

Creative

Evolution

The Arts Education Department Newsletter 2007

A Recipe for GUMBO!

Presenting **GUMBO** at various Schools Festivals was a highlight of 2007 for Arts Education. This modern fairytale is South Africa's first full-length production featuring Deaf and hearing performers together on stage. We spoke to **Tanya Surtees**, **GUMBO** director and company manager of From The Hip: Kulumakahle, the theatre company responsible for cooking up the show.



Gumbo performers Liezl de Kock and Lysander Barends

How did you all get into this thing called 'integrated theatre'?

While I was at university, I stumbled upon a company that was into "integrated dance", meaning that they used both disabled and non-disabled dancers. Being a dancer myself, I was fascinated by this. I realised that I had never seen a physically disabled person onstage before. Or a Deaf person. Or a blind person. Why? The Arts should surely be an ideal place to incorporate different bodies and abilities creatively. Instead of the obstacles, think of the theatrical possibilities of wheels onstage, or a tapping stick, or expressive hands. Soon I was hooked. I began researching integrated companies around the world, and I knew I wanted to begin working in this field.

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South African Schools Festivals: Arts and Culture Trust Award Winners!

In a striking recognition of their impact, the South African Schools Festivals scooped the coveted Arts and Culture Trust Award for 2006 Arts Education Project of the Year.



Arts Education Director Louisa Clayton accepts the 2006 ACT Award for Arts Education Project of the Year on behalf of the South African Schools Festivals from Lebo Mashile.

The annual awards, sponsored principally by Nedbank, is an established event on the arts and culture calendar that recognises individuals and organisations who have made outstanding contributions to the development of arts, culture and creativity in South Africa.

The trust was established shortly after our first democratic election to provide funding for the arts, with Nelson Mandela as its Patron-in-Chief.

On 2 November 2006, Schools Festivals staff travelled to Johannesburg for the awards ceremony. The big night saw us ushered into a beautifully decorated venue brim full of arts and culture pio-

neers from all over the country, also up for awards in different categories. Many of these, including From the Hip: Kulumakahle's production "Bird's Eye View" and dance company Ballet Theatre Afrikan, are productions and companies that are regularly employed by Schools Festivals to be presented to our young audiences. To see them nominated for these prestigious awards was a heart-warming confirmation that our lucky Schools Festival audiences really are being exposed to some of the best the South African arts scene has to offer!

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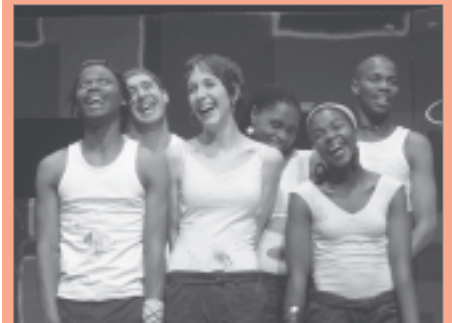
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Days of Our Fantastic Festival Lives...2007!

The Schools Fest team thought we'd share some of our top memories of 2007 with you...Look back and re-live the magic!

▶ Kicking off the Standard Bank National Schools Festival with the breathtaking *Cargo*. What an amazing set: a colossal crate opening up to reveal its cargo of slaves arriving at the Cape; and what a sensitive and unsettling visual portrayal of our country's painful past...and present.

▶ The super-high-energy, outrageously talented and power-packing Ubom! Eastern Cape Drama Company, who trekked around to almost every festival to share their seriously empowering workshops and shout-for-more poetry show, *Rhythm Rebellion*.



▶ Crying with laughter for 30 minutes non-stop in well-known South African comedian Alan Committie's uproarious Keynote Address at Gauteng II.

▶ Experiencing *Gumbo*, South Africa's first ever full-length show featuring Deaf and hearing performers together on stage... AND... watching Deaf and hearing delegates form special friendships

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South African Schools Fests: ACT Award Winners! continued...

Nervous tension was soothed by the performance poetry of Lebo Mashile, acclaimed South African poet and the evening's MC, while some of the nominees performed excerpts of their work, including "Bird's Eye View" - just what many of our delegates had watched during the year! And then the big moment arrived, and the South African Schools Festivals were announced winners of the 2006 ACT Arts Education Award for their significant contribution to Arts Education in South Africa.

Today, our "Oscar" (a beautifully beaded African lady) hangs in the Schools Festival Offices as an encouraging reminder of the impact the projects are having. She spurs us on to keep doing what we do, so our nation's young people can be introduced to the splendour of the arts!



