



24 June 2022

To: Principals, Subject Advisors, Parents, Teachers, Departmental Heads, and Library Information Services (LIS) Coordinators.

Topic: Building back better through advocating for mother tongue at schools and in homes.

Message Objectives are to:

- Promote effective reading in schools and in homes by providing access to reading resources.
- Promote effective teaching and learning in the classroom by providing the correct content.

Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, teachers have had, and continue to have, a fundamentally important role in ensuring education continuity for their learners. When schools were closed, many teachers were responsible for setting (and, where possible, assessing) remote work and providing guidance for parents. When schools reopened, teachers remained on the front line, coping with the need to assess their learners' progress or lost learning during the period of school closure and working on catch-up programs and other remedial initiatives. In some contexts, teachers may also be facing additional pressures of delivering multiple and possibly simultaneous models of provision, as some learners remain learning at home, either by government mandate or parental choice, while others are attending school full- or part-time. Recently the Department of Health removed all Covid-19 restrictions, but the content gap remains in the classroom. The following two activities can help teachers with support from parents to build back better the content lost.

### 1. Support the home learning environment as part of public policy

Providing access to reading resources can help learners to catch up with outstanding learning content as opposed to when they spend long extra hours in the classroom. So, schools can collaborate with Non-Governmental Organisations such as the National Education Collaboration Trust to access books that could be used in schools and in homes. Children who grow up in homes where they have access to books and plenty of opportunities to read are at a significant advantage compared to those who do not. Having at least one book at home has been found to almost double the likelihood of being on track for literacy and numeracy.

### 2. Books need to be in languages that children understand

Teaching children in a language they can understand sounds like an obvious statement. Who would not agree with that? Well, while teaching in the home language is vital, research tells us that most learners are not being taught in a language they speak and understand. To master reading, children need practice and lots of different books to read. A major issue is that there are simply not enough books available in many languages. Models like Book Dash are fast, low-cost approaches for creating new books from scratch when there are just no books available in the languages families use at home. Teaching in the right language is a challenging change to implement. It requires books, but they are only one part of the equation. The right curriculum and teacher training and support are also needed.

From: Bailey Nkuna

[bailey@nect.org.za](mailto:bailey@nect.org.za)