

## **The THRASS SMART Project – The Potential to Benefit All African Children**

Who would have expected to see the SMART Board brought into a township like Orange Farm? But that's exactly what happened last Friday, 9 June when the THRASS SMART project was officially launched at Masibambane College, Orange Farm township by Mandla Maseko, Chief Education Specialist, Children and Youth Literacy, Department of Education, South African Government, and the children, whose first language is either Zulu or Sotho, used the groundbreaking THRASS Phoneme Machine on the SMART Board to teach English to adult visitors.

The THRASS synthetic phonics programme is already being welcomed in the world of education as heralding the start of a new era in the teaching of English in Africa but the launch of this new project at Masibambane College further demonstrates the appeal and success of the THRASS synthetic phonics programme for teaching African children from many different backgrounds and in many different types of schools.

As Mr Maseko rightly said at the opening, much of the success of THRASS has been in independent schools – schools such as St Peter's Preparatory School in Paulshof, where paired reading is used with older boys teaching boys three years their junior and where there has been a 60 per cent improvement in their spelling grades and a considerable increase in their reading ages since THRASS was implemented last year. Boys are traditionally slower than girls to read so this evidence has generated considerable international interest, with regards to the additional benefits of implementing the THRASS programme.

But he then went on to speak of how "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 as the teaching of phonics is beginning to show us that we have good methods that we can employ in our schools to actually teach our children the fundamental skills".

And Mr Maseko and Octavia Sithole (Deputy Education Specialist: Early Childhood) showed their enthusiasm for the project by joining in and dancing with the people with commitment and enthusiasm. It was amazing to see government officials enjoying themselves so much and making the time to dance with the equivalent of 'township teachers' accompanied by 'township children', playing instruments, dressed in traditional costumes and singing in their different national languages.

And Darryl Geffen, Headmaster at Masimbambane College who has previously described THRASS as "empowering a group of people who were previously disempowered" said at the launch, "Our children need the very best in teaching if they are to grow and make our country prosper. I challenge you to come back here in six months and see how much we as a school will have developed with this amazing new technology, which is so simple to use and easy to understand."

In addition the appeal and success of THRASS has been seen recently at Farm Schools in the Kwena 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 THRASS 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 the teachers were really impressed.

But THRASS isn't just for children of normal learning ability. It has also been used successfully in several schools for the Deaf. The following evaluation was received following a THRASS certificate course "You have empowered so many teachers of the deaf, which will have lifelong influences on all present and future deaf children. We will continue to make it work and continue to share what we can with educators of the deaf."

Thousands of teachers have completed the two-day accredited training course, largely organised by the National Union of Educators, and several hundred student teachers have completed the course, as compulsory modules at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and at the University of Pretoria. At the last course, which ended on the 1 June, at Wits School of Education, the 110 students were unanimous on the benefits of the course. As one future teacher wrote, "I believe this course is helpful for student teachers – it is empowering us. Personally, I was not confident enough to teach phonics in teaching experience but now everything has changed. I am now confident to conquer the world!"

So THRASS really is a programme that is already benefiting African children from a wide range of backgrounds and that, with a small amount of additional investment has the potential to benefit all children in Africa.

**The full text of Mandla Maseko's speech** and 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)

Videostreams (including one celebrating The THRASS SMART Project), the THRASS Goes Live! diary, 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)

**The THRASS Phoneme Machine** has been developed primarily for those for whom English is not their first language, for parents of children starting to read and for children finding reading difficult. It is available to parents and schools and costs only 10 GBP (plus VAT). More information can be found at [www.phonememachine.com](http://www.phonememachine.com).

**Further details about SMART Technologies interactive whiteboards**, and their other market leading products, can be found at [www.smarttech.com](http://www.smarttech.com)

**A wide range of other THRASS resources**, including tapes, a CD, worksheets, big books and guided readers is available for parents and schools and can be found at [www.thrass.co.uk/resources.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/resources.htm)

**More detailed 'Notes to Editors'** about THRASS in Africa and the benefits of using THRASS can be found at [www.thrass.co.uk/benefitallnotes.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/benefitallnotes.htm).