Days of Our Fantastic Festival Lives continued...

in the 'Tell-Tale Signs' workshops at Western Cape, where we were privileged to have with us learners from the Dominican School for the Deaf.

▶ Nphanhla Den Mavundla's 'Animal Passion' workshops at North West: At first, no-one was excited at the idea of learning to behave like animals, but when we saw Nphanhla miraculously transform himself into a leopard before our very eyes, inspiration soared and delegates began tackling some fine-tuned physical theatre skills with zest.

▶ The TOTALLY AWESOME Welile Tembe - actress, arts-politics masters student, and inspirational speaker extraordinaire - kicking off the KZN and National festivals with rocking Keynote Addresses. She was real, warm, fun and feisty, and challenged us to live as the people of worth we are, and to make choices that respect ourselves and others.

▶ *Tin Bucket Drum*, a gem of a production with an authentic African flavour, innovative props - mainly tin buckets - and a Mafikizolo percussionist! Solo performer Ntando Cele held everyone's attention throughout as she portrayed a village full of characters.

▶ Out-of-the-ordinary workshops at the Free State/ Northern Cape Festival, including sand painting, stage make-up, and set creation.

▶ The 'Haiku & Gyotaku' workshop at Nationals: Who

would have thought you lot would have had so much fun painting the bodies of dead fish?! And the traditional Japanese haikus you penned afterwards, inspired by your finned friends, were brilliant!!!

▶ Our great workshop leaders - we're sending you contact details for many of them with this issue.

But our best memory of all...is YOU! Thank you for coming to celebrate the arts and for all the creativity, courage and fun you shared with us!



Stage Make-Up at Free State/ Northern Cape



Cargo

A Recipe for GUMBO! continued...

About the same time, I met my husband, Rob Murray, who had his own dream of starting a theatre company, a group of clowns: the conspiracy. After graduating, we worked together for a dance company in Cape Town that works with people of varying disabilities. But as time went on, I realised that I wanted to focus on the Deaf rather than other disabilities, and Rob wanted to focus on physical performance and comedy, not dance. It was an obviously brilliant combination: If anyone knows about physical communication, it's the Deaf! We decided to put our dreams together, and FTHK was born.

Where did the idea behind GUMBO come from?

A number of places! Floss Adams came up with a story idea. We also drew on a short performance called Leap of Faith that we did for a Congress in 2005. It looked at a group of Deaf people meeting a group of hearing people, the suspicion between them and the battle to communicate. We took this idea and created a Deaf hero, oppressed by his hearing father who has never learnt Sign Language (often the case in families with Deaf children). Rob penned the final version. The whole piece is told with no more than 30 words or signs throughout, making 'body language' the primary means of communication. This is great because, after all, Deaf or hearing, everyone 'speaks' body language fluently!

What do you think the show has accomplished?

Well, it's reaching people! It's travelled to 5 different provinces, was invited to perform in Spain, will soon tour Germany for 3 weeks, has played at 6 arts festivals around South Africa and at a number of Schools Festivals. By October 2007 alone, over 5000 South Africans - Deaf and hearing - had seen it.

Wherever it goes, people are amazed by the concept of the Deaf and hearing together onstage, and by the Deaf being part of theatre. Most Deaf people in South Africa have never seen another Deaf person onstage before. Plus, very little theatre gets made here that Deaf people can enjoy. At the same time, for the hearing, it has given them access to Deaf culture, which most of them are very interested in.

So GUMBO is many things. First, it is quality theatre - whatever social change we hope to see through it means nothing unless it can stand proudly alongside other contemporary theatre. It is also South Africa's first full-length Deaf and hearing piece, one that Deaf and hearing people can watch and enjoy together. It is a move towards the Deaf being more included in South African cultural life. It is time a Deaf person can say that they want to be a performer and be taken seriously, and GUMBO is the beginning of this process. Viva la revolution!!

What can South African teachers and learners do to build bridges with disabled people?

Don't be scared of working with people who are disabled in some way, and here I'm talking about the day-to-day obstacles that any of us could face: shyness, lack of self-confidence, not only disability. There is always a way to fully include people in exercises and classes. All it takes is a little creativity, a dash of sensitivity, and an emphasis on fun!

Right: A Deaf delegate and her hearing partner having fun with sign language in one of FTHK's "Tell-Tale Signs" workshops.



