



THRASS UK News Media Centre
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THRASS SYNTHETIC PHONICS PROGRAMME: HELPING TO REALISE DREAMS IN ZIMBABWE

The highly successful THRASS synthetic phonics programme has for some time been described as heralding the start of a new era in the teaching of English in Africa. Now, following two recent workshops in Harare and Nyanga, it is helping to realise the dreams of many children, parents, teachers and others in the education sector in Zimbabwe, including Government Ministers and officials.

For any nation to grow and prosper it is essential to have a workforce that is literate and the workshops were part of a project to improve literacy in Zimbabwe being run by British couple Alan and Hilary Davies, working with World Links Zimbabwe and the Swiss-based Solon Foundation.

The Davies first introduced the THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills) synthetic phonics programme into pilot schools in and around Harare in 2008 using the innovative THRASS SING-A-LONG resources that include the most fantastic interactive software and are considered to be the best way of introducing THRASS where resources are limited. The pilot was an immediate success and in April 2009 the Government gave them permission to extend the project by funding training for teachers at the original pilot schools and including additional pilot schools in Nyanga District.

The workshops were for teachers from those pilot schools and formed part of a new training programme developed by THRASS UK that focuses first on SING-A-LONG before moving on to the more traditional THRASS training and which has already been used with enormous success in Nigeria. The completion of the workshops, funded by Alan and Hilary Davies, means that 100 teachers have now been trained, along with several education officials from both the Ministry of Education and Nyanga District.

And the workshops have been an enormous success. "Brilliant! This workshop will go down in history as one of the major milestones in the reawakening of the education system in Zimbabwe." "From today my pupils will be able to spell, write and read fluently." "It's just been brilliant and it's a dream come true for me." "Wonderful. The information will not only

empower Zimbabwean children but parents, college students, and people who work with English." "I wish I had known about THRASS before; I can see the future of our children bright." These were just some of the comments of teachers attending the workshops.

But it wasn't just the teachers who were impressed. The Government of Zimbabwe fully supports THRASS and several officials from the Ministry of Education and from Nyanga District also attended. Afterwards, Pheobe Musakan, Materials Production Officer (English), said of THRASS, "An eye opener and very educative. I hope that it will cascade to all schools in Zimbabwe as well as teacher training colleges." And John Sithole, Acting Deputy Director, Education Technology Centre, described THRASS as "an exciting programme that empowers teachers to teach aspects of language effectively and efficiently, while affording learners an opportunity to enjoy learning."

There are 44 THRASS SING-A-LONG songs that teachers and parents can sing with children to explain the 44 sounds and 120 main spelling choices of English. The songs are real fun, give everyone a lift and really motivate children to learn. The words and music for the songs were written by South African music teacher Janine Plunkett and they all have really memorable tunes in different musical styles and dance rhythms from around the world, and wonderful imaginative titles such as "The moon fell out of the sky", "A great big gorilla" and "You don't get pandas in Africa". And as well as being fun, singing can benefit children in many different ways: it's good for their physical health and also for their emotional well-being, as it can help them express their emotions, and increase their confidence and communication skills. It has also been shown to accelerate learning and improve memory.

But THRASS doesn't just help with the teaching and learning of English. There are also printable and interactive THRASS Calendar Charts to help with early language learning of Shona and other African, Asian and European languages that can be downloaded free-of-charge from the THRASS website.

It is an indication of the significance of THRASS that in South Africa it is being sponsored by Absa Bank, a member of the Barclays Group, through the THRASS Absa TalkTogether Project, a unique educational partnership that is aiming to revolutionise the teaching and learning of language through partnerships between primary schools, universities and other organisations. To date, over 5,000 teachers and student teachers have earned the THRASS Accredited Certificate, which is already a compulsory module for Foundation Phase student teachers at six universities, with 1,000 of these having been sponsored by the TalkTogether Project.

The Government of Zimbabwe believes that THRASS is “a worthwhile innovation that should be pursued with a view to rolling it out for the benefit of all schools in the country” and Alan Davies, Executive Director of THRASS UK, has already met Minister of Education, David Coltart, to discuss proposals for extending the project further.

The enthusiasm with which THRASS has been received by everyone involved and the possibility of its wider implementation means that the future for teaching English to the children of Zimbabwe certainly looks bright and the dreams of many there are already starting to be realised.

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

To see what can be achieved using SING-A-LONG and THRASS resources, view the videostreams on www.thrass.co.uk/holyrosary_limpopo.htm (South Africa), www.thrass.co.uk/wps08.htm (UK), www.thrass.co.uk/zimbabwe0309.htm and www.thrass.co.uk/zimbabwe0709.htm (Zimbabwe).

For information about THRASS SING-A-LONG, including a demonstration of the interactive book software, visit www.thrass.co.uk/sing-a-long.htm

To download printable and interactive versions of the THRASS Calendar Charts, visit www.thrass.co.uk/cart/cc.htm

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