

# MAKHANDA

## EDUCATION MATTERS



### BUZZING WITH WORDS / 20

growing the love and appreciation  
of isiXhosa through the Spelling  
Bee competition



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## Is there an antidote for South Africa's prevailing reading with meaning crisis?

The 2023 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) report published in May this year has left many people in the teaching fraternity gasping for air. It revealed that only 19% of South African Grade 4 children could read for meaning in any language in 2021.

This is unsurprising, because South Africa's reading culture remains a work in progress. For our little town, Makhandla, various stakeholders continue to work together to find an 'antidote' that will see much-needed literacy improvements. The Rhodes University Community Engagement has worked tirelessly in 2023 with like-minded partners on programmes such as The Right to Read Campaign and the Makhandla Literacy Collective. Their work echoes the works of other stakeholders in the town.

This issue highlights stories that are part of the antidote, thus giving us a taste of what has happened this year and what to expect in the new year. Once again, this issue draws on events, practices and approaches from practitioners, researchers, students, and teachers committed to improving the quality of education in our town and surrounding areas. Consider this issue a call for our esteemed readers to join the various teams searching for the antidote. If anything, scientists and researchers alike during the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak showed us how, indeed, it was possible to find a solution to what seemed like an impossible problem.

**Phemelo Hellemann**  
Editor-in-Chief



# Makhanda Education Summit – A first in South Africa



Figure 1- Dr Ashley Westaway, GADRA Education's Manager.

By Ashley Westaway and Sakhe Ntlabezo (Members of the Summit Planning Committee, as constituted by Prof Mabizela)

**T**A defining characteristic of the basic education landscape in Makhanda is the extent to which it is being actualised as a community undertaking. A wonderfully diverse plethora of individuals and organisations (ranging from public and independent to formal and informal) contribute to uplifting the education standard in our public schooling system. Organically, there is a sense of collective ownership that is being developed.

The wide-ranging network of civil society role-players has already gone a long way to creating meaningful educational experiences and opportunities for the young people in the city. Most strikingly, this is reflected in the massive improvement in all the key matric metrics registered over the past decade. Concerning quantity, the dropout rate has thankfully been lowered significantly, from 55% to 35%, and the pass rate has shot up from around 60% to 85%. If one puts these two statistics together, they

produce a third significant statistic, which is that the number of Makhanda 18-year olds obtaining a National Senior Certificate (NSC) has skyrocketed from around 400 a decade ago up to approximately 650 today - a 62,5% increase. The quality metrics have shown similar growth. Whereas the number of candidates obtaining a Bachelor pass hovered around 180 ten years ago, about 320 young people now earn the right to apply for Bachelor degree study. In other words, this crucial metric has improved by over 75%. This improvement translates into a massive increase in the number of disadvantaged local students now accessing full-time study opportunities at Rhodes University. The increase is more than tenfold, from 10 in 2012 to over 120 annually today.

## 25%

Pass rate increase  
from 60 - 85%

## 62,5%

Increase of 18-year  
olds obtaining a  
NSC in the period of  
a decade



Figure 2- Sakhe Ntlabezo, Makhanda Circle of Unity, programme manager

The person who has come to symbolise the extensive community effort to afford every child in our city quality education is Professor Sizwe Mabizela, the Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University. Ever since his inauguration in 2015, he has consistently mobilised and availed university resources to improve the standard of public schooling in the city. Moreover, he has gone about this drive in an inclusive, participatory way. The university, particularly its Community Engagement Division, has provided the glue that has connected the wide range of civil society organisations alluded to above. Indeed, visitors to our city often remark on our unusually high levels of organisational cooperation and coordination.

Considering the gains made in public education in Makhanda over the past decade and the underlying reasons for the improvements, it is fitting that Professor Mabizela has announced that he will be convening a Makhanda Education Summit on 27 and 28 January 2024. This was publicly shared for the first time on 18 September, to a receptive audience of the city's school principals and district officials. Ultimately, the summit breaks new ground. Given that education is a government responsibility, as laid out in the South African Constitution, it is not unusual for national and provincial governments to convene summits, round-table discussions and indabas. However, this is the first time a civic leader calls all interested parties and role-players, inside and outside of government, to reflect on, and plan the future of public education in a South African city.

Professor Mabizela is emboldened and inspired by the progress that has been made in public ed-

ucation through our collective efforts over the past decade. Originally, we set ourselves the vision to develop Makhanda into a centre of educational excellence. Based on the advances reported above, a new vision is emerging: that we develop into the country's leading educational centre of excellence. The summit promises to be a powerful catalyst to set us on the road to achieving this grand vision. If what has been achieved so far is any indication, now is the time to pursue and give life to this vision.





# Learning to be a globally responsible teacher and citizen: reflecting on the Politics4Future UNESCO online course

By Busisiwe Qinela. 3rd Year Bacher of Education, DPECE, Rhodes University.

I am a 3rd year B. Ed student. In my three years of study at Rhodes University, I have achieved a lot. My greatest achievement is being part of a pilot online course called Politics4Future: Youth Teacher Engagement. The course was part of the UNESCO and UNITWIN Network project between the following universities: Rhodes, Leuphana, York, Heidelberg and Crete. This program started in 2023 online, and it focused on guiding pre-service teachers or teacher trainees to understand the interconnections between Education for Sustainable Development, Global Citizenship and Political Learning. At first, I joined this course because I wanted a certificate that is globally recognised, but at a later stage, I fell in love with the program. We had virtual meetings every week unpacking the content, and activities to perform. This course gave me a better understanding of the curriculum as well as my B.Ed curriculum and teaching in general. I would constantly ask myself why a teacher should teach about pollution, and how it can be taught without having a lot of teacher talk. This course helped to answer my question.



