

## **TARGETING MONEY WISELY IN AFRICA**

### **British Couple's Plan Continues to Gain International Approval**

A British couple who are providing substantial support for educational projects in Botswana, South Africa and Ghana are gaining increasing international approval for their Three-Point Plan for using money wisely in Africa and their efforts are leading to, what many consider to be, a revolution in the teaching of English in Africa.

Alan and Hilary Davies, from Cheshire, England, first produced their plan a year ago, as advice for G8 leaders, and their plan is simple:

1. Work with schools/universities where the teaching of English has a high priority.
2. Improve the quality of teaching of English by improving teacher subject knowledge.
3. Create 'Centres of Excellence' so that the staff can reach out and make a real difference in the wider community.

Dr Melodie de Jager is one of many professional African commentators who have already publicly stated that the THRASS synthetic phonics programme is changing the way 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. And now the latest people to offer support are government officials, university lecturers and representatives from educational institutions and associations across Africa, who recently attended a five-day workshop 'Time for a New Phonics approach for teaching English in Africa?' at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. The workshop, which was officially opened by Professor Mary Metcalfe, Wits School of Education, and Mrs Lucy Moyane, Chief Director: Curriculum, South African Government, was hailed a huge success.

The workshop also included two days of accredited training and visits to independent, remedial, farm and township schools that use the THRASS synthetic phonics programme. It ended on 9 June with the launch of the THRASS SMART Project at Masibambane College, a 'Centre of Excellence' for teaching English in the Orange Farm Township, close to Soweto. The Project is jointly funded by THRASS and SMART Technologies, the world leader in interactive whiteboards, and was officially opened by the South African Governments' Chief Education Specialist for Literacy, Mandla Maseko, who stated that "the South African Government wants to consider how it can use a programme such as THRASS to benefit the majority of South Africans in public schools."

Darryl Geffen, head of Masibambane, supports this view, "THRASS has proved to be a most useful tool to overcome the many barriers faced by our children and educators. It is equipping our children for life. The [THRASS] Phoneme Machine is particularly useful in our environment as all our teachers speak English as their second language and it provides the learners with an opportunity to hear English being spoken by someone whose mother tongue is English."

And independent results from schools show just how effective THRASS is. Broadhurst Primary School in Gaborone, Botswana, the first school in Africa to implement THRASS, has reported that for every four weeks of teaching the average improvement in reading has increased from six weeks to ten and the average improvement in spelling from the normal four weeks to six - particularly impressive results as English is not the first or only language of many of the pupils. More recently, St Peter's Preparatory School in Paulshof, Johannesburg, where paired reading is used with older boys teaching boys three years their junior, has reported a 60 per cent improvement in spelling grades and a considerable increase in reading ages since THRASS was implemented last year. Boys are traditionally slower than girls to read so this evidence has generated considerable international interest.

As far as teacher subject knowledge is concerned, several thousand teachers (including many speech therapists) and several hundred student teachers have already benefited from sponsored THRASS training and resources. Mike Myburgh, Executive Director, National Union of Educators, said, "Our members have been very positive about the two-day training courses. No sooner have we finished one course, then we have a hundred more members wanting us to organise another!"

Elsewhere in Africa Edward Kokole Zuma, Director: Quality Promotion & Innovation, Ministry of Education, Southern Sudan, is also keen to improve teacher subject knowledge. "I want to recommend the THRASS programme for our five teacher training institutes. We can write a project proposal to attract funding for the programme, so that it can be implemented there." And, Dr Sifiso

Nyathi, Director Language Centre, University of Namibia, is keen for Namibia also to be included in the pilot, as the country only introduced English as an official language sixteen years ago. They are now at a stage where they are trying to develop it, so a programme like THRASS would be ideal for meeting their needs.

There is also approval for THRASS from key staff at the Molteno Project, which was initially based on translations and adaptations of the highly successful British programme, Breakthrough to Literacy and has an international reputation for providing quality literacy and language teaching and learning in Africa. Although there are some differences in approach, Manono Angeline Mdluli, National Training Manager, believes that "Molteno and THRASS are two reputable programmes that can enhance and support each other to improve both teacher and learner performance in the field of Literacy learning and development. We share a mutual expression of interest with THRASS and we are keen to look at how we can work together provided we can secure the necessary funding."

And this is an account of only some of the expressions of approval for the Davies' Plan.

The videostream of the launch of the THRASS SMART Project can be found at [www.thrass.co.uk/thrass\\_smart\\_sa.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/thrass_smart_sa.htm), along with other videostreams, press releases, course evaluations and other articles relevant to "The Day of the African Child" can be found at [www.thrass.co.uk/africanchild.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/africanchild.htm)

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Mike Meade, Media Director, 01829 741413 Mob: 07970 151 738 [mikemeade@thrass.co.uk](mailto:mikemeade@thrass.co.uk)

Chris Griffiths, International Development, +30 266 203 1207 [chrisgriffiths@thrass.co.uk](mailto:chrisgriffiths@thrass.co.uk)