



THRASS UK News Media Centre
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Absa and THRASS UK Press Release
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ABSA HOSTS 'GROUND-BREAKING' ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON LITERACY

Today, various education experts and role-players have converged in Johannesburg for the THRASS Absa 2009 TalkTogether Conference which aims to increase English literacy among foundation learners and their teachers in South Africa, through the improved teaching and learning of English.

TalkTogether is a literacy programme pioneered by Absa and THRASS UK. It uses the THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills) synthetic phonics programme in order to achieve this.

Nicholas Young, Chief Operating Officer of Absa Bank's Unsecured Lending & New Business Cluster, said: "South Africa has identified a deficiency in literacy skills. That is why Absa decided to get involved in helping improve literacy skills and we believe that sustainable quality skills will be achieved through interventions at foundation level as well as assisting teachers by improving their subject matter knowledge."

Running over a period of two days, the content for the conference will include key learnings, challenges and future plans for the THRASS programme, both in South Africa and in the other countries around the world where THRASS is being implemented. British Educational Psychologist and Executive Director of THRASS UK, Alan Davies, who pioneered the THRASS programme, will also be in attendance.

The THRASS synthetic phonics programme helps learners develop sound literacy skills from an early stage and creates a strong foundation for English skills using the 26 letters of the alphabet and 44 phonemes (sounds), as well as graphemes to explain sounds and words.

A key component of the THRASS programme is the Phoneme Machine, a groundbreaking computer programme that uses the International Phonetic Alphabet

and moving human lips to demonstrate the pronunciation of the sounds in hundreds of frequently used English words.

The Phoneme Machine has always been particularly effective for teaching the children who find reading difficult and the latest version now includes a Cued Speech option that will enable deaf children to be taught using synthetic phonics. It is expected to transform the way deaf children are taught to read.

It is used in thousands of schools and colleges around the world and is suitable for learners of all ages and abilities, including dyslexics, those for whom English is not their first language and those who are deaf.

To date, over 5,000 teachers and student teachers in South Africa have earned the THRASS Accredited Certificate, of which Absa has sponsored over 1000 since the TalkTogether Project was launched in July 2007.

THRASS has been implemented in a significant number of government schools, including farm schools in Kwenza Basin, Mpumalanga, and township schools, in Orange Farm, and also in private schools in several provinces.

The latest country to show significant interest in THRASS is Nigeria, where the Ministry of Education has approved the introduction of the programme to a number of schools in Oyo State in 2009.

“I am delighted with the progress that we have been able to make through working with Absa. There is significant international interest in the TalkTogether Project and the focus on good synthetic phonics training for student teachers. I have just returned from a visit to Nigeria where everyone is very interested in the TalkTogether model and is most impressed with THRASS,” said Alan.

Young added that they credit their achievements to their partnerships with universities, primary schools and other interested parties.

“As a responsible corporate citizen, Absa will continue to seek ways of contributing positively in the development of our country with a view to securing a better future for all South Africans by providing skills that will enable them to achieve their maximum potential,” Nicholas Young concluded.

Notes to Editors

For more information about the THRASS Absa TalkTogether Project, visit

www.talktogether.co.za and www.thrass.co.uk/talktogether.htm

For more information about the TalkTogether Project, the free materials and the TalkTogether Schools, South Africans can SMS their names to 32828 (R1.00 per sms), e-mail info@talktogether.co.za or write to the Absa Foundation, P.O. Box 7735, Johannesburg 2000.

The THRASS multi-lingual calendar charts and Phoneme Machine software can be downloaded free-of-charge from links on both the Absa TalkTogether Project and THRASS UK websites www.talktogether.co.za and www.thrass.co.uk/talktogether.htm

The THRASS extensive picture-based training website for schools and parents with access to a wide range of resources and support materials, and extensive evidence of the widespread success of THRASS and details of THRASS Professional Development Courses is at www.thrass.co.uk/teaching.htm

For information about the THRASS SING-A-LONG Family Reading Project, visit

www.thrass.co.uk/sing-a-long.htm

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