Busisiwe Qinela. 3rd Year Bacher of Education, DPECE

## All About The Experience

This program brought about so much exposure. I was exposed to people from different countries like Germany, and people from different socio-economic backgrounds. With this exposure, I saw how people live in other countries, and how different their lives are from ours in South Africa. These differences made me want to change the status quo. As much as we are from different countries and have different lives, we did have something in common - an environmental issue. People from different countries had environmental challenges such as noise pollution and carbon footprints. The environmental issues that we are facing in South Africa are pollution, water shortages and most importantly, loadshedding (the generators that release greenhouse gasses). Our challenges seemed worse because they affect our basic needs. However, the reality is that everywhere resources are being used in an unsustainable manner and this might affect the future.

## All About The Experience

The zoom discussions brought an awareness of the significant challenges we face. However, it was also clear that sustainable solutions exist if we act with speed to address prevailing environmental challenges. Teachers bring about change in communities, and the best way to do so, is through storytelling. Storytelling is important as it can teach learners life lessons. I wrote a story about how a young girl found a solution to loadshedding without having to damage the environment. The story talks about the necessity of taking care of the environment and teamwork. The environment is a shared space, so taking care of it should be a shared responsibility. This story will help make an impact and encourage innovative thinking.

## Benefits

The program benefitted me in so many ways. I interacted with different kinds of people and my story-writing skills have improved. In addition, the way I perceive the earth charter is different, and I also received a globally-recognised certificate, which was my initial aim when joining the programme. I believe that a teacher is a life-long learner that should invest significantly in their professional and personal development. With a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive global socio-economic environment, it is important for one to be equipped with the necessary skills to adapt to change. It is equally important to transfer these skills to our learners to equip them to adapt to a rapidly changing world. I discovered my talent for writing texts through this program. I started writing short poems for my learners and stories to help them learn about other concepts. Story writing is a skill that I can continue with in my career.

Global citizens are action takers and impact makers" and I am a global citizen!

# RHODES UNIVERSITY MATHEMATICS EDUCATION PROJECT (RUMEP): DUTYWA COLLEGIAL CLUSTER

By Fezeka Mkhwane, Director of the Rhodes University Mathematics Education Project (RUMEP), Rhodes University

Collegial clusters are communities of practice for mathematics teachers. The Collegial Cluster programme is one of RUMEP's programmes which helps mathematics teachers work on their own professional development in order to improve their practice. The programme has had a positive impact on the teaching and learning of mathematics, especially in rural schools where the project mostly operates. One of the goals of the programme is to develop confident and competent mathematics teachers in terms of mathematics content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. The programme is designed such that after some years of intervention, the communities could be left on their own to continue with their professional development. This is one way through which the communities of practice could be self-supportive and sustainable.

Image above: Learner from Ngubethole SP who placed Position 1 in the Amathole East District Mental Quiz competition





The Dutywa collegial cluster is one such example. Through the programme, most teachers have gained confidence in teaching the subject, meaning that their practice has improved. They can now conduct workshops and other mathematics-related activities on their own, with the subject advisor just acting as an overseer. RUMEP is called as and when the need arises. The confidence has cascaded to learners, and this is evident in the increase in the number of schools and learners participating in the mathematics competitions that are conducted annually. Learners are not scared to participate in any competition that challenges their competency in critical and logical thinking. Below are competitions in which the Dutywa cluster learners participated.

The following are some of the competitions in which the cluster in question participated.

### Mental Mathematics Quiz

Mental Maths Quiz is an event held annually for Grade 7 learners. It assesses learners' mental skills of doing computations without the use of a calculator. The learners below were the best in terms of their performance in the quiz. Their teachers who are on the left in each picture, are Ex-RUMEP students who are also collegial cluster teachers. On the right is the Maths Subject Advisor.



Learner from Jongilanga SP who placed Position 1 in the Dutywa Sub-District Mental Quiz competition



### Horizon Mathematics Competition

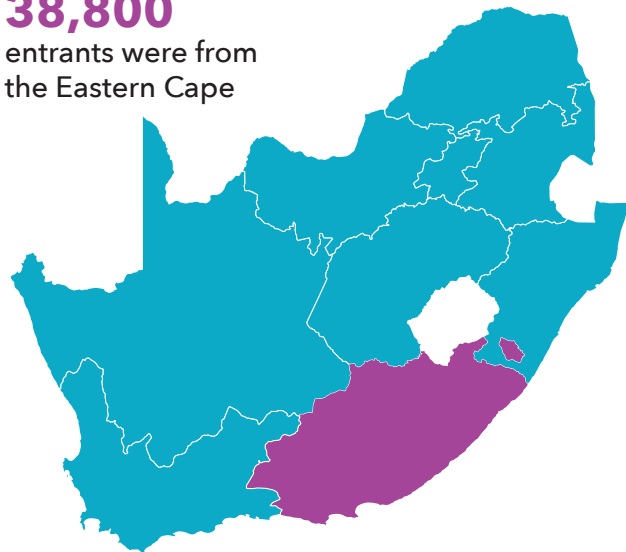
This is also held annually for Grade 7 learners. There were 94 867 entrants in the country, and of these, 38 800 were in the Eastern Cape. From the top 100 learners that were awarded in the Eastern Cape, some came from the Dutywa collegial cluster schools. These are learners who obtained more than 50% in the second round of the competition.

