in schools, as dedicated reading and library space was converted to additional classrooms, as was the case at School F.)

The programme is seen as valuable, and is in high demand at non-participating schools. At least three schools reported specific instances where neighbouring schools that were not part of the programme approached Nal'ibali directly to find out how to enrol.

> *"I shared this with one of my friends from a neighbouring school. She was interested in it when I told her, to an extent that she even went to the Nal'ibali offices herself to ask how one can be involved in the programme, and why they were not included." – Teacher, School J*

Learners from other schools have also shown interest in Nal'ibali, as a Story Sparker reported:

> *"Children who are in schools that are not under Nal'ibali [are] interested to join Nal'ibali. When it's during holidays, we have children from other schools. That means whatever we are*

teaching these children is not only getting through the ones that we teach – rather, through all the children in the community." – Story Sparker, School A

Another teacher reported that a child in the community started her own English school, even though she did not attend a Nal'ibali school, because she was inspired by Nal'ibali: "The love of Nal'ibali has spread all over this community. They adore it." (Teacher, School C)

Respect of Story Sparkers and community members
Some Story Sparkers and community members reported that they have seen their status elevated in communities, and are greeted with respect and gratitude:

> *"Now we are trusted in the community, we are able to go into people's houses and help where we can." – Community member, School C*

> *"I can see the change at home, because now, as the Nal'ibali ambassador, wherever I go, I am being praised: 'Thank you, my child, for helping my youngster.'" – Literacy Mentor, School E*

> *"Sometimes children come to me and tell me that their parents would like my number. When they call, they say, 'Thank you. My child now knows how to read and loves reading.'" - Community member, School C*

Reawakening / invigorating existing reading culture and volunteer activities
Although schools reported many changes, and strongly attributed these to Nal'ibali, it would be misleading to report that there was NO culture of reading or sharing stories in these schools before we arrived.

A few schools emphasized that although they had a culture of reading before, Nal'ibali reawakened their knowledge and invigorated their efforts, and the reading materials made it much easier to do this. For example, School J reported that it already had DEAR period timetabled four times a week (more than any other school), but had implementing it more consistently "since we have things that we can read…now", thanks to Nal'ibali. School E reported that Nal'ibali had reawakened what teachers had learned through a programme called READ, which the school participated in about ten years ago.

A number of the active community members we met or heard about were already involved at schools before Nal'ibali arrived. However, Nal'ibali training and Story Sparker mentorship taught them new skills, and they often shifted their day-to-day focus to spend more time on literacy development activities. For example, a community member at School B used to run the "walking bus"; now, she reported, she tells stories on her walk, and also runs reading clubs and works with classes during the school day.

3. Constructive feedback and recommendations

Teachers, principals, community members and Story Sparkers had a number of constructive suggestions for the Story Powered Schools programme. Additional ideas surfaced through discussion with the project manager, district official and funder representatives during some visits; and through our observations, conversations and reflection.

In this final section of the report, we will present and discuss stakeholder feedback and recommendations from the research team. We will first examine suggestions for project *design*;

followed by suggestions for project *implementation*; and finally, suggestions for how the project is *communicated* to teachers, principals and stakeholders.

a. Reflections on project design

These suggestions fall into five areas: reviewing the project resourcing strategy; sustaining face-to-face support; expanding the target age group; reducing expectation of after-school activities; and strengthening incentive programmes.

i. Review resourcing strategies

Hanging library design

Although all schools appreciated the quality of the books, feedback about the design of the hanging library unit was mixed.

Some teachers and principals praised the design. For example, stakeholders at one school appreciated that they can put the libraries away when they are not in use, and keep them in a safe place over school holidays. A Story Sparker noted that the design catches children's interest, and that it's easy for learners to see the books

However, others raised concerns about the libraries' design and function, including:

- The libraries are difficult to hang, without enough places for hooking, and some teachers do not know how to do it – which in some instances means they do not always get hung up or used.
- Once hanging up, the libraries are not stable and sometimes fall down: "Most of the time, the hanging libraries fall because of the state of our infrastructure. Now we just lay them on the desk. When it's a shelf, it's much better." - Teacher, School E
- On some units, the handles are breaking.
- It's not always easy to search for books, because three or four books are in each pocket and you can't always find the one you want.

These respondents made suggestions that in place of the hanging library units, Nal'ibali could provide a reading box or bookshelf for each classroom, or a book cupboard with see-through doors to protect books from dust.

Recommendations: Nal'ibali may want to consider testing a few of these alternatives in some schools (perhaps outside the Story Powered Schools programme), and gathering more focused feedback on library units, before procuring libraries for 2019. It may also help to cover troubleshooting of common challenges (such as libraries falling down), and to showcase different ways in which schools have hung and used their libraries, during Big 5 training.

Number of books provided, and refreshers/top-ups

Unsurprisingly, all schools wanted more books. This was especially true in larger schools with more than one class per grade. (Some also wanted more supplements.)

