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Connecting, communicating, caring



Younger CM Vellem learners enjoy posing for their older schoolmates who are behind the camera. The older learners take part in awareNet. *Photo by Thandolwethu Mchoboki*

MEET the TEAM



Madien van der Merwe



Nicole Glover



Savannah Wilmot



Stephanie Papini



Kiera-Marie Loughrey



Mikhaila Steenkamp



Jason Cooper

Enrichment through computer education

By Mikhaila Steenkamp

The CM Vellem School computer lab in Rhini is as full as can be expected at 2.00pm on a Thursday: 20 grade eight learners sit in front of their screens, filling up Word Documents with their assignment for the week. So far, so normal – they are all here during school hours a few times a week anyway, to research or type out assignments. Today though, there are ‘visitors’. A man and three women are only slightly too old for school uniforms, weaving between the desks to correct spelling, answer questions or just to discuss the work.

One clutches a notebook while two carry expensive-looking cameras and shoot pictures every so often. All four are Rhodes journalism students, and they are leading the computer sessions usually taken by the NGO Village Scribe Association’s (VSA) awareNet computer literacy programme.

I was the one with the notebook. Back in April, the Journalism, Democracy and Development (JDD) course required all third-year students create a ‘civic map’ of the players and problems falling under a social issue. Stephanie Papini, Jason Cooper, Savannah Wilmot and I – together with Nicole Glover, Madien van der Merwe and Kiera-Marie Loughrey who would take the Friday session at CM Vellem – chose computer literacy, and the research began.

What we found were some schools with computer labs but nobody to open them; internet which was riddled with problems in the few schools which were supposed to be connected to it; and learners with no access to computers outside school. We also found organisations like the VSA, whose community coordinator Terri-Lynn Penney works tirelessly to increase access to school labs and spread computer literacy.

Penney spends her days facilitating community projects with the learners – anti-littering and fitness campaigns are just two examples – and teaching the learners how to navigate and write

about these on the awareNet ‘social network’ for schools. However, there are eight schools she works directly with, the classes are often too big for her to effectively help the learners, and there is always so much going on at the schools that her schedule is constantly changing.

Luckily, our course required us to help. So, for the past three weeks, we have opened the labs on Thursdays and Fridays and given short lessons which led to the learners taking photographs and writing poems, news stories and pieces about themselves. All of it will be published on our website, along with articles about computer literacy, reflections charting the learners’ progress, and everything computer literacy organisations need to know about one another – and what potential volunteers and funders need to know about them.

After all, there are many organisations doing similar things – like the Telkom Centre of Excellence and Ikamva Youth – that could share ideas. They could also coordinate their efforts, as the Department of Education’s Rejoice Batye suggests. As the Grahamstown District coordinator of e-learning, Batye installs curriculum-enriching programmes onto schools’ computers and holds training workshops showing educators how to use them. Since many teachers do not even have basic computer skills though, Batye has begun to hold basic computer literacy workshops too – and it is in this area where she fears overlap with the work of NGOs. “I’d love to know who they are, what they are doing, can we work together,” says Batye of the organisations.

Our website will be the first step in answering those questions, extending beyond just one of the two CM Vellem grade eight classes (awareNet does not have the capacity to teach both). Those learners, although only four of the 20 have access to computers outside the school lab, remain the lucky few. With about 1000 children from grades R to nine, CM Vellem is one of only eight schools in the township with a proper

computer lab: the DBE donated their shiny black computers in 2009. They have an internet connection from Rhodes which is working again after some months. The computers are all working, and are being used by skilled teachers to enrich their curriculum – although some teachers are still “reluctant to changes”, says the grade three teacher who received DBE e-learning training, Phindi Makinana.

The grade eight’s teacher, Vatiswa Frank, represented the school’s intermediate phase at the training workshop.

There is no doubt that computer literacy is crucial. “[Computer literacy] is the best skill that we can give to learners because that is what is needed in the business world and also to make them employable. If we just give them theory, theory, theory, and then we let them go... go where? And do what?” asks Batye.

Yet our programme also follows awareNet’s in enriching language skills. Even though this is their first year with Penney, Frank can already attest to seeing a massive improvement in the learners’ reading and writing skills. Their English teacher, Nompumelelo Frans, adds that even just being exposed to English, writing in English and following instructions helps the learners’ comprehension.

