

# MAKHANDA

## EDUCATION MATTERS



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# A YEAR OF THE SUMMIT:

## REACHING NEW HEIGHTS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

This year has been a jam-packed one! Our little town has had so many reasons to celebrate our education milestones. Teachers, students, and researchers alike have been busy working to improve this town's education quality.

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This issue highlights the various projects and successes that have occupied the education field in Makhanda. We started the year on a high note, with the Makhanda Education Summit, which was a great success. It set the tone for the rest of the year. Rhodes University's Community Engagement office has also maintained an engaging array of events, including a Community Engagement Conference in May.

Throughout the year, the service-learning programmes housed in the Primary and Early Childhood Department, strengthened the mutually-beneficial relationships with their community partners. The reflections provided in this edition show the power of collaboration, and the impact that service-learning programmes have in the town and the university space, thus decreasing the town and growth division.

**From nutrition programs to story days, the students and staff in the education faculty never run out of ways to get involved in the town.**

I hope you enjoy this edition and take a moment to note the staff and student achievements, especially those who have been recently recognised as part of the Top120 achievers in the University. A heartfelt congratulations to the teachers who won the first-ever Makhanda Teacher Awards! A special thanks goes to this issue's guest editor, Thandiwe Matyobeni. Thank you for capturing the RUCE events and stories so eloquently.



# POSSIBILITY THROUGH

## PARTNERSHIPS AND PATHWAYS

Rhodes University has committed to improving the education system in Makhanda by ensuring access to quality learning opportunities for learners across the city. Over the past decade, the University has continuously facilitated networking and collaboration among stakeholders in education, including schools, community-based organisations and researchers. The progress of these collaborations was critically explored at the Makhanda Education Summit in March and at the Community Engagement Conference in May, where several local community partners presented on their transformative journeys.

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Through the Vice Chancellors Education Initiative (Pathways to Education), Rhodes University aims to create a pathway for success, starting at Early Childhood Development and Foundation Phase sectors, all the way to Matric. Rhodes University is consistent and intentional about working with partners to carry out their community engagement activities in the city. Its Community

**Engagement division (RUCE), facilitates these partnerships.**

**Lebone's Centre's 12-year Journey**  
Through Engaged Citizenry programmes, Rhodes students are recruited to act as tutors for Grade 1 learners who have been identified as being in need of additional literacy support. These students are trained by the Lebone Centre in the one-on-one approach that utilises the TIME (Together in My Education) materials that were developed specifically for this purpose by the Wordworks organisation in Cape Town. Before they move into the schools, these students undergo a general orientation by RUCE about the principles of community engagement, as well as the issues of literacy and social justice.

With over 12 years of implementing this project, the Lebone Centre provides mentorship to the groups of students who go into three schools in the townships of Makhanda. The Lebone Centre also conducts the assessment of the learners at the beginning and at the end of the year, to establish a baseline and progress made. While students are drawn from a range of disciplines, and not necessarily Education, this is no doubt also a learning experience for them. For B.Ed students in particular, this often serves as the only opportunity to hone their practical skills and speak back to the theory they are learning in the university environment.

In return, the partnership enables the Centre to considerably expand its reach and the number of children served.



In an extension of literacy support for young children, RUCE also partners with local private school, Kingswood College, to implement the Budding Q school readiness programme for Grade R learners at three no-fee paying primary schools. While Kingswood provides the human resource in the form of its Grade 11 pupils, as well as the necessary equipment, RUCE provides the training and orientation.

The Centre recently won the ECD Centre of Excellence at the inaugural Makhanda Teaching Awards held this year in August.

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One example in the Early Childhood Development and Foundation Phase sector, is the support of literacy development in young learners. A key partnership here has been with the Lebone Centre around the implementation of the Wordworks programme for Grade 1 learners in no-fee paying schools. A Lebone coordinator, Cathy Gush, presented on the partnership at the CE Conference.

# ENGAGED RESEARCH & TEACHING

## FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD: THE INTERCONNECTION OF HEAD, HEART, AND HANDS

Higher education institutions have been called upon to shift from their traditional, disengaged roles as 'ivory tower' institutions and become more socially responsive. This requires universities to facilitate social and epistemic justice through partnerships with external communities. Community engagement emerged as the mechanism for this transformation. Each year, Rhodes University celebrates an academic on their commitment to integrating research and teaching and learning with community engagement, through the Vice Chancellor's Distinguished Award for Community Engagement. The 2023 recipient of the award, Dr Jessica Cockburn from the Environmental Sciences Department in the Faculty of Sciences, embodies this ethos.

Dr. Jessica Cockburn exemplifies working in the nexus - the sweet spot where research, teaching and learning and community engagement align. During the Community Engagement Conference in May, Dr Cockburn delivered a formal lecture which brought her audience on a personal journey of transdisciplinary collaboration and societal engagement.

Through her award-winning work, Dr Cockburn has consistently challenged the traditional view that societal engagement is merely an adjunct to academic work.

"I see societal engagement as the foundation for my work as a researcher and teacher, especially in our discipline of environmental science. One can't do real good environmental science in a disengaged way," she reflected in her lecture.

Reflective practice is of utmost importance to Cockburn. Reflection is crucial for driving impactful change and helping students navigate the emotional challenges associated with sustainability and social justice issues.

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**“Reflection helps students articulate and manage their emotions, making sense of their experiences and learning from them,” she says.**

Dr. Cockburn advocates for a 'good enough' approach that focuses on specific tasks without becoming overwhelmed by broader challenges. This pragmatic outlook encourages both students and colleagues to engage deeply with their work while maintaining a manageable scope. "The world's problems are huge, complex, and overwhelming. We cannot fix them all, but we can do something well enough."

