

Press Release – 27 November 2009

THRASS UK's Innovative Software Helps Children Learn South African Languages and Get Right into the Spirit of the 2010 World Cup

The University of South Africa (UNISA), is encouraging everyone to speak a South African language during the 2010 FIFA World Cup. THRASS UK's innovative software can enable children to do that very easily and at the same time get right into the spirit of the event.

Although English is the language of commerce, politics and the media in South Africa, there are actually 11 official languages. However, this hasn't always been the case and until 1994 there were just two: English and Afrikaans. In fact, one of the factors that led to Nelson Mandela's release was the South African Government's decree that all instruction in schools and universities was to be in Afrikaans, which led to a revolt in the townships and the adoption of 11 official languages.

The THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills) phonics programme is used in thousands of schools and colleges in many countries and is widely acknowledged as having the potential to more than double the rate of progress for reading and spelling in English. As part of that programme, THRASS UK has produced interactive and printable Calendar Charts in many languages, including all 11 official languages of South Africa (English, Afrikaans, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga).

The Calendar Charts make it very easy for children of any age (and of course teachers and parents too) to learn the words for the days, dates, months, numbers and colours, and the names of the lower-case letters (and their capitals) in any of the languages. They even include the dental, lateral and alveolar click sounds present in some of the languages.

The Calendar Charts are fun and easy to use and the children's voices, bright colours and fun pictures will get everyone's attention straight away. They are an excellent introduction to the sounds of the various languages as children only need click on the word, letter or the number on the Chart to hear other children's voices pronounce it. The Charts are also ideal for the language days that many schools organise to encourage children to learn foreign languages and to promote inter-culturalism, and can at the same time provide the opportunity to teach children about the geography, history and culture of South Africa.

The interactive Calendar Charts form part of the THRASS Phoneme Machine, a free computer programme that uses moving human lips to pronounce the sounds (phonemes) in hundreds of frequently used English words. The Phoneme Machine is accredited by market leader SMART Technologies Inc for use on its interactive whiteboards in the THRASS UK licensed territory and it is an excellent resource for teachers, assistants and parents for learning about, and also teaching, the fundamental building blocks of English in an entertaining and fun way.

Once they have been introduced to the languages using the THRASS Calendar Charts, anyone who wishes to learn more can go on to follow the on-line courses being offered by UNISA. UNISA, which is Africa's largest education provider, believes that there is no better way to break down interpersonal barriers than through communication that is understood by the listener, and it has been inspired by Nelson Mandela's words "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, it goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, it goes to his heart." It has therefore now made available short on-line courses in Sepedi (or Northern Sotho), Sesotho (or Southern Sotho), Setswana (or Tswana), isiXhosa (or Xhosa) and isiZulu (or Zulu). These are the languages spoken in the regions where the World Cup matches will be played and anyone following a course will be able to learn not only the key vocabulary for everyday situations but also some basic South African etiquette.

So, why not use the THRASS interactive Calendar Charts to teach children the basics of at least one South African language before the World Cup finals in June and July 2010, and at the same time teach them something of the geography, history and culture of the country, so that they will then be able to get right into the spirit of the event.

The THRASS extensive picture-based training website for schools and parents 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

Interactive and printable versions of the THRASS Calendar Charts can be downloaded from the THRASS UK website at www.thrass.co.uk/cart/cc.htm.

To download and install the THRASS Calendar Charts on all computers in a university or school, first download and register the THRASS Phoneme Machine (Version 6.1) from www.phonememachine.com.

The University of South Africa's on-line course in five South African languages can be found at www.unisa.ac.za/free_online_course

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