For Thomas Mhlali and many of his grade eight classmates in fact, the best thing they have learnt from the Rhodes students and from awareNet is how to speak English. Adds Thanduxolo Rayi: “[I want] to learn more about English things, like similes and onomatopoeia,” he says. Like all the aspiring doctors, journalists and policemen in the lab, Rayi has big dreams. “I want to learn about computers, so when I am at university I can be able to work with computers. When I finish university I want to use computers in my office... I want to become a social worker, so I can help poor children and those who don’t have a home.”

It will take more than two years of awareNet and improved English skills

to achieve those dreams. Much more than a tiny group of student writers, designers and photographers can do in a few weeks. What we can do though, is show them what other kinds of technology, like cameras, can do, and how empowering converting writing into media can be. What we can definitely show them and anyone who will listen, is that journalism can be used for good: for the development of the learners, sure, but also for the development of the journalists themselves.

awareNet

AwareNet is a social network designed for schools, developed by eKhaya ICT for NGO the Village Scribe Association (VSA). It enables to schools to access and share resources even without an internet connection, since awareNet servers create their own wireless network.

VSA community coordinator Terri-Lynn Penney holds weekly 45 minute to one hour sessions with Awarenet’s learners. Under her leadership – sometimes helped by volunteers, most recently Antje Hering and Rieke Heitmüller from Germany, where the VSA began – the learners receive an account, set up a profile, write blog posts and upload pictures. They can also access all other content posted by learners from other schools, and interact with them via instant messaging and e-mail.



Thanduxolo Royi begins to type out one of the exercises for the awareNet sessions. The Rhodes journalism students put together a Power Point presentation teaching the students about similes and metaphors, in order to inspire them to write their own poems. Royi enjoyed these sessions as it helped him improve his computer literacy skills. *Photo by Stephanie Papini*

The Telkom Centre of Excellence

Most education experts agree: to fully be part of the technological revolution, schools need internet. Yet internet connectivity is a major problem for schools like CM Vellem Primary - it is expensive, and the uneven geographical area interrupts even the stronger connections.

So the Rhodes University Telkom Centre of Excellence (CoE) takes it upon themselves to make a difference.

In partnership with the University of Fort Hare, the Rhodes Centre forms one of 16 CoEs in the country. Like all its counterparts, it aims to increase the competitiveness of the multimedia industry by conducting research into improving ICT systems and the skills of students and professionals in the field. As such, a number of research and development groups fall under it.

The Rhodes CoE provides internet to 10 local schools – a process which is difficult given technical issues and problems to do with funding over the past months. Since a key part of their mandate is using new findings in ICT towards social development goals, researchers and volunteers first tested their findings in marginalised rural environment of Dwesa, setting up an ICT ‘hub’ in one of the schools, and training people of all ages to use the lab.

Their work has also branched into coordinating computer literacy sessions with postgraduate volunteers from the Department of Computer Sciences and learners at Joza school NV Chewu Public Primary. The CoE is working towards building relationships (consisting mainly of sourcing equipment and infrastructure) with other schools as well, to eventually expand the scope of their sessions.

Mutual learning

The relationship between the CM Vellem grade eights and the Rhodes students is tied by mutual respect and an urge to learn. To further this relationship, it is important to see how much of an impact the students have made. In the hope of tracking the project’s progress, the learners reflect on the work done with the group, highlighting successes, failures and what they have learnt.



Mikhaïla Steenkamp helps a CM Vellem learner during one of the many computer literacy sessions held with them over the past few weeks. *Photo by Jason Cooper*

By Neliswa Ntwaso

Rhodes students, I like them because they taught me and they asked me questions, they gave me an assignment and I write that answer. I like the Rhodes students because they gave me anything that I needed and they told me anything that I needed to know so God bless you.

By Zimkhitha Donyeli

I learnt to use words that are difficult to me but now I know. I can impress myself in front of people because of the Rhodes students; they are like a miracle to me. I enjoy learning and taking photos with them. I would like to learn more about education but I think they will take care of us and teach us more about education. That’s what the awareNet project what is all about. They are totally different to our teachers; they teach more than our teachers. I would like to thank them for their support and education.