Throughout her journey, Dr. Cockburn has demonstrated the value of building strong relationships within the community. Her work with the Tsitsa Project and River Rescue involved significant immersion in local contexts, including learning and using isiXhosa to facilitate better communication and engagement.

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“We learned how important it was to respect people and work in the local language. Running meetings in isiXhosa was essential to truly engage with the community,” she reflected.

By integrating research, teaching, and community involvement, Dr Cockburn has meaningfully contributed to the scholarship of Environmental Studies, while developing a just and sustainable framework for teaching and learning. In doing so, her diverse multi-stakeholder team of community partners and students have also contributed significantly to building a healthier and more cohesive community in Makhanda.



# POSITIONING ENGAGED RESEARCH

## ON THE AGENDA OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Decolonising higher education institutions requires a holistic redress of how a university constructs and disseminates knowledge and opportunities for learning. This was a recurring theme at the Community Engagement Conference in May where Deputy Vice Chancellor of Research, Innovation & Strategic Partnerships at Rhodes University, Dr Nomakwezi Mzilikazi, delivered a keynote address. Dr Mzilikazi spoke to the critical importance of meaningful partnerships between academics, communities, and institutions globally.

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“Engaged research is probably the most effective pathway to impact,” she says. “It is fundamental in addressing local problems and ensuring that communities are not just subjects of study but equal partners in knowledge co-creation.”

Drawing on Robert Sobukwe’s vision of an African University, rooted in the realities and aspirations of African people, Dr Mzilikazi drew attention to the historical context of decolonisation in higher education, asserting that Sobukwe’s vision must remain a guiding principle for current efforts to decolonise education.

Quoting Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Dr. Mzilikazi noted that: “Colonialism deprived indigenous people of their power to speak. “But we must remember that

Africans were always present, never absent, and always had their own valid, legitimate, and useful knowledge systems.”

Embedding community engagement into the broader academic project - including both research and teaching and learning - is integral to decolonising our institutions. The development of interdisciplinary modules that include principles of community engagement as prerequisites for graduation will be vital for this endeavour.

“It is crucial that community engagement is not seen as a separate issue, but as an integral part of the academic curriculum. Our universities must produce graduates who are not only knowledgeable in their fields, but also committed to the social and cultural dynamics of the communities they serve,” she says.

To achieve this, higher education institutions must not only implement community engagement initiatives, but also develop frameworks that support this vital work. “In the context of the post-colonial society, reimagining research practices and community engagement is a vehicle for epistemic justice. We must consistently engage in rethinking beliefs and practices that hinder the advancement of progressive knowledge forms,” she asserts.

The Community Engagement Division will soon offer a postgraduate diploma in Higher Education Community Engagement which is currently undergoing an accreditation process. Dr. Mzilikazi noted that this will be a major stepping stone for the scholarship of Community Engagement as well as a step towards the critical transformation of universities.

# BUZZING WITH WORDS:

## ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL ISIXHOSA SPELLING BEE!

The Rhodes University Education Department held its fourth annual isiXhosa Spelling Bee competition this year. Led by Dr Lise Westaway and her team, first-year Bachelor of Education students in the Foundation Phase visited various Grade 3 classes at schools in Makhanda. Their goal was to identify the best spellers among the young learners.

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If you've ever watched the American movie *Akeelah and the Bee*, you'll be familiar with a competition like this. Learners from different schools gather to show off their spelling skills. A lot of preparation and practice goes into helping these students spell each word correctly. The competition allows the community to see the results of hard work, perseverance, and effective teaching. It not only promotes literacy in schools, but also encourages a love of learning. As the first isiXhosa spelling

bee, this competition required a lot of planning. The preparations began in May when the first-year students, accompanied by Tammy Booysen and Ntsikohlanga Kistili from the Rhodes University Education Department, visited the participating schools. These included Samuel Ntsiko, Holy Cross, Archie Mbolekwa, CM Vellem, Fikizolo, Samuel Ntlebi, NV Cewu, DD Siwisa, Seventh Day Adventist, and Tantyi Lower Primary School. Every Grade 3 student had the chance to spell over 20



words they had learned beforehand. This created a feeling of inclusion and fairness. The first-year students observed the children's unique spelling styles. Some almost sang the words, while others tapped their feet or snapped their fingers to help them remember. This reminded them that each child learns differently. The children who spelled the most words correctly qualified for the semi-finals.

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The next round, the semi-finals, was marked by excitement, suspense, and tension in the air as we watched the best of the crop battle it out. The seats for the finals were numbered so the children who made it through showed real determination, focus, and literacy competence. Nine learners made it to the finals.

At the final, teachers, parents, the first-year students, and guests all watched in amazement as some tough words were being recalled by the learners that had reached the finals. Applause could be heard, and much joy was shared in the final event as we watched these young upcoming doctors, engineers, journalists, teachers, and professionals performing and giving their best. However, there could only be one winner. This year it was Thawani Nzwere from Samuel Ntlebi who took the title.

We want to congratulate Thawani and his Grade 3 teacher. Thank you to our guest speaker, Mr. Mbelani, and the judges: Ms. Linda Nelani, Mr. Ntsika Kitsili, and first-year students Yonela Hlongwane and Anesipho Velem. We also want to thank the organisers of the competition: Lise Westaway, Tammy Booysen, Kelly Long from GADRA, and the first-year B.Ed (Foundation Phase) students.

Unfortunately, this year was the last isiXhosa Spelling Bee for Dr. Lise Westaway. Her contributions to the competition since its beginning are very important and cannot be replaced. We wish her all the best as she continues to make a difference in education. In the words of W.E.B. Du Bois, "True beauty is born through our actions and aspirations and in the kindness, we offer to others." May she continue to be an example of the power of human connection and the positive impact of education

# SCALING THE SUMMIT,

## TOGETHER

The Makhanda Education Summit was a roaring success highlighting the power of effective collaboration and partnership. There are numerous aspects of the Summit that deserve recognition and demand celebration. In this reflection piece, I will focus on some of the underlying process strengths that contributed to the event's success.