**94,867**

Grade 7 learner entries nationwide

**38,800**

entrants were from the Eastern Cape



Both the Subject Advisor and the teachers are Ex-RUMEP students. These teachers are now principals, but still have a passion for mathematics teaching. Although they graduated more than 10 years ago, they are still actively involved in the collegial clusters.



## Grade 7 Mathematics Olympiads

These are assessments where learners' ability to think critically and logically get tested. Learners from five districts within the Eastern Cape participated in the competition. The top 11 learners, which is 15% of the participants, obtained a mark between 63 and 73%. The learner who placed first obtained 72%. This is the same learner who placed first in the Amathole East District Mental Quiz.

**15%**

which is the of the top 11 learners obtained a mark between 63 - 73%



**72%**

is the percentage obtained by the first placed learner



All the teachers whose learners won in the Mathematics competitions are Ex- RUMEP students, who are collegial cluster members. Because of their love and passion for mathematics, they have been involved in the collegial cluster activities for more than fifteen years. Their commitment and dedication are reflected in their learners' performance.

Congratulations to them for such an achievement!!!



# NEW LEADERSHIP

A hearty congratulations to Dr Lise Westaway and Associate Professor Ingrid Schudel on their new leadership appointments! Lise is the new Deputy Dean for the Education Faculty. Ingrid is the new Head of Department for the Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. We wish them well in their new roles. Malibongwe igama lamakhosikazi!





# WARM WELCOME TO PROFESSOR ZINGISWA JOJO

I am Zingiswa Jojo, a Professor in Mathematics Education in the Secondary and Post School Department at Rhodes University.



**M**y research interests are spread through the fields of Ubuntu in teaching and learning of geometric concepts, conceptual understanding of calculus concepts, mathematics in-service teacher professional development, mathematical thinking, preservice mathematics teacher education, instructional design in mathematics teaching, and learning in mathematics. Currently, my main research focus is on Ethnomathematics, and the use of indigenous knowledge systems in mathematics teaching and learning for the promotion of mathematics teaching in rural situated schools.

Apart from the academic position, I have advanced my engaged scholarship through involvement in community engagement projects that aim to close the content gap, while investigating issues of classroom practice in mathematics. The intention is to extrapolate or improve on them for the better development of teachers and learners' meaningful understanding of the subject. I am the co-founder of the South African Women in Mathematical Sciences. I serve as the current secretary of the Commission of African Women in Mathematics (CAWM), and I am the founder of the Role of Mathematics Education in Women Empowerment (RMEWE). I am also involved in two international research projects: (i) Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe on Indigenisation of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education and (ii) UK, Switzerland, South Africa and Zimbabwe on the Mathematics Education Research Group. Being a woman and a resourceful person who maintains a high standard in the teaching and learning of Mathematics, I serve as a mentor to students and colleagues.

Apart from academic work, I like walking, hiking, singing and listening to music. I am a woman who made it this far from humble beginnings, believing that through focus, strategic planning and use of both emotional and psychological intelligence, all can come to learn and know mathematics and use it when necessary.

I am excited to be part of the diverse, dynamic and research focused team at Rhodes University.

# INDEED! INDEED!

## GESTURE AND POSTURE IN TEACHING AND RESEARCH



**E**arly interest in non-verbal communication in the 1970s and 1980s focused on creating categories for the full range of meaning expressed by the human body: qualities of the voice, gaze, gesture, bodily positions or movements. The growing interest in and understanding of non-verbal factors were in turn used in many kinds of research into human behaviour.

A key early realisation of students of non-verbal communication is that all body movements and facial expressions complement

verbal communication. This challenges the common perception that the verbal is the main or only communication available to teachers or to researchers into educational contexts. Excluding the non-verbal inevitably strips teaching exchanges of meaning. Researchers therefore support the principle that any fine-grained research into human meaning making should include an analysis or acknowledgement of the full range of verbal and non-verbal resources. In many contexts the researcher cannot fully understand an interaction by analysing one mode alone.



Researchers have raised issues and opened debates on the reliability of non-verbal communication. Firstly, they assert that gesture can be open to many interpretations by both participants and researchers. However, others argue that non-verbal communication is highly reliable, and that where there is apparent contradiction, the non-verbal is more likely to communicate the sender's true intention.

A second issue is that gestures may be interpreted differently when there are language or cultural differences. There are two points to make in this regard. Firstly, Kendon (1988) and McNeill (1992) assert that there is a continuum of meaning from gestures which are stable and symbolic to gestures which are idiosyncratic or unconventional. They argue that the most symbolic or sign-like gestures are stable because of the tight relationship between form and meaning. These are therefore least open to multiple interpretations. Idiosyncratic or unconventional gestures on the other hand, are freely open to interpretation.

Gestures have received particular attention in teaching environments because of their obvious role in explaining and demonstrating. Teachers point to writing and diagrams on blackboards, to objects and to learners to explain the learning

content and to direct learning. In mathematics and science teaching research, gestures have recently received particular attention because of the link gestures can create to abstract concepts. However, gesture is only one of many communicative resources available to teachers and learners.

