

# DGMT Trustees visit Solomon Qatyana

The DG Murray Trust have been very generous in their support of the Learning Gains through Play project being implemented in KZN and the Western Cape. One year into the project it was time for members of the Board of Trustees from DG Murray to visit one of the project schools in order to see for themselves how their funding was being used.



The visit was scheduled for August 20<sup>th</sup> and the selected school was Solomon Qatyana Primary situated in Asanda Village in Strand. Solomon Qatyana is a school that comprises prefabricated classrooms and is often plagued by flooded playgrounds and freezing cold or boiling hot classrooms depending on the season.

Mr Rodney Nissen from the Metro East District of the Western Cape Department of Education and Tracey Butchart, the monitoring and evaluation expert for the project, from SchoolNet accompanied the seven trustees to the Grade R and Grade 1 classrooms at the appointed hour.

The Grade 1 class in Ms Buyeye's classroom were using a range of different apps on their Intel tablets that had been donated through the project. These apps highlighted the different foundational literacies targeted by the project (fine-motor skills; English oral skills; number sense; and visual literacy including sequencing and emotional literacy). There were 42 learners in the class sharing tablets and despite the potential distraction by visitors, one can see from these photos that the learners were engrossed in their work.



The Trustees circulated around the classroom asking questions of learners. The visitors were particularly interested in the selection of apps and Tracey explained which apps had been selected to develop which literacies and their links to the CAPS curriculum. They also asked Tracey about the teachers' reactions to the training that SchoolNet had conducted and how the project had been received generally by schools.

Ms Tafeni's Grade R class was having a lesson using a number of work stations with one of them being an energetic Xbox station. As can be seen from the photos, the learners are captivated by their Kinect games.

After the visits to the classrooms, the principal, Ms Mniki gathered her full SMT team in the staff room as well as the Grade 1 and Grade R teachers in order to answer questions from the DGMT board members. Ms Mniki started with appreciation for the inclusion of Solomon Qatyana Primary School in the Learning Gains through Play project. She highlighted some of the challenges they have faced particularly around the issue of language and pointed out that isiXhosa was not the first

language of all learners and yet it was the chosen language of learning and teaching (LOLT). Solomon Qatyana was therefore considering the adoption of English as their LOLT next year in Foundation phase. However, the point she wished to emphasise was that the current year's Grade 2 learners have acquired noticeably higher levels of English than in previous years and teachers felt it was as a direct result of their experiences with the tablets and the Xbox in 2014.



David Harrison, of DGMT had opened the meeting with a message to teachers, mentioning that they were "switching on learners' brains". One of the trustees asked further about the issue of mother tongue in Foundation phase. Ms Buyeye pointed out that even though the language of the Xbox and the language used in the apps was English, the learners were still using isiXhosa while playing. Ms Buyeye explained how the project had impacted on teachers. She said that she was 52 years old and had never touched a tablet before the project came to the school. Now she was using it all the time

and "for everything" such as email, taking photos and videos and Ms Buyeye explained how she enjoys making collages of her photos.

The trustees passed complimentary comments about the innovative design of the tablet storage/charging box and the compact Xbox casing. Hardware and software issues were mentioned briefly. Learners' low emotional scores during the evaluations had been a cause for concern. Tracey explained how the apps were helping learners and how engaged the learners had been in them. Trustees were interested in how the teachers chose relevant apps. Tracey explained how teachers had been through professional development workshops practising analysis of the CAPS curriculum and assessing the usefulness of apps within that context, to truly integrate the technology in classroom practice. It is an ongoing collaborative process that will result in an anthology of reviews of apps being compiled by her and the project teachers. The trustees thought this was an excellent idea and great that the project would be leaving a legacy for other teachers.

The principal, Ms Mniki highlighted the fact that the Change Leadership course had had a very decisive and positive impact on the management and administration of the school. Tracey reported that the cohesion in the SMT was visibly reinforced by the unity and enthusiasm for the project that they displayed during the discussions. Ms Mniki explained that the project had been so successful in the Foundation Phase that they were really hoping that it could be extended to the rest of the grades.





At the end of the discussions, Mr Nissen summarised proceedings and wrapped up what had been a most successful school visit. Everyone felt that Solomon Qatyana Primary teachers had excelled themselves and that they had demonstrated their expertise, enthusiasm and commitment to the project.