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### DIFFERENT COORDINATING STRUCTURES COMING TOGETHER:

Over the past decade, several coordinating structures have emerged in the basic education sector. Three of the more important of these structures are the Vice-Chancellor's Initiative (to Revitalisation Public Schooling), the Makhanda Circle of Unity (specifically its Education Cluster) and the Principals' Forum. Each of these structures is collaborative, and each undertakes essential work, as summarised below.

#### **Vice-Chancellor's Initiative:**

This is driven by a committee comprising representatives of various university institutions (e.g. Education Faculty, RUCE) and GADRA Education. It has been consistently nurtured, inspired, and challenged by Professor Mabizela since its establishment in 2016. Essentially, it coordinates all initiatives in the basic education sector that are resourced by Rhodes staff and students. It has been impactful and efficient, as evidenced by nine-tenths (the VCI flagship mentoring programme) winning the international MacJannet Award for social innovation in 2021.

#### **Makhanda Circle of Unity (Education Cluster).**

This organisation is a growing and vibrant space that has slowly but surely brought together city school representatives and education advocates. It has been aimed at fostering a collective understanding of the sector-wide challenges being faced, and where possible, identifying opportunities for collaborative solutions towards those challenges.

#### **Makhanda School Principals' Forum.**

GADRA Education initially established the forum, but from 2014, it has been convened, administered and sustained by the principals themselves. It has provided principals with a supportive and collegial institutional space to share their challenges and devise effective collective strategies to engage the Department of Basic Education and other stakeholders. What set the Summit apart from all previous interventions and processes, is that it brought all of these coordinating structures together. This meant that the Summit could galvanise and mobilise the entire community of basic education stakeholders and activists.



## DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM COMING TOGETHER:

The Summit brought together the fee-exempt, fee-paying, and private/ independent portions of the basic education system in the city. In recent years, these portions tended to operate in silos, and there have also been inter-sectoral tensions relating to their different needs and interests. The resultant parochialism has militated against collaboration and solidarity.

The inclusive approach to the Summit preparation processes brought together all these parts of the system, for example, by formulating a joint situation analysis.

Occasionally, this resulted in the aforementioned tensions being surfaced. However, the difference is that the tensions were addressed rather than causing the parties to retreat into their respective laagers.

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The Summit has created an environment conducive to a set of possibilities not conceivable a year ago. Bridges across the different parts of the system are now in the process of being built. These linkages enable innovative collaborations.

## WHERE LEADERS RISE:

The leadership of Professor Mabizela was essential in mobilising the Makhanda community behind the Summit and adopting the unifying vision to establish the city as THE leading academic centre in the country.

But what became apparent over the course of the preparation process was the depth and breadth of leadership in the sector. All members of the planning committee took responsibility, invoked their networks, and mobilised their constituencies. All those who facilitated and presented at the Summit did so with humility and aplomb. It was an event that enabled a multitude of leaders to learn and to rise.

# CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

## AT THE TOP 120 AWARDS

The Top 100 Awards at Rhodes University is a prestigious annual event that recognises the outstanding achievements of the University's top students across various categories, including academics, sports, arts, and community engagement.

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This year, in honour of Rhodes University's 120th anniversary, the event was renamed the Top 120 Awards, highlighting an even greater number of exceptional students. The awards ceremony took place on Wednesday, 2 October 2024, at the Thomas Pringle Hall in the 1820 Settler's Monument, in partnership with the Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics (AGCLE). It was an evening filled with pride, celebration, and a shared commitment to excellence within the Rhodes University community.

As I entered the beautifully adorned hall, the atmosphere was vibrant with live music and a palpable sense of excitement. This event was dedicated not only to recognising individual success, but also to celebrating the collective efforts of all students who strive for greatness in their fields. Receiving the Academic Excellence Award was a remarkable honour for me, Marelise Grobbelaar, and my fellow students: Angelique Steyn, Matsobane James, Jessey Frazer, and Busisiwe Qinela. This award recognises the top achievers in each faculty, and we were

honoured to represent the Faculty of Education. It embodies the dedication, perseverance, and hard work that we have all invested in our studies.

Another inspiring moment of the evening was when Sinomhlobo Ndlela, also from the Faculty of Education, was awarded the Sports Award. The award recognises her outstanding achievements and leadership in sports at Rhodes University. Sinomhlobo's commitment to her passion encourages all of us to pursue our interests wholeheartedly, reminding us that success can be achieved through dedication, resilience, and teamwork.

This experience reinforced my belief that hard work pays off and it is vital to recognise the contributions of our lecturers and mentors who support us along the way. Each award is not just a personal victory, but a reflection of the collective effort of our Education Faculty. I hope this inspires others to embrace their journey, set ambitious goals, and strive for excellence in all that they do. As we move forward, let us remember the words of Winston Churchill:



**FIGURE 1: LEFT: ANGELIQUE STEYN, JAMES MATSOBANE, JESSEY FRAZER, MARELISE GROBBELAAR, SINOMHLOBO NDLELA, BUSISIWE QINELA.**

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“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts.” May we all find the courage to pursue our passions, uplift one another, and positively impact our communities. Together, we can achieve great things.

# STRIVING TO THE CENTRE

## OF EDUCATION EXCELLENCE!

As we, the Makhanda community, strive to become a centre for educational excellence, we need to look first for the meaning of an excellent education. Our journey can only be successful if we are clear as to where we wish to go. Many questions have been asked about what the role of education should be, including:

SHOULD EDUCATION BE AFFIRMATIONAL  
VS TRANSFORMATIONAL?