McDermott, in a study of a teacher with young readers showed that group members are not only performing activities and speaking about them, but are also signaling to each other what they are doing through posture, gesture and glance. They adjust these messages to each other and take on the movements characteristic of their activity. Furthermore, they do this at the same time as each other in an "elaborate postural-kinesic dance" (McDermott et al, 1978, p. 251) in which the learners and the teacher round each other up to focus on the group task. This dance confirms to group members, in a micro-stream of information, what the current purpose of the group is. Erikson suggests that non-verbal signals identify who is doing the work in the group. This in turn allows individuals to align themselves to the group purpose or to withdraw from it. For example, learners who face each other with eyes directed to a task communicate "I am (we are) working." Gestures and postures, as well as other non-verbal information, are thus a rich data source for a researcher, who can view members' perceptions of the work of the group, and the contribution of individuals to that work, on an ongoing basis.

By their deeds shall ye know them, indeed!





Image 1: Kim Schmidt (far right) with colleagues.

## Guidelines for an Early Childhood Home-Visiting Programme: The Question of Beneficence Post Phd

by Dr Kim Schmidt, Scholar in the University Staff Doctoral Programme Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Work, University of Fort Hare

The PhD journey is a long one. It takes courage to begin, and even more to continue when the going gets tough, and the work gets hard. Once completed, the celebration is real, shared by many, and accompanied by a sense of relief that the journey has been completed. For me, once the celebration had ended and I began to recover from all of the time and energy that I had invested in my PhD, I started to grapple with the question of "what happens now"? Is a 300-page PhD and a graduation the end of my research journey or could it, should it, be the beginning of the next phase in my journey as a social worker and academic and even as a South African citizen?

As I was carefully considering this and contemplating how I would begin to consolidate the PhD and possible post-PhD research with my current workload, a call from one of the research participants pulled me back, and grounded me in the need to continue what I had begun. The PhD was indeed finished, but perhaps the lifelong journey of engaging in research that is impactful, that makes a difference, contributing in a meaningful manner to society, was only beginning. This contemplation took me back to the ethical considerations that I addressed during my PhD, and in particular that of beneficence. Beneficence is an ethical consideration that refers to the benefits that the research may have for the participants, and furthermore implies that the research should be conducted in such a way that there are benefits for the participants themselves, for other people and for society at large (Sotuku & Duku, 2015).

The research, my PhD, should thus generate new knowledge that would benefit the participants, other people in the Eastern Cape province and society. Strydom (2011) agrees, stating that the responsibility of sharing the findings with the public is important, as the research is meaningless without this. I had already in some way ensured this through the dissemination of the study findings to participants, and to a larger audience through the publication of a book chapter, participation in conference proceedings and the submission of two articles to journals for publication. However, I was left questioning whether this was the best way for the findings to be shared, to make a difference and benefit our local Eastern Cape community.

I reached out, collaborating with the University of Fort Hare (UFH) Social Work Department, the UFH ECD Centre of Excellence and the USDP to plan and invite local stakeholders and role players to an early childhood research seminar. This was one way in which I could ensure that the findings of the research were shared locally, at a community level, and where I could begin to negotiate the way forward in terms of the implementation of the research findings.

The seminar was well-attended, and various stakeholders were given an opportunity to share the work that they are doing with vulnerable, young children in the Eastern Cape. A resolution was taken at the end of the seminar to keep working towards securing a good future for all young children in the province and for future seminars to reflect on the progress being made towards achieving this goal. For me, this opened up an opportunity to begin a discussion and invite interested communities to partner with UFH in implementing the guidelines for a home-visiting programme that were developed as an outcome of my PhD. Consequently, a follow up seminar in this regard is planned for November 2023, and the training of a home-visiting workforce is planned for January 2024. For me, as a social worker and researcher, the planning and hosting of this early childhood seminar was instrumental in upholding the ethical considerations of my PhD study as I was able to share the findings locally, across various disciplines, with people who are working daily in the field of early childhood and vulnerable children. Furthermore, as I reflect on this seminar, it has become the bridge from my PhD towards post-PhD research, where I hope to implement the guidelines of the home-visiting programme through a pilot study, monitoring, evaluating and then disseminating the findings that emerge as the process unfolds. And perhaps, as I travel along this bridge, continuing my research journey, through the implementation of the developed guidelines for a home-visiting programme, the ethical consideration of beneficence, where research truly gives back and benefits participants, local communities and society, will continue to unfold.

# Makhanda's Miracle:

## A Beacon of Hope in South Africa's Education Crisis

By Kelly Long  
GADRA Education communications and research manager.



Forty percent of Grade 4 children in Makhanda are able to read for meaning, more than twice the national average of just 19% (PIRLS, 2021).

These remarkable results emerged from a recent study which included over 1000 children and all public primary schools in the city. The collaborative research project involved NGO, GADRA Education, and the Rhodes University Department of Primary & Early Childhood Education under the umbrella of the Rhodes University Vice-Chancellor's Initiative for the Revival of Public Schooling.



As a sample set, the study utilises 1017 Grade 4 learners from 20 local primary schools. Makhanda provides a microcosm of the different types of public schooling available in South Africa, all located in a reasonably small geographical area. Fourteen no-fee public primary schools, four fee-paying public primary schools, and two low-fee private primary schools participated.

Two measures were utilised. One being comprehension, and the other Oral Reading Fluency (ORF). Comprehension measures assess a learner's ability to extract meaning from text. ORF measures assess a learner's level of reading fluency which is widely accepted in early grade literacy research to be a key element of early reading, creating a bridge to comprehension.

Assessments were independently administered and marked by Bachelor of Education year 4 students from the Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education and moderated by experienced team leads from GADRA. Students participated in training and were assigned to schools in teams of two to six. They were also supported by a team lead throughout the onsite testing. All assessments were completed within a four-day period from the 18th to the 21st of September.

