

educational resources (for the various designated groups), and that there were usually none, obviously further exacerbated the problem.* Edupeg historically supplied resources to other NGO's to assist them with their lack of resources for training into schools, but this never proved to be advantageous to Edupeg and the spread of knowledge of this programme, and we no longer work in this fashion.

To further aggravate things, many teachers are themselves poorly trained, and are expected to teach subjects in which they have no real foundation themselves.

These above circumstances give rise to classroom environments where the teachers lack confidence (in themselves and their subject) and frequently, self-esteem. To mask this, discipline can be harsh and abusive, as teachers strive to maintain control, often shouting to cover their lack of ability. (In many classrooms, we still see lengths of rubber pipes/sticks and although corporate punishment is illegal and is never used in our presence, I feel sure that this does still exist in some schools).

Teachers do not, or very seldom, ask questions of their learners that require thought or critical thinking: questions are restricted to those that require a "yes" or "no" answer and thus vocabulary enrichment, sentence construction, as well as confidence in general, verbal communication and personal confidence and self-esteem, are all limited. Actually asking questions can be interpreted as being disruptive or dis-respectful to the teacher or even challenging the teachers' authority, and to express a lack of understanding can be interpreted as an insult to the teacher. This is why we frequently find in schools rows and rows of learners who together chant and chorus the drill that has been taught to them by the teacher, and learners who are shy, withdrawn, even mute, when we initially commence working with them. (After a short period of our interaction with the pupils they soon begin to respond and enjoy the interactive experience). In most instances the critical thinking skills of the learners are very underdeveloped. To be able to implement RNCS, planned lessons, with identified outcomes, need to exist. This has also proved to be highly problematic, as previously many teachers did not plan at all. We have begun to plan lessons with the teachers in attendance, and to then demonstrate these same lessons, to try to overcome the huge resistance to planning.

The most basic classroom management is lacking in many schools. Those cupboards that are available are often full of obsolete books and general "tat" and secure store rooms/resource rooms seldom exist. Most pupils carry all of their belongings to school in plastic shopping packets. There are no hooks or lockers for these bags, which are then frequently dumped onto their desks, so that their minimal working space is yet further compromised - already many children sit 3 or 4 to a desk designed for 2. Alternatively, these bags are forced onto their seats (which are frequently broken - we've seen Foundation Phase children who need to learn to balance and sit on 3-legged chairs!), or these bags

are kept on the floor, making circulating around the classroom to assist/assess learners (by the teacher) almost impossible, as well as hazardous - as it is easy to trip on these bags.

In many of our schools, our quiet and persistent encouragement has resulted in the rows of desks being replaced by groupings of desks. We have also had some success with varieties of activities for these groups - i.e. *not* rote teaching to all learners, but legitimate group work/team activities. Incorporating class monitors to assist has had some success. We are delighted that many of the classrooms we visit now do have educational charts/displays on the walls, as well as learners' work. Besides enhancing the teaching and learning environment, we encourage teachers to use these charts to promote language and literacy, and any other related learning areas. We also share with teachers the value of displaying the work of the learners, not just to beautify the room and to make it more stimulating and exciting, but also to build the confidence and self-esteem of the children. Assessment is another benefit of displaying work. By demonstrating and simplifying planning and concepts, we have sought to make more teachers more aware of why we plan, what outcomes we seek (for each lesson), what we assess, and why and to let pupils know what it is we are setting out to achieve - so that they (the learners) become active participants in the process, and hopefully find the lessons easier to follow.

Motivating learners, enhancing their listening and thinking skills and involving them (as more than passive passengers) in the lesson are all aspects that we continue to work on with the teachers. When the learners are all actively involved with relevant educational activities (many of which Edupeg provides) at the correct developmental level, teachers are astounded at how easily a lesson progresses and how discipline issues disappear, and the pupils are actively engaged, have motivating tasks and goals and objectives to achieve. All of the above takes time, patience, perseverance, persistence, and obviously money, to facilitate the training.

We do see positive development in the majority of the schools into which we work. With the on-going negative media reports about continuing poor results nationally with regard to numeracy and literacy and teacher stress, etc, it would be wonderful to have the support of SACTWU to reach educational decision makers, to expose to them, our project. Our present liaison level is at district level, and thus seldom with any decision makers.

"Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to do the thing that you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not." Thomas Henry Huxley

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EDUCATION THROUGH ACTION



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DEAR COMRADES AND FRIENDS

What one can count on, being involved in the transformation of education in South Africa, is that each carefully planned day in the schools and communities, often unfolds quite differently to that which is programmed. I need to highly commend our Edupeg trainers, who use their skills, resourcefulness, flexibility, patience, persistence and perseverance on a daily basis, in the schools and communities in which they work. Essential to the success of the work with which we are involved, is the building of relationships and trust, both of which require time, to be developed and nurtured.

We are indebted to our donors, for their generous funding, which has enabled us to incorporate in our planning, returning to clusters of schools, to provide on-going training support and to further assist with the development of skills, (as well as trust).

All of our trainers are qualified teachers themselves, with practical teaching experience. However, for those of us who taught in ex model C schools, the safe, organised, structured and predictable environment which was the norm, is far removed from the often tragic circumstances that we are exposed to in the schools in which we work. The lack of infrastructure in many schools (still now in 2007, 13 years post 1994) is appalling, including:

- the number of learners in a class (at times exceeding 90 or 100)
- that two teachers need to teach simultaneously in a crowded and cramped classroom/or community space inadequate and/or broken classroom furniture, where 3 or 4 learners sharing a desk built for 2, is the norm
- in most instances lack of/ insufficient/ non-secure storage areas
- lack of resources, including textbooks, crayons, pencils, scissors, sharpeners, rulers, erasers, maths sets (geometry), exercise books, basic counting equipment and perceptual skills equipment
- lack of basic services-electricity and running water, and where learners can hardly see in gloomy, dark, non-electrified classrooms on dull/rainy days

in some instances, lack of toilet facilities, where learners have the indignity of having to relieve themselves in the open fields or surrounding veld the absence of a culture of teaching and learning

This latter, is something that I would like to focus on in this newsletter. The previous mode of traditional teaching in rural and semi-rural schools (the focus of our project), was that of rote, repetition and drilling and where memorizing and parrot fashion learning were highly commended and regarded.

Many of the teachers directing the learning in the classrooms, are poorly trained themselves, having entered teaching with a Standard Eight and a two year teaching diploma. Additional to this is the historic fact, that in the previous dispensation, the only fields of further education for black women, were teaching and nursing. We thus do have teachers who are not passionate about their career - and teaching *is* more of a vocation than a profession/job. These are the same teachers who have attended multiple, often confusing and contradictory training sessions and where despite the best efforts of education departments and NGO's, the impact expected has not been evident. Teachers have obviously been the targets of the training and the measure of impact has ultimately been the performance of the learners-which has not been great. What has emerged, is that even if teachers were able (or appeared to be able) to comprehend the content of the training courses, when they returned to implement this newly acquired knowledge, alone in their own classrooms, without guidance and support, they were unable to do so, and thus reverted to their traditional methods of rote and repetition. What should also be mentioned, is at times the assumption that the teachers were "ignorant" and this "ignorance" would be rectified by the training "experts", who often knew little or nothing of the prevailing teaching environment in which these teachers worked and operated, was yet another reason that teachers became reluctant and resentful about change. When one couples this perception with a natural human resistance to change and a reluctance to try new methodology, it is not surprising that progress has been slow (on non-existent). That teaching in the newly prescribed method requires



Classrooms hard at work



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