It was also important to keep the selection of books "fresh" by refreshing the supply or swapping/rotating books. In the words of one Story Sparker:

> *"It would help if Nal'ibali could bring new books at the beginning of the year, and then again in the middle of the year. They can add new ones or come and do a swap."* – Story Sparker, School C

> *"We had a problem where the children were starting to get bored with the books because they had read all of them, but [the Nal'ibali researcher] gave us the idea that we could swap the books between grades, for example, swap the grade 3 with the grade 4 books, and that really helped us."* – SS, School C

Recommendations: If Nal'ibali is able to successfully work with funders and government to launch a large-scale book distribution scheme, existing Story Powered Schools should not be overlooked because "they already have books." While it is a great start, 150 books is not enough to sufficiently serve Grades R to 4. These schools – where reading culture and practice is already established – are fertile ground to "plant" more books, if it becomes possible.

For 2019, Nal'ibali should also consider international research pointing to a minimum standard of 42 book titles per pupil per year as a minimum number required[26], and see whether it is possible to achieve this within the budget, with forward planning and the inclusion of some carefully vetted, creative commons titles (such as those from Book Dash, the African Storybook Project or the Mikhulu Trust).

New materials are needed regularly to keep reading fresh and exciting. Nal'ibali should also consider whether a "refresher" book top-up can be planned for in future iterations of the project – for example, another 15-20 books per grade delivered in Year 2 as schools enter the reduced support phase. These could potentially be an incentive linked to meeting certain milestones in Year 1 of the project – for example, at least 3 active reading clubs, participation in the reading club showcase, and regular DEAR periods.

For now, Story Sparkers can also encourage schools to be more creative and make the most of the books they have – for example, by swapping titles between grades when students start to get bored – as noted below.

Stationery and T-shirts
Requests also emerged related to:

- **Stationery:** A few schools asked if Nal'ibali could provide more stationery. A principal said that when his school only has enough materials for the teachers, "it looks like Story Sparkers aren't doing the work". Two community members at School B who buy all stationery themselves for the reading clubs said it was difficult to ask their husbands for money to do this.

- **T-shirts**: A few schools mentioned that it was unfair to provide only 15 T-shirts for children when more than 15 children participated in reading clubs: "It's crippling all the other learners who are left behind. It's discouraging." - Principal, School C

ii. Sustain support – face-to-face as well as digital
Most schools we visited, especially in 2018, pleaded with Nal'ibali to continue supporting them with face-to-face Story Sparker visits, even if these visits came less often.

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[26] Results for Development Institute (R4D) and International Education Partners Ltd. (IEP). (2016). Global Book Fund Feasibility Study: Final Report. Washington. Retrieved from http://www.r4d.org/knowledge-center/global-book-fund-feasibility-study, p.14

> *"In deep rural areas, you need to keep on supporting people. If you give us ongoing support, it will assist us … our learners will always be on the level of where we want them to be. If Story Sparkers can come once a month, [learners] will be able to be in that reading mode."* – Principal, School C

> *"Please do not take away the programme too soon from us, because we still need it and we still have a long way to learn. If you take it away before we master it…if you decide to leave these schools now…please don't."* – Principal, School J

> *"The regular visiting must not come to an end because we have graduated. If you can just keep in touch with us, that means we won't lose being a Story Powered School, we will carry on. But if there is no one pushing the boat, that means we can just leave it…and [go] back to our old ways."* – Community member, School A

Two schools visited in 2018 said they were willing to pay for their Story Sparker's transportation if she was willing to continue visiting the school.

Schools also requested follow-up refresher trainings, mentoring visits and additional community trainings. People were also interested in receiving SMSes and other regular communication from Nal'ibali, although they did not feel that remote support *only* would be sufficient.

In general, there is a strong desire to be "seen" and "touched" by Nal'ibali regularly, in order to sustain motivation and get feedback on how to improve practice.

Face-to-face support does not all need to fall to Nal'ibali. As Story Sparkers noted, active community members can also drive the programme, and Department of Education officials can also play a role:

> *"[If DoE officials] visit Nal'ibali at the schools, maybe once a month, all teachers will be more supportive of Nal'ibali because then they could see that Nal'ibali is supported by the department."* – Story Sparker, School E

Recommendations: Nal'ibali may want to consider retaining its trained and experienced Story Sparkers in a part-time capacity to provide occasional face-to-face support to schools (for example, monthly or twice a term), and explore the degree to which schools are willing to co-fund this (i.e. paying for Story Sparkers' transport). This has an associated cost; however, it may be the most cost-effective way to ensure the investment made thus far in project schools is sustained over time.

Nal'ibali should also continue seeking opportunities to establish stipended posts for community members by linking to existing schemes in schools, such as Learner Support Agents, the Community Work Programme (CWP), SETA- or ELITS-funded internship programmes, and SGB[27]-funded posts for administrators and classroom assistants.

