



Learning Gains through Play – Change Leadership

Senior management teams from schools in the Metro East Education District of the Western Cape congregated at the district offices on the wintry afternoon of August 1st. They were about to attend the first of many workshops in the D G Murray-funded project called **Learning Gains through Play**. They would not leave before 6pm that night and were back the next morning for a full day Saturday workshop.



SchoolNet South Africa is driving this three year project that is using innovative technologies in ten schools in two provinces in South Africa, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The focus is on Grade 1 and Grade R learners who will be experiencing the joys of playing with Intel Android Tablets as well as the Xbox Kinect in their classrooms. The specific literacies being tracked are cognitive and motor development as well as the acquisition of English.

The first phase of the project prepares schools for the transformation that technologies bring to classrooms and schools. To ensure this process is effective, principals and their senior managers are attending a series of workshops concentrating on change leadership before the technologies are introduced to their schools.

The five Western Cape primary schools that gathered at the Metro East District offices on Friday 1 August 2014 for the first of these workshops in their province were Christmas Tinto, Somerset West Methodist, Nomsa Mapongwana, Solomon Qatyana and Temperance Town.

The Change Leadership course had been developed by SchoolNet SA for the CSIR's ICT4RED initiative in the Eastern Cape. One of the first research reports coming from the ICT4RED project recognised that ***“Adequate change management is the single most important factor affecting the success of ICT in Education interventions in schools”¹***.

The content for the course material was influenced by literature on the key elements of change management and the debate about change leadership in Michael Fullan's work on *Learning to Lead Change*; the notion that change needs energy, ideas, commitment and ownership rather than a controlling management.

Participants in this workshop soon demonstrated their commitment and their willingness to adapt to the changes espoused in the materials. Discussions were energetic and debates were vigorous. Many of the senior management teams had clearly thought about these issues before and their views were deeply reflective and coherently expressed. This was a most impressive group of competent and committed school managers.



Sipho Didiza and Thembisa Tafeni during the Give One Get One activity.

While the Change Leadership workshops are concerned with improving communications at the school and encouraging principals to adopt more participative approaches, this course also makes use of the teaching strategies that are going to be used by teachers in their classrooms. The Change leadership course was deliberately designed to give school management teams insight into these teaching strategies and first-hand experience of actually using the strategies as part of each module.

The Change Leadership course provides the basic framework for achieving an understanding of this process, gaining buy-in from the role players and exploring how to achieve buy-in from all stakeholders. One of the first questions from this group was, “What if people don't

¹ *ICT for Education (ICT4RED)2013, Initiatives: eTextbook Pilot in Nciba Circuit Schools, p17*

want to change?” By the end of the first few modules participants had gained a good sense of how there were to solve that problem.

This group of senior managers displayed an alert intelligence that enabled clear understanding of the exact problems outlined in the materials. They were easily able to apply the theories to their own schools and situations. Furthermore they were able to expertly draft vision statements and summarise the essential issues involved in change leadership. Here are wordles of some of their offerings.



In its implementation the course, all activities adhere to the following: specific principles:

1. model the same pedagogical skills advocated in the teacher professional development course
2. address the practical issues in the form of case studies which in turn model collaborative problem-solving activities
3. model peer coaching
4. provide the principals with tools to reflect on, monitor, evaluate and communicate about what is happening in their schools.

One of the most effective problem-solving strategies that is explored in this course is that of role play and the most professional demonstration of acting was on display on Saturday 2nd August at the MEED district offices when Gwen Williams, Ella Klaasen and Thobeka Mqikela worked through their issue of principals delegating work to staff members. The video may be viewed on the SchoolNet YouTube channel.



The workshop finished on a very high note following the excellent role play that clearly displayed the very capable problem-solving skills of this group.

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