ARE WE LOOKING FOR EXCELLENCE OR PERFECTION?

SHOULD WE FOCUS ON DEPTH OR BREADTH  
OF CURRICULUM?

IS OUR APPROACH THAT OF A PLANTATION  
OR A RAINFOREST?

ARE WE LOOKING FOR SPECIALISTS OR GENERALIST?

As institutions of education we are called on to not only prepare our learners for the future, but to also be able to imagine what the future will be. Preparing young minds academically, socially and emotionally for a future that is rapidly changing, requires that we remain agile and flexible, while at the same time building on the solid foundation of past generations.

We have accepted that education fills many roles in society, and that as educators and institutions we should be mindful of all of these.



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“Education is  
the kindling of  
a flame, not the  
filling of a vessel.”  
- Socrates.

**1. Acquisition of knowledge and skills:** Education aims to provide individuals with the knowledge, facts, concepts, and skills necessary to understand the world around them. It equips students with foundational knowledge in subjects such as mathematics, science, language, history, and more.

**2. Personal development:** Education helps individuals develop intellectually, emotionally, socially, and morally. It fosters critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and communication skills. Education also plays a significant role in shaping individuals' values, attitudes, and character.

**3. Preparation for future endeavours:** Education prepares individuals for their future roles and responsibilities in society. It equips them with the skills and qualifications required for various careers and professions. Education also helps individuals develop essential life skills such as teamwork, time management, and adaptability.

**4.Social and civic development:** Education contributes to the formation of an informed and engaged citizenry. It helps individuals understand their rights, responsibilities, and roles in society. Education promotes social cohesion, tolerance, respect for diversity, and the development of democratic values.

**5.Economic development:** Education is closely linked to economic progress. A well-educated population contributes to economic growth and development by providing a skilled workforce, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, and fostering technological advancements.

**6.Personal empowerment:** Education empowers individuals by expanding their opportunities and enhancing their social mobility. It can break the cycle of poverty, reduce inequalities, and enable individuals to achieve their goals and aspirations.

These are all important goals for an excellent education system. Yet, I am always drawn to the words of Holocaust Survivor and psychologist, Haim Ginott ,as he ponders the meaning of education in the quote below.

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“I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no person should witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot by high school and college graduates.

So, I am suspicious of education.

**My request is this: Help your children become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths or educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.”**

I am first and foremost an educator. This choice of career comes from my deep belief that a person's happiness and fulfilment comes from helping others be the best versions of themselves. Enabling others to reach their dreams, lead fulfilling lives, and in so doing benefit society at large, is where I find my joy. Living in a city that is dedicated to becoming a centre for academic excellence is a true privilege. It gives meaning to our lives. It gives hope for a brighter future, as well as providing clarity of purpose to a community.

# MAKING AN EARLY DIFFERENCE:

## ECD FOR THE VERY YOUNG

With a strong focus on Early Childhood Development (defined in South Africa as being children aged 0 – 9 years), the Lebone Centre developed a Theory of Change that recognises the importance of providing a continuum of educational support for children in this age group.

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The Centre’s “Pipeline Programme” therefore starts with the #EveryBabyMatters project, moves on to Next Step, Baby! and informal playgroups for 2- 3 year olds, through a pre-Grade R preschool to projects that support learners in Grade R – 3. For purposes of this article, the focus will be on the early part of the pipeline.

“Early means early” is a slogan employed by the Nal’ibali Reading for Enjoyment campaign

and relates well to the increasing awareness that the First 1,000 Days is a critical stage of development in a child’s life. Much of the laying down of the foundations for learning happens in the early years, which speaks to the need for greater advocacy and support of caregivers and children in this phase.

Issues that impact children greatly in the first years of their life are those of nutrition, bonding and attachment, and early stimulation. Under

nutrition could count not only breastfeeding and the issue of adequate food to ensure optimum growth, but also the issue of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and the use of alcohol, drugs and cigarettes during pregnancy. Sadly, South Africa has one of the highest rates of FAS in the world, which means there is much work to be done in this area. The Hantam Trust from Colesberg have developed a good awareness-raising programme to address the issue of FAS, and the Lebone Centre staff have been trained in the sharing of this information. Regular sessions at the community clinics in Makhanda include a visual demonstration of the effects of FAS, alongside the need for early stimulation and the importance of the First 1,000 days.

Participants in the clinic awareness-raising programme are issued with a package of handouts that includes a Book Dash book, a leaflet on the First 1,000 Days that was designed by the Western Cape Health Department, as well as a full-colour two-pager with information from Nal'ibali and Wordworks about babies and books. They also get the opportunity to sign up for a series of six to eight home visits.

The Lebone Centre's team of four Home Visitors has been trained on Responsive Caregiving by the Ububele Education Psychotherapy Trust from Johannesburg. They utilise this knowledge to work with caregivers in their homes on the importance of bonding and attachment, alongside the Every Word Counts(EWC) material that Wordworks designed for the support of early learning in babies and young children.

Resources issued to the caregivers during the home visits include an EWC manual, baby books, rattles, soft toys, and a baby sensory blanket specially designed and made locally by the Ubunye Foundation's women's sewing co-operative. All of this gets stored in a brightly coloured Baby Treasure Box, also locally designed and manufactured.

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**In order to follow up and strengthen the work done through the #EveryBabyMatters project, the participating caregivers are encouraged to join one of the Lebone Centre's other early learning programmes, such as Next Step, Baby! or the informal playgroups run by Champion Moms. These Champion Moms are identified from the ranks of the #EBM participants, and then trained and equipped by the Centre to run playgroups in their communities.**

Next Step, Baby! takes the form of a kind of “coffee club” for moms and toddlers, where they can learn to make toys out of recycled materials and other ways to stimulate their young ones.

