

EDUCATION TO  
READ AND WRITE

# Hands-on

Learning from our implementing partners

## The Shine Centre: Words can Change Worlds

Relative to our investments in education, South Africa has one of the lowest literacy and numeracy rates in the world. Most school going children today are reading very little or not at all. A future generation plunged into literacy poverty has disastrous consequences for South Africa. Cas Prinsloo, the Chief Research Specialist at the Education Research Unit for the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) reports that the reasons for this problem were complex, pointing to poor teacher training, a lack of skills, poor support for pupils in their homes and shortages of educational resources. The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) tests in numeracy and literacy have consistently shown that learners' performance levels are so low that they would not be able to cope at high school level. In the Western Cape Shine noted the following challenges at schools that they chose to support:

To us it was apparent that the majority of children were not coping academically, possibly due to the fact that most of them had no formal pre-education, and there was very little support available to them. Teacher morale was extremely low and class sizes were between 35 and 43 which were overwhelming for teachers. There was also little or no remedial support available to children and parents who could not afford private tuition and a lack of early intervention and close monitoring of children's progress meant that it was very easy for children to fall between the cracks. Children with poor eye-sight or hearing were overlooked in this way while children with high potential were failing at school unnecessarily. This, in turn, affected their self-esteem and caused behaviour problems.

What is more, many children at these schools came from economically challenged households and often came to school hungry. Although very few children had books at home or access to a public

library, access to readers and reading books at school was not ideal as school libraries were closed and teachers did not allow their learners to take readers home. The learners were also learning in their second language despite the fact that the school curriculum was designed for children learning in their home language and very few could speak English when they began Grade One.

Many of the parents of these children simply assumed that all was well because they thought these schools were much better than the schools in their own communities. They did not understand the difficulties facing their children or the teachers. They had no idea what the literacy rate at the school was, had little communication with other parents and therefore assumed it was their children's fault if they were failing.

Screening all children at the end of Grade One would ensure that any child needing extra support in literacy could be identified and notice of serious problems and recommendations forwarded to the relevant departments (i.e. poor eyesight, poor hearing, speech defects and learning disabilities). By creating a literacy support centre for the Foundation Phase within the school, gaps in learning could be quickly remedied, poor self esteem could be addressed and teachers could benefit from the individual support that they were unable to give children due to the enormous needs of their large classes.

By the end of Grade 3 all children would be able to read to learn and those who were still struggling would have a detailed profile with a relevant assessment on file. Grade 4 teachers have not received training on how to teach children to read nor does the curriculum allow for this. If a child has not learnt to read by Grade 4 the chances are that they never will.



### **How we assist schools in literacy education**

Shine's strategy is to provide schools that offer a Foundation Phase with an intervention programme driven by trained volunteers. This programme is implemented in a centre which is established within the school and run during school hours. Any child that is not coping with literacy spends two hours a week from the beginning of Grade 2 to the end of Grade 3 and follows the Shine programme. Each volunteer works with either one or two children per session. Every six months the child's progress is monitored and results are fed back to the class teacher, Head of Department (HOD), Head of school and parents. Weekly access to storybooks and readers, which are in English and the child's mother tongue, form a major part of this programme. Parents are invited to two workshops within the Foundation Phase where they are given valuable skills, insights and resources whereby they can support their children's reading journey and hopefully help them understand the importance of their role at home.

Our main activities involve running our five flagship centres and giving quarterly volunteer training sessions. We try to work very closely with the principals of our six schools, looking at the school's language and literacy policy, children's access to books, and strategies that can be adopted to help learners and parents reach their full potential. We hope to continue to improve the literacy levels at each school, to ensure that each child has easy access to readers and storybooks, that the school develops its own strategy for learner support in literacy and that parents play a vital role in the academic journey of their children by being better informed and skilled.

We have also developed an outreach workshop, which aims to enable interested parties to set up a literacy centre in their community, based on the Shine model. Our goal is to have three levels of training in order to ensure that high standards are kept and the integrity of the Shine programme is not at risk. The first level of training is open to any person or group who is interested. The training is based around volunteer tutoring; using paired and shared reading as methods to drive the programme. In order to receive the second and third training, Shine follows strict criteria in choosing the applicant. They then need to become

a Shine Outreach partner which involves an annual fee, a contractual agreement, annual training and reporting. We have had interest expressed in our programme from three other provinces and our three year plan is to have a flagship centre in every province. Our expected outcome is that the Shine Model is available to schools throughout South Africa and that the Department of Education promotes the programme in other provinces.



We also deliver two parent workshops a year. The focus of these workshops is first of all to empower the parent – we believe that they need to see themselves as paying clients of the school. At the same time, we want them to see themselves as an important role model to their children. Nutrition, health, life skills, the importance of storybook reading and Paired Reading is covered in this workshop. Our aim in 2011 is to make more life skill and reading resources available to parents and to promote Praesa's Vulindlela Reading Clubs. We would also like to make the workshops more widely available. We would like to reach parents throughout the Western Cape and are looking to create partnerships with other NGOs, corporates and the media in order for us to carry out our goals.

One of the creative approaches that we hope to implement is to run a pilot project where we offer a corporate client two parent workshops for their employees and a Shine resource cupboard which employees can access in order to promote familial literacy. Shine believes that this intervention could have a positive effect on the families of the employee, thus empowering the employee, strengthening the relationship between the employee and corporate and moving us closer to our vision of a 'Nation of Readers'.



