



Learning Gains for Play - Report on school visits in the Western Cape

30 October 2014

Even though the schools had only received the Xbox and the 7" Intel tablets a few days earlier, Rodney Nissen from Metro East had informed the schools that he was bringing SchoolNet (Janet and Tracey) and that we would be expecting to visit classrooms. Being observed teaching in class is always onerous for teachers so there had been quite some anxiety in some schools before our arrival.

Temperance Town Primary

First up was Temperance Town Primary. The school is surrounded by a dramatic landscape, being at the foot of the beautiful Hottentots Holland Mountain Range and at the same time being able to look down on the picturesque seaside village of Gordon's Bay which is part of the famous False Bay coastline. The photos below do not do justice because the weather was misty and rainy on the day of our visit.



We were warmly welcomed with an overwhelmingly positive response from principal, Gwen Opperman, and her Foundation Phase staff. It is clear to see that the school and its community are proud of their school which looked spic and span with no children to be seen wandering around; the one child who found himself out of a class as we walked from the admin block was firmly chided back into a classroom.

Read more of this report on the SchoolNet website [here](#)

We stopped in at Ella Klaasen's classroom and greeted her learners and then proceeded to Bianca Bayer's class where there was a palpable feeling of expectation and excitement – the room had been darkened and two children were in the middle of the classroom engaged in their game. When greeting us the whole class in unison asked in Afrikaans how we were and when Tracey answered and asked how they were, there was a resounding chorus of "FANTASTIESE!!" Both Bianca and Mary-Anne Meyer had their tablets in hand and were taking photos and capturing videos.



The Xbox was set up and projecting against a sheet clipped up over the board and Bianca's classroom had curtains to close. Children were playing *Rally Ball* in pairs and taking turns. All learners were completely engaged – not just the two participants but the rest of the class who were acting as spectators and constantly answering questions, providing encouragement and enthusiastic support. Impressively, Bianca made use of every teaching and learning opportunity presented. She used the scores to reinforce whole numbers breaking them up into tens and units. She regularly interrupted the game in order to make use of a teaching opportunity such as practising laterality and directionality with left and right hands moving left and right and whole body forward and back. She practised English visual literacy, reading English instructions to learners and directing them to English instruction buttons on-screen.



It was a privilege to watch little Monica Blekiwe included in a vigorous game of *Rally Ball* without any risk of injury to her fragile little body but the most striking aspect of her performance was the kind and caring encouragement she received from her classmates. Unfortunately Bianca experienced a technical difficulty half way through the lesson that prevented access to the games. Despite this, the teachers and learners at Temperance Town are extremely positive and motivated to make the most of the opportunities presented by the project. They showed us a roster to maximize and distribute the use of the technology among the classes and Mary-Anne even gave us a glimpse of a delightful video of Principal Gwen enthusiastically 'Xboxing' accompanied by the school cleaner. We were able to ask principals of the other schools if they had videos to show us of them using the Xbox.

[Christmas Tinto, N2-Strand-Somerset West](#)

We moved on to Christmas Tinto where we had a brief meeting with the principal. We then went to the classroom of Ms Ndabeni, the Foundation Phase HOD. She had the Xbox kit in the classroom but it wasn't set up yet. She took us next door to Phindi Makibi's classroom. Phindi was in the process of handing out tablets to her class. We assisted with the distribution and turning on the tablets. The learners were enthusiastically engaging with the tablets.





Phindi gave instructions in isiXhosa but there seemed to be some confusion with not all the tablets having the same applications available. The SD cards seemed to be causing problems in some cases, extruding from the slots. Learners were choosing games that were not installed from the SD card and we were all bombarded with learners thrusting tablets at us to fix it. However many learners were able to explore independently and I saw a number watching Sesame Street videos on their tablets. The most popular game choice seemed to be *Cupcake Maker* but it was not available on those tablets where the SD card was faulty. Phindi managed the class really well especially considering the challenges and was taking advantage of teaching opportunities.

