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BRIDGE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT COP MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

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01 SETTING THE SCENE

Literacy remains an enduring challenge in South Africa's education system. Research indicates that 80% of Grade 5 learners, between the ages of 9 and 10 year's old, have not mastered basic reading skills. Results from a global literacy study paint an even grimmer picture. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assessing children's reading comprehension has placed South African children last in 50 countries. These details formed the focal point of the last Teacher Development CoP held on 1 November 2018.

02 HELP2READ

Soon after checking-in, Help2Read's Thuli Mashiyane took members through an exercise that required them to decipher nonsensical text with an accompanying image. Thuli used the exercise as an analogy to express the difficulty of learning to read for a great many children. The CoP was then given an overview of Help2Read - a developmental NGO which provides children who struggle to read with one-on-one attention from a volunteer 'Reading Helper' or community 'Literacy Tutor'.

Through consistent literacy skills input, reading help and the inclusion of fun activities – participants in the programme not only learn to read, but fall in love with it. The salient points of Thuli's presentation are captured below.

WHY DO CHILDREN STRUGGLE TO READ?

- Disrupted schooling and poor attendance (learners miss important concepts and fall further and further behind) – Illness, lack of parental involvement, transport problems, poverty, food insecurity, poor school facilities, poor learner educator relationships (e.g. learners may fear their teachers)
- Medical problems – Hearing, sight (children struggle to express this as they don't realise others can see better than they do – how do teachers recognise these subtle signs?), special needs, learning disorders
- Home environments – Is the home a literature rich environment? Do children have access to reading material? Are children getting enough sleep and/or food? Do children have role models who read regularly? Are parents literate and confident enough to help their children learn how to read?

All of these issues leads to low self-esteem in children which further discourages them from learning to read.

WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED IN ORDER TO LEARN?

- Time – an opportunity to learn at their own pace
- One on one help
- Patience and understanding – a chance to keep trying until they get it right
- Encouragement and praise – both for trying and when they get it right
- Relevant and inspiring resources and an interest in the subject
- An atmosphere of fun and enjoyment (taking children out of a known environment encourages this – consider reading outside)
- Motivation and the freedom to stop when they've had enough
- The room to make mistakes

HOW DO WE AS HELP2READ CULTIVATE A READING CULTURE?

- Involve children in the reading process – talk about the books they're reading, ask them what they like to read

- Inspire the child – the reading culture must be visible and practiced. Learners need to see teachers reading
- Give children choice – reading time is not too structured
- Provide a variety of resources
- Ensure the sessions are child-led – start where the child is regardless of their grade level
- Enjoy reading together – do children see you laughing at stories or exclaiming in excitement? Ask children if they've enjoyed the book and ensure they feel safe enough to give their honest opinion

WHAT DOES A HELP2READ READING SESSION INVOLVE?

- Choosing books and games
- Reading and checking for understanding
- Looking at letters, sounds and words (e.g. using kinetic teaching to teach reading and vocabulary – literally allow children to jump when they learn the word 'jump' so they're more likely to remember it)
- Playing games
- Talking – engage in conversation about the reading material
- Encouragement and praise (not just for getting it right, but for trying too)

WHAT IS A READING CULTURE?

A learned practice of seeking knowledge, information or entertainment through the written word.

"A teacher commented that the children in the Help2Read programmes may not gain those reading skills overnight, but it does so much to improve their confidence. She said her learners are more eager to volunteer to read even if they are not advanced readers."

— THULI MASHIYANE, HELP2READ



WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR SCHOOL & CLASSROOM?

- A holistic understanding of the link between reading and school achievements
- A vision for the school's reading culture
- A shared understanding of said vision
- Reinforcing the reading culture and exemplifying engaged readers constantly
- Prioritising the library, its resources, services and programmes
- Maximise your existing reading groups – extend your day by 15-20 mins to avoid rushing through reading activities; establish different ability reading groups taking turns to ensure each group is given special time with the teacher
- Shared reading (CAPS) – from requirement to daily practice; end each day with shared reading; read to your learners (be animated as you read/make it look fun and model that to learners); ask learners to volunteer to read.

To access Thuli's presentation, click [here](#).
To learn more about Help2Read, click [here](#).

03 QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

After Thuli's presentation, CoP members had an opportunity to ask questions and share their thoughts. Some key points from this process are captured below:

- It's important to source the right reading materials – materials that interests children. In the advent of 4th Industrial Revolution, consider diverse reading materials like comics or audio books, or online reading materials such as blogs, e-books etc.
- Consider non-traditional approaches to teaching reading, such as using Youtube, Instagram, and Wikipedia
- Treating reading as punishment discourages children from taking it up
- Children that have been transferred to English medium schools from schools that use vernacular often struggle to grasp English when it is the medium of instruction. However, research shows that children with a full grasp of their mother tongue adapt better in English medium schools than learners who don't
- Private ECD centres that aren't adequately regulated add to the problem of illiteracy as they do not prioritise reading
- Representation in reading material matters – children are more interested and invested in reading if they can recognise themselves and their contexts in what they read
- Pronunciation – we take our cue from educators who say that if the pronunciation undermines the understanding of the word you correct it, but if it doesn't – you leave it be



04 GROUP WORK: SOLUTIONS TO READING CHALLENGES

BRIDGE's Hassiena Marriott led CoP members through the last session of the day – a group activity which required them to think of some solutions to the literacy crisis in South Africa. Some of these innovative ideas are captured below:

- Put ‘drop everything and read’ into action (whole school participation)
- Invite icons and celebs as part of a fun event to read with learners (e.g. reading pyjama party)
- Create different spaces where learners can read which are different from their regular work spaces (e.g. outside or the back of the classroom)
- Make reading come alive – if there is a bee in the story, make a buzzing sound
- Source books based on the TV shows learners enjoy so the materials interest them (e.g. Batman, Star Wars, etc.)
- Use PVC pipes to create a telephone with two ends so that learners can hear themselves reading
- Use chalkboard laptops – you make a laptop using chalk paint and cardboard material and use it as a fun tool for learners to practice spelling etc.
- Use the ‘ZINGO’ game (like Bingo) – have children create the game
- Use culturally relevant material given SA’s multi-cultural and multi-lingual context



Learning to read is an ongoing process that should be done by all teachers across all subjects. All teachers are reading teachers.

CoP MEMBER

BRIDGE looks forward to the creative ideas that will emerge from its Teacher Development CoP in 2019, and will continue to update you on new and exciting developments as they happen.