Cornerstone Institute and OUPSA addressing literacy challenges in SA primary education

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Cornerstone Institute, in collaboration with Oxford University Press Southern Africa (OUPSA), proudly announces the 2nd Critical Dialogue event which will take place on 7 March, 2024 at Workshop 17 situated at the V&A Waterfront. The event will tackle 'The Challenge of Literacy in South African Primary Education,' aiming to address the significant literacy challenges facing South Africa, particularly in primary education.

The event is a crucial platform for critical dialogue and collaboration, bringing together esteemed academic leaders, representatives from the publishing industry, authors, and stakeholders. Together, they will explore multifaceted solutions to the literacy crisis, considering factors such as access to resources, teaching methodologies, curriculum effectiveness, and policy and challenges.

The lineup of panelists features Dr Xolisa Guzula, senior Applied Language and Literacy Studies lecturer at the University of Cape Town; Dr Frances Wessels, lecturer for PGCE Foundation Phase Students at Cornerstone Institute; Natalie Southgate, foundation phase deputy chief education specialist for English at the Western Cape Education Department, and Portia October, literacy specialist for Western Cape Interventions at Funda Wande. Thulani Dube, head of innovation and advancement at Cornerstone Institute, will moderate the panel discussion.

The main objective of the event is to facilitate informed dialogue and collaboration to address the literacy crisis facing South African primary education by identifying actionable solutions in terms of addressing literacy challenges, including the current state of literacy, policy challenges, teacher obstacles, and effective interventions.

The urgency for action is underscored by the distressing findings of the 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), revealing that 81% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning, an increase from 78% in 2016. South

Africa also ranked last among the 57 participating countries, highlighting the urgency for immediate and effective interventions.

Furthermore, the release of the 2023 Background Report for the 2030 Reading Panel on 7 February, 2024, authored by leading education economist Nic Spaull, revealed a significant decline in basic literacy among South African children. The 2030 Reading Panel, convened by former Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, seeks to gather respected South African leaders to implement solutions to ensure all children learn to read by 2030.

According to the 2023 Background Report, most children leave Grade 1 without knowing the alphabet, while 82% of Grade 4 children need help to read for meaning. The research revealed that failures in Grade 1 predict fluency and comprehension failures in Grade 7 (https://www.readingpanel.co.za/resources).

By partnering with the Avbob Road to Literacy Campaign for three consecutive years, OUPSA champions mother tongue education to promote literacy and reading comprehension among students. OUPSA remains committed to prioritising and investing in literacy initiatives to ensure a brighter future for our children and societies.

Cornerstone Institute's collaboration with OUPSA solidifies its continued focus on service excellence, innovation, and responsiveness to social imperatives. The institute aims to lead in developing our society into one that is prosperous and equitable – in addition to expanding social skills to confront the numerous challenges we face.

We invite industry experts, educators, and advocates to join us in shaping the future of South Africa. Your expertise and insights will be vital in shaping this discussion and contributing to potential solutions. We look forward to your valuable contribution and believe that together, we can significantly improve the literacy crisis.

Book and secure your seat on Quicket: https://qkt.io/dp4647

For further details, please contact comms@cornerstone.ac.za.

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