

EDUCATION REPORT

Dear Comrades & Friends

The South African Child Gauge 2008/2009 reviews the situation of all South African children. This is conducted annually by U.C.T.'s Children's Institute. A rather bleak picture has emerged where 2/3 of Junior Primary School children are functionally innumerate and illiterate, and where this number grows to 73 % of children in Grade 4.

Shirley Pendlebury, of the institute, identified that "meaningful access to education requires, among other things, access to well-conceived textbooks and other learning materials, competent and prepared teachers who are able to use a range of appropriate classroom practices, a curriculum that builds a strong basis in the Foundation Phase, teaching facilities and resources and a safe and supportive environment."

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) study identifies good literacy instruction is linked to the qualification of teachers and the quality of their training. "Children also experience difficulties when switching too abruptly from mother-tongue to a different language of learning and teaching", states Cas Prinsloo of HSRC. Paula Ensor, Professor of Education and Dean of Humanities at U.C.T, indicates that "a solid foundation in numeracy is just as critical for further learning. This can only be achieved if teachers understand how children learn numbers".

A research project at U.C.T and The Cape Peninsula University of Technology found that "teachers often used inappropriate numeracy teaching strategies and that pupils did little independent written work".
Cape Times- 19.06.2009.

Children should be seen as thinkers, not empty vessels which need to be filled with knowledge. They are indeed active participants in the construction of their own knowledge. It is during these early years, when the first networks of knowledge based on experiences are formed, that the foundations for all later learning are laid. The environments of home and school enhance and support each other in learning. They provide the context in which learning takes place and the opportunity for learning to be effective. These environments obviously influence the child's growth and development, and are the foundation for all learning situations. Extensive studies by Piaget concluded that knowledge is created actively and is not received passively. It is thus vital to create and provide an exciting and stimulating learning environment.

The Edupeg programme provides stimulating, interactive opportunities for young learners themselves to interact with learning resources. While practically interacting with Edupeg activities, children learn to recognise, evaluate and cope with educational and developmental challenges. Edupeg activities also help to develop concentration, perseverance, memory skills, socialisation, self-confidence and self-esteem.

This comprehensive, learner centred educational programme, is fun and challenging, but not threatening. The activities encourage a positive attitude towards learning and the self-corrective aspect promotes self evaluation, immediate access to right or wrong answers and has obvious multiple benefits in a classroom environment.

The Edupeg programme is an accurate, comprehensive and well structured learning resource, with a strong training component, which focuses on developing visual perception, promoting mathematical awareness and proficiency, improving literacy and encouraging life skills, all of which will promote numeracy and literacy in young learners.

Special thanks to all of our donors who continue to generously support this educational initiative.

FEEDBACK SUGGESTION

We would like to re-initiate the idea that we get donor feedback which we can place in our newsletter.

OFFICE NEWS

Tia had a beautiful baby boy, Joel, on 24 April 2009 and he is thriving and content. Tia has generously given of her time to regularly support us at the office during her maternity leave. Les & Sue continue with their administrative support and Judith and Andile competently run the warehouse.

TRAINER NEWS

Our training team is stable and we are delighted with the caliber and integrity of our trainers. Sincere thanks to them all for the professional, yet supportive role that they fulfil in schools.



2009 - STATISTICS

Number of schools	112
Number of pupils	43755
Number of teachers & principals	1810



Support for schools in the Western Cape by W.C.E.D. is evident in many of the schools that we visit, in various aspects of school life. With an increasing awareness that children require nourishment to be able to learn, we are very pleased to report that in all of the schools that we work, a nutritious meal is served to the children, daily. The delivery of this service is reliable and dependable.

With an increased focus on the E.C.D. (Early Childhood Development), we notice more primary schools with Grade R, (Reception), classes. The necessity for these young learners to develop large muscle control, prior to focussing on small muscle development, has also been given attention, and in many of the schools that we visit, climbing equipment has been erected for use by the Grade R children.

The building of new classrooms is also evident, and this development is received with much enthusiasm in the schools where these new structures are being built. One very positive aspect of this, is that pupil:teacher ratios can be reduced and classrooms will become less overcrowded. W.C.E.D has also been involved in major refurbishment projects in many of the schools into which we work. This programme also incorporates the addition of storage (shelves and/or cupboarding), into classrooms. Teachers are very positive about these developments, as classroom storage assists teachers to improve their classroom organization and the more effective and efficient functioning of the classroom. Aesthetically, painted walls, replaced window panes, and repaired floors and ceilings, all promote a more positive teaching environment and frequently a more positive educator, who is proud of their school and work space.

