

JULY 2016

POINT OF VIEW

In the past four years, important research has been carried out in South Africa to try to understand why our literacy results are so low. These studies have focused on Grades 1-5, and found that children struggle to read fluently and to understand what they read. Proposed solutions include putting more reading material in classrooms and improving teachers' knowledge about how to teach reading effectively.

While we welcome increased support for teachers in the early grades, we have questioned why research on our literacy crisis has not considered children's levels of language and early literacy before they begin Grade 1. Early literacy experts have found that the first six years of a child's life have a strong influence on how easily they learn to read and write.

Children who learn to read and write successfully don't only do so because they have better teachers in the early grades. They do so because they have the benefit of language- and text-rich homes and ECD Centres, and a high quality Grade R year. It is in these early years that we build a love of books, an understanding of how print works and strong spoken language that will support the development of reading and writing.

To find solutions to our literacy problems, we must start looking for the roots of literacy in the years from birth to six. We need a much better understanding of levels of language and literacy as children enter school. And, crucially, we need to involve families and communities in our solutions to the literacy crisis.

Before they walk into a Grade 1 classroom, some fortunate children will have had six years of experiences that support the development of reading and writing. How would our school literacy results change if all children had access to these experiences?



Shelley O'Carroll,
Director of Wordworks

Wordworks joined the **Positive Poster Week** initiative to help showcase good news for a change. Teachers, parents and volunteers made posters to convey a positive message to our children and communities about their involvement in literacy. See our album of these heartwarming posters on our facebook page (<http://bit.ly/29pTtt0>).



Did you know?

The brain develops faster between the ages of zero and three than at any other time! Children begin learning language - and about language - from the moment of birth. The more language a baby hears, the more her brain will grow and develop.

STOP PRESS... STOP PRESS...

3000 Grade R Teachers, 80 WCED Advisors, 250 Lead Teachers, 6 Wordworks Support-Advisors, 10 NGO Trainers, and 5 days!

Week-long block training sessions took place throughout the Western Cape and in groups in the Eastern Cape and North West Province during the school holidays. This followed five monthly cluster meetings to support Grade R teachers, using an integrated, story-based approach to early language and emergent literacy. See our facebook page for inspiring pictures and stories.

My story

My name is Babette le Roux. As a teacher and a researcher I was troubled by the poor performance of South African learners in national and international literacy assessments. Knowing



that early intervention is key, I directed my attention to ways of supporting informal learning opportunities at home. That interest led to a doctoral study with the theme: *The role of family literacy to*

support emergent literacy in young learners. The aim of the study was to investigate how family literacy programmes can assist to bridge the literacy gap between informal learning at home and formal learning in school so that young learners can come to school better prepared. I implemented the *Wordworks Home-School Partnership Programme* and the outcomes confirmed a greater sense of community, improved confidence in parenting for literacy development, improvement in quality of parent-child interaction and a raised awareness of literacy learning opportunities at home. Implementation of the programme also strengthened the relationship of trust between parents and teachers and created a new level of confidence to approach the school whenever parents need to seek clarity on curriculum issues. The teacher-facilitators also reported less tension and stress around children's reading in the classroom; that the children who had participated in the programme have much more confidence in the classroom and feel less intimidated by reading and learning. Family Literacy Programmes have much to offer if we are serious about improved literacy outcomes.

Top tip:

Love and communication boosts a baby's brain!

The way the parent or caregiver responds to a baby can change a baby's life forever! IF the parent responds to a baby's babbling, smiling, cries and gestures from birth, THEN the baby will be encouraged to respond. The baby will know it is worth the effort, will feel 'listened to' and will COMMUNICATE more and more. The more a baby communicates, the more the baby's language develops, laying the foundations for all learning.



Did you see?

Two new academic papers have been written on our Home-School Partnership programme. Babette (Sarlina) Le Roux's doctoral study is on "The role of family literacy programmes to support emergent literacy in young learners" (read more in My Story on the left), and Dawn Cozett's masters thesis is titled "Determining the efficacy of the Home School Partnership Programme (HSPP)." You can access these studies on our website (<http://wordworks.org.za/academic-studies/>).



For more information visit our website: www.wordworks.org.za or keep up to date with our activities by following us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/wordworksSA.

Calendar

Ready, steady ...read and write!

26th, 27th and 28th July: Co-ordinator training
23rd & 24th August: Grade One Tutor training
30th & 31st August: Grade One Tutor training

Every Word Counts

12 – 14 July: Grahamstown, Eastern Cape
30 Aug – 1 Sept: Underberg, KwaZulu-Natal
13 October: Refresher workshop, Cape Town

Home School Partnership Programme

25 and 27 October: Orientation for new facilitators

STELLAR

11 – 15 July: Emergent Literacy for Grade R teachers – 5-day course (WCED Districts, North West and Eastern Cape Partners)
1 – 5 August: Emergent Literacy for Grade R teachers - Cluster 6 (for participating WCED Districts, North West and Eastern Cape Partners)
5 – 9 September: Emergent Literacy for Grade R teachers - Cluster 7 (for participating WCED Districts, North West and Eastern Cape Partners)