By Matyhumza Banathi

I learnt how to use a computer and how to write something on the computer. I want to learn many things about computers. I hope they come to CM Vellem all the time. I learnt lots of things from the Rhodes students, things that I don’t know or understand. I enjoyed learning similes, metaphors and alliterations. I would like to learn more about acting because I want to be an actor so that’s why. We enjoyed learning things from Rhodes students and we love them, we would like to learn more and more.

By Sihle Nqola

I enjoy education because it will put me far away from Grahamstown and give me all my dreams. It will let me be something when I am older. It will put me in the high way that I don’t understand even that it is me in the offices. It will be there for years and years to teach us many things that are different and totally different to the primary ones.

By Azizipho Mpiyawwe

The Rhodes students are kind to us, they are very supportive. They ask questions when I didn't understand they explained for me. I learnt something big from them. I enjoyed the Peace Day; the thing that I enjoyed was the singers. I also enjoyed the day that I was taking photos with my friends. I want to learn more about the computer though.

By Thawaxolo Royi

What I learnt from the students of Rhodes is, they taught us about many things like similes, alliteration and metaphors. Today we took some nice photos outside and it was fun. We took flower photos and animals and some kids photos, it was nice. They must not stop what they are doing, they help. I would like to learn more about poems and stories and how to write them in your own words.



Meet the Grade 8 class whose writing and photography is featured in this paper. They produced a range of different material during the sessions the Rhodes students had with them. They wrote personal narratives, stories about their friends and family, poems, as well as experimented with photography. They seemed to thoroughly enjoy the sessions, and gained many more computer literacy skills. *Photo by Stephanie Papini*

My best day ever

By Amanda Salman

My best day ever was at school when I was with my friends, we like to say to our classmates that there is a teacher coming and they all run because they are scared of the teacher. They were very scared, some fell and the others hid behind doors and desks. I laughed and laughed all day, it was the best day ever. Then at break time they beat us and it was fun, we had a best time ever and we played with water and we laughed at each other when the others were falling down and it was happily ever after. We had a lot of fun.

By Andile Hoyi

My best day ever was when the school soccer team travelled to Somerset East. The game ended 2-1 in favour of us. We left for Somerset East at about 7:15 am and we got there at 8:45. On our way there, we had a beautiful view of wildlife. We saw giraffes, rabbits and springboks.

We expected a field of grass but we played on the field that was made or patched with a bold green carpet. Our opponents scored during the first half and we scored early in the second half and then later we were leading by two goals to one. We had hotdogs with braai meat and fruit juice and apples.

We came back with our hearts full of joy because we qualified for the semi-finals. I will never forget this day because it was my first day in Somerset East and that is why I call this day 'my best day ever'.

By Matyhumza Bawathi

My best day ever is the days I get to read my books all day, because last year I didn't do well but this year I want to study hard. Many people tell me that whatever you do, don't forget school it's the best thing in the world. When you lose at school you become nothing in the world, so now I told myself that I will do well in the school.

By Bongive Mgudlandlu

My best day ever was taking photos of my school. It was a great day because it was my first time taking photos and I didn't know how to switch it on and how to take a photo of something. We were five learners and two students from Rhodes University and we were the first group to take photos and it was awesome. We were taking photos of kids and classes, flowers and inside the classroom and of ours. I never took a photo before and I was so excited a lot because I learnt so much from the students from Rhodes. I had so much fun thanks to the Rhodes students.



Another grade eight learner experiments with using a digital camera for the first time. Despite the poor weather, the learners showed great enthusiasm for the photography exercise. They preferred taking photographs of their friends rather than of the misty surroundings. *Photo by Vuyolwethu Menti*

Who is my inspiration?

By Mpongoshe Buntu

Someone who inspires me is the famous rapper Pro-Verb. He inspires me with his music. I always listen to his music. Some of his songs I sing when I'm alone at home and thinking of writing my own songs. In school my friends call me ProVerb, in my community they call me the same name. My dream is to meet him and maybe he would include me in one of his music videos. In all the songs that I sing, I include that man and I don't know why? Maybe I just like the guy too much. My phone is full of Proverb's pictures and songs. In every song there is this message that inspires me a lot.

