

# News from Matopo Primary School, Zimbabwe

## ETAS Teacher-to-Teacher Project



report in the ETAS Winter Journal, 2009). This financial support will enable us to expand the project to include 5 more primary schools and 2 secondary schools in the Matopo region. Most of the Teachers' Workshop participants are from these schools, which form an official cluster, and it has long been my dream to be able to do more for these schools as they continue to struggle under the difficult conditions prevailing in Zimbabwe, even under the coalition government.

Upon our arrival in Bulawayo I was fortunate to be able to meet Senator David Coltart, who is the Minister of Education in Zimbabwe. This meeting was extremely enlightening. Mr Coltart is a Human Rights lawyer and it would be hard to find someone more dedicated to improving the education system in Zimbabwe, which, though once considered the best in Sub-Saharan Africa, has now declined to a shadow of its former glory. Although the present government gives lip service to supporting education for everyone, the reality looks very different. Mr Coltart's input gave me new insights into the problems which face us in trying to bolster a decaying system.

To that end, my husband Peter and I, joined by one of our new partners in the project, Norma Ferguson, made a day-long tour of the school cluster.

There are so many exciting things going on now with our project that I hardly know where to start. When I think back now to my first meeting in 2006 with Newmann Ncube, the Headmaster of Matopo Primary School, and the modest goals we set there, I can't help but feel proud of what we have achieved thanks to your interest and generosity.

The third annual Teachers' Workshop Day, sponsored by ETAS, took place at Matopo Primary School on October 3rd and once again it was a smashing success. Many of the 60 participants were there for the first time and having heard so much about the previous events, they were curious and very keen to get started. After a short 'getting to know you' mill warm-up, we began with the first set of activities: ideas for learning and recycling vocabulary. I always aim to provide the teachers with ideas which are simple to use, versatile, don't require much in the way of resources, and are fun for both pupils and teachers. Before long even the shyest were grinning and obviously enjoying themselves.

I had been collecting materials for the workshop for many months. A big thank you to Jayne Herzog at Oxford University Press as well as to Mary Patricia Rowland from Pearson, who donated graded readers, pens and other items, and to Swiss Printers AG who gave us bags, cards and stationery. It was a pleasure to watch the teachers as they discovered the treasures inside each bag. Getting the seven parcels there had been a bureaucratic nightmare, however, and horrendously expensive. As I reported in my blog ([www.matopoprimaryschool.blogspot.com](http://www.matopoprimaryschool.blogspot.com)) Zimbabwe customs authorities were not really motivated to be helpful and

Patson Mpofu, the Deputy Headmaster of Matopo Primary, spent days running around trying to get various letters and stamps in order to release the goods, which I was only able to receive the day we arrived in Bulawayo.

It was all worth it in the end. A highlight of the Workshop was the activities we did on using folk tales in the classroom. I'd been looking around for ideas for folk tales as I knew that Ndebele people love stories. Then by coincidence I found out that JoAnn Salvisberg and Elizabeth Ulrich had just been clearing out the ETAS Library, and Corinne Tschumi asked if I'd be interested in anything for Matopo. Among the items I ticked was a book called *Using Folktales in the English Classroom*, thinking that it might come in handy. It turned out to be a goldmine of great ideas. I used a choral repetition version of 'Stone Soup' in the workshop and it was a huge hit. One group of teachers even acted out an Ndebele tale to great hilarity.

The time sped by and before we knew it, it was time to say good-bye for another year. Before we broke up, I told the teachers about our Teacher Pen Friend scheme, and almost got crushed by the crowd rushing to sign up. Everyone there wants a Pen Friend from Switzerland. Twenty-five ETAS members and friends have signed up, but I still need more. How about you? It's really easy, doesn't require a lot of time or expertise, and would mean so much to a teacher in Zimbabwe. Please think about it and get in touch with me if you'd like to join the fun.

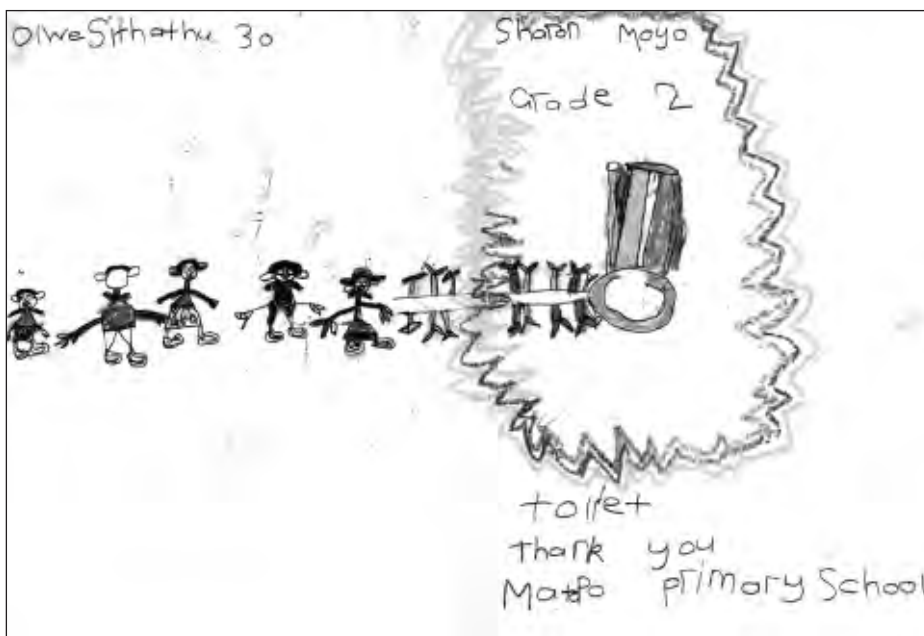
As most of you probably already know, our project is now being subsidized by the Roger Federer Foundation (see the



Like Matopo Primary, these schools are all dilapidated and shabby, but kept spic and span by busy children wielding hand-made straw brooms. We have our work cut out for us: new windows, doors, cupboards which can be locked for the books we plan to buy, and most importantly, refreshed and refurbished blackboards. Most of the boards are so cracked and pitted they are almost impossible to write on, and as the teachers depend heavily on being able to write up notes and lesson plans (no Interactive Whiteboards here) this project will be one of our first priorities. The welcome we received at each school was heart-warming and it was difficult to tear ourselves away so that we could keep to schedule.



I'd like to conclude this report by reminding you about something very important: even with the Federers on board, this is still ETAS's project. We need your support and your donations, now more than ever, in order to ensure its success. Seven ETAS members have really gone the extra mile and have made CHF 600.- annual pledges to sponsor teachers at Matopo Primary, and I would like to publicly thank them: Martina Lazaro, Katherine Stoney, Fay Rogers, Ann Humphry-Baker, Laura Camacho, Caroline Rickli, and Katharina Hegy-Bürgin. Thank you. If you would like to join them, please let me know. How about this for an idea? Not only individuals but also schools or groups could sponsor a teacher. This sponsorship not only helps the teachers and the project as a whole, it also shows the Federer Foundation that we are doing our part to make this initiative work.



As Raymond Rogers told me once when we were talking about our wonderful project at Matopo Primary School in Zimbabwe, "It's all about commitment and citizenship," qualities I know ETAS has in abundance. Let's prove it.



*"Cricket civilises people and creates good gentleman. I want everyone to play cricket in Zimbabwe. I want ours to be a nation of gentlemen."*

Robert Mugabe,  
quoted in *The Times*, 1984