We returned to Ms Ndabeni's class where the Xbox had now been set up. The teacher was sitting at the back of the class on a desk watching silently while individual boys were successively playing *Rally Ball*. There was lots of excitement from the learner audience especially when scores were presented at the end. These were greeted with loud applause and victorious acknowledgement by the 'champion'.



Solomon Qatyana, N2-Strand-Somerset West

We drove a few hundred metres to neighbouring Solomon Qatyana where we met with the principal in her office. We discussed issues around insurance and ownership of the devices. Ms Buyeye, the Grade 1 teacher, joined us and mentioned that there had been some resistance from some teachers to what was thought to be additional work.



Rodney stressed at each school that the technology needed to be integrated into existing lesson plans to add value to the curriculum and that there should not be lessons 'on' the technology but rather lessons 'using' the technology where it was most relevant and could add value.



We followed Ms Buyeye to her class where she distributed tablets to her learners. Learners were excitedly engaged and Ms Buyeye demonstrated the use of the app, *Cupcake Maker*. She conducted her lesson in English teaching the vocabulary used in the app and reinforcing this by writing the words in English on the chalk board. We were privileged to see an experienced teacher in action who thoroughly covering each topic; she practised laterality and directionality and took advantage of teaching and learning opportunities presented in the app. The learners seemed to really enjoy the activity.



Somerset West Methodist Primary

We moved on to Somerset West Methodist Primary School and met with the principal. He had just finished teaching a lesson himself and was very positive about the opportunities offered by the project. As it was break time, we waited in the staffroom before going to observe a well-prepared Grade 1 lesson using the *Cupcake Maker* app on the tablets. The teacher Adele Driessen was extremely well organised and her learners listened to her; she had brought concrete baking utensils and ingredients from home to compare with the virtual process of cookie making offered by the app. The learners were engaged and enthusiastic and knew what they were doing. English oral communication skills and fine-motor skills were being thoroughly practiced. Adele brought a tear to our eyes by introducing a new learner who did not speak English, Afrikaans or isiXhosa and despite her inability to communicate with him, she had been able to happily engage him with his tablet and enable him to participate in the activity.





We visited Mrs Elhaan Issacs in the classroom next door before we left. She was using the Xbox with her Grade R class as a reward for finishing class work. Two little boys were playing *Rally Ball* with such intensity that they did not even seem to notice our presence. As the technology had been delivered so recently, Mrs Isaacs said that they were all still in the exploration stage but it was encouraging to see it all up and running smoothly and the children clearly gaining so much enjoyment from it already.



Nomsa Mapongwana, Khayelitsha

The last school to visit was Nomsa Mapongwana and we arrived just before the end of the school day. We met with the principal where Rodney highlighted concerns about communications with the school. The principal had not been expecting us despite the official communication through the District office. The technology was still locked away and had therefore not been set up for us to see. The principal expressed a reluctance to use it until it was insured. We met Foundation Phase HOD, Leti Qayi, who said that she had been expecting us but as no demonstration of the technology had been prepared, Rodney made a

follow up appointment to visit again next Thursday. Leti took us to the Grade 1 classroom of Ms Mbondwana and then the Grade R classroom of Ms Thembi Tafeni. The Grade R class sang for us and said thank you for the technology. Thembi seemed very excited and motivated to start using the Xbox and tablets in her class. We met a few more Foundation Phase teachers as Leti guided us through vandalized classrooms while parent-teacher meetings seemed to be being conducted. It was a rather chaotic visit and Rodney reminded everyone to be ready for his follow up visit the following week.



Videos of the visits will be available on the project website and the photographs will be uploaded to the SchoolNet gallery on the website.

The plan is to follow up with some rich professional development sessions in the New Year where teachers can exchange ideas about the inclusion of the technologies and share a large repository of apps and games to choose from.

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