Turn to pg 5 for "Tips on Interacting with the Deaf"!

By Keryn Chitsike

The Amaphiko ("Wings") Grahamstown Township Dance Project has been going - and growing - for a number of years. It aims to empower and develop township youngsters through formal dance training. Over 150 boys and girls attend dance classes two afternoons a week. They also have opportunities to show off the skills they've developed in performances, as well as to have their progress assessed in the internationally recognised AIDT modern dance and hip hop exams. The programme builds much-needed confidence and self-esteem into them. At the same time it demands serious commitment and dedication, fostering hard-core self-discipline and encouraging them to strive for excellence.

That self-discipline has yielded amazing results, with these boys and girls scooping top awards wherever they go and sailing through their exams year after year, outshining many from more advantaged backgrounds. Some highlights through the years have included dancing for prestigious events such as Standard Bank National Schools Festivals, SciFest (Africa's premier Science and Technology Festival), the Highway Africa Conference (where they danced to a live performance by Yvonne Chaka Chaka), and performing for President Thabo Mbeki at a Lekgotla at Alicedale this year.

Meet some of the people whose lives have been transformed as they've discovered dance...



Nomcebisi Moyikwa

Nomcebisi is like any normal 18-year-old: she wears jeans, laughs with her friends, has just endured those nail-biting matric exams, and isn't entirely sure about her future. But just wait till she starts to dance, and you'll see that this ordinary teenager is carrying around an extraordinary talent. One minute on stage and it's clear to all present that this young woman was born to dance.

Nomcebisi joined the Dance Project's classes in 2001 when she was in Grade 6. She just wanted to try something new - she had no idea that she would fall in love with dance or that she had such a talent for it. At the end of that year, she undertook her first AIDT exam - and earned Honours with Distinction, the highest award possible. She has gone on to do the same every year since. She's also garnered a heap of gold awards from various eisteddfods, and when she entered her very own group choreography piece in the 2006 East London Eisteddfod, she won one of only two gold awards out of the 28 entries.

What does dancing mean to her? "It's saved me from being bored," she says. "I've seen how some of my friends have gotten involved in bad things, and I think dancing has stopped me from going the same way as them." She also likes to keep herself busy - when not at her dance classes or performing somewhere - with reading and singing.

Nomcebisi would love to make a career out of her dancing, but she realises, she tells me, that "That may take some time, so I might have to do something else at first so I can get paid!" Secretly, I send up a prayer that somehow she can get out onto that stage before long - when I watch her dance I feel like all is right with the world.

Wendy Adam

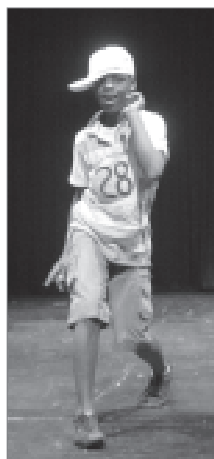
A dynamic, energetic 28-year-old, Wendy is today an assistant dance teacher with the project and working towards becoming a fully-qualified dance teacher in her own right. But it all started for her back in 1993 through her mum, who worked for project director Janet Buckland as a domestic worker. Wendy would peep into Janet's dance classes and liked what she saw, but felt too unsure of herself to join in. However, with Janet's constant invitations and encouragement, the 14-year-old eventually took the plunge. It wasn't long before she felt that all she wanted to do with her life

was dance. This showed in some excellent exam results. So, in 2000, Janet took her on as a teaching assistant, with Wendy doing more and more teaching ever since and preparing for her teachers' examinations.

What would she be doing now if she hadn't gotten involved in the project? "If Janet hadn't gotten me into all this, I would probably be sitting at home doing nothing! She's seen that dancing is what I want to do, nothing else, so she keeps pushing me. She's even pushed me to go and get my driver's licence!" So far Wendy has crossed the first hurdle and passed her learner's. With her determination and passion plus Janet's relentless encouragement, her driving, her dancing and her teaching will surely go from strength to strength.



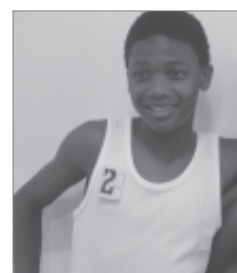
Mandisi Ngcwayi and Yonela Ntshiba



I caught up with these energetic 13-year-olds on the rather nerve-wracking day of their dance exams. I didn't think they had too much to worry about, though: these are two talented dancers who've sailed through their exams for the past two years. Mandisi also came away from the 2006 East London Eisteddfod with the Most Promising Male Dancer award.