## **How we got started and our implementation so far**

In June 2000, our Founder Director, Maurita Weissenberg, set up a 'reading partners' pilot project (The Shine Centre) at Observatory Junior School using Paired Reading as the method of improving literacy. The aim was to set up a volunteer-run literacy support centre in the school using the community as 'reading partners' to any Grade 2 or 3 children recommended by their class teacher.

In 2002 the WCED began assessing all Grade 3's in the Western Cape in literacy and numeracy and they found a steady increase in the Grade 3 literacy rate at Observatory Junior from 50% in 2002, to 57.5% in 2004 and 71.1% in 2006. These pleasing results encouraged Weissenberg to turn the Shine Centre into a registered NPO and to establish more centres.

From 2007 to 2008 a formal Shine literacy programme was developed with four learning areas and 52 literacy games. By the end of 2008, WCED literacy testing showed that the Observatory Junior Grade 3 results had gone up to 84% and the Grade 6 results had risen from 48% in 2006 to 78% in 2008. As a result a task team was set up in August 2008 to establish three more Shine Centres in nearby schools which had similar criteria to Observatory Junior and an operations manual was developed.

By the end of 2009, three new centres, supporting four schools, had been established at Prestwich Primary in Green Point, Zonnebloem Boys and Girls Schools in Walmer Estate and Claremont Primary in Claremont. The number of volunteers increased from 65 from Observatory Junior to just fewer than 200 spread over the five schools by the end of 2009. A bi-annual assessment of all Grade 1, 2 and 3 learners showed a marked improvement in literacy in December 2009.

In 2010, the Shine Trust established a Shine Centre at St. Agnes Primary in Woodstock. The year was spent monitoring and evaluating the Operations and Programme Manual, developing an outreach strategy, manual and workshop, and creating a set of training DVD's for the Shine Centre programme. In order to improve

capacity to cope with our expansion, we added two Board members to the team, broadened its funding base and obtained USA and UK charity status. We ended the year by presenting our first Outreach workshop to a Johannesburg school, two EMDC remedial teachers and a Franshoek NGO.

All foundation phase children at Shine schools are assessed individually in order to pick up any problems and to track their progress. Assessments occur at the end of Grade One, mid Grade Two, end of Grade Two and mid Grade Three. All learners' results are recorded on a Salesforce Data base system and given to the class teacher, HOD and parents. WCED continues to assess all Grade 3 and 6 pupils' literacy and numeracy. Shine's assessments have showed a marked improvement of children attending the Shine Programme.

## **Our advice to others**

The Shine model can be used effectively in any school and in any language. The following approach in setting up a centre will ensure its success:

- 1. Identify the school** and get commitment and buy-in from the school Principal and Head of Foundation Phase. Look at infrastructure, safety, security and surrounding community of that school.
- 2. Establish a Shine Room:** A space designated to this project is vital as it gives ownership to the volunteers and ensures that resources are safe. This room should be comfortable and inviting so that children attending the programme feel special.
- 3. Appoint a Centre Manager:** It is important that someone facilitates the programme, manages the volunteers and ensures the programme is successfully delivered. This person cannot be a class teacher as they need to be available during the Shine literacy hour and for at least an hour before and after the session. They need to have a friendly, warm disposition, leadership qualities and integrity. This can be a volunteer from the community but ideally it should be a paid position. This would suit a retired teacher but many of the Shine centre managers have no teaching background.



**4. Recruit Volunteers:** Make contact with community newspapers, community leaders, religious institutions (churches, mosques, etc.), local libraries, clubs, social groups, rotary clubs and international volunteer organisations. Volunteers need to give a commitment for at least one session for one year.

**5. Ensure access to books and book buddies:** Beginner readers need to regularly read with someone who will support and affirm their reading. Shine would like to broaden the system of Paired and Shared Reading by introducing Book Buddies into schools. This is a successful project that has been run in the UK where beginner readers pair off with fluent readers a few times a week for a short period of time to read together. Shine ran a Book Buddy pilot project very successfully in 2008 but was unable to get the school to continue with the project. A school policy needs to be developed whereby a reading period takes place in a school every day using Paired and Shared Reading as the method of improving literacy and where beginner readers are supported by a Book Buddy. In addition to this, teachers should read a story to the children on a daily basis. Books should be chosen from a recommended booklist.

**6. Establish an informal lending library (Swap Shop):** If a school does not have a successful working library then a policy for ensuring children's weekly access to storybooks must be prioritised. A Shine pilot project called Swap Shop was set up at Observatory Junior School. Shine collected second hand storybooks by doing book drives at more affluent schools. Every afternoon from 1pm-2pm volunteers from Shine allowed any child from foundation phase to take out a book with a view to swap it with another when they were ready to. Children loved this project and every day we were inundated with visitors. Ideally, we would love this project to be in

every school and for this you need at least three people to commit to an hour a day. Preferably, this hour would be from 1pm-2pm when the Grade R's, 1's and 2's have finished school for the day and are waiting for transport and Grade 3's are having their second break. In some Shine Centres we have set up Swap Shop in each classroom, training the teacher to run it. We have been disappointed with the results as most teachers have failed to run the programme. In 2011, we would like to implement a pilot whereby we start a Shine Reading Ambassador's Club. This club would have members in Grade 6 who are willing to run a Swap Shop at second break for foundation phase children or for each foundation phase class. We would have incentives and rewards for members who carry out their duties with success. We feel that this could be a part of the school literacy policy.

**This learning brief tells of the hands-on experience of:**



WORDS CAN CHANGE WORLDS

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