Nal'ibali can also encourage schools to invite people who are already stipended on such programmes to the community trainings. For example, many schools in these areas have CWP participants, who are already paid to spend two days a week supporting the school. Some of these people may be interested in getting involved with Nal'ibali activities, and are more likely to continue the work over time if they are stipended to do so.

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[27] School Governing Body

The researchers also found strong interest in the FUNda Leader programme and the SMS support it will offer. Nal'ibali is already in the process of enrolling active Big 5 and community members from 2017 (and 2018) schools into its national network. Referral to the call centre can be more widely utilised (as many people had never heard of it).

However, face-to-face interaction remains critical and should be prioritised, even if it is less frequent after the first year of the programme.

iii. Expand target age group

The majority of schools reported that although the programme is focused on Grades R to 4, there is strong interest **from teachers and children in Grades 5 to 7**. They asked Nal'ibali to please make the programme available for older age groups as well.

In the words of educators:

> *"There is a need there. …There are learners who are having reading challenges coming from the lower grades, and they … find this interesting because they come in two languages, the languages they understand." – Teacher, School J*

> *"Grade 5 is not directly involved. But those learners will have acquired these skills, and then [when they graduate into Grade 5] they will be left, if we don't avail those books to [them]." – Principal School B*

Some schools have already extended the programme to older learners, to varying degrees. For example, at most schools, older learners join in for whole-school activities conducted at assemblies or on the school grounds outside. Two schools (School B and School I) reported specifically that they had to register new, additional reading clubs due to demand from older learners; School E also had reading clubs for learners in Grades 5 to 7. Another school reported that older children's participation was more informal:

> *"We work only up until Standard 2 [Grade 4], but even the Standard 3, 4, 5's [Grade 5, 6, 7's] come and want to see what we are doing, and they borrow books, sit and read as well. They are also interested." – Community member, School I*

Some schools reported that supplements are more appropriate for older children, with their small fonts and longer stories. In at least three schools, supplements are already used by children in all grades.

One school also mentioned that the achievements of younger learners **motivated older learners** to work harder:

> *"We had a heritage day celebration and they [foundation phase learners] staged their own drama. When the older ones saw that the younger ones were taking over, they started to pull up their socks. The whole school is rising." – Teacher, School B*

Recommendations: While the Grade R-to-4 focus is still a helpful way to set targets and budget for resourcing, Nal'ibali may want to reconsider the explicit focus on Grades R to 4 when communicating the project to schools.

Historically, Nal'ibali secured funding for the programme under USAID's Early Grade Reading strategy, which focuses on Grades R to 4. As such, the project positioned Grade R to 4 children as direct beneficiaries, and older children as indirect beneficiaries – and built its budget to match, providing hanging libraries and supplements only for these grades.

However, Nal'ibali by its nature is a campaign for children (and adults) of all ages. And for reading culture to thrive in a school, it needs to be embraced by all teachers and children, regardless of grade. Many of the Big 5 trained in both 2017 and 2018 are Intermediate Phase teachers, and the most successful schools are already implementing Nal'ibali for all. However, other schools did not seem to know that they were "allowed" to give supplements to older learners or to include them in reading clubs and other activities.

In an ideal world (with unlimited resources!), Nal'ibali could also provide books and supplements to all grades. Within the current parameters and resource constraints, Nal'ibali can take actions such as encouraging schools to involve older learners as reading club leaders and helpers; to use supplements with children in all grades; to register reading clubs for children in all grades; and to create book check-out systems that all learners can use.

iv. Reduce expectation of after-school activities

At the schools we visited, after-school activities were rare. Schools worried about children's safety when travelling home later than normal, or had inflexible scholar transport programmes that did not make provision for children to stay late. For example, as some Story Sparkers reported:

> *"Together with the school, we decided it was safer for the children, and better for Nal'ibali, to have the reading club at 1, because the area is not safe, especially for the children, if they have to walk home an hour after school has ended."* – Story Sparker, School C

> *"I am a male and no parent will allow their child to stay behind [after school] with me."* – Story Sparker, School D

Recommendation: Nal'ibali may want to reduce the emphasis on after-school activities, and place more emphasis on before- and during-school activities and on community reading clubs.

v. Strengthen incentive programmes

Several schools suggested that a stronger incentive programme would motivate participation and activity. Specific ideas included:

- Learner certificates for reading club membership
- Learner certificates for participation in the reading club showcase
- **"**Educational prizes" such as colouring pencils or notebooks, for children
- Branded prizes, such as Nal'ibali mugs, school bags or jackets
- Useful things for schools – for example, cupboards or a TV.

Recommendation: Incorporate these suggestions into the broader FUNda Leader incentive scheme, and ensure certificates are provided for participation in key activities.

b. Recommendations for project implementation

i. Deepen programme in existing areas in Year 3

In areas where Nal'ibali has been operating, other schools, parents and children have become aware of the programme and developed substantial interest in it. There is much demand for Nal'ibali to bring

the programme to other nearby schools, as documented above. In these areas, Nal'ibali has also made much effort to develop relationships with district officials and has a thorough understanding of the area, and thus the start-up costs and effort required are lower. It has trained and experienced Story Sparkers who could be retained in some instances, depending on proximity to the schools. And as a matter of fairness, Nal'ibali should also offer the programme to the schools that served as control schools during the first two years of the randomised controlled trial (RCT).

