

# ETAS Teacher-to-Teacher Project

## News from Matopo Primary School, Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe customs officials just don't seem to like tourists. We had to use all of our wits, and even cheat a little (don't ask), to finally get across the border from South Africa to Zimbabwe ... but we made it. As we wended our way along the dusty, pot-holed road towards Matopo, it was lovely sunny weather and we spotted a few vervet monkeys playing on the smooth rounded high rocks that are typical of the region. I was really looking forward to the 5th annual Teachers' Workshop Day, and seeing the progress the seven schools had made since our last trip.

Just as we rounded a curve, who should we spot but our partners on the ground in the project – Norma and Chris Ferguson. They were showing some American volunteers around the area and all of us were overjoyed at the chance encounter. We stopped right away, took our folding camp chairs out of the Land Rover and settled in for a nice chat and a snack. Later that afternoon, Norma and two of the volunteers helped me pack the bags for the big event on Saturday.

Unfortunately the warm spell was short-lived, and the next day, winter came back with a vengeance. But the atmosphere for the workshop was warmed by the good cheer and enthusiasm of the 62 teachers who came to take part in the day's activities. We were incredibly busy during the rest of our stay, meeting with the school Heads,

touring all of the schools to admire newly-painted blackboards and walls, and brainstorming ideas for the project next year. We also took a look at the proposed site of a girls' dormitory we are hoping to build at Silobi Secondary School. As we stood in the sun (but shivered in a freezing wind), we were taken aback to spot a Cape Cobra slithering through the brush just in front of our feet! We were assured that once the building started, the snake population would move elsewhere!

Everyone is tremendously excited about the new ETAS initiative 'Send-a-girl-to-secondary-school'. The Heads of the six primary schools have already started working on details about how the girls will be chosen. We hope to be able to collect enough funds to send 10 girls starting in 2012. At a cost of US\$600 per girl per year, that means we need a total of US\$18,000 (each girl must be assured of three years). At the time of writing, we've collected US\$13,000. This amount includes a record-breaking raffle intake at the SIG Day in Zug, but we still have a way to go to reach our goal. Please contact me if you are interested in helping.

A fascinating book I've been reading, *Half the Sky: turning oppression into opportunity for women worldwide*, by Nicholas Kristof

and Sheryl WuDunn, is about fighting poverty in developing countries. The title refers to a Chinese proverb: "Women hold up half the sky". The book has this to say about girls' education: "One study after another has shown that educating girls is one of the most effective ways to fight poverty." We can't do anything about Mugabe and his cronies' plundering of the country's resources, but we can make sure that at



least 10 girls have the chance to escape the cycle of poverty that will be their fate without further education.

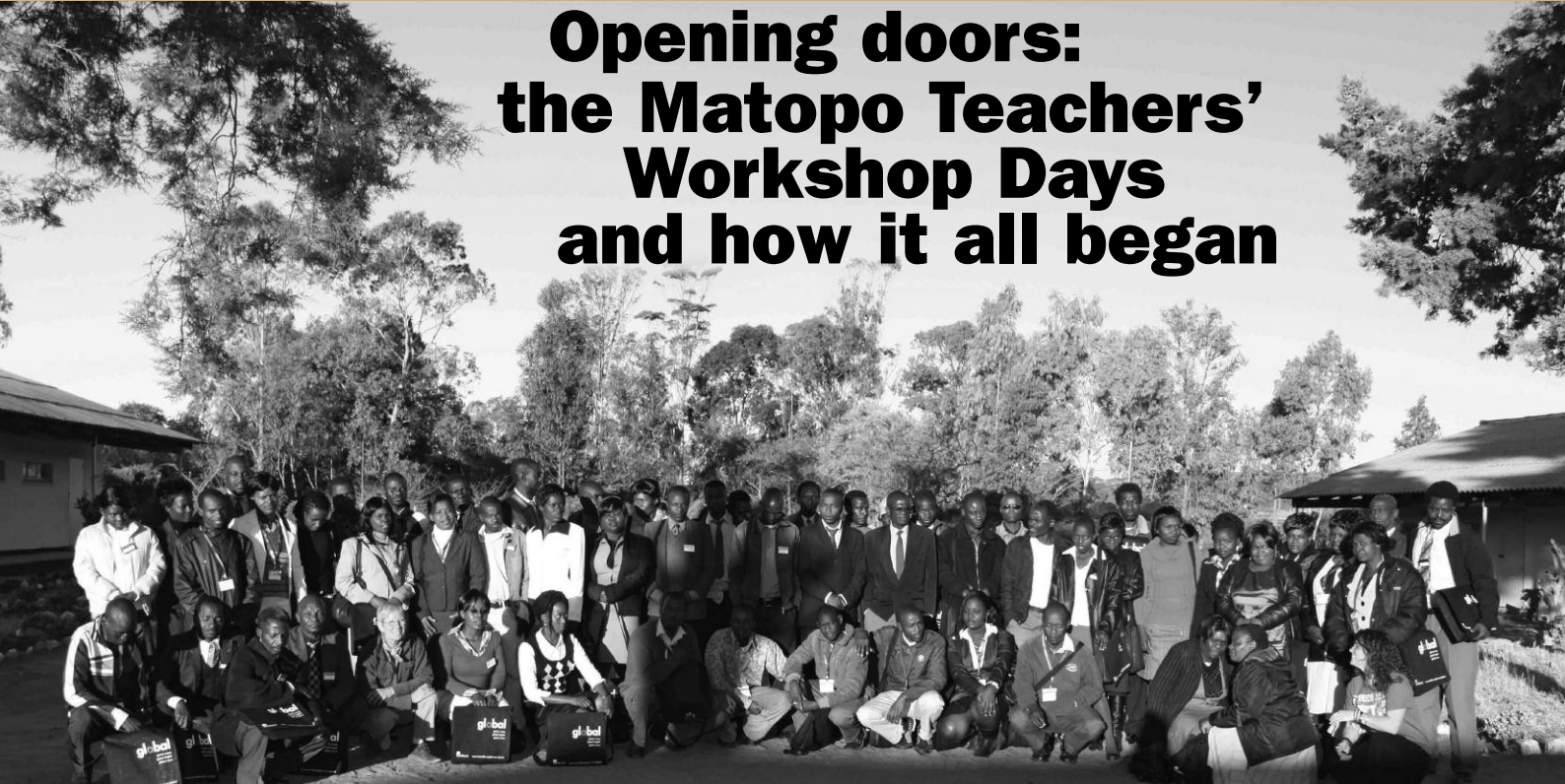
I hope you will join us in giving 10 girls a chance to hold up half the sky.

