

Investec takes its Promaths programme to the next level under lockdown

By [Mahlatshe Nicolas Mmako](#) and [Setlogane Manchidi](#), issued by [Trialogue](#)

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[Promaths by Investec](#), which provides extra maths and science tuition for learners in previously disadvantaged communities from grades 10 to 12, was first launched in 2005, in partnership with the Kutlwanong Maths, Science and Technology Centre and the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Today, the programme operates a total of 16 centres (eight of these directly funded by Investec) in six provinces, reaching thousands of learners who show potential in these subjects.

In responding to the coronavirus crisis, which has turned the world as we know it upside down, Investec wanted to ensure that our flagship maths and science learning programme continued, and that we would be able to salvage as much of the school year as possible. Under normal circumstances, our learners would be attending classes at centres across the country, but physical distancing has prevented this. We, therefore, came up with the idea of extending Mobi-Tuta, a mobile platform previously introduced in partnership with Tuta-Me to assist learners in township and rural schools, to accommodate the Promaths Online offering.

Introducing virtual classrooms

Promaths Online was an introduction of virtual classroom-based lessons that are designed to give any Promaths learner with a simple smartphone access to maths and science lessons. It was very important for us to engage learners' regular teachers to avoid any disruptions to learners. These lessons are offered by the same teacher to the same classmates, replicating the circumstances when physical contact lessons were possible.

By piloting Promaths Online, we bring teachers to learners in the virtual space using the existing Mobi-Tuta platform. Teachers use a virtual blackboard to teach, and they engage with an average of 35 learners at one time, just as they do in the classroom. The live classroom functionality of this offering, as with most online meeting or interaction platforms like Microsoft Teams, will enable learners to verbally interact and have full view of the content being presented and shared by the teacher in class. In addition, learners will also be able to engage with their teacher by posing questions through the live chat platform during class. An even more exciting feature is that classes are recorded, enabling learners to have access to them for revision purposes.

With full appreciation that passing maths and science is not enough for one to pass a grade, support covering all other subjects is extended through the Mobi-Tuta platform. Each learner on the platform will have access to online textbooks, worksheets, tests and practice questions on other subjects, over and above maths and science. They will also be able to connect to live tutor online in those subjects should they need extra support. In this way, learners would not fall behind and levelling the playing fields for disadvantaged children would be a possibility. This pilot project – an extension of the Promaths programme – has proved extremely popular.

What is the reach of the programme?

The programme reaches a total of 2,000 Promaths learners, in both Investec-funded and other Promaths centres. We prioritise learning for grade 12 learners as we are mindful of the DBE's communication that grade 12 is a critical year and grades seven to 12 should receive the most attention. For now, the platform will be accessible by grade 12 learners on the Promaths programme. Having said that, we will also be able to reach 2,000 grade 10, 11 and 12 learners over and above Promaths learners who always received much needed extra academic support through the Mobi-Tuta platform. However, these learners will not have access to the virtual classrooms for now.

Overcoming challenges

From Investec's perspective, the key challenge has been access. Not all learners have smartphones, and those that do may not have data. Coverage is also a major issue in deep rural areas. We have, therefore, come up with some solutions. Understanding the challenges often presented by the cost of data for our communities, this online offering will be free of charge to all our learners. Investec will carry the cost of data usage through a reverse billing arrangement with the major network providers, that is, Vodacom, MTN and Cell C.

Being able to assist these learners in the virtual space is vital, however, this is a good time to revisit the conversation about infrastructure development in the country, particularly if we want to be able to compete from a fourth industrial revolution (4IR) perspective. Through innovation, we have offered our learners a platform to keep them learning, but we are also building something for the future. We believe the platform has benefits that can be leveraged beyond the coronavirus crisis. We therefore hope to continue with this programme on a full-time basis once we have assessed its effectiveness through the current pilot.

[Promaths by Investec](#) won the Trialogue Strategic CSI Award 2019. Investec sponsors the [Maths and Science Education topic on the Trialogue Knowledge Hub](#), a digital platform for social investment information. For more on Maths and Science Education, visit: <http://www.trialogueknowledgehub.co.za>.

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