Recommendation: Rather than enter brand-new districts in 2019, Nal'ibali should first offer the programme to schools in the 2017 areas of operation.

ii. Develop communities of practice for principals and Big 5 teachers

Site visits revealed the diversity of 'good practice' and innovation at school level, as well as the areas where schools were struggling or had questions about what to do. In the words of one principal:

> *"There is a need for us as schools involved in this project to come together and share."* – *Principal, School F*

Recommendations: This could be achieved by, for example, the Department of Education including Nal'ibali on the agenda in local principals' meetings / circuit meetings, and is a strong strategy to encourage sustainability.

iii. Involve older learners to run reading clubs and activities

This was discussed already above, under the recommendation to expand the target age group. This would have the added benefit of strengthening sustainability of the programme, as Story Sparker visits phase out.

iv. Make sure books are engaging and pitched to the audience

For the most part, respondents said the books are engaging and exciting; pitched at the right level for children; and have the right mix of languages. A few people made suggestions for small improvements – in particular, to increase the number of short, simple books in hanging libraries for Grades R to 2, including books that are appealing to children who have not yet learned to read but want to look at the pictures.

> *"The children are reluctant to read the big and thicker books. They love those that they can get through quickly, before getting bored."* – Story Sparker, School C

Recommendation: Ensure Grade R and 1 libraries have enough simple books for children who have not yet learned to read when procuring books.

v. Use local suppliers for transportation and catering

When Nal'ibali invests resources in events and other programme activities, it is important to identify and use local service providers wherever possible[28], and to be clear to schools and stakeholders about what criteria are being used to select service providers. If service providers or food are brought in from outside, this can create ill will towards Nal'ibali, a risk for the project.

Schools have also sometimes been resentful when Story Sparkers have come in from outside the community, and the job did not go to a family member who was already volunteering at the school.

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[28] In line with compliance requirements from Nal'ibali's finance department.

Response: Nal'ibali has made efforts in 2018 to more clearly communicate hiring processes, and ensure all Story Sparkers are local to the cluster of four schools that they serve. The issue of local procurement has also been addressed by the implementation team.

vi. Improve reading club showcase design and adjudication

Several schools also asked if more than just 15 learners could participate in the reading club showcase.

One principal was concerned that reading clubs with more resources had been judged more favourably in the reading club showcase competition. He felt adjudicators had marked up reading clubs with flashy things, like carpets and cushions, and judged reading clubs negatively when learners had shabby clothes. He asked Nal'ibali to ensure adjudication focuses on the primary objective of showcasing learners' work.

Response: This has been addressed in the 2018 programme design, whereby a tiered showcase system is adopted where the winning club at school level proceeds to the next level. Adjudication training will begin earlier, and criteria will be honed to ensure schools are judged fairly.

vii. Reduce number of M&E forms

Though evidence of schools using M&E forms was observed at multiple schools, this was not consistent, and we suspected that the forms we saw at schools had not been submitted to Nal'ibali's head office. Story Sparkers noted that the project had too many monitoring forms; that some forms felt repetitive; and that the M&E system should be redesigned so it relies only on Story Sparkers, not on teachers or community members.

Response: This input has been incorporated into the project's redesigned 2018 M&E system, where reporting requirements from teachers and volunteers are minimal (a poster to record reading club sessions), and tools have been developed to consolidate multiple project management functions (for example, performance management/oversight, transport costs, and data collection).

viii. Plan ahead, keep our word, and ensure transport money is paid on time

Multiple Story Sparkers mentioned that they have faced difficulties due to last-minute planning of events, last-minute changes in plans, and insufficient communication to principals about upcoming events. They shared that this reduces Nal'ibali's credibility on the ground and puts them in difficult positions. Story Sparkers also expressed that they would like to be consulted more in planning of things like holiday activities. Late payment of transport money was also raised as an issue by both Story Sparkers and principals in 2017. However, in 2018 it did not come up, suggesting that the issue may have been addressed.

Response: The project team has done more thorough advance planning in 2018, based on the learnings from Year 1 of the project.

c. Suggestions for communicating the programme

i. Clarify that there is not "one right way" to be a Story Powered School

Overall, while we witnessed highly creative interpretations and actualisations of the "Story Powered Schools" concept, we also encountered some schools who seemed to be waiting for "permission to innovate". In trying to ensure that they ran Story Powered Schools "the right way", they lost some opportunities to deepen reading culture, by integrating Nal'ibali materials into existing ways of working or by extending Nal'ibali activities to all grades.