Huge investments in text books, including class reading material, have been made (by W.C.E.D.). In some schools, some of these magnificent publications are being used, but we continue to see many schools, whose store-rooms are clogged with boxes and boxes of resources that are often still in their shrink-wrap packaging, and which are not utilized at all. This is obviously very disturbing, and we continue to focus on the use of all resources, not just Edupeg, in our interactive sessions with educators and principals. What is of interest is that the Western Cape is the only province into which we work, where we meet education department officials on school visits.

Heidedal Primary in George, which is run by a dynamic woman principal, has received departmental recognition for their improved systemic evaluation results. This school uses Edupeg well, and also has a fabulous, new functioning library (from W.C.E.D.) which is really uplifting to see. This school is assisting Thembalethu Primary, also in George, to get their library ready and functional.

It is my sense that the time that has been invested in relationship building in the schools into which we work, has paid dividends. Coupled with this, is the sincerity, patience, dedication, commitment, experience and expertise of our trainers Shirley and Ingrid. Their non-judgemental attitude, integrity in how they work and honest support and advice, have in many instances endeared them to the educators with whom they work. These educators now have increased trust, coupled with a willingness to expose their existing skills (and weaknesses), and to be guided and supported to gain greater skills and capacity. We are seeing far more, better planned and executed lessons, far more functional group work and far more written and recorded activities. This is not to say that we have won over all educators! Some teachers possibly lack the willingness or the skills and capacity to change, and we can only encourage, support, suggest, demonstrate and advise.

In some schools, we have probably reached a ceiling of what can be achieved, and we will evaluate our schools, and look to give additional contact time to some of our very big township schools (often 1000 1800 pupils). Penetration into such schools obviously takes much longer due to the size of the staff, as well as staff changes and the death of educators.

One of the Western Cape Teacher Training Colleges is keen to incorporate Edupeg into their teacher training, a situation that I will pursue in June. Generally I am well pleased with the progress that we have made and as always, am grateful for the trust and responsibility granted to me by our generous donors, along with the funding, to complete our work in community schools.



EASTERN CAPE

2009 - STATISTICS

Number of schools	72
Number of pupils	14770
Number of teachers & principals	571



Through the media, we are aware that the administration of the Eastern Cape has been under pressure, and a variety of support systems have been tried, to assist responsible provincial governance. Working in the sphere of education in this province, one is aware of the impact that the lack of leadership, planning structure, organization and delivery, has had on education in general. Many of the schools that we visit are in a poor state of repair, and almost all schools that we visit need some form of refurbishment. The access roads to many of our schools are also poor, and in some instances our facilitators have needed to walk the final distances to the schools, as the road is not passable with a vehicle. Storage and school security are an issue at almost all of our schools, and although many schools are now fenced, this deterrent alone does not prevent vandalization and theft from the community schools. In some schools, animals wander and feed in the school grounds with the resultant mess and unpleasantness of their urine and faeces. Educators working in such environments are obviously negatively impacted upon, and the morale in the schools in which we work is not high.

This year, the school feeing into the schools is somewhat more reliable than that which we have experienced in previous years. However, educators report that at times there are "shortages" or late or non-delivery. With the very high unemployment in the Eastern Cape and the resultant levels of poverty, the school going children with whom we work are heavily reliant on this single daily meal on week days. It would appear that the majority of state/provincially granted funding is spent on text books and we frequently come across learners who have no pencil or pen to use to record any written work, as their parents/grand parents are expected to provide these, and at times are unable to do so. It is my intention to look at our balance of funding and to once again purchase pencils which our trainers could carry, and distribute when the need arises.

Teacher absenteeism is still high in the Eastern Cape and funerals, memorial services and preparations for memorial services, all leach very valuable teacher:learner contact time. In late May, SADTU, in the King William's Town district, organized a two day conference during school time, in connection with the election of new office bearers. When I sensitively and respectfully spoke to a senior SADTU representative about the impact that such absence from school by the educators could have on the learners with reference to teaching and learning, just prior to the second term assessments, as well as safety of learners at school under no educator supervision/at home in the community under no supervision, I received only a torrent of abuse and muddled non logical argument. As a sister union, does SACTU have any forum to propose after school/weekend/school holiday meetings/conferences etc? (This was a question I also posed and to which no response was given). If education is in crisis as reported, (and in many instances it is), surely we should collectively be looking how best to promote learning, not have learners deprived of teacher contact time.