A team of co-researchers from both organisations are working together to develop a deep understanding of the rich data. It is the intention that the research provides vital formative information to all local education stakeholders. The data will be analysed to highlight notable accomplishments and to meaningfully guide local, contextualised attempts to address literacy challenges and enhance positive outcomes.

This Grade 4 comprehension study pulls into focus the ripple effect of partnership that is transforming the city into an educational powerhouse. Results such as these would not be possible without the collective effort of a wide variety of education

stakeholders across the city over the last 10 years. In the face of a national crisis in primary education, Makhanda has emerged as a shining example of what can be achieved when a community comes together with a shared vision of educational excellence.

In the end, it's a testament to the potential that lies within every community, no matter how challenging the circumstances. With the right commitment, resources, and a shared determination to provide quality education for all, we can overcome the most daunting educational obstacles and pave the way for a brighter future for the next generation.





# POTHOLES DONKEYS & SO MUCH MORE

A visit to Makhanda as a gateway to  
understanding the complexities of the South  
African education system a tiny bit better





By Marion Mathier, Dozentin Englisch &  
Französisch Institut Primarstufe

Rhodes University partners with the University of Teacher Education Bern, Switzerland, where I am working as a lecturer for French and English. Thanks to this mobility agreement, I was able to visit Makhanda, Rhodes University and discover parts of the beautiful Eastern Cape in late August/early September this year. My visit to Makhanda also marked the beginning of my postdoctoral research journey and I could not have imagined a better start into my endeavors in South Africa.

Before I present why my research interests led the way to South Africa, let me briefly dwell on the picture on the right. It is one of the first pictures I took upon my arrival in Makhanda – not donkeys, but cows entering the arch that leads to the campus of Rhodes University. I must say I was amused on that Sunday, not only seeing cows strolling around freely, but also encountering those famous donkeys grazing in a strip of green between streets. I also admit I found myself asking “where am I?” But for me, the more I saw of Makhanda, the more this picture came to represent a town where the people I met do their best to unite different living environments, learn together, and try to reduce systemic inequalities to the best of their abilities.

I could say that it is this link to inequalities – digital and educational inequalities – that led the way to South Africa. In my research, which is grounded in critical discourse studies, sociolinguistics, and critical (digital) literacy studies, I am interested in the ways in which learners and teachers interact with digital media and learning software, and how educational technology shapes knowledge production and literacy practices in classrooms. Because global, corporate education software developers, such as Google for Education, increasingly fashion themselves as educators, attention needs to be drawn to the uptake and use of these technologies in education. In South Africa for example, Google says to be partnering with the government to invest in ed-

ucation technology and promote online learning, and many other British- or American-based learning software companies also sponsor learning programs in South African schools. Even though these public-private partnerships might be well-intended, they do not disclose possible effects on pedagogic practices at local scales. Especially in postcolonial education systems such as the South African one, western, English-only learning software might not necessarily reflect the learners’ diverse (linguistic) backgrounds and needs.

Thus, when planning a project to conduct research in a context that is entirely new, I relate on local experts and knowledge before entering the field. The Education Department at Rhodes University was the ideal place to start learning about the South African education system, current research, and meet and exchange with many scholars, lecturers, and teachers from different fields. Many doors were opened – doors into classrooms, seminar rooms, community centers, research methods, theories from the South, ... Warmly welcomed by the people opening those doors, I am not only inspired by their work and investment in education and research, but also very thankful for their time and interest in mutual exchange and discussion. And I sincerely hope that we can continue the conversations and meet again – be it in Makhanda or Switzerland.

# Buzzing with words

## growing the love and appreciation of isiXhosa through the Spelling Bee competition

by Tsephang Tau and Bukiwe Tambo Wakashe



Over 80 first year BEd aspiring teachers visited schools around Makanda seeking a champion for the Rhodes isiXhosa Spelling Bee during the months of July and August. The Spelling Bee is part of a service-learning course run and organised by Tammy Booysen and Lise Westaway. The event demonstrates a mutually beneficial partnership between first-year Bachelor of Education Rhodes University students and local school teachers and learners. Learners were asked to spell from a list of 40 words. The minimum requirement for round 1 was getting 25+ words to make it to the semi-finals. The learners were fierce, however, only seven schools managed to reach the semi-finals, which took place over two days due to the high number of pupils who managed to make it through. The names of the participating schools are: NV Cewu, CM Vellem, Makana Primary, Fikizolo, DD Siwisa, Samuel Ntsiko, Tanti Lower, Archie Mbolekwa, Samuel Ntlebi and Grahamstown Seventh day Adventist Church. The language of learning at the schools are isiXhosa home language.



During the semi-finals at the Rhodes University education department Big Lecture Theatre, everyone in the audience was sitting on the edge of their seats, with tensions thick enough to cut with a knife. All the learners tried their best to secure their place in the finals. The fierce competition highlighted the sheer intelligence of the young Grade 3 learners' ability to spell in their mother tongue, isiXhosa.



The finals celebrated excellence in young isiXhosa home language students in Makanda. Prof Ngcoza welcomed the learners, teachers and parents and spoke about the importance of being your child's role model. The top three spellers were Ntombizandile Platjies (1st), Enzokuhle Maku (2nd) and Asonle Nkompo (3rd). The victor graced the photographers with a smile as she took home the trophy making Samuel Ntlebi Primary School the winners. They were followed by DD Siwisa in second place and Archie Mbolekwa Primary School in third place.