Recommendation: This can be shifted through:

i. continually emphasizing to schools that they OWN the programme and have permission to innovate;

ii. sharing diverse examples of "good practice" with schools in training and ongoing Story Sparker visits, rather than communicating a "right way"; and

iii. bringing schools together to share best practices and ideas.

Some of these specific suggestions for communication include:

Clarify that the school can extend the programme to older learners

This has been discussed thoroughly [above](#).

Clarify that Nal'ibali does not limit the number of reading clubs

While a number of schools we visited established more than 3 reading clubs, we met some principals and teachers who understood that 3 was an upper limit. One principal found this problematic:

> "If we are a Story Powered School, and among us we had to choose a certain group of learners to be part of a reading club and exclude others, it doesn't actually serve the goal of serving everybody." – Principal, School C

When these queries or comments arose, the researchers explained to stakeholders that schools are allowed to register as many reading clubs as they would like. To some teachers and principals, this news appeared to come as a surprise.

Recommendation: Three reading clubs per school is a target set during the project planning phase, and represents a minimum desired level of activity. However, if the project seeks to truly inculcate a *school-wide culture of reading*, it should ensure that it is communicated clearly at Big 5 training and by Story Sparkers that the "3 reading club target" is a minimum goal, not a limit.

Explain that there's not "one right way" to use hanging libraries

During the September round of visits, it became clear that in some instances, teachers, principals and Story Sparkers felt that Nal'ibali expected them to use the hanging libraries in a specific way. They would note that learners get bored once they have read all the books, but no one seemed to have considered swapping books between grades. They would make suggestions like "Nal'ibali should let us use the books with the older learners, they are also interested." We saw that when schools had other storybooks, Nal'ibali books were rarely mixed in as part of a broader library system, but were usually kept separate – even when that meant the Nal'ibali books were barely used.

Recommendation: Story Sparkers and trainers can share diverse examples of good practice with schools, and work with each school to optimise the way they choose to use their hanging libraries.

ii. Clarify criteria for "what makes a reading club a reading club"

We saw a range of practices with regards to "what constitutes a reading club." At some schools, teachers simply signed up full classrooms of learners as reading clubs; at others, children voluntarily joined the clubs, which met near the end of the school day; and at others, teachers or the Story Sparker selected learners to participate.

The original theory of a Nal'ibali reading club is that it is:

- Voluntary to join – to ensure learners feel free in the space.

- A free space, outside of a classroom environment, where there are no wrong answers, creativity is encouraged, and children know they will not be graded on the work they do.
- Not too big – to ensure that every child can receive individual attention.
- A space for reading-for-enjoyment activities, not reading instruction.

Recommendation: While it may not be possible for all schools to run reading clubs outside of class time or structures, Story Sparkers should support schools as much as possible to adopt the principles above. The reading club showcase adjudication criteria can also be used to help encourage this.

iii. Provide greater clarity around what happens in Year 2 of programme participation

During our 2018 visits, we encountered many questions about **what happens in Year 2** of the Story Powered Schools project. Although letters went out to each school outlining the package of support provided during the reduced support phase, and although principals briefings were held to clarify the reduced support strategy, teachers and principals at most schools visited in 2018 expressed a great deal of uncertainty about what would happen in Year 2 of the project.

A few schools did not seem to know that they could/should continue running reading clubs. Most schools wanted to know whether they would continue to receive supplements; whether they would receive more books; whether community members should keep participating; and whether their Story Sparker would/could continue to visit them in 2018. There was a strong plea for continued support, even if less frequent or intensive (as discussed below in Section 3). Two principals offered to pay for the Story Sparkers' transport if they could still visit occasionaly.

Response: Since the visits, Nal'ibali has distributed reading club and FUNda Leader (Nal'ibali network) registration forms, along with a letter explaining why and how to re-register reading clubs in 2018. The project team will continue to share the support packages at district meeting platforms, and continue to make use of planned monthly principals meeting engagements where these questions can be addressed.

iv. Ensure front-line staff are empowered to answer frequently-asked questions

In 2017, Story Sparkers reported that they often confronted questions from teachers and principals that they did not know how to answer. These have included questions related to resourcing; how schools were selected for the project; and how Nal'ibali chose and hired Story Sparkers. For example:

> "In [some] schools we [as Story Sparkers] are asked if Nal'ibali will pay for the ink that is used when printing and that puts us in an awkward position because we don't know the answer."- Story Sparker, School A

Responses: The new implementation cycle, where Story Sparkers meet with their Literacy Mentors every Friday, can assist in equipping Story Sparkers with answers to any questions they encounter at schools. Time was also spent in 2018 training to ensure all Story Sparkers understood how schools had been selected in line with the parameters of the randomised controlled trial.

D. Conclusion

While there is still plenty of room for improvement, a culture of reading is unequivocally taking root at the schools we visited. The training, Story Sparker support and reading materials provided to schools are of excellent quality. These have spurred changes in knowledge, attitudes and practice, and schools report that children's reading skills are improving as a result.

