

engaged in debates, which Trelor (15) said were nerve-wracking as they did not have enough time to prepare.

By Matthew Makgatho, Nicholas Claassen and Xola Madi

AN intensive education improvement programme has started bearing fruit after its second year of operation. This is according to the results of numeracy and literacy tests administered last year to about 14 000 Grade 3 learners from 461 schools.

Known as the District Development Support Programme, this project is an education improvement initiative of the Government, and is funded by the US Agency for International Development.

The programme is conducted in collaboration with the Department of Education and the provincial departments of education in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape and Limpopo.

The programme focuses on the quality of teaching and learning, school management and governance, and the support services provided to schools. One focus of intervention is the foundation phase, which ends in Grade 3.

The first test was in October 2000 before the programme was introduced to the target schools in 2001. Grade 3 pupils in those schools were then tested in October 2001 and 2002.

The goal was to test the effect of the programme on learner performance in numeracy-literacy. Appropriate testing instruments were developed to measure pupils' grasp of skills as they are stated in curriculum documents for Grade 3.

These instruments were administered to random samples of learners from the 461 schools. About 14 000 were tested each year. There was very little, if any, change in Grade 3 performance from 2000 to 2001, but in 2002 the numeracy score increased by 12 percentage points, whereas the literacy score increased by five percentage points.

In 2000, pupils obtained an average success rate of 26 percentage points in numeracy and 53 percentage points in literacy. In passing, the literacy tasks may perhaps more aptly be referred to as reading tasks.

The significantly higher scores in the reading tasks may partly be attributed to the fact that all the tasks were of a multiple-choice type, resulting in pupils probably getting a number of answers correct by chance.

In the case of numeracy, there was a significant improvement (of about 1 percentage point) in 2001 and again (of about 10 percentage points) in 2002.

For literacy there was a significant decrease (of about 2.3 percentage points) in 2001 and a significant increase (of about 7 percentage points) in 2002. Girls outperformed boys each year in both numeracy and literacy. In numeracy, girls outperformed boys by 2 percentage points in 2000 and 2001, and by 4 percentage points in 2002.

In literacy, they outperformed boys by 6 percentage points in each of the three years. This is a *significant* difference.

required to perform one full year of national service", which Trelor said was interesting.

It's confirmed: girls have better head for figures than boys

and there is no indication that it may be shrinking. It is generally found that girls mature faster than boys do emotionally and socially during the foundation phase, and it may be that they naturally progress faster in schoolwork.

On the other hand, it is possible that learning conditions at schools favour girls over boys.

As for the general scores, based on comparisons of the test results of 2000, 2001 and 2002, it is clear that small changes occurred between 2000 and 2001, and large improvements in performance occurred in 2002. These improvements may have resulted from any one or more of a number of factors:

- The support from the districts could have succeeded in improving educational practice;
- School support officers could have been focusing their efforts more directly on Grade 3;
- Service providers were probably better established in 2002 and would consequently be more effective than before;
- It could have taken a year or more for the training of educators and new teaching materials to take effect in the schools;
- Some additional programmes that were introduced only in 2002 could have had an exceptional effect on learner attainment;
- The feedback session in January 2002 could have helped to motivate service providers and educators to make a difference;
- The nature of the questions in the tests may have become known, resulting in some "teaching to the test". However, this need not be a bad thing if the desired outcomes are achieved. It is unlikely that this kind of teaching had an adverse effect in the form of rote learning, as performance increases were observed on all questions;
- The material provided by some of the service providers could have clarified the curriculum objectives in a meaningful way for educators, empowering them to teach more effectively;
- Teachers could have become more comfortable with teaching in the new curriculum framework and could have translated curriculum goals into effective classroom practice on their own;
- Teachers could have motivated learners much better to do well in the tests in 2002 because the educators realised that much was at stake regarding continued support of the kind provided by the DDSP; and
- The implementation of the minimum school admission age of seven years.

Performance in these tests will provide feedback to both teacher and pupil. Repeated testing of proficiency in numeracy and literacy at the end of the foundation phase helps to identify the nature and extent of changes in learner performance.

