

Learning Gains through Play



Playtime again!

Teachers and Senior management teams from the five project schools in KZN attended a two day workshop during the January 2015 school holidays. Thembelihle Primary kindly hosted the workshop which was attended by twenty five participants and a team of facilitators comprising Hlengiwe Mfeka, Tracey Butchart, Senzo Ngcobo and Janet Thomson.

Purpose of the workshop - The purpose of the two new modules was to share the findings from the evaluation research with teachers and show how the research objectives are directing the project. Teachers appreciated this information because it gave them further insight into the effective use of the technology and allowed them to delve deeper into the interpretations of the CAPS documents. By the end of the two days, teachers were able to identify and explain the focus literacies of the project and how their development is enhanced through play. These focus literacies of the project are gross-motor, fine-motor skills, visual literacy and oral communication in English.

Fine Motor Skills – Touchgrind BMX The first day was devoted to exploring the research-based value of developing gross and fine motor skills for academic progress and success. Teachers were in agreement in their responses to the readings and shared ideas around how they had been using play-driven learning in their classrooms using the Xbox Kinect games and tablet apps.



Damon Shaw (Thembelihle)



TouchgrindBMX app



Mandla Mkhulise (Qhamukile)

The requirements of CAPS relating to fine-motor skills were analysed and appropriate apps were identified to explore these further. Touch grind BMX was considered to be one of the most effective in targeting fine motor skills; teachers experimented with their own skills in

the game, while having to accept that they will probably crash their BMX bike a lot more than their learners will. Videos of the teachers using the BMX app are viewable on the SchoolNet YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/user/SchoolNetSA/videos>

What the research is measuring - Lively discussions followed the sharing of favourite apps and Kinect games as well as a debate around the differences between “teaching” and ‘training’ as well as the value of using rubrics. Teachers also explored the relationship between the project research instruments and the related content from CAPS. The presentation, “What are we measuring?” is available on Slideshare <http://goo.gl/d4DoKA> The famous “Little Boy” poem by Helen Buckley, demonstrating how important it is for teachers to allow learners to be creative was discussed. Teachers were unanimous in their support for creativity above conformity. Some concern was expressed by teachers who felt that their SMT members may not always be in support of sometimes noisy and seemingly chaotic classrooms.



Team relays with bean bags

Analysing Physical Education CAPS requirements – all teachers formed teams outside, in order to participate in a quick shuttle relay race. The experience demanded a surprising level of spatial awareness and sequencing skills but an even more surprising degree of social interaction because heated disputes about the winners followed each race. ☺

Using the Gallery Walk methodology, teachers circulated around readings from academic papers written about the relationship between motor development and cognitive development which included a report by the UK Sports Trust **on *The importance of physical literacy on child development***, an article entitled, ***More Active Play Equals Better Thinking Skills for Kids*** and a paper from Brazil, ***Inter-limb Coordination: An Important Facet of Gross-Motor Ability*** which included recommended classroom activities to promote gross motor coordination. Two of the exhibits linked these issues to the relevant compulsory content in the CAPS physical education. These were then related to the most appropriate Kinect games and apps and teachers subsequently explained that this gave them more confidence in selecting physical activities with a deliberate purpose.

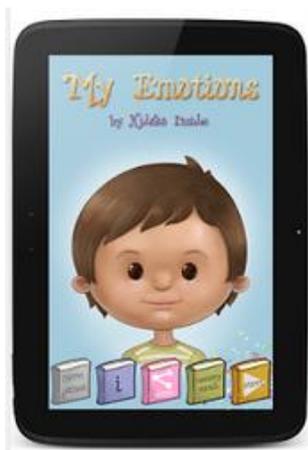
Teachers were exposed to the Bartle Test, a gaming profile test which assesses one's gaming personality; it categorises gamers into being one of four personalities: Killers, Achievers, Socialisers or Explorers. Participants were requested to take the test for homework and one of the comments on the evaluation form was how interesting it was to gain insight into how learners might be motivated.