A hearty thank you to the Grade 3 learners and teachers, Prof Ken Ngcoza, Dr Samu Chikiwa, Ms Linda Nelani, Dr Anele Gobodwana, Ms Lwando Tutu, Ms Nosphelo Nogqala and Ms Junitha Els who made the two bee costumes.

## Die Departement van Sekondêre en Naskoolse Onderwys aan Rhodes Universiteit onderneem 'n vennootskap met Afrikaanse Onderwysnetwerk (AON) om die opleiding van Afrikaansonderwysers aan te spreek

Deur Kavish Jawahar and San Knoetze



Die kwessie van onderrigtaal is steeds 'n belangrike onderwerp in die Suid-Afrikaanse onderwys en die opleiding van taalonderwysers van gehalte bly steeds 'n deurslaggewende faktor. Daar is 'n dreigende tekort aan kwaliteit onderwysers met taalonderrigkwalifikasies in sommige provinsies, en dit sluit dié in wat nodig is vir die onderrig van Afrikaans. Die Departement van Sekondêre en Naskoolse Onderwys aan die Rhodes Universiteit Opvoedkunde Fakulteit voel dus opgewonde om met die AON saam te werk. AON het onderneem om Rhodes Universiteit-studente wat gedurende 2023 vir Afrikaans Metodiek in die Nagraadse Onderwysertifikaatprogram (NOS) ingeskryf is, te befonds.

Gesprekke het in Augustus 2022 begin, gefasiliteer deur Hoërskool PJ Olivier se skoolhoof, mnr. Joubert Retief. Die Departementshoof van Sekondêre en Naskoolse Onderwys, dr. Kavish Jawahar, en die RU Afrikaans Onderwysmetodiekdosent, me. San Knoetze, is genooi na 'n vergadering met die Hoof Uitvoerende Beampte van die AON, mnr. Daan Potgieter, en 'n aantal skoolhoofde van Afrikaansmedium- en dubbelmediumskole in en om Makhanda.

Die vergadering het gehandel oor die groeiende behoefte aan Afrikaans onderwysers wat omliggende skole ervaar, en oor moontlike maniere waarop die Departement van Sekondêre en Naskoolse Onderwys aan Rhodes Universiteit kan help. Mnr. Potgieter het in sy aanbieding gepraat oor die belangrikheid van moedertaalonderrig, insluitend in Afrikaansmediumskole, en 'n reeks statistieke gedeel oor die behoefte wat bestaan aan onderwysers in Afrikaans. Die AON-befondsing van studente wat vir die Afrikaans Metodiek in die NOS-program ingeskryf is, het as 'n oplossing na vore gekom.

Mnr. Potgieter het die Departement van Sekondêre en Naskoolse Onderwys op 1 Junie 2023 besoek om die akademiese personeel en Afrikaans Onderwysmetodiekstudente te ontmoet. Hy het gepraat oor die belangrikheid van passievolle onderwysers en die feit dat taalonderrig van gehalte aandag behoort te geniet. Die studente het as groep van hul werk uit die Afrikaans Onderrigmetodiek aangebied. Op die foto (van links na regs) is me. Lauren Aspelings, dr. Kavish Jawahar, mnr. Daan Potgieter, en me. San Knoetze.



# PLAY 'N

## STAY TENNIS

### with Rhodes Preschool

The Play 'n Stay Tennis Service-Learning with the Rhodes University Education students forms part of the second year B.Ed curriculum. It is a way for the students to work with younger children to develop their teaching skills, as well as develop the children's motor skills. This program benefits the students as well as the children participating as they learn from each other. In this programme, students have to teach children ranging from 2 - 5-year-olds, the basic skill that they will need to play tennis. Term 1 started off with introductions as the students and children started getting to know one another. The children grew fond of the students very quickly because the students this year displayed genuine care, passion and consideration for the children. The students were always helpful, patient and gentle while working with the children. This helped our babies adjust quickly, despite the challenges of a new environment and new faces.

The dedication and enthusiasm of the students this year is commendable. Their passion was evident throughout the programme, which created a positive and exciting environment for the children. Their energy and motivation were contagious, encouraging the children to give their best in every session.

The students ensured that the children were always safe and comfortable, even emphasising their need for water breaks and cool downs. They communicated effectively with the children by being clear and concise, and demonstrating as needed. They participated with the children, and did the activities with them to help them understand the techniques and concepts they were teaching. This encouraged teamwork and good sportsmanship. It promoted a positive and inclusive environment in which the children felt motivated to participate and form positive relationships with the students.

The students always came well-prepared. It is clear that a lot of effort was put into the development of lesson plans, and creating a structured learning programme for the children.

The students combined tennis skills development and fun activities into their plans, catering to the different needs and abilities of the children. The programme allowed the children to progress gradually, building a strong foundation while keeping them engaged and entertained. They enjoyed being able to learn through play. In Term 4, the children and students were a lot more comfortable and secure in each other's space. They were familiar with the structure and routines of the programme. The students were more confident in their teaching abilities. The difference in the children's physical development in Term 4, compared to Term 1 was also very clear, showing the effectiveness of the programme. Physically, the children displayed improved gross motor skills like balance, coordination, strength and agility. They also improved their fine motor skills as they learnt more controlled and precise movements through tennis activities. This also gave them the opportunity to develop their hand-eye coordination and spatial awareness.

