



This Learning Brief is part of a series emerging from the After School Game Changer Symposium held on the 16th and 17th of February 2017.

LEARNING BRIEF 4: Innovations in After School Programmes



The After School Game Changer in the Western Cape aims to have 112 000 learners from poor schools in quality after school programmes at least twice a week by 2019. This will involve extensive collaboration and sharing of promising and best practices from all organisations in the sector. Many of these organisations already have creative and innovative ways of dealing with a range of challenges. These involve keeping learners incentivized to participate in programmes, getting parental buy in and support for after school programmes, making learning fun and working with learners who come from difficult circumstances.

Hout Bay Partnership – offer incentives for participation

Ashley Newell of the Hout Bay Partnership points out that there can be no benefits of after school programmes if learners won't attend them. Ikasa Youth offered Maths and English to teenage boys but struggled to make this appeal to them. In Imizama Yetho, the area of the programme's operation, gangs offer youth opportunities for short term recognition, affiliation and income. Ikasa Youth realised they needed to offer the same opportunities through using an incentive scheme.

Essentially they use a classic sticker chart. Stickers are used to reward attendance and good behaviour and become credits. Learners can cash in credits to get food and other material items like airtime or deodorant. Credits can be saved, or used for tickets to go on group outings and camps. With this system learners can monitor where their own commitment is slipping. They become participants making choices rather than passive recipients of donations.

Thope Foundation – hard skills role modelled in STEM for girls

Rethabile Mashale of Thope Foundation speaks about the success of using role models in a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programme for teenage girls. They find and train funky young women who are established in STEM fields either through university or work and train them to be mentors. It's amazing for the girls to see a different type of developer or engineer who looks like they do and who comes from where they come from. In addition, a lot of these kinds of programmes just focus on the academics of science and maths but the Thope programme includes robotics and experiential learning where girls acquire hard skills in the fields of STEM.



COUNT - involve the whole community in Maths

COUNT is a community Maths programme operating in Limpopo. Simangaliso Twala of COUNT explains how teachers, parents, caregivers, and learners of different ages come together in a relaxed setting and engage in Maths. Adults working in different roles like that of seamstress, baker or plumber, are asked to talk about their experiences of using measurement in their work place.

Things like beans, cards and straws are used to engage whole families in simple methods to do Maths. In addition to strengthening Maths skills, parents and caregivers are now more confident and committed to helping their children with Maths at home. The programme has formed a bridge between parents, learners and teachers. COUNT has found that when parents and caregivers participate in educational processes, learners become more confident, have better attendance and better results.

“The After School space can be a test ground to experiment with new ideas”

Thanda - make academics fun

Tyler Howard from Thanda operating in KZN describes how all their programmes are structured and built from the premise that they must be fun and enjoyable. This starts to address some of the foundational issues that prevent learners from being successful in academics, for example the issue of poor self-esteem. It also makes the job of the practitioner exponentially easier. Instead of trying to get the learners to do something, they do it because they like to and they because they have become comfortable with learning and books.

Thanda also focus on trying to give learners real experiences of being valuable. For example they have created a program where high school learners create culturally appropriate story books in Zulu for younger children. In order for the high schoolers to do this, they must read all the story books they didn't read when they were younger. There are multiple benefits all round for this programme but what is emphasised is that it creates an opportunity for the learners to be successful.

Sun Valley Primary – play is vital for learning

Gavin Keller, principal of Sun Valley Primary believes that 100 percent of education is “blood oxygen level dependent.” To get to the necessary blood oxygen levels for academics requires play. Play is an activity that engages the emotional brain. It is only when the emotional brain is activated that the neo-cortex, needed for academic learning, can be activated.

At Sun Valley Primary, sport and play are important part of day-to-day life both in and after school. Each and every day learners complete the 1km “Walk-it Circuit” which includes a balance beam, monkey bars and pull up bar. This is a specially designed circuit to enhance fitness, build muscle and co-ordination and cross the mid-line to assist learning. In class, learners take part in a number of movement activities. They perform movement songs which are designed to cross the horizontal and vertical midlines. This “wakes up” the brain and aids learning in various subjects such as Literacy or Maths.

SchoolNet – Learning Gains through Play

Tracey Butchart of SchoolNet South Africa described their project called “Learning Games through Play.” The idea was to use technology to support learners to have self-driven learning through play. Foundation phase learners received Intel tablets with a variety of apps loaded that would support the learning outcomes of the CAPS curriculum. Learners also received Xbox Kinects. Teachers were trained to find ways to identify and emphasise the things the children had learned while playing. Across a range of subjects, learners achieved better results. In fact, SchoolNet found that just having the technology available for learners to play with, even without the teacher, improved academic outcomes.

ASSITEJ – make the arts accessible

International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ) is a membership organization targeting children and young people in order to get them to learn through artistic mediums such as song, music, storytelling, role-playing, and improvisation. Yvette Hardie of ASSITEJ explains that one of their concerns is how to make theatre and art events accessible to learners.

War Horse is both a novel and a film and when the extraordinary string puppet stage production came to Cape Town, ASSITEJ wanted their learners to experience it. They also understood that it could be alienating to some children, many of whom had never been to the theatre before. ASSITEJ ran a series of immersive workshops preparing them for the experience of seeing the landmark play. The workshops were on puppetry, theatre skills, visual arts, and the play’s central theme of war. There were links made to the CAPS curriculum. By the time the learners got to see War Horse there was instant recognition. After the show many of the learners were inspired to read the War Horse book.

Counselling NPO – use a colouring book to bridge the traumatic space

Andreas Benetsi has a No-Profit Organisation offering free counselling in Phillipi and Khayelitsha from the back of a micro bus. The micro bus works against some of the stigma associated in seeking psychological help. The project provides containment and works with a group of psychosocial supporters who offer support groups, workshops and referrals.

One of the innovations of this project is the use of a colouring in book designed for adolescents. Often the learner arrives not being a in a good space to talk and the colouring in book serves as a bridge to their accessing the counselling services. On the one side of the page is the picture to colour and on the other is a series of questions.

For example:

- how was your day
- what happened
- rate your feelings
- rate your anger

Once they have responded to the prompts, they are invited to do some more colouring then rate feelings again. The learner can work with the book and colour for as long as it takes for them to be ready to share and talk with a counsellor.



EarthChild – teach learners mindfulness to help self-regulation

EarthChild teach mindfulness through yoga after school. Janna Kretzmar described how through attention to physical posture, breathing and relaxation children learn to still mental chatter and become present in the moment. There a long list of benefits of doing regular yoga practices including reduced stress, anxiety, emotional self-regulation and improved academic performance. Some learners living in challenging situations do yoga to help deal with difficult emotions. Yoga is a practical tool that helps learners cultivate confidence, self-worth and a renewed sense of belief in themselves.

Conclusion

It is important that first and foremost after school programmes are designed and experienced as fun for learners. In attracting learners to participate, after school programmes can offer incentives and also try to ensure their programmes are run by practitioners who can be role models. Yoga and mobile counselling are innovative ways of working with learners who may live in difficult circumstances and be suffering trauma.