Yet, if not for Mandisi's sister, they might never have started dancing! She was attending the project's classes and told him about it, so he went along to see and soon joined. Yonela then saw Mandisi dancing and also wanted to get in on the act.

Why do they enjoy dancing, I ask them? "Because I want to be a star one day," Yonela says enthusiastically, with quite a few sparkles in his eyes, and "Because I want to be a professional dancer one day," Mandisi echoes seriously. Clearly, dancing has empowered these young men to dream. Meanwhile, though, they will continue doing what lots of other boys their age do - they both play cricket and soccer, Mandisi enjoys swimming, and Yonela plays touch rugby - and, of course, they will dance.



Township Dance Project continued...

From the Director's point of view...

Janet Buckland recently won the Herald Citizen of the Year Award in the Arts and Culture category for her work with the Amaphiko Dance Project. But this is only one of the things she does. She is well known in the theatre world for her formidable talents, especially her directing feats. Currently she can be found in Grahamstown, struggling to divide her all-too-short hours between teaching at Rhodes University's Drama Department, running Ubom! Eastern Cape Drama Company, and, of course, her dancers.



What is outstanding about Janet's work with these boys and girls is not just that they have achieved enormous success, but that they've done it against the odds. These dancers face great challenges - shortage of money is only one of them. "Because of the demands of the discipline," Janet explains, "it's difficult to be a dancer and wayward." She means, I soon understand, that a drunken, promiscuous lifestyle is not compatible with the rigours of dance. "But the temptations of living in the kind of environment these kids do are just enormous," she says. She tells me how the project has recently lost some brilliant dancers because they just weren't able to withstand such temptations. "Also, the project is very demanding on them. Dance requires that you deliver 100% of the time. Slack off for just a moment, everyone sees it immediately and you promptly get shouted at. So we're really asking a lot of them. And sadly, there are some who don't manage to keep that up."

So how does she account for the success of the majority who do? (Besides, I think to myself, her excellent teaching, unstinting hard work, and balance of kindness with firmness.) "Dance enables them to see themselves in a different light," Janet explains. "It gives them a vision of themselves that is beyond what they are right now. Its almost transcendent for them." As I watch them getting dressed for their exams and going over their steps in the dressing room, I realise that she's hit the nail on the head. The candidates argue curly with each other as the bigger girls affix ribbons to the younger ones' hair, but as soon as I ask if I can take a photo of them, they strike up a super-confident pose and huge smiles light up their entire faces. They are instantaneously transformed. No longer are they ordinary children - they are *dancers*. They are their very own Creative Evolution!

Drama Workshops Draw Out Learners' Creativity



Matthews Nontyi,
Drama Workshop
Facilitator

The Eastern Cape Eisteddfod, still without enough funding to run a main event, has meanwhile been hosting weekly drama workshops for township learners in Grahamstown.

Matthews Nontyi, a gentle rather than a loud type of drama guy, completed a Skills Development Programme at Rhodes University a few years ago. Now, he goes to township schools each afternoon to host drama classes for keen students looking for something creative to do.

And keen they are. Between 25 and 50 learners at each school are eagerly throwing themselves into the drama programme. "I realised how much they actually enjoy it," says Matthews "when I arrived at a school one day to find it had closed early and everyone had left, but my little group of students were there waiting for me because they didn't want to miss their drama class."

Matthews' groups (from Archie Mbolekwa Public School, Nombulelo High School and Makana Primary School) recently performed in the Makana Drama Development Festival for community theatre groups. One of his proteges walked off with the Best Supporting Actress award. Her group had come up with their own story idea, and Matthews had helped them develop it into a script.

It all goes to show that learners are hungry for creative activities. So, teachers...and learners...why not have a go at starting a drama group (or some other kind of arts club) at your school? We'd be happy to point you towards helpful resources or people. Dig around in your library for books that could help, or get one of the workshop leaders whose details we've listed to come and give a workshop in your area for everyone interested, just to get you started. And soon you'll be off on your own exciting creative journey!

The Latest on the Eastern Cape Eisteddfod...

