

SIX BRICKS ENHANCING THINKING SKILLS AT VREUGDEVOETJIES



~ Brenda van Schalkwyk ~



~ Stef Esterhuizen ~

Vreugdevoetjies Nursery School is a farm school in Oudtshoorn. The school started in 2013 with only 14 children. Their enrolment for 2018 stands on 103 children, ranging from birth to grade R. About 80% of the children grow up in dysfunctional homes. Unfortunately, alcohol abuse and poverty form part of the children's domestic circumstances. The parents do not know how to communicate with their children and therefore, the children cannot communicate with the staff. As a result, the level of development of the children is not up to date. The staff of Vreugdevoetjies has a huge educational task at hand, not only in terms of the children, but also in terms of the parents.

In February 2017 we were introduced to "Six Bricks". The research team of the NWU led by Prof Mary Grosser and assisted by Dr Stef Esterhuizen, committed themselves to help us to enhance our children's holistic development through a cognitive thinking strategy that involves play through the use of the Six Bricks Lego tool. Dr Stef Esterhuizen provided us with thorough training and each child in our school received a set of Six Bricks, kindly sponsored by Mr Brent Hutcheson, Director of Care for Education and the master brain behind developing the Six Bricks tool and accompanying learning activities.

A pre-test was done with our Grade R learners at the end of February. The observations of the learners' application of thinking skills and dispositions were expressed through the feuersteinian concept of distance (Feuerstein *et al.*, 2002:530-540). "Distance" relates to the extent and nature of required mediational intervention (RMI), on a continuum from 0-9, necessary for maximum cognitive modifiability.

- Levels 1-3 are regarded as low levels of distance and high degrees of RMI (very dependent on guidance from a mediator).
- Levels 4-6 imply average levels of distance and moderate required RMI (with the assistance of a mediator become more independent and autonomous).
- Levels 7-9 refer to high levels of distance and lower degrees of RMI (autonomous learning).

The results were as follows:

1. Perceptual skills were observed to be developed between Levels 3-4.
2. Physical-motor skills were observed to be developed between Levels 3-4.
3. Socio-emotional skills were observed to be developed at Level 2.
4. Speech and language skills were observed to be developed between Levels 2-3.
5. Mathematical skills were observed to be developed between Levels 2-3.
6. Cognitive skills were observed to be developed at Level 2.

Given the results, we carefully concluded that all learners still require high degrees of mediational intervention to nurture the mentioned skills.

After the test, we actively made time for Six Bricks on a daily basis. Every teacher had already been shown the previous day which Six Bricks activities had to be done the next day. The teachers also had to observe and record each learner's progress.

The children are very enthusiastic and cannot wait for the Six Bricks activities every day. One of the many advantages of these activities is that the children develop the most important skills needed for academic success in later years through play. Another benefit of the Six Bricks is that it has given our children the chance to talk. The children are not used to communicating with adults and through the Six Bricks there is now unconditional communication. The children now participate in discussions, argue, know their colours, collect data, build constructions, count, compare, tell and remember stories, etc., not even to mention the value of the Six Bricks for developing fine motor skills. They are no longer scared to venture out and there is already a clear change in their discipline and self-regulation. Their quarterly progress reports are a testimony of this.

Six Bricks taught Vreugdevoetjies that there is still so much to discover and learn, BUT, above all, that learning is fun!

Thank you Six Bricks, you have changed teaching and learning at Vreugdevoetjies positively!



One of the teachers assisting a child.



Children embark on tasks with so much more confidence!



Six Bricks = Happy children!