By Sihle Nqola

I love my teacher because she is so kind and she encourages her class to join every club at school and she doesn't want a dirty place. She always keeps us busy and loves jokes and doesn't like someone to be angry. She understands everyone and understands problems. She always takes care of everyone who has a problem and gives him or her a plan on what to do to solve this. She teaches us many things about life. She always keeps smiling and telling jokes to everyone. She loves everyone and I don't like her to be angry. She is very lovely and nice and kind person.

By Siwoxo Likho

Someone who inspires me is my mother because she is the one who understand me and she is always there for me and I love her so much. My mother is a person that doesn't want to talk too much. She always says to me "if someone challenges you don't be afraid just tell your teacher and don't fight at school or anywhere". She told me not to be with the wrong friends and don't do the wrong things that they tell me to do. She told me not to stop my education until I finish it and she has a dream about me in a University. I am following her dream and it is my dream too. On mother's day I write a letter for her, cook and make her coffee and she says "that's my girl."



Jennifer Kosi photographs her classmates posing and having fun in front of the camera. During one of the awareNet sessions at CM Vellem, the Rhodes journalism students decided to teach a few classmates at a time how to use digital cameras. This was the first time many of them had the opportunity to use a camera. *Photo by Jennifer Kosi*

My story about karate

By *Thanduxolo Royi*

I am 14 years old. I am a grade 8 at CM Vellem School. One day I was playing with my ball at home. My neighbour called me and asked me if I would want to train karate with him. I said yes because karate was the very first thing that I saw on a movie with Jean Claude van Dam. He was kicking the bad guys down and I was so impressed and that's when I decided to train karate.

The next day my neighbour took me to Tanti Hall. I was shocked but not scared because he was a black belt. I trained

my basics, and he said that my stance was good. I was happy. The third day, he called and told me that I mustn't stop training because I am good.

He also told me that I have been selected to be in a tournament. My first tournament, I was scared, he told me not to be scared. The tournament was on 8 February. I was 11 years old.

On Saturday I was ready. The tournament was at the Hangar at Rhodes University. I was also scared because there were all kinds of belts. My age group was 11 to 12 years, some guys were big and strong in my age group but they don't have power.

They are not strong and then I wasn't scared anymore. Our names were called and we got to the floor and bowed. At last the winners were announced, and I got third place. When I got home, I showed my friends what I had won.

My third tournament was at the Monument. I won gold. My fourth tournament was in the indoor sport centre, I won gold and bronze and I was selected to represent the Eastern Cape at the Fish River Sun. I won two silvers.

This year I have been selected to represent South Africa, it was tough but I won a bronze medal for the team fighting.

My story about Dance

By *Anathi Mali*

My name is Anathi Mali. I'm 14 years old. The name of my school is CM Vellem Health Promoting School in Joza location. One day it was Monday, we were in the assembly and Miss Frans asked us if you want to dance on Wednesday. Wendy will be at Noluthando Hall at 2:00PM UNTIL 3:30pm but on Wednesday I wasn't there because I was in church. On Thursday my friends and I went to Noluthando Hall.

Sisi Wendy told them to do warm ups and that she would come back. I was sitting in the chair and watched what they were doing. I was so scared because Wendy shouted at them when they did something wrong. When they were dancing, I looked at them and did what they did. Sisi Wendy told me to come and join them because I could do what they were doing.

Last year we were dancing KwasaKwasa. Our dance teacher was Thabisa. She was a perfect teacher, she was the best teacher. When you didn't understand the dance, she would show you until you got it right. In the last year she has made us so happy, we love her so much. She is cute and smart. She is the best teacher.

My dance teachers are now Lisa and Ziyanda, I love them too because they are like Thabisa but not that much. My dance class is on Monday and Wednesday. I love dance the most and I'll win this term at Rhodes.



Mentor Savannah Wilmot teaches Bongiwe Mgdlandlu and Neliswa Ntwasu how to use a digital camera. *Photo by Andile Hoyi*

All about my holiday

By *Ukho Siwonxo*

On holiday I used to go to the Transkei to my family there but this holiday I didn't go because my mother used the money to pay for my brother's ceremony. I was very angry but I understand so my holiday was very boring in my area. My sister is working she left me with her daughter. I

like children so when there was nothing to do I would just play with her, read a story or listen to music. I always have asthma and I don't like doing things in front of people, I become so scared. I was hoping to see my friends soon and when the school opened I was so excited. It's been a long time to see my friends.



