

The Need for Social-Emotional Learning in South Africa

SEL (social-emotional learning) is currently a hot topic in global education news. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines this as learners' "acquisition of skills to recognise and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively". Growing recognition of the value of SEL has resulted in the promotion of this as an actual teaching goal and embedded in every lesson. Social-emotional literacy is 'teachable' and while some classes such as Drama are best suited for this, every teacher can encourage, promote and model SEL skills no matter what subjects or classes they teach.

Emotional literacy was one of components of a SchoolNet South Africa research project, funded by DG Murray Trust, which involved the integration of technology in Grades R to 3 to enhance essential foundational skills. The Learning Gains through Play (LGP) project has focused on the development and practice of gross-motor skills, fine-motor skills, numeracy, visual literacy (including emotional literacy) and the acquisition of oral English skills through the innovative use of technology-enabled, learner-centred play in the classroom. For the past four years, SchoolNet South Africa has been tracking progress of the same cohort of learners, through Foundation Phase, at ten schools (five in the Western Cape and five in KwaZulu-Natal) and comparing their progress with control schools in each province.

Intel tablets loaded with carefully selected apps were integrated in learning activities to stimulate and enhance visual literacy skills such as visual recognition, visual discrimination, visual interpretation such as sequencing, and visual memory. Emotional literacy was included. Xbox Kinect game consoles with data-projectors engaged learning through play and provided further opportunities to develop, practice and consolidate these important 21st Century skills at the time when learners are at the stage of beginning to make sense of written text.

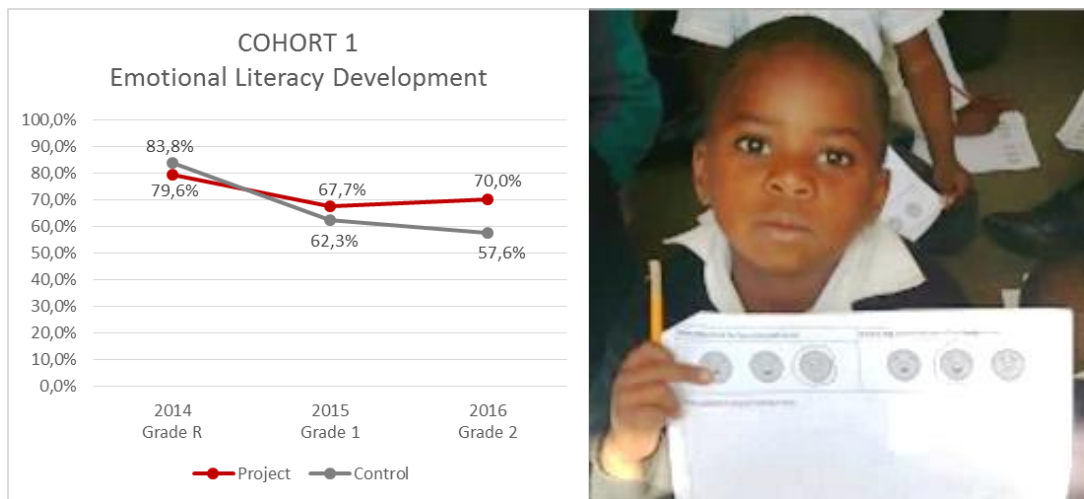
Teachers participated in professional development workshops focusing on analysing, evaluating and choosing tablet apps to develop visual literacy skills. Teachers used their own tablets in class to develop visual literacy skills particularly in class reading sessions. The school timetable governing the sharing of the tablet bank and Xbox Kinect between the Foundation Phase classes provided weekly opportunities for learners to explore Xbox games and tablet apps not only with their teachers, but also on their own or with their peers.

A baseline assessment was conducted in mid-2014 with Grade R learners. The same learners were tested again in Grade 1 in 2015 and finally in Grade 2 in 2016. Tests were grade-specific and included an emotional literacy component. Responses were assessed using rubrics. Results were collected, processed and analysed.

Learners were asked to identify each basic emotion through the use of simple emoticons.

