

The THRASS SMART Project – A Partnership to Excellence

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 now THRASS UK has 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.

The THRASS synthetic phonics programme is now being welcomed in the world of education as heralding the start of a new era in the teaching of English and 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.

And the first to benefit from the partnership will be learners at Masibambane College, a THRASS 'Centre of Excellence' for the teaching of English in the Orange Farm township near Soweto. There Darryl Geffen, Headmaster at the school who has described THRASS as "empowering a group of people who were previously disempowered" says, "Our children need the very best in teaching if they are to grow and make our country prosper. Now for the first time at Masibambane, our children can learn and interact together in an Audio Visual Classroom, which will make teaching and learning English Literacy easier for everyone. This facility will be used not only by the school but also for the benefit of the local community in Orange Farm. 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."

One of the main reasons SMART Technologies and Edge Interactive, the authorised distributors of SMART products for all the SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) countries including Mauritius, agreed to Alan Davies' suggestion to jointly sponsor a SMART interactive board at Masibambane was the reaction of teachers and children to the THRASS Phoneme Machine. It was an instant hit with them when it was installed on individual computers and there was an audible and collective gasp as everyone watched the word 'box' being broken down into individual sounds (phonemes) of English, quickly realized that the letter 'x' was actually made up of two sounds and then saw the moving human lips produce the four individual sounds of the word. This made SMART Technologies and Edge Interactive realize just how powerful a learning tool the Phoneme Machine was.

The project will be launched in the Audio Visual Classroom at Masibambane College on 9 June when the SMART Board will be unveiled and the children, whose first language is either Zulu or Sotho, will use the groundbreaking Phoneme Machine on the Board to teach English to adult visitors.

The launch will be attended by Nestus Bosman, Channel Account Manager, Edge Interactive, Alan Davies, Executive Director of THRASS UK, Mandla Maseko, Chief Education Specialist: Children and Youth Literacy, and other senior representatives

from the South African Government. Also attending will be over 100 delegates from all over Africa (including head teachers and educators from the UK) who are currently attending a THRASS workshop hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

The installation of the SMART Board at Masibambane is being sponsored by HNR Technologies.

The launch starts at 10.00 and is expected to attract a lot of media attention. Requests for media passes and interviews should be made to Darryl Geffen, Headteacher, +27 11 850 3858/0118 Mobile 082 4433 568, Mike Meade, Media Director, THRASS UK +44 7970 151738 or Hilary Davies +44 1829 741413

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.

Further details about SMART Technologies interactive whiteboards, and their other market leading products, can be found at www.smarttech.com

Further details of the workshop 'Time for a New Phonics Approach for Teaching English in Africa?', being hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa 5-9 June 2006 can be found at www.thrass.co.uk/witsworkshop.htm along with streamed video of THRASS in action in South Africa, Botswana and Ghana.

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

More detailed 'Notes to Editors' about THRASS in Africa and the benefits of using THRASS can be found at www.thrass.co.uk/partnershipnotes.htm.

Issued by: THRASS UK News Media Centre www.thrass.co.uk/nm.htm

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