Tennis also promoted our children's abilities to focus and concentrate whilst promoting their thinking skills and decision-making abilities. In addition, tennis helped promote the children's emotional and mental wellbeing. They developed their self-confidence and self-esteem. It was motivating for them to see just how much they improved week-to-week, giving them a sense of accomplishment. The programme also gave the children an opportunity to develop their social skills as they learnt to interact with their peers and student instructors. They learnt to cooperate, communicate, participate and support each other through the tennis service-learning programme.

Overall, this programme has been a meaningful and enjoyable experience for our children. It has been critical in promoting their holistic development. It was a very positive experience, and we are so grateful to be part of it! We appreciate the effort and hard work that has gone into developing and implementing the programme. Thank you for involving us from the onset and for supporting the specific needs of our school. We look forward to starting again in 2024!

by Naycan Ferreira and Annidene Davis (Rhode Pre-School teacher) and Michaela Zimmerman (3rd year B.Ed student)





## Famed Author Dr.Sindiwe Magona visits Makanda and Launches New Reading Programme, Partnering with the PUKU Foundation and Rhodes University.

By: Kiara Pritchard and Ntokozo Mbambo, 3rd year  
Bachelor of Education, DPECE, Rhodes University

**O**n Wednesday 27 September 2023, Dr. Sindiwe Magona visited the second year Bachelor of Education students, along with Ms. Elinor Sisulu, the executive director of the Puku Foundation. They told the B.Ed student about how we will be a part of the Masifunde Sonke Extensive Reading Programme. This programme has been established to address the literacy crisis in South Africa. A total of 81% of children in South Africa cannot read for meaning or for pleasure. This is a major problem for our youth. If the youth cannot read, they are at a disadvantage. According to PIRLS, South Africa has one of the lowest reading levels in over 50 countries. The goal of this programme is to have all children reading by 2030.

Later that week on Friday, we had the honour of celebrating Dr. Magona's 80th birthday with her. To honour a living legend in South African literature, Amazwi: The South African Museum of Literature opened a new exhibit celebrating the work that Dr. Magona has done in the field of literature. This exhibit will be open for a year, allowing aspiring writers to draw inspiration from the work, so that one day they may become the face of change in literature in South Africa, as well as become inspirations themselves. Dr. Magona has done it all, she is a mother and an author who received her Ph.d in Literature last year. This achievement is a brilliant showing of how it's never too late to achieve your dreams. As Dr. Magona said, "We cannot expect young children to dream about what they have not seen." This should give you an idea of how limited many of the youth of this country are, due to the fact that they cannot read. This problem is the key focus of the Masifunde Sonke Extensive Reading Programme.

I asked Ms. Elinor Sisulu, how the programme hopes to achieve its goal of having all children reading by 2030. Her answer was to start at the source, the teachers. By having future teachers review books and correlate content, as well as having adequate digital skills, we are investing in our teachers and creating a better source for the next generation to learn from, to be inspired from and to succeed from. The reason that our current teachers are not teaching our learners how to read is because they are not readers themselves. In order to teach children to read, you yourself must have a joy or appreciation for reading as well.

The programme is not just working towards having children read for meaning, but to also have them reading for pleasure. When a child only reads for a comprehension test, they will most of the time just look for the words from the question or they only focus on the questions and not the story as a whole. When they read for pleasure, they read for themselves and develop a want to read, leading to a daily exposure. This programme has kicked off with the B.Ed students receiving a pack of books to review and use when they enter the classrooms. On behalf of the B.Ed students, this programme is a great honour, and we are very grateful that we were chosen to help the next generation of doctors, artists, writers, teachers and so many more find the joy of reading and the places it can take them. This programme is open to the community, and if you wish to learn more about the programme and the Puku Foundation, you can visit the website at [www.puku.co.za](http://www.puku.co.za).



# Improving Handwriting in Learners: The Crucial Role of Gross Motor Skills

By Samantha Cloete, 4th year Bachelor of Education  
Student in DPECE, Rhodes University

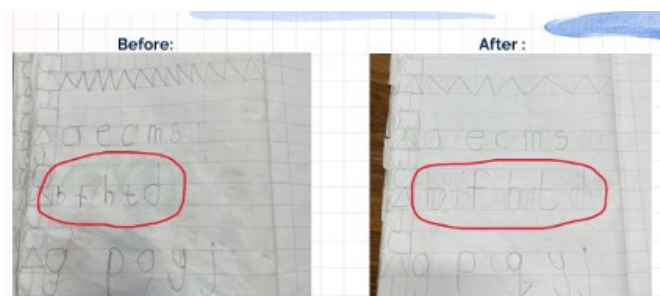


**E**ach year, the Year 4 group embarks on a mini-research journey, conducting classroom-based research that seeks to improve their teaching practices. As a class, we presented our findings on the 7th of September at a mini-research conference organised by Dr Samu Chikiwa in the Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. My research focused on using gross motor skills activities to improve handwriting with Grade 1 learners at a local school in Makhanda.

In the pursuit of providing quality education and fostering academic success in young learners, it is essential to pay attention to every aspect of their development. Handwriting is one aspect of their development as a critical component of foundation phase education. However, many learners struggle with handwriting due to challenges linked to the lack of motor skills, specifically gross motor skills (Sherry & Draper, 2013). Gross motor skills involve the coordination of large muscle groups fundamental to developing fine motor skills, which are required for precise activities like handwriting. Without the ability to write legibly, learners cannot effectively convey their knowledge and ideas (Feder & Majnemer, 2007). As a result, poor handwriting can lead to misinterpretations and reduced academic performance.