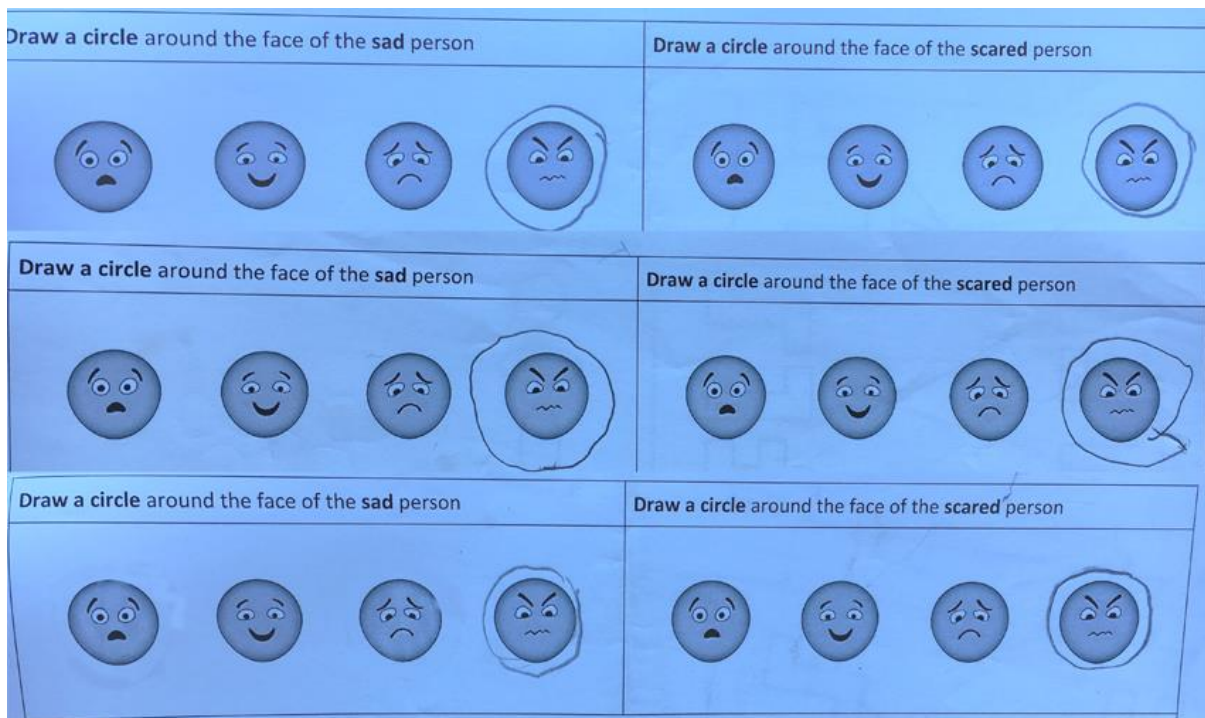


When analysing the emotional literacy component of the visual literacy assessment, a small difference between the LGP project and control learners was evident. This was not unexpected for the project school learners to outperform the control learners as the former had had the opportunity to play with the emotional literacy tablet apps and Xbox games while the latter had not. It was further analysis that provoked deeper thoughts.

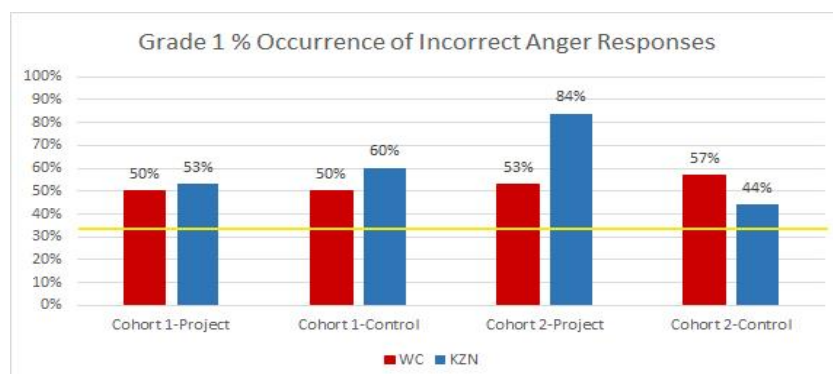


Firstly it is interesting that emotional literacy results decreased with age. This explanation could be due to the fact that the Grade R test required only a simple distinction between happy and sad while Grade 1 and Grade 2 tests included more emotions such as anger and fear. However research by Visser, Alant and Harty (2009) shows that by age four years old, most children can recognize the basic emotions: happy, sad, angry and afraid.

A worrying aspect was an apparent prevalence of incorrect selections made of the emotion, 'anger'. Learner responses were further analysed to confirm this.



Only Grade 1 data was analysed because the Grade R emotional literacy test questions did not present any angry options and the Grade 2 emotional literacy test required an angry option choice for a correct answer in one question. Correct responses were discarded and incorrect responses were analysed for the occurrence of anger.



There was a 33 1/3 percent chance of any one incorrect answer chosen (shown by the yellow line). In all data-sets, the anger option occurred more often than this, ranging from 44% to 84%. While still higher than expected, this lowest incidence of anger was among the Cohort 2 control learners in KZN and the highest incidence of anger was among the Cohort 2 project

learners in KZN. This is surprising because the control school and one of the project schools are within one kilometre of each other.

Interviews conducted with teachers participating in the LGP project paint a disturbing picture of the social-emotional life of their learners. One LGP teacher, Ms M., believes the home and community environment in her peri-urban township is the most damaging to the children. She noted that the majority of learners have young, and even school-going, parents who behave irresponsibly and recklessly themselves. In many cases the grandparents are struggling to raise their grandchildren while simultaneously dealing with their own children's alcohol, drug and physical abuse issues in the same home. Ms M. was disheartened by the extent and severity of behavioural problems witnessed in her Grade 1 classroom. She rarely met parents instead she dealt only with the desperate grandparents overwhelmed by their circumstances and who plead with her "just to beat their children" she says. Ms. M has since left teaching to pursue her Masters in Psychology where she feels she can play a more useful role in serving her community.

Written by Tracey Butchart

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SchoolNet Learning Gains through Play Recommended Emotional Literacy Apps and Games



Kidoko My Emotions Free

Kidoko Inside Education



This app is compatible with your device.



Tuli Emotions

IBM Argentina - Ciudadanía Corporativa Puzzle

Unrated

This app is compatible with your device.



Baby Face, Teach Emotions

E-Nizio Education



Offers in-app purchases

This app is compatible with your device.



Touch-Emotions

Special iApps Education Education

3+

This app is compatible with your device.



Emotion Matching Games

My Kid Soft Puzzle

3+

This app is compatible with your device.



Baby Sitting - Nursery Doctor

Princess Mobile Entertainment Limited Educational

3+

Offers in-app purchases

This app is compatible with your device.

Add to wishlist



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