

Ms Noxolo Buyeye – the profile of an “early adopter”¹



Noxolo Buyeye was born, bred and schooled in the Eastern Cape. She taught for many years in the Eastern Cape before coming to the Western Cape. She is currently a permanent staff member at Solomon Qatyana Primary, in Asanda Village near Somerset West, teaching Grade 1 and as Head of Department responsible for both Grade R and Grade 1. Noxolo believes that like building a house, learning must be built on a strong foundation. She describes herself as a teacher who loves challenges. She has always requested the difficult learners be placed in her class so that she can help them

build this strong foundation.

She is the first to point out that she has benefited personally from the Learning Gains through Play (LGP) Project in the growth of her technological skills. At the start of the project she had never used a tablet or a smart phone. Her skills were limited to typing on a computer and printing her work – that was all! She never knew about emails or Facebook. The LGP project motivated her to learn to master technology. It began with creating her email address and being able to communicate through email and even sharing her photos. Now she says she can't live without it. When her tablet's battery dies, she is lost without it. When it was in for a week for repair, she wasn't sure she would survive!

Noxolo has enjoyed the exposure to other teachers and other schools through the LGP project. At Solomon Qatyana Primary the teachers are all Black and isiXhosa-speaking. She has valued meeting a range of different people at the workshops and being exposed to other cultures; her confidence in interacting with others and especially speaking in English has grown tremendously. Noxolo feels that the LGP project has raised her profile – she is well known now. The opportunity to travel to Durban to participate in the SchoolNet SA conference was a highlight. It exposed her to a large number of people and to different cultures. It boosted her confidence, her passion and her reputation. When she was requested to make a presentation at the RASA international conference at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town, Noxolo took it in her stride.

Noxolo feels her teaching practice has been completely changed through the LGP project. She believes that the learners love technology. She notes that even before they go to school, children are able to use phones, TV remotes etc. so *“we must move forward for them, not back!”* She believes that “old” teachers have decided that change is not for them so Noxolo wants to show them that if she can do it (as she says “with her background from the Eastern Cape”) that they can do it too. She believes that it is critical for teachers to have their own personal tablets before

¹ An early adopter is a person who embraces new technology before most other people do.

they can use them in their classrooms for their work. She feels that schools must invest in teacher technology first. She describes it as *“you must have a car to learn to drive”*.

Noxolo says that when she helps teachers she starts with smart phones to get the teachers on board and so that they see that the tablets are not very different from their phones. Teachers who don't have smart phones find the tablets more difficult to use. In planning, Noxolo believes that technology must always be present, even in assessment.

Noxolo believes that her views about the value of play at school have changed a lot through the LGP project. The use of the Xbox has introduced more play. The indoor games have solved problems of being unable to do physical education outside when it floods (which it does frequently). Even though the assembly of the Xbox is not easy and takes time, the demand for it from the learners is great. Solomon Qatyana Primary has two Xboxes and



this has made the sharing between the eight classes much easier. The Xboxes have even been used at school fundraisers – the parents eagerly pay to take turns playing the games and this has generated funds for the school.

The LGP project has enabled Noxolo to develop new skills. As a passionate teacher who was always willing and keen to help others, LGP has made her a more valuable resource to her school. As she says *“God knows she is an asset”*. Noxolo feels valued and appreciated at SQPS and is committed to stay there beyond the project to continue the progress of integrating technology in the classroom. She says that sometimes she is disheartened when other teachers are not as enthusiastic but she believes that they are all growing and she must manage her frustration that others are not growing at her pace. She copes by not focusing on the challenges but rather on the bigger vision.

Noxolo has registered for an on-line course as she wants to learn more in order to be able to increase her skills and knowledge. She wants to grow so that she can help teachers beyond her own school. There is no question for her that she will continue to integrate technology in her lessons and she plans to expand its use. She wants the Grade 4 learners of 2017 to use the new tablets and she will ensure that this happens. She has undertaken to assist the Grade 4 teachers develop their technological skills. She says *“it is the 21st century, we must go forward”*.



Solomon Qatyana Primary School is the highest overall achieving school in the LGP project. While ranked 9th out of 12 schools including the two control schools at the start of the project, based on ANA results, not only did SQPS make the largest learning gains over the three year period of any project school but SQPS achieved the highest actual overall results when compared to all of the other schools. This is an extraordinary achievement and testament to the commitment and focused energy of the teachers and the senior management team

at SQPS, truly embodied by Ms. Noxolo Buyeye.

Noxolo's advice to teachers who are introducing technology in the classroom is to be totally committed to seeing it through right to the end. She says there must be no half measures. Noxolo has certainly been a shining star throughout the Learning Gains project and has definitely been totally committed to being the best 21st Century teacher she can be. The now famous quotation from Noxolo very early on in the Learning Gains project sums up the attitude of this early adopter:

"I am 50 something years old, I had not touched a tablet before this project. Now I cannot live without it and I cannot teach without it."