

Press Release

THRASS British Phonics Programme Currently Sweeping Gauteng Now to be Brought to Western Cape

The THRASS British phonics programme is already sweeping Gauteng and other parts of Africa and is being welcomed by many in the world of education as heralding the start of a new era in the teaching of English in Africa. And now educators in Western Cape will also have the opportunity to learn about THRASS when the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) Western Cape presents a two-day workshop in Cape Town on 11 and 12 May.

The THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills) phonics programme, pioneered by British Educational Psychologist Alan Davies, is used by teachers, teaching assistants, parents, educational psychologists and speech and language therapists in thousands of nurseries, schools, colleges and universities worldwide to help learners of all ages and abilities understand the relationships between the 44 phonemes (speech sounds) of spoken English and the 26 letters of the alphabet, which are the key to reading and writing. It concentrates on the word level, but also recognizes the importance of the sentence and text levels and is part of a balanced literacy programme.

Dr Melodie de Jager, author of 'Mind Moves' is one of many professional African commentators who have publicly stated that THRASS is changing the way that English is taught in Africa. She and Dr Jean Place, Principal Tutor, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, agree that THRASS is a revolutionary approach to teaching English that provides learners not just with handwriting, reading and spelling skills but also with valuable life skills training. Dr de Jager says "A workforce that is literate is vital if our rainbow nation is to grow and prosper. Once THRASS is part of our culture in schools we can look forward to a new era in the teaching of English in Africa."

In Southern Africa the success of THRASS is such that the THRASS Accredited Certificate is already a compulsory module for Foundation Phase student teachers at both the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and the University of Pretoria and several hundred student teachers have already completed the course. Other universities in Africa have also expressed interest in making it a compulsory module.

And the THRASS programme is also enjoying outstanding success with children from all types of backgrounds and in all types of schools. In the independent sector, at St Peter's Boys' Preparatory School in Bryanston, within a year, THRASS, combined with paired reading where older boys teach boys three years their junior, has produced some stunning results with a 60 per cent improvement in pupils' spelling ages and a considerable increase in their reading ages. Boys are traditionally slower than girls to read so this evidence has generated considerable international interest. More recently, the Crawford collection of schools that constitutes the largest single private school organisation in South Africa, has begun implementing THRASS from the beginning of this year and this decision is expected to have a big impact on the independent sector in many countries.

The considerable appeal and success of THRASS has also been seen at the opposite end of the educational spectrum, at Farm Schools in the Kweni Basin in the province of Mpumalanga, where some of the schools do not even have running water, toilet facilities or electricity. There, Third Year Foundation Phase student teachers from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, who had only received 30 minutes training in using THRASS, were amazed how easy it was to use and how quickly the children learnt. The children at the schools, many of whom spoke little or no English really loved using the THRASS resources and their teachers too were really impressed.

But THRASS isn't just for children of normal learning ability. It has also been used successfully at several schools for the deaf, including Fulton School near Durban and at remedial schools such as Bellavista School in Johannesburg.

And THRASS is also highly acclaimed in the world of technology. The THRASS Phoneme Machine, which is free to download, is a groundbreaking computer programme that uses moving human lips and the International Phonetic Alphabet to teach children, and indeed learners of all ages and abilities, to read and spell in an entertaining and fun way. In June 2006 market leader SMART Technologies Inc joined THRASS UK as sponsors of the THRASS SMART Project at Masibambane

College in Orange Farm Township and the Phoneme Machine has also more recently received software accreditation from SMART for use on its interactive whiteboards in the countries that THRASS UK is licensed to serve. In addition, the software is to be showcased at Microsoft's African Schools Technology Innovation Centre.

NAPTOSA, along with the former National Union of Educators, now amalgamated as one union, has run THRASS courses in Johannesburg since October 2005 and every course has been fully booked, with between 100 and 150 teachers attending on every occasion. It will therefore be essential to reserve places early for the two-day workshop to be held on 11 and 12 May 2007 at Oude Molen Technical High School, Pinelands, Cape Town. The application form can be downloaded from www.thrass.co.uk/sa2007p.htm or further details are available from NAPTOSA on 021 686 8521.

For a summary of the main features of THRASS and the benefits of using THRASS, (including comments from teachers, parents and those attending THRASS Professional Development Courses), visit www.thrass.co.uk/keyfacts.htm

For details of other THRASS Professional Development Courses that are held regularly in the UK, Europe, West and Southern Africa, visit www.thrass.co.uk/courses.htm

For information about the THRASS SMART project, visit www.thrass.co.uk/thrass_smart.htm

For information about the Phoneme Machine and to register for a free download of the software, visit www.phonememachine.com

Demonstration lessons can be viewed as videostreams or downloaded as wmv or iPod files from www.thrass.co.uk/tavc.htm

For details of the full range of THRASS resources for parents and schools, visit www.thrass.co.uk/resources.htm

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