

## FROM SHELLEY

### Grade R - what a year!

Since 2001, the Department of Basic Education has invested in increasing access to Grade R but the rapid expansion of Grade R provision has not yet had an impact on learning outcomes for the poorest children. There is now increasing recognition that access is not enough – quality of teaching and learning is what counts.

But what would quality look like – how would Grade R children experience a quality year of literacy learning? Even though they can't yet read independently, this is the year that children learn about the magic of stories and books. They learn that the book corner is a great place to spend time, and books become friends. This is the year when they learn to express their views orally, so that one day they will have the language and confidence to set down their thoughts in writing. This is the year when they develop a curiosity about meanings of words in their own language, and others, so that they will one day have a wide and deep vocabulary that will support reading comprehension. This is the year when they become more confident at expressing their ideas through drawing, and their drawings start to look like what they are trying to represent. They learn that unlike drawing, written words aren't a representation of how things look, but of the sounds in our spoken words. They learn that the sounds in the words we speak are represented by letters in our writing system. They start to experiment with forming these letters and writing the sounds that they hear in words.

This is the year when children build key foundations for literacy in ways that are fun and playful, when words, sounds, letters and books become part of their everyday world. What a year!

Of course, all of these things can (and should be) happening before Grade R in homes and ECD Centres. However, in South Africa many children don't have access to rich language and literacy learning opportunities in their early years. ECD Centres and homes are under-resourced and there are very limited opportunities for parents to learn more about how to read with their children and support language learning in informal ways.

Until government invests more in the birth to 5 space, Grade R is likely to be the most pivotal year in a child's school career. It is here that we bridge home and school in our poorest communities, and give children the foundations they need to succeed.



Shelley O'Carroll,  
Director of Wordworks



## Stellar partner and public workshops

We have been delighted with the warm reception of our updated materials at the various courses and workshops we have held this year. We enjoyed the exchange between experienced Stellar trainers and teachers, and people new to the programme – there has been so much for us all to learn from one another! The following partners have all been hard at work supporting trained teachers and taking Stellar to 112 new Grade R teachers this year: Khululeka, Axiom, CSD, Early Inspiration, ITEC, Lebone, Knysna Education Trust, ELRU, PSP, SDU, Molo Mhlaba.





## MY STORY

### Lesley Pearson

*Les Pearson is a Subject Advisor for ECD and the Foundation Phase. She is a committed educator and passionate about the potential of the Grade R year. Years ago she introduced the Stellar programme in District South, and following this, Stellar was*

*incorporated into the WCED's provincial ELIT project for Grade R. As part of their ongoing commitment to quality Grade R, the district has purchased update packs for all Stellar teachers. We hope they bring these unsung heroes new inspiration! A warm Wordworks thank you to Les and all her colleagues for their vision and their hard work to build a reading nation.*

When my colleagues at Metro South were involved in the Litnum strategy with WCED, I wanted to do something for the Grade R educators too. Then I was introduced to Wordworks, and we have never looked back. The sooner young children are introduced to strong emergent literacy skills, the better: they will have fewer problems later in their lives, and will need less (if any) corrective work in the higher grades. The spinoff will be improved literacy results in our systemic tests because the foundation laid will be so strong.

I know that nothing that is worth something is ever easy. Running the ELIT programme in Metro South was a huge project. There were tough times, but when I look back, I have learnt all sorts of skills, and above all, many, many young lives have been touched.

I have learned the power of a team. I was supported by many people while we were rolling out the ELIT programme, including my colleagues at the District Office and the folk at Wordworks. But a huge shout-out must go to the Lead Teachers – I was so privileged to work alongside them. Three years later, we still share life together, together with our ideas, inside jokes and our love for Hershey Chocolates.

One of my earliest memories as a little girl is Mom reading a bedtime story to me at night. That daily ritual started my lifelong love for reading. I remember those stories well, and some of those stories are still around today. As we read and engage with language and literacy, the journey of life becomes a new discovery on a daily basis. I know the joy I have experienced from dreaming and discovering all sorts of worlds through books. My wish is that all children experience those same discoveries from a very young age.

On the cover of my 2018 diary, I have the famous quote from Dr Seuss: 'You're never too old, too wacky, too wild, to pick up a book and read to a child.'

If all of us across South Africa could do just that, we would create warmth, love and joy. And what a great reading nation we will be.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Stellar Teacher's Guides for each story were revised and are now available. They contain comprehensive activities for a two-week cycle of teaching. There are story-based, letters and sounds, and rotation group activities for each day, clearly laid out, with a weekly planner to guide you. The Stellar Update Pack costs R315 (for those who already have a Stellar file). The Stellar Teacher's Box (complete resource including classroom materials) costs R850. Order form: <http://www.wordworks.org.za/category/buy-resources/>



## DID YOU HEAR?

Stellar has a brand-new Teacher's Guide for Parent Meetings. Wordworks developed this guide to help busy Grade R teachers to get parents interested in their children's schooling and resource them to support their children's learning at home. The guide provides teachers with clear guidelines, handouts and practical ideas for six parent meetings. <http://www.wordworks.org.za/category/buy-resources/>



## TOP TIP

Encourage your child to write for a purpose this festive season.

There are lots of reasons to write – just think of your family's favourite festive recipes, shopping lists for celebratory meals, greeting and gift cards, thank you notes, invitations, captions for family photographs, and New Year's resolutions. You can write yourself, reading aloud to your child as you do so, or you can encourage your children to write what they want to say. Even if it is very early writing, leave it just as it is and give lots of praise. Ask your child to 'read' it to you, and sometimes offer to write it in grown up writing underneath.



## DID YOU SEE?

We are so pleased that Shelley's article, **How you can be part of the solution to our literacy crisis** – Mail & Guardian, has been so well received online. If you missed it, find it here. And please share widely. This is something we can only get right together!

<https://mg.co.za/article/2018-11-26-how-you-can-be-part-of-the-solution-to-our-literacy-crisis>