By addressing these issues early on, interventions can be developed to improve learners' gross motor skills, enhancing their fine motor skills and handwriting (Feder & Majnemer 2007). Motor skills are the function in the human body where the brain and nervous system work together for your body to do a certain thing. Gross motor skills help with body strength and coordination, for example, skipping. They develop before fine motor skills. Fine motor skills develop after gross motor skills and use the small muscles in the body for precision and a high degree of control like holding a pencil (Akin, 2019).

After reviewing multiple research articles (Sherry & Draper, 2013; Feder & Majnemer, 2007; Akin, 2019 and others not included here), I noticed that handwriting is a recurring issue in research. A lot of what is out there only speaks to the effects of fine motor skills on handwriting, but gross motor skills also impact handwriting. My research led me to explore how the development of gross and fine motor skills impacts the handwriting abilities of learners. The research revealed how children lacked secure play areas at home, thus resulting in them spending extended hours watching television or using smartphones. To address this concern, I used the school facilities as safe and suitable spaces for them to play.



I structured a classroom-based intervention through play-based activities to help learners develop their gross motor skills, which impacted their fine motor skills, which improved their handwriting abilities. I used the following activities to help improve the learners' handwriting:

- Hopping on one leg and then the other
- Star jumps
- Practicing monkey bars
- Playing with playdough
- Ball skills with tennis and netball balls
- Walking on a balancing beam
- Running
- Assisting learners to sit correctly when writing
- Creating a calm, focused environment when working on handwriting
- Assisting learners in holding their pencils correctly

Below are examples of learners' work showing progression and improvement after engaging in the above-mentioned activities over a couple of weeks.

Through the recognition of the connection between the fine and gross motor skills and the implementation of play-based interventions, I facilitated the development of outstanding handwriting abilities in learners, thereby improving their academic performance and self-confidence.

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## Amazwi hosts CYCLES Exhibition at the National Arts Festival

By: Ingrid Schudel, Lwazi Bhengu, Abongile Ndzipo and Simamkele Crankydy Xako



In partnership with the Centre for the Understanding Sustainable Prosperity (Surrey University) and the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, the Rhodes University Environmental Learning Research Centre has participated in the CYCLES (Young Lives in Seven Cities) project since 2017.

CYCLES is about listening to young people from seven cities around the world talking about their everyday lives, including what they like about where they live, and what they might like to change. Makhanda is one of the seven cities, its sister cities being Christchurch (New Zealand), Dhaka (Bangladesh), London (United Kingdom), New Delhi (India), Sao Paulo (Brazil) and Yokohama (Japan).

CYCLES began with a research project in which youth responded to surveys and photographed and talked about their lives in relation to different aspects of well-being such as food, water, energy, transport, leisure, living spaces and education.

Photographs and stories from Makhanda youth were featured with its sister cities in an international exhibition in London in November 2018, an exhibition in Christchurch (November, 2021), and the third time at the South African National Arts Festival (NAF) at the Amazwi South African Museum of Literature (Amazwi) in July 2023.

The museum was the perfect home for the CYCLES work given Amazwi's own commitment to sustainable museum practice in southern Africa, and their recent initiatives that speak to youth perspectives on sustainability. These include the 'This is What I'm Made of' exhibition, produced in partnership with an organisation called 'Upstart,' and the 'Humanature' Exhibition. Amazwi complemented the NAF exhibition with literary materials curated from these previous exhibitions, as well as from their extensive collection of literature.



At the NAF exhibition, further reflections from the Christchurch and Makhanda youth were featured in two documentaries by the award-winning director - Amanda Blue - in which youth were invited to write and read letters to their cities reflecting honestly and critically on what they loved and would like to change.

Another highlight of the exhibition were contributions from two of the youth from the original exhibition. Crankydy, speaking with the vital energy of youth, told visitors that "I learnt that perfection is overrated. An idea doesn't have to be perfect. It just needs to be implemented". In her contribution, Abongile told the audience: "I want to be the change I wanna see in my community, I want to be the message I want to deliver out there. Young people are suffering, we're drowning from our own tears and I want to change that. My aim is for young people to come together and connect in the name of healing. I want us to heal from things we're suffering from, which we do not speak of".

She added: "It is about time we acknowledge our worth, take back our power and fight for our identity. We need to redefine ourselves. In order for us to change the world, we first have to change our own world. Our voice should be the one changing our world, our circumstances. It should be one that heals broken hearts and gives hope to the hopeless. Each one of us should be able to identify themselves and embrace their truth as I am embracing mine.

My truth is...

Being Black

Beautiful

Strong

Capable & Enough."

For more information visit: <https://cusp.ac.uk/themes/s1/cycles-brochures/>

### Beauty of a broken glass

Poem by Lwazi Bhengu

Can something broken be beautiful?

Can it be attractive?

I'm broken

Can I be beautiful

Can I produce something beautiful then

If love is a beautiful thing Am I able to love then...

I'm in love and I love so hard. I love genuinely.

I love with all my heart What's beautiful about

broken people is that they are willing to try again

They become overprotective of their own

They become insecure and always want to make sure

of things Broken people are limited

They do things to a certain point We draw a line

somewhere

Can I love someone then?

Love is kind, patient and beautiful Now can a broken

glass be kind Can it be patient nor beautiful

Because a glass that I know off can only be dangerous

One needs to be cautious around it You need to

protect yourself around it You need to limit

yourself around it Because it can cut you,

it can hurt you.

How beautiful can a broken heart be?



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