The tests themselves were developed with the help of the Joint Education Trust (JET). The numeracy test is a paper-and-pencil test with free response questions (not multiple choice) about counting and ordering, addition, subtraction and multiplication. The literacy/reading test was adapted for the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement Survey conducted in 27 countries. It is also a paper-and-pencil test but all the items are multiple choice. The learners were assessed on core reading competencies such as recognition frequently used words, sentence completion and comprehension of short and non-fiction texts.

These tests were named *Measurable Instruments* and were translated from English into eight other languages in which the DDSP schools offered instruction. The skills required for performing well in the *Measurable Instruments* are an important part of the curriculum phase helps to identify the nature and extent of changes in learner performance.

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Prizes keep schools on the ball

By Mchaback Khotha

TEMBISA School Sports Soccer Association, has received a soccer sponsorship to benefit and encourage the soccer-playing schoolchildren to take the sports seriously.

Soccer balls, bags and other valuable materials will be up for grabs for the first 50 lucky pupils each month. The monthly draw will run from the end of this month (August) until December.

Primary development officer, Vuyisile Magweni, disclosed this to *Sowetan Education* after his organisation received a whopping sponsorship of R50 000 last month to stage a soccer tournament.

It is backrolled by the Oltants Hyper company in Olifantsfontein near Kempton Park.

The inaugural competition will accommodate all local primary and high schools in soccer categories only, said Magweni.

He explained that R20 000 has been set aside for prizes for the lucky students, which will be divided into R5 000 worth of soccer equipment for each month.

"Entry forms will be available at all local schools. The students will have to fill in the forms then submit to the relevant shops before the closing date of every month," said Magweni.

Schools that top the log of the league in each section (primary and high), will each receive a floating trophy and gold medals, while the runners-up will get trophies and silver medals.

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All three are in the course Assessment, Training and Educational Research Programme



Front left, Jerry Magweni (tournament officer), Antonio Brax (sponsor), Vuyisile Magweni and Solly Chokoe showing soccer balls which will be part of the prizes for the lucky 50 winners this month.

trophy and gold medals, while the runners-up will get trophies and silver medals.

The sponsors, manager, Antonio Brax, said they are obliged to donate something back to the supportive community in the form of keeping the youth busy.

Deputy chairman of Ekurhuleni West School Sports Association, Solly Chokoe, who maintained the sponsorship

Monell Gangabane try out one of the centre's countless sweeping science and technology gadget

Fun, excitement at Newtown Sci-Bono

By Nozuko Mchaback

I remember well, science was never my favourite subject at school and it must have been almost seven years since I tried my hand at it.

I dreaded visiting the new science centre in Newtown as I did not want to bring back memories of how my teacher would read out my embarrassingly low mark in front of my peers.

But as I entered Sci-Bono, my whole perspective about science changed. The building, as big as it is, boasts hundreds and hundreds of scientific displays.

Sci-Bono does indeed have many surprises in store. Being screened when entering the building is just one of them.

I did not understand the perspective laid on sound cultural and racial background. My vision is not isolated. For I wish to see a continent where all of us live, and are content.

Where all of our fortunes are rounded. I am an African, and a crying one at the HIV-Aids pandemic affecting our race.

Threatening to wipe out our very existence. And, to nullify our wisdom of medicine. I am an African, pleading with the world to cancel all the debts we so regrettably carry.

Aid, I say, here's to 10 years of freedom - *Thandeka Mabona, a Grade 11 pupil at Sowetan-Medunsa Senior Secondary School in Sowetan, Johannesburg.*

TRAVELING FOR KNOWLEDGE
You were an African lion when you roared on the airwaves. You were an African lion when you roared on the airwaves. You were an African lion when you roared on the airwaves.

As you raised the yam with a goal for gold. A true community builder. You transported commuters to their various destinations.

HEADING TO THE VILLAGE
My roots are in this very land of diversity and colourful rainbow people. Of conflicting yet, one economic

TRANSPORTED THE EMOTIONS
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