# POSITIONING ENGAGED RESEARCH

## ON THE AGENDA OF HIGHER EDUCATION

What a night of celebration! Rhodes University Vice-Chancellor, Prof Sizwe Mabizela addressed an excited room of education leaders at the first Makhanda Teacher Awards at the end of August 2024!

The Makhanda Teacher Awards was an opportunity to witness the impact of inspirational leadership first-hand. The testimonies shared by stakeholders committed to establishing Makhanda as a city of educational excellence was beyond inspiring for all those attending the ceremony.

For example, in 2017 Khutliso Daniels Secondary School in Makhanda had a class of 32 Matrics writing the NSC exam - a 25 percent pass rate; no Bachelor passes. But then, something happened...In 2023, the same school had a class of 84 Matrics who wrote the NSC exam, with a pass rate of 96 percent and 46 Bachelors! The school got the highest pass rate a fee-exempt school has ever achieved in Makhanda.

The Makhanda Teacher Awards are funded by the Kavod Trust and organised by Gadra Education.

This event provided a space for us to look back to where it all started, with the Vice-Chancellor reminding us in his inaugural speech that we are not only located IN the city of Makhanda, but we are OF and FOR this city, inextricably bound. From this sentiment, the Vice-Chancellor's Education Initiative was born.

We also recognise the donors that made the Vice-Chancellor's Education Initiative all happen - the Niven Trust who got us started, and now the Standard Bank Tutuwa Community Trust, Energy Mobility Education Trust and Kagiso Trust amongst others who have brought us this far. We also show immense gratitude for the people leading these trusts who saw the potential and invested in this dream. They include Lynne Fiser, Zanele Twala, Vuyo Mwase, Paul Smith.

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CONGRATULATIONS  
PRINCIPAL MCUBE!  
Babsy Makombe, GADRA  
Coordinator read his  
remarkable citation as  
Rhodes University  
Vice-Chancellor Prof  
Sizwe Mabizela handed  
him his Award.

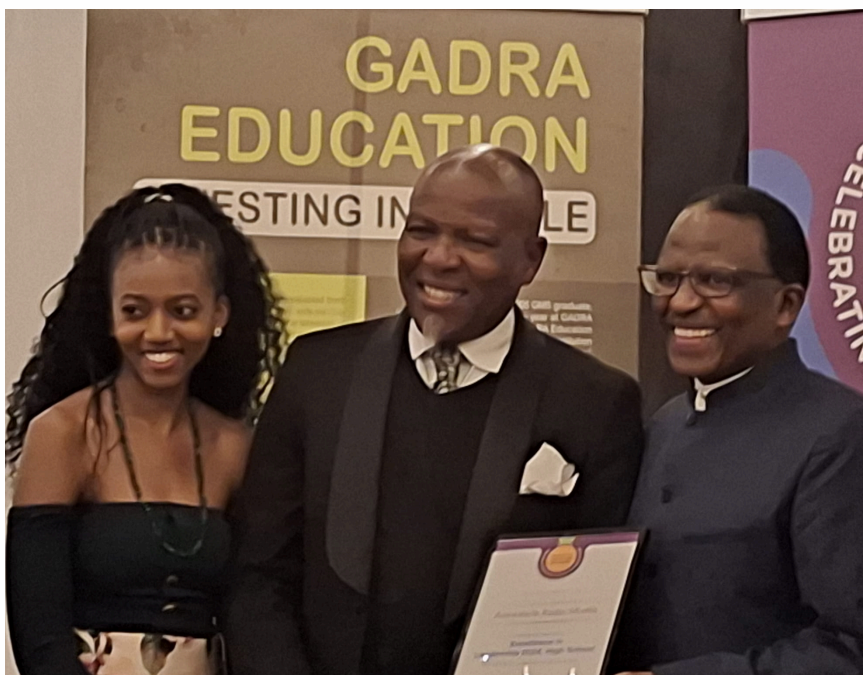
The first Makhanda Teacher Awards took place in August, but the seeds had been sown sometime prior. In short, it was felt that for the first year, it would be most appropriate to celebrate excellence, since we are striving as a community to see Makhanda rise as the leading centre of educational excellence in the country.

Donor Victoria Freudenheim, founder of the KAVOD Trust, visited Makhanda in mid-2023. While visiting, she was struck by the positive strides being made in education across the city. In discussions with GADRA Manager Ashley Westaway, Victoria suggested the initiation of an annual Makhanda Teacher Awards program as an avenue to celebrate successes and to raise the status of the teaching profession. This suggestion was perfectly timed given the strides that have been made in all sectors of education across the city over the past 10 years, many of which are highlighted in the Education Summit Chronology.

The Kavod Trust provided the funding, and GADRA teamed up with the Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Rhodes University to run the first annual awards in 2024.

A committee of experts was formed consisting of GADRA and RU Education staff. The committee decided on seven award categories for the 2024 awards. These categories will not necessarily remain the same each year.

Congratulations to all the winners and to GADRA for organising the event. It was wonderful to have Barbara Proudfoot from the KAVOD trust join us for the evening of celebration.



**MR RADIO MCUBE (IN THE MIDDLE) WAS RECOGNISED AS THE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR AND WHAT AN IMPACT HE HAS MADE! KHUTLISO DANIELS SECONDARY SCHOOL IS A LEADING LIGHT IN OUR CITY.**



**LOOKING BACK AT THE BIRTH OF THE MAKHANDA TEACHER AWARDS PROJECT**

# IMPLEMENTING A COMPREHENSIVE

## NUTRITION, HEALTH, AND SAFETY PROGRAM IN MAKHANDA ECD'S

Anthony Lake states that poor nutrition in the first 1,000 days of children's lives can have irreversible consequences (UNICEF: 2013). This can cause illness, stunting, malnutrition, and slow brain development. All this can negatively affect the children's health and schooling which can impact their later life productivity, health and contribution to society.

