

THRASS Hits Old Phonics for Six in the Caribbean

"Enlightening, enriching, powerful and a great approach to literacy development." "I really am convinced this will make a difference in my students' lives." "Excellent whole school, whole language approach to language learning and improving literacy levels in our schools." These are just some of the comments from teachers in the Cayman Islands attending a two-day course on the THRASS phonics programme that has hit old-style phonics programmes for six in the Caribbean.

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.

Over the years THRASS UK has built a reputation for providing high quality Professional Development Courses in many countries and it was on the recommendation of Susie Bayles, a British Educational Psychologist now based at George Hicks Campus, Georgetown that Alan Davies and his wife Hilary were invited by Adora Bodden-Groome, Campus Director at George Hicks, to provide training for a number of their staff and all the primary reading specialists from the primary schools. Susie Bayles had used THRASS as both a teacher and educational psychologist while working in Hampshire, England. Hampshire Local Authority obtained results to show that THRASS can more than double the normal rate of progress for reading and spelling in children who have problems with reading and spelling, results that have also emerged in schools elsewhere.

The Davies have been delighted by the reaction of the primary reading specialists attending the course and have now been invited by many of them to visit their schools (including North Side, John A Cumber and George Town) to present demonstration lessons. They were also invited by George Hicks to present a parents' meeting, open to all parents on the island.

The THRASS programme, is being referred to by many educationalists as "New Phonics", whereas the traditional one-letter-makes-one-sound approach ("Ah, ber, cer..."), which is widespread in the Caribbean is frequently referred to as "Old Phonics". In the THRASS programme, letters are always identified by name, as if the letters were players in a team, such as a dance troupe or a cricket team. This is because the letter 'a' ("Ay") makes different sounds in words like (a)nt, b(a)by, ban(a)na, zebr(a), sw(a)n and b(a)ll. The letter also plays different roles in words such as sn(ai)l, tr(ay), h(air), squ(are), c(ar), br(ea)d, b(ea)ch, n(ear), coll(ar), b(oa)t, s(au)ce and s(aw).

But it isn't just in the world of phonics that THRASS is considered to be innovative. THRASS is also highly acclaimed in the world of technology. The THRASS Phoneme Machine 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. Although it is suitable for learners of all ages and abilities, it has been found to be particularly suitable for parents of children starting to read, children finding reading difficult and those for whom English is not their first language. The Phoneme Machine has already enjoyed considerable success since its launch last year and is free to download in the countries that THRASS UK is licensed to serve. Thousands of teachers and parents, especially in the UK, USA and Africa (especially South Africa) have already downloaded it to use with their students or their own children.

An indication of the esteem in which THRASS is held is that in June 2006 SMART Technologies Inc, the market leader for interactive whiteboards, joined THRASS UK as sponsors of the THRASS SMART Project at Masibambane College in Orange Farm Township near Soweto, South Africa and the Phoneme Machine has recently received accreditation from SMART Technologies for use on its interactive whiteboards. In addition, it is to be showcased by Microsoft at the Africa Schools Technology Innovation Centre from May.

And the general consensus of the first thirty teachers in the Caribbean to do the THRASS training? That THRASS is an excellent programme for, first, improving teacher subject knowledge and, second, implementing in all schools. As Adora Bodden-Groome, the first director, principal or headteacher, in the Caribbean to become a THRASS certificate holder, wrote in her evaluation, "Excellent whole school, whole language approach to language learning and improving literacy levels in our schools."

Notes for Editors

The demonstration lessons using THRASS, filmed on the George Hicks Campus and three primary schools, will be available from mid-April 2007 as videostreams or downloadable as wmv or iPod files from www.thrass.co.uk/tavc.htm

The Cayman27 TV live interview with Adora Bodden-Groome and Alan Davies, the lead story on the widely-viewed 'Daybreak Today' programme, will be available from early April 2007 from www.thrass.co.uk/cayman27tv.htm

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 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

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

The countries that THRASS UK is licensed to serve are shown in blue on the world map at www.thrass.co.uk/worldmap.htm

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