AwareNet kid by day, karate kid by night

Thandolwethu Mehoboki, or “Thando” as her friends call her, is a 14-year-old grade eight learner at CM Vellem Higher Primary School in Joza, Grahamstown.

She takes part in the awareNet computer literacy program on many afternoons after school, and says that awareNet has helped her with her school work as well as with learning to read, write and speak English.

Thando is positive that the key to success is

getting the best education possible, which is why she is so eager to learn and devote her time to the awareNet program. But there is more to Thando than meets the eye. She has a red belt in karate and she trains at least three times a week. She is busy working towards her final grading at the end of this year, where she hopes she will advance to a new ranking. Thando is taking large, high-spirited strides towards a bright future.

Photos by Jason Cooper



Thandolwethu works on an assignment given to her by the Rhodes students during an afternoon literacy lesson.



Realising the importance of education, Thandolwethu reads at her home in the Joza township.



Thandolwethu helps her grandmother wash clothes at their home in Joza.



Thandolwethu does karate at the Community Hall in the Joza township in Grahamstown. Thandolwethu has a red belt in karate and is competing in her final grading at the end of this year.



Thandolwethu and her friend Thanduxolo Royi practice their karate moves after school. They both train at the same dojo, and when Thandolwethu first started practising her karate, Thanduxolo bought her her first karate suit.



Thandolwethu and Thanduxolo have both taken part in many karate competitions. Thandolwethu competed in a national competition in September this year, and emerged victorious with both a silver and a bronze medal. She is currently a red belt.

Poetry lesson

What is computer literacy without a comprehensive understanding of English itself? Poetry, the essence of creativity, seemed like a necessity to teach so that the students learnt to not only express themselves through news stories but through creative means too. Equipped with similes, metaphors, alliteration and onomatopoeia, the students grappled with each to produce beautiful pieces on home, nature and even their friends.

Poetry

By: Ntwaso Neliswa

As fat as a pig. As cold is eye, as a wonderful girl.
As a sweet gal, nice gal. Ginger is simile because it is.

A gal is silly because she doesn't understand
Cute cat
Drink and drive, dog day, human higher.
Beautiful best, lovely like.

Jibber, jabber. Gabble babble.
Cackle, clack, and crack.
Twiddle, twaddle. Mutter, stutter.
Utter, splutter, quack

My Mother

By: Nqola Sihle

The mother who has lost her child.
Why mom? You promised to be happy with me.
You promised to take care of me.
You promised to love me.
You promised to die with me.

The real mother
Now where are those hugs and kisses from you?
You have lost your only child.
"I love you my child"
You have lost your child.
You have lost everything.
Why? It's because of your child.
It's because you've lost your child.
You've lost so many things.

I love you mom.
You're so yummy
and so sweet to me.

You're the only mother that I have.

My School

By: Thomas Mhlali

My school is beautiful like heaven.
It is a smart school, it is so peaceful.
As sky, we have what we call respect.

We are fairy tales at school.
We love each other so much.
We are love birds at my school.

We don't fight, we don't swear.
We don't do anything wrong that insults people.
We like the colours of the rainbow.

We are so close like we are really the rainbow colours.
We help each other when we have problems

My Country

By: Mali Anathi

Africa is a beautiful country.
Africa is like a rainbow nation.
I love to be African.
It has beautiful animals.

Here in Africa we have peace.
We have the hottest weather as hot as tea.
We are the rainbow nation.
We have the beautiful country.

My Country

By: Mcoboki Thawodwethu

Oh my beautiful country.
The country of love and peace.
The birds and the beats are shaking our hearts.
The sun is shining like a star.
So let's shine bright like a diamond in sky.

My Music

By: Siwoxo Likho

I like RNB
It has songs that are guiding you with something.
It tells you if you are thinking of doing the wrong thing.
It can stop you.
It has love songs about someone who is special to you.

My Country

By: Mgudlandlu Bongiwwe

My country is for love and peace
So say its valleys where ancient rivers
Flow the circle of life under the proud
Of birds running in the sky like they are
Chased away.

My School

By: James Silindokuhle

My beautiful school, as a flower.
My school is an angel

My Family

By: Royi Thawaxolo

My family.
My dad is a poet.
My mom is worker.
Always shouting and working like,
a slave talking and shouting.
But I don't care when I need someone
they are not always there but
they are the best for me.