We witnessed enormous potential for schools to take ownership of and sustain the programme, especially if tweaks are made to project design, implementation and communication, "permission to innovate" is given, and Nal'ibali's contact with schools is sustained.

In the words of two principals:

> *"Nal'ibali has not been here for so long, but the love of reading that has been ploughed into our learners, it's amazing. They have gained confidence. They are able to go to the front and narrate their own stories.* **Such programmes need to go to all the provinces, so we will be on the same page***." – Principal, School C*

> *"Even if…[Nal'ibali] moved to other districts, we as [school name],* **we are still going to continue the programme for life***." – Principal, School H*

A Grade 4 child shows off her storytelling skills in Uthukela.

Footnote

The researchers wish to express their gratitude to the project team for facilitating and making time for school visits; for joining them in the field at several schools; and most of all, for their passion, commitment and dedication to bringing the ambitious Story Powered Schools vision to life.

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18 April 2018

Appendix A: Interview questionnaires

Below are the interview questions developed for the research. (These were tweaked between the September and March visits, based on our experience and learning – here we present the final versions used in March.)

The interviews were semi-structured and did not always follow the script as laid out below; however, this questionnaire provides an indication of what was covered in interviews.

Principals

Nal'ibali SPS internal research – March 2018
Interview questionnaire: PRINCIPALS

School and district: _____

Interview subject: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

1. **Tell us a bit about yourself. How long have you been the principal at this school?**

2. **In your own words, what does it mean to you to be a Story Powered School?**

   [If teacher / SS did not answer]
3. **Do you have any other reading or literacy programmes running at your school, or did you in the past?** *IF YES: What is the programme called? Can you tell us about it?*

4. **What do you think about the hanging libraries from Nal'ibali?**

   [If teachers/SS did not answer]
   Did your school have any books before receiving hanging libraries?

5. **Which parts of the Story Powered Schools programme have been the most useful or helpful for your school?**

6. **Have you seen any changes in your school or your community since the Story Powered Schools programme came to your school?**
   PROMPTS/FOLLOW- UP:
   - *Have you seen any changes in children?*
   - *Have you seen any changes in teachers?*
   - *Have you seen any changes in community members or community involvement?*

   > [*CHANGES MAY INCLUDE:*]
   > - *Awareness that reading for enjoyment is important*
   > - *Understanding of how reading for enjoyment helps children learn*
   > - *Motivation to read/ write/ share stories*
   > - *Print- rich environments*
   > - *More time spent reading/writing/sharing stories*
   > - *Community involvement in schools/reading promotion*

> - *Children choosing what they want to read*
> - *Children taking books/supplements home*
> - *Children's reading skills*
> - *Other*
> - *FOR ANY CHANGE – NOTE WHO WAS INVOLVED*

7. **What feedback do you have that would help Nal'ibali make this programme better?**

8. **Is there anything else you want to share?**

Teachers

Nal'ibali SPS internal research –March 2018
Interview questionnaire: TEACHERS

School and district:

Interview subject:

Researcher:

Date:

1. **Tell us a bit about yourself, and what subjects and grades you are teaching**

2. **In your own words, what does it mean to you to be a Story Powered School?**

3. **Did you attend Nal'ibali training?**
   IF YES:
   - *Was it Big 5 or community training? (Big 5 = 2 days training, community = 1 day training)*
   - *What did you think about the training?*
   - *What are the main things you learned from the training?*
   - *Did you share what you learned with anyone who did not go to training?*

4. **What kinds of reading for enjoyment activities is your school doing since Nal'ibali came to your school?**
   FOR ACTIVITIES MENTIONED, USE PROMPTS:
   - *How often? When? Who leads that activity?*
   - *Was the activity happening before Nal'ibali came to this school?*

   READING CLUB PROMPTS:
   - *Do you run or help run a reading club?*
   - *Do you do any reading for enjoyment activities in the classroom?*

   > [*ACTIVITIES MAY INCLUDE:*]
   > - *School reading clubs*
   > - *Community reading clubs*
   > - *Reading (DEAR time)*
   > - *Reading aloud to children*
   > - *Library activities / children check out books*
   > - *Writing*

> - *Storytelling*
> - *Holiday programmes*
> - *Reading club showcase*
> - *Events*
> - *Reading for enjoyment activities in class (before/during/after activities), e.g. games, drawing, songs, book talk, drama/play*

5. **We'd like to ask a few questions about the hanging libraries.**
   - **Did your school have many books before receiving hanging libraries?**
     IF YES: About how many books did you have? Are they readers or story books? What languages are they in?