Visual Literacy and Oral Acquisition of English – on the second day of the workshop the literacies in the spotlight were visual literacy and acquisition of English oral communication skills and how their development is enhanced through play. Teachers considered the differences between additional language 'learning' compared to 'acquisition' of language and analysed the development of the 21st Century skill of Visual Literacy. Discussions related to opportunities or 'teachable moments' that present themselves in the Xbox games and tablet apps but this time for developing oral and visual literacies as stated in CAPS.

Teachers analysed their favourite games and apps, assessing their value in promoting visual literacy. This was further broken down into visual recognition, visual discrimination, visual interpretation and visual evaluation. Teachers surprised themselves with how many visual perception benefits they discovered in a range of apps and Kinect games.

The presentation for Visual Literacy is available on Slideshare here <http://goo.gl/sd0yJz>

Games about Emotions - the project research so far had indicated that many learners had struggled with visual interpretation of faces showing different emotions or certainly struggled with their recognition of emotion displayed on cartoon faces. Learners' visual interpretations of the facial expressions predominantly and erroneously chose anger. Therefore time was spent on two apps that assist learners with visual discrimination and perception of emotions, one of which had been developed for autistic and Down syndrome children who invariably fail to evaluate and relate to social situations. These apps were **Tuli Emotions** and **Kidoko My Emotions**.



Kidoko My Emotions



Tuli Emotions

Videos of teachers experimenting with these apps at the workshop are viewable on the SchoolNet YouTube Channel - <https://www.youtube.com/user/SchoolNetSA/videos>

Language Acquisition – Teachers used the learning stations teaching method to study a number of videos about the 5 stages of language acquisition as well as theories around

comprehensible input. A great deal of debate was stimulated by the quote from *Elliot W. Eisner (2002)* “Our language abilities do NOT define the limits of our cognition” and from *Lynell Burmark*, “The primary literacy of the 21st century will be visual: pictures, graphics, images of every kind. It's no longer enough to read and write. Our students must learn to process both words and pictures. They must be able to move gracefully and fluently between text and images, between literal and figurative worlds”

Teachers analysed the language levels of their own learners according to these theories and the 5 stages of language acquisition. They were in agreement with the findings. The table on the right indicates findings so far both in the W Cape and in KZN.



Prizes and awards – Coincidentally there was a visit from Mr Thami Nkabinde, Deputy Chief Education Specialist for e-learning at the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education. Mr Nkabinde was requested to present prizes to those teachers who had been most supportive to their colleagues. He was also asked to say a few inspirational words about the status of e-learning in the KZN province and how the *Learning Gains from Play* initiative might align to it.



Teachers listening to Mr T Nkabinde (KZN DoBE)



Ms Joyce Ntuli and Mr Nkabinde



Ntabiseng Hlela, Janet Thomson and Mr Nkabinde



Mr Nkabinde addressing the workshop

[Project website and curation of artefacts](#) – unfortunately there was insufficient time for teachers to experiment with uploading evidence for badges to the website. However, there was time for Tracey to explain three exciting project initiatives.

1. **Learning Gains Through Play Publication** – Games to Develop Foundational Literacies: A Collection of Authentic Learning Briefs
2. **Video Diaries** – completed by teachers on a monthly basis for the Video Diarist badge.
3. **The Reflective Journal** – this is organised by creating a ‘Two Stars and a Wish’ entry each month. A Star is a classroom lesson, activity, teaching/learning moment or incident that worked well, while a Wish is a classroom lesson, activity, or incident that the teacher wished could have happened in a different way – or worked better.

[Foundational Literacies – findings](#) – being short of time at the end of the last day of the workshop meant that schools were only able to take away hard copies of their learners’ performances in all four literacies; the discussion around these results and how they relate to the future of the project will have to be included in the next workshop.

More photographs of the workshop are available on the SchoolNet Gallery

Day 1 <http://goo.gl/kzjTxK>

Day 2 <http://goo.gl/LUqTkB>

Janet Thomson

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