This project is currently without funding. Sadly, it is simply impossible to fulfil the Eisteddfod's vision of staging a multi-disciplinary event, fully inclusive of diverse participants, without the necessary funding. A number of applications have been submitted to the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund, and, more recently, to the National Arts Council and the Arts and Culture Trust. We are very hopeful that we will soon be notified of positive outcomes. If you are interested in participating in the Eisteddfod, please help us to ensure that we have your correct contact details by emailing them to eisteddfod@foundation.org.za. We will contact you as soon as we have positive news.

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Creative

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“We did it!” - How ordinary people like you made it to a Schools Festival!



A happy bunch of delegates who made it to Grahamstown for the Standard Bank National Schools Festival

Sometimes, raising the money to get to a festival can seem an impossible goal. But it *can* be done! Meet some people who are living proof that where there's a will there's a way. So take heart! They did it - and so can you!

Vaal Reefs Technical High School is in Muzimuhle near the small mining town of Orkney in the North West.

They have been attending the Standard Bank National Schools Festival for over 5 years. They apply to the Schools Festival Office for sponsorship but still cover much of the total cost of their trip, including registration, accommodation and transport to Grahamstown and back. This is under the direction of enthusiastic teacher Belinda Wade. When they've run out of space in the bus, she's even squeezed eager learners into her car and driven them to Grahamstown herself!

But Belinda is also a firm believer in getting learners to be responsible for their own fund-raising. With some help from her, the group plans and runs a campaign which begins early in the year. Various events are organised. One of these is a popular Mr and Miss Vaal Tech competition. R7 entry fees are charged for audience members and entrants. Some of this money is used to buy prizes for the top 3 guys and girls, such as toiletry sets and CD players. Everything left over goes straight into the Festival Fund. Another popular event is a Valentine's Ball, held in the school hall. Again, entry fees are charged. The group cuts costs by DJ-ing themselves, sharing and borrowing equipment. A School Talent Show works along similar principles. Belinda also helps organise Film Shows in the school hall. She's found someone who brings along the projector and movie in exchange for half the profits. And, because everyone loves food, a tuckshop is held at each of these events.

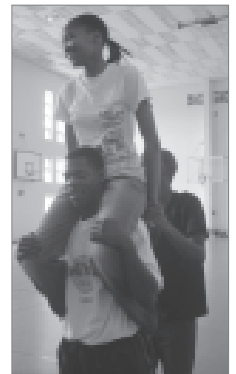
Sounds like a lot of work - but to Belinda, it's worth it. “The kids get such joy out of the festival and I just love it too!” she enthuses. And according to her, the fund-raising process is one of the most valuable aspects. “The kids involved in the planning and fund-raising grow in leadership and their self-esteem blossoms. I'd even say the actual festival is an amazing cherry on the top of the whole process.”

Ikanyegeng Combined School, in the small town of Jacobsdal, has participated in the Free State/Northern Cape Schools Festival for more than 10 years. Close to half the learners' parents are unemployed and live off of grants, while others are farm labourers or shop workers. But Ikanyegeng have a secret weapon in the form of teacher Simon Bingwa. Under his guidance, school groups have managed to raise much of their festival costs, with a little help from the Schools Festivals sponsorship programme. How do they do it? “It's all about *motivation*,” Simon explains. “I tell the learners that what they are paying is nothing compared to what they are gaining.” Groups from the school embark on small fund-raising efforts such as concerts, but most of the funds come from the learners' parents. Simon holds a meeting with them about 6 months

before each festival. He encourages them to begin paying instalments each month. Most parents pay off the amount over the 3-6 months leading up to the event.

KP Toto Technical and Commercial High School, near Kuruman, follow a similar strategy. This year they paid full registration and accommodation fees for 40 learners to attend the North West Schools Festival. Like Ikanyegeng, many of the learners' parents are unemployed. But teacher Motlalekgabo Bodike calls meetings with them well before the festival to motivate them. “I help them see that this is an investment into their children's future,” he says. They pay off the costs over the 3-4 months leading up to the festival.

The parents of **Ikusaselihle Secondary School** were also instrumental in their children's trip. Teacher Annacleta Mkhulisi brought 30 learners to the 2007 KZN Schools Festival. They paid their own transport and reduced registration fees. This was achieved by learners taking on Saturday jobs, plus contributions from guardians, many of whom are illiterate and unemployed. Mrs Mkhulisi says it was worth it: “Many of the learners who attended gained new motivation for their studies and to keep working towards getting their matric,” she says. They have cooked up a plan for their 2008 fund-raising: to grow vegetables in the school garden and sell them to other learners.