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## **'Notes to editors'**

1. The THRASS Phoneme Machine is a ground-breaking computer programme that uses the International Phonetic Alphabet and moving human lips to demonstrate the pronunciation of sounds (phonemes) and hundreds of frequently used English words. It has already enjoyed considerable success and THRASS UK has recently teamed up with SMART Technologies and the very latest in education technology to achieve true excellence through the joint sponsorship of a new project in South Africa, the THRASS SMART project.
2. Alan Davies, Executive Director of THRASS UK, developed the Phoneme Machine primarily for those for whom English is not their first language, for parents of children starting to read and for children finding reading difficult. SMART Technologies is the industry pioneer and market leader in interactive whiteboards, which represent the very latest in education technology and bring tremendous benefits to learners of all ages. This partnership between these two leaders in their respective fields can only bring significant benefits to all involved.
3. THRASS (Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills) is a whole-school synthetic phonics programme for teaching learners of all ages and abilities using pictures and keywords. It is a multi-sensory programme that is based on developing Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic skills in learners and helps them to understand the building blocks of the English language by teaching them about the 44 phonemes (speech sounds) of spoken English and the 120 graphemes (spelling choices) of written English.
4. Using THRASS in a balanced curriculum can more than double the normal rate of progress for learning reading and spelling for primary and secondary school children and also for dyslexics and those for whom English is not their first language. THRASS is a truly international programme and THRASS resources are used by teachers, parents, educational psychologists and speech and language therapists in thousands of schools worldwide, mostly in the UK, Europe, Africa and Australia and there is currently very strong demand for THRASS in Southern and Western Africa.
5. Alan Davies MSc C Psychol AFBPsS is a chartered educational psychologist and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society. He is listed on the BPS Register of Competence in Occupational Testing, having successfully secured the Statement of Competence in Educational Testing (Level A). He also has the Dyslexia Institute Diploma and British Dyslexia Association Diploma. Alan is a former teacher, college lecturer and university teacher trainer. Alan has pioneered THRASS (Teaching Handwriting, Reading And Spelling Skills) resources and courses since 1987 and is the author of the teaching guide, TEACHING THRASS.
6. Alan Davies and his wife Hilary believe that targeted funding to improve communications within Africa through such international languages as English, is the key to empowerment. They have already donated £40,000, which has funded a 'Centre of Excellence' for the teaching of English at Masibambane College, in the Orange Farm township and has benefited 300 student teachers at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and 80 teachers of the deaf, following training at Fulton School in KwaZulu-Natal.
7. St Peter's Preparatory School in Paulshof is a boys only school. Boys are traditionally slower than girls at learning to read. THRASS was implemented there a

year ago and already in one year the pupils' reading ability has increased by 2.7 years.

### Training Courses

8. THRASS Professional Development Courses are held regularly in the UK, Europe, West and Southern Africa. Full details can be found at <http://www.thrass.co.uk/courses.htm>

9. Alan Davies is also the author of an accredited 'Phonics Certificate for Parents' training course which was first run at Oxley Park Primary School, Milton Keynes, England, in September 2005 and attended by 50 parents. More information on the certificate can be found at [www.phonics4parents.co.uk](http://www.phonics4parents.co.uk). The website also has links to 3D animations, a free email course (on the features, phases and stages of the THRASS programme), downloadable files (e.g. the photocopyable THRASS Calendar Chart) and streamed video of features, interviews, demonstration lessons and a school's video diary.

### Resources

10. The THRASS *Phoneme Machine* is available to parents and schools and costs only 10 GBP (plus VAT), which covers its use on any number of computers at the same address. It comes with a free DVD/CD DualDisc, containing over four hours of video of THRASS in action in the UK and Africa, including two one-hour presentations to parents. More information, including an online and downloadable trial versions for both PC and Mac computers can be found at [www.phonememachine.com](http://www.phonememachine.com).

11. A wide range of other resources, including tapes, a CD, worksheets, big books and guided readers is available for parents and schools and can be found in the 'Resources' section of the main website at [www.thrass.co.uk/resources.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/resources.htm) .

### Further Press Releases

12. Over the next few weeks further press releases will be issued to coincide with

- the visit of a delegation of UK head teachers and advisers to the Farm Schools taking part in the Kwena Basin THRASS Project, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa;
- the visit to schools in the UK of the Third Year Foundation Stage student teachers from the University of the Witwatersrand who were taking part in the Kwena Basin THRASS Project.

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