   - **Where do you keep the hanging libraries?**

   - **How is your school using the books?**
     PROMPTS:
     - *Do you have a checkout system?*
     - *Can children take books home?*
     - *If you're not using the books, what are the main reasons you don't use them?*

   - **Do you think hanging library is a good system for storing and displaying books? Why or why not?**

   - **Do you have any suggestions about how Nal'ibali can improve the hanging libraries?**

6. **How are the books that Nal'ibali gave your school?**

   PROMPTS:
   - *Are the books interesting and relevant to the children?*
   - *Are the books at the right level for the children, or are they too easy or difficult?*
   - *What are your favourite titles? What are the children's favourite title?*
   - *Are there any books that you and the children did not like or did not use? If so which books and why not?*
   - *Is the balance of English vs [Xhosa/Zulu] books right or would like more books in one of the languages?*

7. **What feedback do you have about the Nal'ibali supplements?**

8. **How are you using the supplements?**

   PROMPTS:
   - *Do you use the supplements as a classroom aid?*
   - *Do you use the supplement in reading clubs (If you are involved in reading clubs)*
   - *Do supplements go home with children?*
   - *How often should supplements be delivered?*

9. ***Do you have any other reading or literacy programmes running at your school, or did you in the past?***
   IF YES: What is the programme called? Can you tell us about it?

10. ***Are any community members actively involved in reading for enjoyment activities?***
    IF YES:
    - *Who are they? What activities are they doing? Where, when, How often?*
    - *Were they already active before Nal'ibali came to your school?*

11. ***Which parts of the Story Powered School programme have been the most useful or helpful for your school?***

Community members

Nal'ibali SPS internal research –March 2018
Interview questionnaire: COMMUNITY MEMBERS

School and district: _____

Interview subject: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

1. **Tell us a bit about yourself, and what subjects and grades you are teaching?**
   PROMPTS: Are you a parent? Retired teacher? Graduate of this school? Teriary graduate? Etc…

2. **How did you get involved with Nal'ibali?**

3. **Did you attend Nal'ibali training?**
   IF YES:
   - *Which training did you attend - Was it Big 5 or community training? (Big 5 = 2 days training, Community = 1 day training)*
   - *What did you think about the training?*
   - *What are the main things you learned from the training?*

4. ***Which activities are you doing with Nal'ibali at this school?***
   PROMPTS: How often? Where?
   Were you already doing any of these activities before Nal'ibali came to this school?

5. **Have you seen any changes in your school or your community since the Story Powered Schools programme came to your school?**
   PROMPTS/FOLLOW – UPS:
   - *If you are a parent or guardian, have you seen any changes in your child?*
   - *Have you seen any changes in the children you work with?*
   - *Have you seen any changes at the school?*
   - *Have you seen any changes in parents/ the broader community?*

> CHANGES MAY INCLUDE:
> - Awareness that reading for enjoyment is important
> - Understanding of how reading for enjoyment helps children learn
> - Motivation to read/ write/ sharing stories
> - Print rich environments
> - More time spent reading/ writing/ sharing stories
> - Community involvement in schools/ reading promotion
> - Children choosing what they want to read
> - Children's reading skills
> - Other
>   FOR ANY CHANGE – NOTE WHO WAS INVOLVED

6. **What feedback do you have that would help Nal'ibali make this programme better?**

7. **Is there anything else you want to share?**

Story Sparkers

Nal'ibali SPS internal research – March 2018
Interview questionnaire: STORY SPARKERS

School and district: _____

Interview subject: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

1. **Tell us a bit about yourself. How did you come to join Nal'ibali? What did you do before you joined Nal'ibali?**

2. **In your own words, what does it mean to be a Story Powered School?**

3. **How did this school respond when Nal'ibali first came here?**

4. **What does a typical day look like when you visit this school?**
   PROMPTS:
   - *What activities do you run yourself?*
   - *How do you work with teachers?*
   - *Do teachers run or help run reading clubs?*

5. **How active do you think the teachers and community members are on days when you are not at the school? What activities are taking place at the school / in the community?**
   PROMPTS:
   - *What reading for enjoyment activities are they doing independently?*
   - *How often? When? Where? Who leads that activity?*
   - *Was the activity happening before Nal'ibali came to this school*

> [*ACTIVITIES MAY INCLUDE:*]

> - *School reading clubs*
> - *Community reading clubs*
> - *Reading (DEAR time)*
> - *Reading aloud to children*
> - *Library activities / children check out books*
> - *Writing*
> - *Storytelling*
> - *Holiday programmes*
> - *Reading club showcase*
> - *Events*
> - *Reading for enjoyment activities in class (before/during/after activities), e.g. games, drawing, songs, book talk, drama/play*

6. **We'd like to ask a few questions about the hanging libraries.**
   a. **Where does this school keep the hanging libraries?**

   b. **How are the books being used?**
      PROMPTS:
      o *When / how do children use the books?*
      o *When/ how do teachers use books?*
      o *Does the school have a checkout system?*
      o *Can children take books home?*
      o *If you're not using the books, what are the main reasons you don't use them?*

   c. **Do you think hanging library is a good system for storing and displaying books? Why or why not?**

   d. **How do you think Nal'ibali can improve the hanging libraries?**

7. **How are the books that Nal'ibali gave your school?**
   PROMPTS:
   a. *Are the books interesting and relevant to the children?*
   b. *Are the books at the right level for the children, or are they too easy or difficult?*
   c. *What are your favourite titles? What are the children's favourite titles?*
   d. *Are there any books that you and the children did not like or did not use? If so, which books and why not?*
   e. *Is the balance of English vs [Xhosa/Zulu] books right, or would you like more books in one of the languages?*

