



## Shine Literacy's Khanyisa Project 2017: a brief overview and key findings

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## 1. What is the Khanyisa Project?

In 2017 Shine Literacy piloted a reading support programme, named Khanyisa (“ignite”) in 24 primary schools across Cape Town. Nineteen of these schools are part of the Western Cape Education Department’s 100 Schools Project. (These are schools which have the lowest literacy profiles in the Western Cape according to systemic testing). Four of the schools are not involved in the 100 Schools Project but were selected as they are schools supported by Partners for Possibility. The 24<sup>th</sup> school was included as there was an existing relationship with Shine Literacy. Reading Partners received a monthly stipend from the Jobs Fund. The Khanyisa Project provided four components of reading support for these 24 schools throughout the year:

- a) School management and educators from both Foundation and Intermediate Phase attended a full day workshop on creating a culture of reading in a school. In August, schools had an opportunity to showcase what they had implemented to develop a culture of reading.
- b) Family Literacy Workshops were held at each school for parents and caregivers of Grade Two children to highlight the importance of their role in their children’s reading development.
- c) Eighty-seven Grade Two classrooms were equipped with a reading corner package containing a colourful mat, cushions and a container of 50-60 carefully selected books (both picture books and levelled readers in English and isiXhosa/Afrikaans).
- d) Ninety unemployed youth who have recently matriculated were trained as *Reading Partners* (at a three day initial training workshop) in shared and paired reading methodology. They were then placed in each of the 87 Grade Two classrooms four days a week over a seven month period. The youth were tasked with reading to the whole class (shared reading) as well as reading with individual children (paired reading) every day. The Grade Two teachers from these classrooms also attended the last day of the initial training so that they could meet their Reading Partners and the expectations, roles and responsibilities of Reading Partners could be clarified.

## 2. Methods used to evaluate the project

In order to monitor and track what was happening in the classrooms, Grade Two teachers and Reading Partners were asked to keep daily records of the number of books read for both paired and shared reading as well as highlights experienced. Surveys, interviews and classroom observations were carried out. Data emerging from these methods form the basis of the project’s findings.

## 3. Findings

- a) **Relevant reading materials:** Providing relevant reading materials as well as a mat and cushions was key to making reading happen more often. Children need exciting, appropriate books to engage them and hook them into reading. The books provided were in English and children’s home language (if not English). By providing home language books to schools where the language of learning and teaching was isiXhosa or Afrikaans meant learners were more at ease with these books, particularly in the case of children who lacked proficiency in English.

b) **Increased pleasure:** Setting structures increased opportunities for reading resulting in greater excitement and children getting pleasure from spending time with books. This was evident from the frequent references both teachers and Reading Partners made to pleasure and excitement when commenting on highlights of the programme:

- *They all want me to read for them, “Me, me, me, Miss” and some, they come to me at once. All of them, they make noise, they all wanna read (Reading Partner).*
- *The learners are more excited to do the reading and want to read the same book over and over again (Reading Partner).*
- *All children are interested in reading books with him [the Reading Partner] everyday (Teacher).*
- *The children are so interested in sitting on the mat and having somebody who reads with them (Teacher).*
- *I can see how happy they are when they are in the reading corner (Teacher).*

c) **Children having more reading opportunities:** The excitement and energy generated around reading motivated children to create their own opportunities for extending reading opportunities. They asked the Reading Partners to stay in at break and after school so that they could spend time reading:

- *Learners even begged for more books (Reading Partner).*
- *They even want to go home with books (Reading Partner).*
- *They even stay until 3 o’clock when I’m leaving the school and they take my advice that their parents must read to them (Reading Partner).*

d) **The Reading Partners (youth) benefitted:** The training provided by Shine Literacy to become a Reading Partner, as well as the placement in a school with materials and support from the teachers provided Reading Partners with exposure to a work environment. This increased their confidence and awareness of the impact an individual can have. They were proud of their children’s improvements in reading and motivated by the excitement generated around reading. Some Reading Partners now want to be teachers. Below are some comments from Reading Partners:

- *I have learnt that I have the ability to do anything as long as I put my focus forward.*
- *Khanyisa has given me the platform to grow, think out of the box, explore and also to plan my goals.*
- *I know now that you don’t have to have money to actually make a difference in the community, schools etc. but just giving your time, dedication and sharing your knowledge can also have an impact in someone’s life.*
- *I get to help them with the gift of a lifetime of being able to read. I also love the way their interest in books has been sparked.*

e) **Teachers enjoyed having support:** Teachers generally felt that the Reading Partners contributed to generating more reading practice and increased the children’s motivation:

- *The volunteers [Reading Partners] are superheroes. They helped us a lot. I am looking forward to them being teachers of tomorrow.*
- *We can see the difference in reading. We are happy about them [Reading Partners], they can read more than us [to the children].*

## 4. Challenges

- a) **Not all teachers supported the Reading Partners:** Overall, teachers embraced the project but some were reluctant to provide time and opportunities for the Reading Partners to do both shared and paired reading every day.
- b) **Reading was not prioritised in all classes:** Teachers did not always prioritise reading and in some cases saw the focus on reading as getting in the way of work.
- c) **Drop out of Reading Partners:** There was some drop out of Reading Partners (due to other work opportunities or personal reasons) and this meant new Reading Partners had to be trained.
- d) **Limited training of Reading Partners (initial three day training and follow-up training):** Some of the Reading Partners did not always apply reading methodology effectively. Added to this was the concern that many of the young volunteers are themselves not regular readers.
- e) **Socio-political factors:** Gang violence and protests impacted the attendance of Reading Partners in some schools.
- f) **Insufficient communication channels:** Having a wide geographic spread of schools combined with Shine Literacy splitting project responsibilities with a partner organisation meant that some issues fell through the cracks.
- g) **Sustaining the project:** Ensuring that the schools take ownership of structures and newly-implemented practices and that these are sustained even when the Reading Partners are not available is a challenge that falls outside the control of Shine Literacy.

## 5. Conclusion

Key to teaching reading is the provision of appropriate, exciting and enticing reading materials. Reading should be seen as a pleasurable and enjoyable activity that is clearly valued in the classroom and across the school. Seeing adults engage with reading motivates children to do the same. Apart from systematic daily teaching instruction, children also need a safe and comfortable space to sit and linger with books of their choosing and books that are both at their ability levels and that challenge them. Placing young adults, resources and guidance as to how to structure reading events in a classroom appears to have positively impacted on the visibility and enjoyment of reading within most schools in the Khanyisa Project.

