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## Supporting reading-literacy: a grade 6 pilot study

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### Abstract

This paper discusses a pilot reading-literacy development initiative in a class of Grade 6 township learners. The purpose of the study was to pilot a model of literacy development that could be implemented across a wider platform of schools. The pilot study, using classroom observation and focus group interviews, was designed within a psycholinguistic perspective. Criteria for effective reading-literacy development – access to text and the desire to engage, knowing what to do with text, and opportunities to understand and reflect on text – were used to design the study, and as a lens for analysis. The paper focuses on case studies as illustrative examples of the ways in which the initiative supported access to texts, reading-literacy confidence, and the development of interpretive and reflective reading skills. The study suggests that a conducive literacy environment, including access to texts, knowing what to do with texts, and opportunities to understand and reflect on text – as well as the support of teachers who know how to facilitate literacy – has the potential to achieve literacy gains for even seriously compromised learners.

### Introduction

Basic literacy competencies are taught in the first few years of schooling, and thereafter learners are expected to be able to apply these competences to new reading challenges (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). However, many children fail to develop basic reading competence in the early years (Bhattacharya, 2010; Enriquez et al., 2010; Graves & Liang, 2008). In 2003, a study conducted by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) found literacy levels in the region to be poor, with only 36,8% of Grade 6 learners able to score at age-appropriate levels (WCED, 2003). Only 26,6% of children from historically “coloured” schools in the region performed at age-appropriate levels (WCED, 2003). The Report (2003:7) highlighted the “striking relationship” between poverty indices and literacy competence. International studies suggest that children from homes where literacy practices rewarded at school are not modelled struggle to master basic literacy competencies in the early years at school (Enriquez et al., 2010).

This paper discusses a pilot study designed to support the reading-literacy of a single class of Grade 6 learners in a township school near Cape Town. The primary aim of the study was to develop and pilot a reading-literacy initiative appropriate for the age, needs and context of this particular cohort of learners and their teachers. The paper





























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