

The THRASS SMART Project

The official opening of The THRASS SMART Project, Orange Farm Township, Johannesburg, 9 June 2006 by Mandla Maseko, Chief Education Specialist: Children and Youth Literacy, Department of Education, South African Government.

Who said we cannot bring the SMART Board into a township like Orange Farm? I think this is very great! For us I think it is a step in the right direction. We have a firm belief, in this Government, you may realise that, most of the material that you see in the operation of THRASS is still happening in the independent schools, but what we, and my colleagues who have been here for a week, are here to observe, how do we then take this kind of a programme and translate it in a manner that it can benefit the majority of the South Africans, and that is the government schools. So I think from here, our job is to go back and begin to advise our Seniors on this wonderful work that Alan and his colleagues are doing. I think we are very much grateful to be part of this journey, and seeing everybody here, especially colleagues from our neighbouring countries who are here to experience the same thing, that we are experiencing first hand. For me it brings joy! More so today, just to see our children. One day, these are the children that will be standing around watching our children. And I think, within the group, we have the Mandlas of tomorrow. We have the Alans of tomorrow. So I think, for me, it is one of the moments that I will not forget for now. Because, sometimes if we sit in those offices in Pretoria, we forget what reality is all about. Then you come back, you get in touch with the reality, then it just excites you. And for us, I think it's still a long journey, but we are hoping that we have started the journey. It's not that we are sitting down and not doing anything about it. And Alan, thank you very much for the two-day course. I felt like a practitioner again, having to sit and listen. But for us, because in this, is a country where the issue of literacy - it is a problem. But it has always been neglected, for a long, long time, and as we see every day, the adults, because we always thought that when you talked about literacy you talked about Adult Literacy and we neglected the component that is very critical, the development of fundamental skills of our children, at the Foundation Phase. I think 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. There was a wave about ICT, television and everything - that is actually coming into the country. We got excited. But reality dawned to all of us, and this is the Minister of Education who is beginning to say, "Let's go back to the basics". This current Minister is the Minister saying, "One of my achievements, if I have to leave after five years of serving this Government, will be to have made sure that South African children can read, write and count, at that grade". For me that is a very fundamental skill; a fundamental statement. So, from this Minister, this is the Minister who's putting the resources into schools. At the moment, as a person responsible for Literacy for Children and Youth in the Department, we are bringing mobile libraries in this country, we will roll that at a national level. We are putting reading books, simple story books, not readers. Simple story books into classrooms, to make sure that our children read. But we know that, when we give them those resources, we need as well, to sharpen their skills. And I think these kind of programmes are beginning to assist, in making sure that when they acquire the skill they have something to read at the end of the day. And, I think that the biggest job that I must do today, is to hand over this Smart Board, to Masibambane officially. We are grateful to all the donors; Alan and everybody else from Smart Board. I have been interacting with the Smart Board guys on several occasions. I did not know that this can do this kind of amazing thing. And it looks so nice in a classroom. And we are hoping that each and every single school in this country, one day, can have this kind of facility. I've been looking around in the classroom, I've seen the materials. It just makes teaching so easy, to make children given all the materials and teachers using the facilities that they have. So for us, we have to strive and work hard and we are thanking everybody who made their way to Orange Farm, to Masibambane College, and we will conquer and bridge the gap between the first economy and the second economy.

Further details: www.thrass.co.uk and www.thrass.co.uk/thrass_smart.htm