

## Learning Gains through Play

### KZN – Showcase and Graduation May 27 2016

Although the Learning Gains through Play programme still has nearly a year to run, the first professional development part of the project has been completed. This comprised the ICT4RED modules from the Learning and Teaching with Mobile Devices course as well as SchoolNet's Change Leadership course for senior management teams.

The first province to hold its graduation event was KZN. The ceremony was hosted by Thembelihle primary school in Howick, who had pulled out all the stops to prepare for the day by kindly donating beautiful flower arrangements, home-baked cakes for the occasion with the SchoolNet logo and handmade necklaces for all graduates and guests.



The proceedings were heralded by the Thembelihle school choir, trained by Mr John Tungay, one of the founders of the Drakensberg Boys Choir school. Attendees at the ceremony were honoured to be able to listen to the choir warm up with several entertaining songs before they sang the national anthem followed by two other excellent renditions of well-loved songs to start proceedings.



Hlengiwe Mfeka, the SchoolNet Project Manager, requested that teachers open with a prayer and then she drew attention to the programme for the day and explained that officials from the KZN Education Department had indicated that they would be arriving a little late. On cue, three curriculum personnel from the District, who specialise in the Foundation Phase then arrived and took their places at the top table.

Janet Thomson, Executive Director of SchoolNet South Africa provided a brief background to the project as well as a short history of SchoolNet SA. She outlined the aims of the project as well as the summarising the achievements and current findings. The emphasis in the project so far had been on promoting learner-centred teaching and specifically promoting “play” with the assessment of its impact on visual literacy, oral communication in English, fine motor skills, gross motor skills and numeracy. She explained that teachers had progressed at different rates but that eventually, even resistant teachers had to acknowledge that the use of digital apps and Xbox Kinect games were impacting significantly on improved learner performance and to such an extent that the use of specific apps could be detected in the learner scores in specific literacy tests.

Then it was the turn of the teachers to provide accounts of their experiences. First up was Mrs Thembisile Maphumulo from Triandra Primary in the Karkloof who gave a graphic account of what life is like in a multigrade classroom in a remote farm school. Videos of Thembi’s presentation are available on the SchoolNet YouTube channel – <https://youtu.be/Hz2VfkToAfe>



*Mrs Thembisile Maphumulo*



*Ms Nompumelelo Hadebe*

The next teacher to present was Ms Nompumelelo Hadebe from Qhamukile Primary in Mphophomeni who was such a confident and professional speaker that she could have been making such expert presentations for her whole career. Three videos of her presentation are available on the SchoolNet YouTube channel here <https://youtu.be/eN2WbVF6M3o> here

[https://youtu.be/Nm9U8v\\_eyh0](https://youtu.be/Nm9U8v_eyh0) and here [https://youtu.be/CMsHI1sP\\_SY](https://youtu.be/CMsHI1sP_SY) The main message of Mpume's presentation was on the benefits of using X-box and examples of how well it integrates all learning areas

The next presentation was from Joyce Ntuli, Grade 1 teachers from Thembelihle Primary School. Joyce explained the language complexity at the school. While the Language of learning and teaching was English, none of the learners use English as their home language and in fact the school dealt with a range of home languages. Joyce carefully outlined how she had been significantly affected by the Learning Gains project and how her confidence with technology use had soared. She cited her Grade 1 learners of 2015 and how they had impressed their Grade 2 teacher in 2016. Two videos of Joyce's presentation can be viewed from these links <https://youtu.be/7LTUbr2zGJ8> and here <https://youtu.be/feU2RgnzQq0>

The first representative from the senior management group was introduced by Hlengiwe. <https://youtu.be/5oXCuDL43Gk> Mrs Flo Buthelezi Principal of Triandra Primary spoke about the assistance and support that the Learning Gains programme had afforded her. She particularly drew attention to the Change Leadership course, how it changed her perception of her role as principal and had drawn in the staff, encouraging them to work as a team.



*Ms Buthelezi*



*Ms Mfeka*



*Mr Shaw*

The principal at Thembelihle Primary School, Mr Damon Shaw echoed Ms Buthelezi's sentiments but also shared the story of how he had arrived at the school and had been immediately thrown into the midst of the SchoolNet Learning Gains programme and the Change Leadership course, even before he had sorted out the furniture in his office. Damon emphasised how much the project had made him realise the value of lifelong learning. The highlight of the course for him was developing a culture of evaluation within the school that allowed him and the staff to measure progress and then to assess and to strategize how to improve. Videos of the two principals' speeches are available from these links:

<https://youtu.be/ssbMuRLB6KM>, <https://youtu.be/TuEVtCcgbBc>  
[https://youtu.be/g\\_6WaWXOKeg](https://youtu.be/g_6WaWXOKeg)

and



Before Hlengiwe introduced the next speaker, the Acting Principal of Cedara Primary requested to speak even though she was not scheduled on the programme. Ms Pat Makhaye explained how she had not been part of the project because she was teaching Grade 2 and was therefore not fully supportive of the programme but now that she is teaching learners who are products of the programme, she has appreciated the value of the Learning Gains through Play project. Ms Makhaye explained that having the project at her school had replaced the need to attend the gym because the Xbox was the best form of exercise.

The next speaker was Dr Thami Nkabinde from the provincial department of education. He said he felt the enthusiasm and excitement from the teachers in the room. He expressed some scepticism around whether teachers were really implementing new teaching concepts with these learning technologies in their classrooms. He took issue with the terminology, '21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills' because these skills were not necessarily new. (Of course he was omitting to mention what was new was that these skills have not specifically been targeted in the curriculum before and that the really new move is to develop new pedagogies for this deeper learning.) A video of Dr Nkabinde's speech can be accessed here: [https://youtu.be/g\\_6WaWXOKeg](https://youtu.be/g_6WaWXOKeg)

The ceremony closed with the awards, firstly prizes for those who had made presentations at the showcase then certificates for all the graduates and finally special prizes to two teachers; namely Nompumelelo Hadebe who has shown great support for her peers and beyond and Thandiwe Zuma for good progress and overall improvement.



A vote of thanks to the hosts, Thembelihle Primary was given by Hlengiwe and the ceremony closed exactly on time.



This graduation invigorated enthusiasm and a sense of ownership from project teachers and created a better understanding of the purpose and the moral imperative of the project. It is hoped that teacher commitment to lifelong learning, skills and knowledge being acquired will lead to self-motivation as it is one of those individual attributes required for project sustainability. This last year of the project is devoted to a Peer Coaching approach which involves the whole school in a staff development programme around the effective use of technologies to achieve learning gains across literacies.

H Mfeka June 2016