

SPICK & SPAN

A hand-washing adventure in rural South Africa

article and photographs by Rudi Malcolm



arepp:Theatre for Life has partnered with UNICEF and the Department of Basic Education to produce an Applied Theatre presentation aimed at developing Life-skills and Self-efficacy in relation to Basic Health, Hygiene and Tuberculosis amongst Foundation Phase (Grade R to 3) learners.

Yanga Jikela (left) and Sheilla Madiya (right) in *No Monkey Business: Spick & Span*

The project has been ongoing since March of 2013, with teams travelling to the deeply rural parts of South Africa. The show has been performed in isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sepedi and Afrikaans in KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Mpumalaga and the Northern Cape respectively.

The target schools nominated by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) for this project are rural and severely under resourced Primary Schools. Approximately 90% of learners performed to in 2013/2014 were exempted from paying school fees, while 30% were known to be Orphans or Vulnerable Children (OVC's). 78% of the schools had access to running water and 53% had access to flushing toilets.

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Applied Theatre

Using a rights-based approach, each of the arepp:Theatre for Life shows is specifically designed for the targeted age group to foster identification and emotional recognition. The shows incorporate the current music, the sayings and the ‘attitude’ of that age group, and address the audience on their level, in their home language, with stories from their context.

Each performance is followed by a facilitated peer discussion in an open and non-judgemental forum, which encourages problem solving and contextualising of the issues presented.

The focus is on choices, problem solving and self-image. The intention is to enhance and encourage the development of the audience’s knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to enable them to make sound, informed and honest decisions about themselves and their relationships; for the present and in the long term.

No Monkey Business: Spick & Span

Aimed at Grade’s R to 3 and able to perform to audiences as young as 3, *Spick & Span* deals with basic health and hygiene, germs, sickness, nutrition and Tuberculosis.

It’s Banana Burgers for lunch, Mac Monkey’s favourite favourite! He is so excited that he hurries to make sure he gets the biggest one, while his best friend, Vanda Vulture, dutifully washes her hands first, slowing her down. Sure enough, Mac gets the biggest Banana Burger, but in so doing he’s not entirely truthful when Thandi brings up the question of hand washing.

Later, Mac starts to cough and sneeze, but he is afraid to tell Thandi because he’s scared that it’s because he didn’t wash his hands and that, as punishment, Thandi will take him to the horrible clinic! He tries to hide away but Vanda, still smarting over his earlier dishonesty, tells on him. Thandi takes Mac to Nurse Hippo who, with the assistance of Germy Germ and the audience, explains to Mac how and why people become ill, what germs are, what a coughing germ like TB is, how to wash hands and cough properly so as to not catch or spread germs, and how to look after himself in the future... but unfortunately not before Mac gives both Thandi and Vanda his cold.

The show incorporates the basic symptoms of Tuberculosis, how to recognise them, and how to protect against them, along with other illnesses. Basic health and illness are put into context and explained, along with the notions of adherence to medicine regimens, and most importantly how to cough and wash hands properly to protect oneself and others from spreading germs. Attention is given to promoting a healthy, balanced lifestyle as a means to combat illnesses, along with personal health and hygiene.



Mac Monkey and the delicious Banana Burger

Impact

At the end of 2014, arepp:Theatre for Life performed 574 shows in 258 schools across South Africa, reaching a total of 75,899 learners.

The increase in self-efficacy, and thus the impact of the project, is reflected by the learners' perception of their feelings of competency, agency and control regarding the issues after the presentations. Each performance is evaluated by both the learners and educators.



Nurse Hippo and Gergy Germ explain to Mac how germs made him sick

Learners were asked a number of questions relating to the themes of the show. When asked how they felt about the presentation, an overwhelming majority said the play was extremely entertaining, emphasising how much they enjoyed the puppets and singing along to the songs.

“I had the best time watching the show. I wish it could come back”

**- GRADE 3 LEARNER
TOUR 5, 2013**

When describing what didn't enjoy about the show, almost every learner said that they didn't like it when Mac Monkey ate the Banana Burger without washing his hands. They further detailed that, as a result, he then got sick and had to go to the clinic. They understood the notion that they need to be responsible in maintaining their health and that do their utmost not to make their friends sick if they have fallen ill.

When asked, “What did you learn?” learners consistently, correctly and articulately identified the main themes and messages in the play.

“To wash my hands before I touch my food. And after the toilet we need to wash our hands with soap and clean water. If we don't brush our teeth, germs can come in if you don't clean your body”

**- GRADE 1 LEARNER
TOUR 2, 2014**



2,039 educators attended the performances. As of the end of 2014, 629 Educator evaluations were completed and returned.

“Learners reacted very well to the presentation, they enjoyed. It will help them to keep clean all the time. They have learnt the importance of being clean and eating healthy. It was educational in a fun way because they learnt songs that will help them not to forget what was learnt.”

**- EDUCATOR
TOUR 2, 2014**

The Educator feedback has consistently and unequivocally been positive, complimentary and appreciative, reporting themselves engaged with the presentation. They were enthused about the medium, method and language, describing it as age-appropriate and well suited to the developmental phase of their learners, which enhanced both the teaching and learning of the topics. They felt that the presentation was applicable to the Life Orientation Curriculum, relevant to the current topics and themes, and included subject integration.

They reported a significant increase in the learners’ ability to communicate effectively, problem-solve and adopt personal responsibility in relation to the show’s themes. They also indicated that the presentations assisted their Life-skills lessons by making the information and learning practical through theatre and song. Focus was also placed on the long-term impact of the presentations.

Educators also specifically mentioned how the presentations positively impacted the learners by developing the learners’ ability to communicate and take responsibility. They felt strongly that the presentation created the confidence, skills and opportunity for learners to share information with others, thereby cascading and broadening the impact.

“The show was so interesting, learners enjoyed a lot. We wish as teachers if they can keep coming and do their presentation at least once a semester”

**- EDUCATOR
TOUR 5, 2014**

The arepp:Theatre for Life *No Monkey Business: Spick & Span* project will be returning to the various schools across the country for a third time. The show is scheduled to perform in KwaZulu-Natal in the second school term, the Eastern Cape in the third, and Limpopo and Mpumalanga in the fourth.

We look forward to reporting on the impact of the project over the three-year period and wish all our teams the best of luck!