8. **How are supplements being used?**
   PROMPTS:
   - *Do you use the supplement as a classroom aid?*
   - *Do you use the supplement in reading clubs (if you are involved in reading clubs)?*
   - *Do supplements go home with children?*
   - *What do you think of supplements compared to books?*

9. **Are any community members actively involved in reading for enjoyment activities?**
   IF YES:
   - *Who are they? (e.g. parent, SGB member, retired teacher, youth)*
   - *What activities are they doing? Where, when, how often?*
   - *Do you know if they were already active before Nal'ibali came to this school?*

10. **What do you think are the most useful or helpful parts of the Story Powered Schools Programme?**

11. **Have you seen any changes in your school or community since the Story Powered Schools Programme came to your school?**
    PROMPTS/FOLLOW-UPS:
    - *Have you seen any changes in children?*
    - *Have you seen any changes in teachers?*
    - *Have you seen any changes in community members or community involvement?*

    > *CHANGES MAY INCLUDE:*
    > - *Awareness that reading for enjoyment is important*
    > - *Understanding of how reading for enjoyment helps children learn*
    > - *Motivation to read / write / share stories*
    > - *Print-rich environments*
    > - *More time spent reading / writing / sharing stories*
    > - *Community involvement in schools / reading promotion*
    > - *Children choosing what they want to read*
    > - *Children taking books/supplements home*
    > - *Children's reading skills*
    > - *Other*
    >
    > *FOR ANY CHANGE – NOTE WHO WAS INVOLVED*

12. **What feedback do you have that would help Nal'ibali make this programme better?**

13. **Is there anything else you want to share?**

Appendix B: Observation checklist

The researchers used this tool to guide their observations during visits. They jointly discussed their experiences after visits to compare, verify and cross-check their observations.

Nal'ibali SPS internal research –March 2018
OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

School and district: _____

Story Sparker: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Visit summary: (e.g. classes/reading clubs observed; interviews conducted)

HANGING LIBRARIES	
Indicator	**Observations / Comments**
Where are libraries kept?	
Do books look used or brand new?	
Evidence of check-out system?	
Evidence of learners taking out books?	
Evidence of books being read by teachers in classroom?	
Other comments	

SUPPLEMENTS	
Indicator	**Observations / Comments**
Evidence of supplements at school?	
Evidence of supplements being used? (If so – by whom? How?)	
Other comments	

PRINT-RICH ENVIRONMENTS

Indicator	Observations / Comments
Are Nal'ibali resources on display? (e.g. posters, supplements, hanging libraries)	
Do teachers have their own resources on display?	
Is children's work on display?	
Is print-rich content meaningful/ relevant?	
What languages are used?	
Other comments: (What do classrooms look like?)	

READING CLUB(S)

Indicator	Observations / Comments
Who runs/helps run the reading club? (e.g. SS, teacher, volunteer) One person or more than one?	
How many children in the reading club? Are children all from the same grade?	
In what language(s) does the reading club take place? How are the languages used?	
When does the reading club take place?	
How long does the reading club last?	
How often does the reading club take place?	
Which resources are used? How? By whom? If supplement, which section(s)? In what language(s)?	
Which activities are done?	
What is the interaction like between adults and children?	
Other comments:	

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES	
Indicator	**Observations / Comments**
Which activities are done? By whom? In which languages?	
Which resources are used? By whom? In which languages?	
What is the interaction like between adults and children?	
Other comments:	

Appendix C: Consent form

All interview participants signed the consent form below, except for the principal of School F (whose interview took the form of a less formal discussion with the Programme Manager and funder representatives). During the second round of visits, business cards with one researcher's contact information were also distributed.

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in an interview for the Nal'ibali Story Powered Schools project.

I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can choose not to answer a specific question, or that I can stop this interview at any point should I not want to continue, and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively.

I understand that this is internal research being conducted by Nal'ibali, with the goal of improving the Story Powered Schools programme, and that nothing I say will affect me or my school negatively.

I understand that no potential risks are envisaged, as the evaluation is not looking for personally sensitive information about myself or anyone at my school.

I understand that my interview will be kept confidential.

I understand that no financial costs or reimbursements are involved with this interview.

I understand that this interview will be digitally recorded and I hereby agree to the recording.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact the interviewers:

Katie Huston, katie@nalibali.org, 0735071464
Luleka Bara, luleka@nalibali.org, 0732658839

_____ _____
Name of Participant   Signature

_____ _____
Participant phone number   Email address

_____ _____
Name of Researcher   Signature

_____
Date