**NUTRITION, HEALTH & SAFETY HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED IN THE MAKHANDA EDUCATION SUMMIT (2024) AS ONE OF THE CRITICAL AREAS THAT NEED INTERVENTION IN OUR ECD'S.**

### TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

The early learning and development standards for children from birth to four years (NELDS), which is a curriculum-related policy initiative focusing primarily on the early learning needs of children in ECD's, has six early learning development areas.

Practitioners must organise their daily programmes, plan activities and record their daily observations to demonstrate the aims of the ELDAS. We assist practitioners to link nutrition activities with the curriculum. For example, these are some of the themes they might prepare in their lesson plans:

Vegetables

### CONCEPTS:

- Different kinds of vegetables
- Parts of the vegetable

- What part of the vegetable can we eat?
- Ways of preparing and eating vegetables
- Value of vegetables
- Growing vegetables
- Buying and packaging vegetables

### WATER CONCEPTS:

- Uses of water
- Water sources and water (rain) clothes
- Water cycle and properties of water
- Water in our world
- Water recreation

### GARDEN VISITORS CONCEPTS:

- What is an insect?
- Bees
- Snails
- Ants and termites
- Ladybirds and beetles
- Butterflies and moths
- Spiders

Practitioners are encouraged to start learners gardens, and this is included in their daily program, and is linked with the curriculum. Children do not only plant and water the garden, but critical skills are taught while doing this e.g. social skills, sensory play, regulation of emotions and knowledge of different types of insects and vegetables. This then encourages them to eat vegetables since they have been part of the process of growing them.

We have also provided educational posters, toys, and learners garden tools to ensure a smooth implementation of the program.



## GROWTH MONITORING

Monitoring growth and physical development is important in the early years. We want to ensure that our children in ECD centres are regularly monitored so that by the time they reach age five, they are truly ready to start Grade R and formal schooling.

Our vision is that each quarter, every learner in Makhanda is measured for height-for-age, weight-for-height and upper arm circumference. We have started this work in thirteen (13) centres this year. In partnership with Department of Health, we trained 13 ECD Nutrition Champions and 20 Change Agents. The purpose of this training was to equip them to conduct these assessments themselves in their ECD centres.

After the assessments are done, the data is sent to Settlers Hospital, and those results are shared with ECD Centres. A follow up is done if there are children with malnourishment issues.



## SONWABILE PRESCHOOL AND PHAPHANI PRACTITIONERS DEMONSTRATING HEIGHT AND WEIGHT ASSESSMENT

### Hygiene and Safety in ECD Kitchens

Poor hygienic practices during food preparation and feeding is one of the major causes of childhood diarrhea. These can be prevented by washing hands with water and soap before food preparation and eating, by using clean utensils to prepare and serve food. ECD cooks are an important part in our nutrition program. They are trained every year on food preparation; food safety and hygiene and storage.

Cooks are mostly forgotten in the background, but they have an important part to play in the program. Through this program, they now know that they are professionals who play a big part in feeding and growing children's brains. In these workshops, they bring their own knowledge on how to cook nutritious food, and learn what nutrients are in each vegetable so that they cook with a purpose.

”

Together with dieticians from Settlers Hospital, we have developed a standardised menu for ECDs. The feedback was very positive because they told us “not only has the new menu saved us money, but we know what to put in our children's plates.”

We assist ECD centres in meeting the guideline standards from the Department of Health by ensuring support visits with the environmental health officer from DOH. We also encourage cooks to wear protective clothing while in the kitchen.

The 1st We Eat project supplied most of the centres with equipment to start gardens in their schools. Gardens in ECD centres are supposed to be maintained by a gardener employed by the Centre.

”



**LHS: COOKS FROM GLADYS WILLIAMS    RHS: UBUNYEBETHU PRESCHOOL DURING AN UNANNOUNCED VISIT**

Unfortunately, this does not happen often because of a lack of funds, schools depend on parents who are willing to volunteer and CWP participants program.

Our vision is to have a vegetable garden in every ECD site in Makhanda. This allows children to have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. This is also a money saving mechanism since they do not have to buy everything.

We partnered with Umthathi Project to train participants and parents from ECD centres in our program.

## NUTRITION CHAMPIONS

Each centre in our program has appointed a nutrition champion. These champions play a critical role in promoting healthy eating habits and ensuring the nutritional well-being of young children. They raise awareness about the significance of healthy eating habits during the formative years and the impact of nutrition on children's growth, development, and overall well-being.



## Nutrition Champions

Nutrition champions work to integrate nutrition education into the ECD curriculum. They develop age-appropriate materials, activities, and resources that promote healthy eating habits and teach children about the importance of nutritious foods.

”

Nutrition champions provide education and training to parents, caregivers, and community members on topics related to child nutrition.

They offer resources, workshops, and guidance on breastfeeding, appropriate feeding practices, food safety, meal planning, and nutrition-related issues. They have attended training from the DOH in these topics.



## CHALLENGES

In implementing this programme we have come across some challenges:

- Some ECD centres do not have sufficient space to have vegetable gardens.
- We do not have enough resources to conduct growth monitoring in all ECDs in Makhanda.
- Some centres do not have fencing to close off their yards for animals
- Supplements for children identified with malnourishment

# ONCE UPON A LEADERSHIP...

VERONA DAVIDS AND CALLIE GRANT



”

“Inside each of us is a natural-born storyteller, waiting to be released.”  
Robin Moore

A group of 20 Bachelor of Education Honours students can attest to this quote. In February 2023, we, the researchers, embarked on a multi-case study to explore whether learner leadership could be cultivated in primary school learners and, if so, how. Using the Lundy model of child participation as our theoretical framework, we employed various participatory methods, including storytelling, to engage with the learners during the year. The idea behind using storytelling was for the learner participants to express moments when they felt like true leaders. The decision to use storytelling was deliberate. By sharing personal experiences, we believed learners could more vividly express moments when they felt like true leaders. Encouraged to communicate in their preferred language,

learners could choose to present their stories orally, in writing, or through dramatisation. The results were overwhelmingly positive, 19 of the 20 studies confirmed the effectiveness of this method, highlighting its ability to bring out authentic expressions of learner leadership in diverse contexts.

