

POINT OF VIEW

There is no doubt that learning to read and write in the language you speak at home is the best choice for young children, and that knowing how to read and write in one language supports the development of literacy in another language. Rather than being in competition, first and second languages are interdependent.

In South Africa there is a great need for resources that support effective language learning in multilingual contexts both at home and at school. The Wordworks team has been developing early literacy materials since 2005, and although we began our work in English, in recent years we have made it a priority to develop materials in other languages too.

For us, translation is not a technical exercise of simply replacing English words with their equivalent in another language – it requires that we grapple with terms in different languages and that we are sensitive to dialects and regional variations in language usage. We also need an understanding of how children learn to read and write in different languages.

Our programme materials and free resources for download on our website are now increasingly available in more than one language (www.wordworks.org.za). We hope that these resources will be used to create multi-lingual language and literacy learning opportunities for young children. We are also working on a multilingual glossary of language and literacy terms which we will share on our website.



Shelley O' Carroll,
Director of Wordworks

PICTURE STORIES



This quarter over 150 new teacher facilitators were trained to facilitate our Home-School Partnerships Programme



Subsistence farmers in KZN participating in an Every Word Counts workshop being offered by Thanda - one of our new partners.



Ready Steady Read Write volunteer tutors in action. Over 82 new tutors were trained this quarter!

Training for Wordworks Programmes

If you would like to attend training in one of our programmes, please consult our website for training dates. Application forms will be available on the website when applications open: <http://www.wordworks.org.za/category/train-with-us/>



MY STORY

Xolisa Guzula, a passionate proponent of multi-lingual education, is a doctoral student who currently teaches PGCE students. Xolisa has had wide language and literacy teaching experience at schools and universities. She has also trained trainers and worked with parents in the NGO sector. Below are extracts from her story on our website.



In 1998, I worked as a researcher observing children at home and at school. While this taught me a lot about early literacy development, I always wished that I could do more than observe and describe – I wanted to intervene!

From 2001-2012 I was employed at PRAESA, and the Early Literacy Unit, doing action research which helped me to do both research and development at the same time. Here we put an emphasis on emergent literacy, especially emergent biliteracy development. Getting bilingual children to learn to read and write in both languages simultaneously was our alternative approach to teaching language and literacy; and a way to disrupt the monolingual bias in our education system. We believed that young bilingual children can learn to read and write in both of their languages if teachers support and value their bilingual efforts.

Our approach valued informal and implicit learning strategies, to complement teacher's formal and direct teaching approaches. We also found mentoring teachers through team teaching to be a non-threatening way to help teachers to improve their teaching methods and pedagogies. It was different from evaluating teachers without modelling to them that which they have to do. We emphasized reflective practice and 'kidwatching' (to use Goodman's term) as a way to get teachers to notice individual children's early literacy development. Team teaching, reflective practice and training through workshops became our strategies for mentorship.

I am now studying towards my PhD focussing on multiliteracies and translanguaging practices in an afterschool literacy club. At the same time I am doing part time work with Wordworks. This has been twofold. I advise on isiXhosa literacy content in as far as it differs from the English. Most often, early literacy teachers are taught in English and have to translate the work to mother tongue in the classroom. This is very tricky because people's interpretations differ and may lead to different applications of the strategies taught. A lot of important knowledge gets lost in this way. Secondly, I translated most of the Wordworks teacher professional development materials as well as parent training material. In doing this, I developed and coined terminologies for literacy in Xhosa.

By making teacher training material in isiXhosa, we not only make it easy for teachers to access material in mother tongue but also contribute to giving power to isiXhosa as a language of teaching and learning, beyond just teaching the children but for teacher professional development.



TOP TIP

To all parents and caregivers: Use every opportunity to talk with children in your mother tongue! This helps build a strong foundation of language for literacy before your child starts school. Listen to your child babbling and talking, follow what interests your baby or child and comment on what they are doing, add words or ask and answer questions. When your child is with you, think out loud and talk about what you are doing. You will be surprised at how much language children can learn from these simple exchanges!



DID YOU HEAR?

Three new early literacy specialists have joined our team in 2017! Welcome to Asanda Mphala, Sarah Florence and Phutunywa Gxavu who have already greatly enriched our work with their insight and experience. Read more about them (and the rest of our early literacy team) on our website.



For more information visit www.wordworks.org.za

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