A 'giraffe' spotted in the 'Animal Passion' workshop at North West!

Some tips and ideas for festival fund-raising:

*Plan well so that you don't end up losing money when you should be making it! For instance, if you decide to hold a Mr & Miss competition like Vaal Reefs, make sure you don't spend more money on buying the prizes than you can reasonably expect to make on entry fees.

*Try and sell something or provide a service rather than just asking people for money. Think of something people in your community want or need, and try and provide it. For instance:

*Wash cars. (Make sure you know how to do it properly though! Ask a car owner for tips.)

*Braai & sell boerewors rolls outside your local shopping centre. You could ask a local butchery or store to give you a discount on the meat and advertise at the stall for them in return.

*Ask local businesses to donate prizes (eg. meal vouchers for a restaurant or fast food franchise, or vouchers for a hair or beauty salon) and hold an art or poetry competition.

*Go where the money is! Your parents or fellow learners may not have much money to burn, but someone, somewhere does - you just have to find them! So, for instance, don't just sell food at your school - go to your local shopping centre and do it there.

Go for it!!!

What has YOUR school done to raise funds for a festival?
PLEASE write/fax/phone us with your ideas so we can share them with others.

Tips for interacting with the Deaf:

*Remember when working with the Deaf that demonstration and drawings work better than long explanations. They are used to communicating through a visual medium.

*If you are going to be talking to a Deaf person who lip reads, make sure there is enough light on your face and try not end up with the light behind you. Talk clearly and don't shout as this will distort your mouth.

*When talking through an interpreter, remember that there is a short delay between what you say and them passing it on, so be careful of leaving them behind! Also remember that they will need a break every 40 minutes or so. Check with the interpreter before the session what their needs are in this regard.

Sign Language is fun! Here the GUMBO cast demonstrate a few South African Sign Language signs to get you talking with a Deaf friend.



Super-Teacher!

Meet one of our home-grown South African heroes, teacher Annette Beneke - boy can she keep going! Over the years she's popped up at regional Schools Festivals all over the country. Read on to find out why this small-framed, humble lady leaves the Energizer Bunny in the shade!

Q: Annette, do you mind telling us how old you are?

A: I'm 71.

(Note: Looking at Annette, this is difficult to believe! And it's even more difficult when you find out what she gets up to! Read on...)

Q: And you're still teaching! How many years have you been teaching for now?

A: (Racks her brain.) Goodness, it must be more than 45 years.

Q: Where?

A: At schools around the country. I started off in the Eastern Cape after I first qualified. More recently I've been teaching in Vryburg in the North West and now in Kroonstad in the Free State, where I live with my daughter.

Q: You tried retiring for a bit and then gave that up, didn't you?

A: Yes, I retired when I was 65 but I only lasted 6 months! Life was too quiet so I went back to school! I love the children and I love my subject, English.

Q: And how long have you been involved with Schools Festivals?

A: (Racks her brain again.) I must have been bringing kids to festivals for more than 20 years - Eastern Cape, North West, Free State/Northern Cape, and Nationals too.

Q: Tell us about your trip to the 2007 Free State/Northern Cape Festival?

A: I brought 7 kids. Our school has no transport so I drove all of us the 200km from Kroonstad to Bloemfontein in my daughter's Corsa Bakkie. We had one girl in the group so she sat in front with me, and the boys squeezed in the back. Everyone was quite happy!

Q: Why do you keep bringing your learners to the festivals?

A: They're the very best way that learners can come to appreciate English and realise that if you have English, you are connected to the world! They learn so much...poetry comes alive to them, for instance. I firmly believe that any child who doesn't attend a festival during their school career misses out. While I can keep going, I'll keep going!

Annette, you are an inspiration! May we all be as passionate and actively involved in serving our communities as you have been over so many years! We salute you!

English stars shine as Olympiad receives record number of entries



There were a record number of entries for the 2007 De Beers English Olympiad, with 5170 eager learners signing up to write the stimulating examination paper. The theme was "One Week in November", and took as its text 'other writing' (newspaper articles, adverts, even sms's) all found in one week's newspapers. The top three stars were Olivia Walton of St Cyprian's School (centre), Achita Singh of Westville Girls High School (left) and Kirsten Drury of St Anne's DSG (right), seen here with Tracey Peterson of De Beers Corporate Social Investment. Olivia scooped first place with a witty essay on the excesses of the political correctness craze.