One Honours researcher reported: “I let them tell their stories in writing or out loud to the group. The activity went well, and the participants enjoyed it. I saw their confidence grow from the moment we started. English is their second language, but they weren’t shy about telling their stories in English, even though they aren’t fluent. This activity brought out leadership qualities in them.”

# THE AWAKENING

Once upon a time, nestled in the heart of the Eastern Cape in South Africa, there was a city that felt like a step back in time. This city was a place where history whispered through the cobblestone streets, and the buildings themselves seemed to hold secrets.

The city was like a living museum, with charming Victorian and Georgian buildings lining the roads. It was not just about the history it had to offer, but it was also a place of learning, being a home to many schools. It was a place where the pursuit of wisdom and understanding was cherished. Through its history which mirrors much of South Africa's, exists an unequal schooling society. Engulfed with informal/formal settlements, potholes, and gravel roads is Sisonke\* Secondary School. In this school is a young girl named Asonge, and she has a story to tell.

This 14-year old girl is raised by her mother and grandmother after her father having abandoned his family. These two women instilled the value of hard work in this young girl. As a result she would become an ambitious, and passionate individual who was dedicated in succeeding, and lifting her name to new heights. She thrives on overcoming challenges, and is constantly setting goals for herself. A person who is in search for opportunities to do better to achieve greatness as shown by her academic achievements; it comes as a shock to most that she never thought herself as a leader, all because she did not get an opportunity, through being chosen as a leader in a position.

This has since changed after being involved as a co-researcher in a case study based on learner leadership in primary schools. Through being involved in this study Asonge was able to tap into her past experiences in primary school, this allowed her to navigate through how these experiences made her feel, and how she could better take up space and cement herself in her current/future reality as Zozibini Tunzi once famously said.

Through the various participatory methods used in this research with her co-leaders (the participants), she was able to come to a realisation that even when not chosen to be in a position of power, one can take the lead and initiative on issues that affect them. In her own words Asonge says, "Being part of this group, being amongst people who value the importance of leadership has now made me a leader". She says, "Last term, I told myself that I won't be in leadership because I had the mind-set of 'I can't do this, I have no skills to do it' but after some time I realised that I actually CAN, all I need is within me. I am an unstoppable force of nature". In this journey, Asonge has awakened and come into her power. This is an inspiration to many others, because YOU are Asonge and Asonge is YOU.

As we look back on the stories shared by each learner participant, it's clear that our research became more than just a research project. It turned into a collection of voices, each one adding to a bigger story about leadership and the power of storytelling. As Graham Greene wisely said, "A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead."

# PLAY 'N STAY 2024

## SERVICE-LEARNING TENNIS AT RHODES UNIVERSITY PRESCHOOL

As 2024 draws to a close, we reflect on the Play 'n Stay programme this year. Term 1 was met with a mixture of excitement and anxiety as the children of Rhodes University Preschool met with the B.Ed students in preparation for a collaborative learning experience.

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For some of our children, this was the first time they stepped out of their safe, comfortable school environment. Some of them burst onto the courts enthusiastically and ran with confidence across the courts, whilst others huddled close to their teachers, not quite ready to embrace their new terrain. The students were ready and prepared to help our little ones feel more at ease as they greeted them with big smiles, comfort and high energy. This allowed our nervous little ones to feel confident and comfortable in this big, new environment. Once they were all on the courts, they were ready to ace the year ahead!

Our children, aged 2-5 years, were all accommodated and supported in two groups based on their ages. The students catered to the needs of our children by making use of a fun, flexible play-based approach. They incorporated singing and a lot of movement to help our energetic little ones to develop their motor skills in an enjoyable way. They were adaptable in their approach to make sure no child was left behind, by tailoring their plans

to suit their individual needs. This year, our class included some younger babies that were bursting with energy.

This presented a challenge to the students, but also provided them with an opportunity to develop their classroom management skills. The students motivated the children to participate through words of encouragement, guidance, and by holding their hands and offering them hugs through challenging moments. This allowed the children to form trust and build strong relationships with the students throughout the year.

Each week, the children's faces light up with joy as they arrive for tennis. They are thrilled for each session, which has helped them develop a positive attitude for sports and movement. This programme helps to build strong foundations in the development of various skills needed to achieve success on the sports field and we look forward to engaging in this programme again next year.



# Rhodes Librarians Fostering Social Change through Read Aloud Sessions with the Schools in the Makhanda Community

Rhodes University Library is thrilled to share the success of the Read Aloud Event on March 19, 2024. The event was a heartwarming celebration of literature and community, bringing together foundation phase Grade 1 learners from various schools in the Makhanda community in a united effort to celebrate library week in fostering social cohesion and a love for reading.

## A DAY OF STORYTELLING AND CONNECTION

The Read-Aloud event saw enthusiastic participation from students, teachers, and community members. Schools across Makhanda gathered at the Samuel Ntlebi Primary School to engage in awaited activities. The day's highlight was the Read Aloud sessions, where librarians and teachers took turns storytelling and reading the children's favourite books to the audience. The children also explore storytelling. The stories ranged from timeless classics to contemporary tales, capturing the imagination of listeners young and old. There were also audio stories to encourage young children to know how to tell their own stories.

## BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH BOOKS

One of the key aims of this event was to promote social cohesion within our community. The Read-Aloud event created a platform for shared experiences and mutual understanding by bringing together primary school children from diverse schools. The power of storytelling became evident as students bonded over their favourite characters and narratives, breaking down barriers and building friendships through playing games together.

## ENCOURAGING A LIFELONG LOVE OF READING

At its core, the Read Aloud event sought to encourage a lifelong love of reading in our young learners and encourage the use of classroom, school, and community libraries. Reading not only enhances academic skills, but also broadens horizons and nurtures empathy. Through the collective efforts of our schools and community members, the aim was to inspire our children to become avid readers and lifelong learners.

## A HEARTFELT THANK YOU

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the schools, teachers, librarians, and volunteers who made this event possible. Your enthusiasm and dedication have left an indelible mark on our community. Special thanks to the host school, Samuel Ntlebi, for opening its doors and unused new structure to accommodate all participating schools, and to the Rhodes Teacher Resource Centre for providing an excellent selection of books and the librarian who sponsored refreshments for the event.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The success of the Read Aloud event has inspired the librarian to plan more such initiatives in the future. They are committed to fostering a culture of reading and learning in Makhanda and look forward to the school's and community's continued support.



# PRIMARY TEACHERS IN REFLECTION:

## LOOKING FOR PRACTICAL AND LOCAL SOLUTIONS

The primary sector breakaway sessions at the Education Summit took a practical, engaged approach. Sessions were well-attended, vibrant, interactive, and inclusive.

In the first breakaway session, on day 1 of the Summit, Dr Lise Westaway facilitated a lively discussion with primary education sector participants. The group critically reflected on the content of the Primary Education Sector status-quo presentation, particularly considering what resonated and what was missing.

Participants continued in-depth discussions in smaller groups of between five and eight. In the feedback session which followed, participants shared the salient points made in their smaller groups, the result of which was the formulation of a rich understanding of the current status quo of the Makhanda Primary School sector.

The group used the next session as an opportunity to discuss the sector's most pressing needs, as these relate to the current status quo. This resulted in a wide-ranging set of needs, all of which were agreed to be of integral importance to the sector's future success. Dr Westaway asked the group to consider the long list of needs to identify those needs, which the stakeholders present could reasonably expect might be within their power to address. This resulted in unanimous agreement on four main areas of need (highlighted in bold below). In the final session, the sector representatives worked collectively to map

a way forward. Participants considered each of the highlighted areas of need, being specific and realistic, considering all of the role players (including school leadership, NGO's, Rhodes University and the DBE) in a position to take reasonable and achievable action.

### THE AREAS OF NEED HIGHLIGHTED, INNOVATIVE IDEAS FOR ACTION AND PROGRESS MADE TO DATE ARE AS FOLLOWS:

#### **PRACTICAL, LOCAL TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (TPD) OPPORTUNITIES WITH A FOCUS ON SUPPORTING LEARNERS EXPERIENCING BARRIERS TO LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM.**

Representatives suggested that local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) and Rhodes University would be best placed to take action in relation to this need. Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) are working with experts to develop a TPD short course for teachers focusing on providing teachers with practical everyday tools to assist learners experiencing barriers to learning in the classroom. GADRA is working with the Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education (PECE) to consider the possibility of reinstating the RU/GADRA annual TPD short course. Demonstrating their commitment to answering the needs of the sector, these partner organisations have already held a highly successful and well-attended TPD session in April providing a practical guide on how to complete and submit forms to the DBE for learners who experience barriers to learning.



## **EXPERT LEARNER SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS EXPERIENCING BOTH PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS TO LEARNING.**

RUCE are committed to continuing to run the successful and impactful Budding-Q programme which benefits a large number of primary schools and learners in Makhanda. This programme is designed address gross and fine motor skill deficits at a Grade R level to ensure school readiness by Grade 1. Representatives highlighted the valuable work of the ADC Counselling centre which is ongoing. In April the DBE approved new LSA posts for Makhanda schools, a welcome and positive step.

## **DECLINING LEVELS OF PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION AND THE NEED TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS.**

The ICDP Trust continues its dedicated work with parents. Suggestions were made to approach local radio stations and churches with the view of heightening awareness about the importance and impact of parental involvement in education and providing useful, practical ideas for how they can best support their children's education from the home.

## **LOW LEVELS OF NUMERACY AND LITERACY.**

Participants suggested that, while action can and must be taken on a classroom and school level, the assistance of Rhodes University and local NGO's would be crucial to success in this regard. All local education-focused NGO's and education activists

are committed to continuing their valuable work with schools. The following highlights just the work of GADRA and the PECE in response. However, it should be noted that this is by no means an exhaustive list of the work being carried out across the city.

The utility of standardised assessment data at a primary school level was highlighted. In response, PECE and GADRA have institutionalised the 2023 city-wide Grade 4 comprehension study as a service-learning component of the BEd fourth year programme. This ensures that the study will be conducted annually. PECE has secured funding to provide the '6 Bricks' early learning to all Makhanda ECD centres that have Grade R classes.

## **THE PROGRAMME IS DESIGNED TO DEVELOP THE CHILDREN'S PERCEPTUAL-MOTOR SKILLS.**

GADRA's Whistle Stop School English single sound phonics programme for Grades R and 1 as well as a Graded Reader programme for Grades R to 3 was being piloted in seven classrooms at two schools in 2023. GADRA has accelerated the roll-out process to include 15 new classrooms and two new schools in 2024. The PECE are committed to continuing their successful Spelling Bee service-learning programme benefitting isiXhosa LoLT primary schools in the city. PECE has also introduced a new service-learning programme which sees BEd second year students working with Grade 3 learners at three local isiXhosa LoLT primary schools to develop their English FAL skills.





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