Can Workbooks Improve Learner Performance?

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Abstract: The study is a randomized control trial in 42 primary schools in quintiles 1-4 in the Gauteng Province of South Africa using a method that is commonly regarded as the ‘gold-standard’ in social science research. Two sets of quality learner materials were tested. The main study was undertaken in January to July 2010. The schools were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Learners in the experimental group were all issued with a ‘workbook’, which children write in directly. The workbook emphasizes basic skill proficiency and the four basic operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Learners in the control group of schools were all given an approved textbook that is widely used in South African primary schools. The trial covered 14 weeks of the Grade 6 NCS curriculum. In addition to books and teacher guides, both the experimental and control groups received two days of training in the use of the books and three classroom visits to monitor coverage. In this talk I will present the main findings and discuss some implications for policy and further research.

Ingrid Sapire has been involved in mathematics teacher education for 17 years. She worked as a full-time lecturer for eight years at the Johannesburg College of Education (JCE). She has been involved in the development and presentation of materials for mathematics teacher education courses and training programmes, has written and edited primary and high school mathematics text books, and has developed and reviewed on-line interactive mathematics material. She is currently employed as a project coordinator and researcher in the Data Informed Practice Improvement Project (DIPIP).