Non-withstanding the challenging working environment, Vuyo and Theresa have had a fairly successful term. Their caring, supportive and non-judgemental attitude, has encouraged teachers to try lessons which are then observed by our trainers. Teachers are often delighted with the response of their classes, and thrilled with their own growth and development of skills and capacity. The lesson feedback form that we introduced last year, which can be utilized along with the I.Q.M.S. evaluation, has proved to be very much appreciated, and in some instances the I.Q.M.S. team accompanies our trainers during our classroom visits.

Much focus this quarter has been placed on active learner-centred tasks and classroom involvement, the use of ability groups vs. random grouping of learning, the importance of written tasks (by the learners), and incorporating resources into lessons. At Foundation Phase, the focus on resources also encompasses the use of concrete equipment to clarify and consolidate concepts taught.

The response from educators who are willing and conscientious, and who do seek to improve their teaching skills and capacity, has been very encouraging. Once again, the time spent building trust and relationships has been well utilized, and our trainers are usually greeted with warmth and affection when they visit schools. We have much to achieve in this province, but I feel that this quarter has been fruitful and I am pleased with the gains that have been made.



KWA-ZULU NATAL

2009 - STATISTICS

Number of schools	68
Number of pupils	30390
Number of teachers & principals	774



I read Jonathan January's column, An Educated Guess in The Times on 28.05.2009. In this he says: "Values are learned through potent examples of leadership". It is my sense, that in Kwa Zulu Natal, children are being exposed to positive role models, in that in almost all of the schools we have visited this quarter, the principals have been present in their schools, and the educators are also present, and in their classrooms, teaching. These constitute "potent examples of leadership" to me, and the results we observe are learners who are learning in clean, tidy classrooms, where attractive educational posters are displayed on the walls. (Some of the classrooms are in need of repair and maintenance, but they are clean!). Attempts have been made with respect to innovative storage solutions, where storage is a challenge (which is apparent in most classrooms). Many classrooms have activity centres, and almost all classrooms, in both Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase, have book corners where the books are used!

The exterior of schools in Kwa Zulu Natal are usually attractive, with both established flower and vegetable gardens. The produce from the vegetable gardens is frequently used to supplement the school feeding, which in Kwa Zulu Natal is nutritious and which appears to be well run.

The teachers with whom I have come in contact with in our Kwa Zulu Natal schools, generally leave an impression of being committed and involved. We somehow have less politicization within the schools (although Nomzamo Primary School in Kokstad, which was previously incorporated in the Eastern Cape, is an exception to this), and teachers are more willing to learn, to try new methods and to look to improve their skills and capacity.

Educators appear to be more conscious of the differing ability levels of children within their classes, and are more willing to look at methods to best seek to serve all of the students, and to thus promote learning. The education department in Kwa Zulu Natal has distributed The Foundation for Learning documentation and the accompanying Milestone expectations to schools. Educators have been delighted with the willingness of Sibongile and Nomvuzo, to work with them, to give greater clarity on the expectations of the department and the ways in which their objectives can be met.

I must applaud the sensitivity, caring and support, which both of our trainers afford the educators with whom they come in contact, as well as their value system and commitment to education. They are both aware that we cannot inculcate values into our learners through a curriculum alone, and they tirelessly work with educators, to help, guide, advise and assist across a full spectrum of educational issues. During my visits to schools, I am aware of a sense of gratitude and appreciation from principals, educators and learners, which is very evident and very honest.

The pandemic of H.I.V.Aids has had a devastating impact on families, and as many of our schools are situated in poor rural/semi rural regions, we are aware of the tragic circumstances of these communities. Huge percentages of children at school frequently no longer have any parents. Grandparents are increasingly the primary care givers, and their own frailties, due to their old age, often prevent their full engagement on the educational issues of their grandchildren.

Although most learners are in school uniforms, and most of these are clean, they are usually well worn and much repaired and mended. Not all the children have school shoes and many children do not have pens or pencils to complete written work. As mentioned in another report, it is my intention to explore costs of pencils that our trainers could carry, to give to those children who lack these essential items.

Principals share that the schools as institutions are also finding things very challenging, as parents/grandparents are unable to pay any funds to contribute to general school expenses. Parent meetings are apparently very poorly attended, as some parents are deceased, others are working and the grandparents are often unable to easily leave their homes. Such are the circumstances of many of the schools into which we work, yet non-withstanding these challenges, we are making slow progress. I am pleased that our generous donors continue to have confidence and trust in the work that we do in community primary schools, and that the funding allocated to us is assured for this year.



edu-peg

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