**Cindy Hauert**  
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# Matopo Special Feature

## Opening doors: the Matopo Teachers' Workshop Days and how it all began



**“To learn and never be filled, is wisdom;  
to teach and never be weary, is love.”** Anonymous

Although I have been giving teacher-training workshops for many years at ETAS events as well as at IATEFL BESIG, I've always thought of myself primarily as a teacher, not a teacher trainer. So when I found myself thrust by chance into this role when we started our Teacher-to-Teacher Project in Zimbabwe, I felt rather intimidated at first. To make matters worse, my entire teaching experience (nearly 30 years!) has been TEFL for adults, most of it focused on Business English. I knew very little about primary or secondary education and even less about dealing with a completely different culture, teaching conditions, and infrastructure.

Still, needs must when the devil drives, so in preparation for the first Teachers' Workshop Day at Matopo Primary School in October 2007, I plunged into research on teaching English to children. There was no lack of material to be found on the internet and in resource books, but I soon realized that a great deal of it was pretty much useless for my purposes. The stories, songs, pictures, and activities were almost entirely geared towards our 'rich world' lifestyles, portraying kids happily getting ready for school in the morning, brushing their teeth in a pristine, sumptuously equipped bathroom, riding the school bus along with the other well-dressed and fed kiddies ... followed by an after-school treat of perhaps a jaunt to the zoo, complete with ice cream and a burger.

Compare these scenarios with the reality of children's lives in most of Zimbabwe. Most

of them live in child-headed families or with aging grandparents in thatch-roofed huts with no indoor plumbing, and have to fetch water for cooking and washing from some distance away. They walk to school, often very long distances, barefoot even in winter. They have one set of threadbare clothes (always very clean). They don't have books, bicycles, skateboards, toys of any sort except the handmade kind, pets or computers, and after-school activities are most likely working in the garden or taking care of the family herd of goats.

So I realized that I was pretty much on my own – I'd have to create the workshop activities myself.

It was about this time that a 'new' idea started making the rounds at conferences, one which was materials-light and depended on the input of the participants rather than technology and teacher-driven activities: that 'new' idea was dogme, a way of teaching which uses very little in the way of published materials. I saw that my problem was solved.

So the first Teachers' Workshop Day had the following approach as its starting point:

*“English is taught all over the world, by all sorts of teachers to all sorts of learners. Schools and classrooms vary enormously in their wealth and their provision of equipment. Learners are very different from place to place. But, whatever the conditions in which you are working, there is one resource which is universal and unlimited:*

*the human mind and imagination. This is probably the single most valuable teaching and learning resource we have. Nothing can replace it. In even the most 'hi-tech' environment, a lack of imagination and humanity will make the most up-to-date and sophisticated resources seem dull; conversely, the simplest resources can be the most exciting and useful”* (Jill and Charles Hadfield).

Drawing inspiration from Bertrand Russell's view that “more important than the curriculum is the question of the methods of teaching and the spirit in which the teaching is given”, I decided to make this my own motto:

**In this workshop, I would like to tap on that simple but valuable resource: YOU!**

Once I started looking at the day's program from this point of view, I started finding lots and lots of ideas which would help the teachers understand that they could do so much even without textbooks and fancy equipment. It was an eye-opener for them and they have never forgotten it. Since then, thanks to ETAS and the Federer Foundation, we have been able to supply many things such as graded readers and coursebooks, but I still keep the same emphasis every year in the workshops. We use local folk tales, songs, mime, TPR, chants, and games that require little or nothing in the way of resources.

This year the program focused on fluency vs accuracy, a new concept to most of

the teachers who tend to stick to the tried-and-true rote learning methods of days of yore. I think everybody came away with a new understanding of how a mix of types of activities can liven up their classes and make learning more fun. We also tried out some TPR (Total Physical Response) games that soon had everyone laughing and moving around the large room. Each primary school in the project cluster received a copy of Graham Workman's book, *TPR for Primary English*, which he kindly donated for the event.

Five years since we started the Matopo Teachers' Workshop Days, I am proud to present the first ETAS Journal Matopo Special Feature. This section highlights the contributions of four Matopo teachers who joined our last workshop. I thank Sarah Giles and John Raggett for their help with the preliminary editing of these writings.

The first writing in this Special Feature is by Khumalo Nothabo, a Grade 6 teacher at Lukadzi Primary School. She was surprised to find that even as an experienced teacher she still found many stimulating ideas at the Workshop Day, and is thrilled that her rapport with her pupils has improved tremendously. The next writer, Teddy Hadebe, a Silobi Primary School teacher, has already contributed once to the ETAS Journal. He especially liked the TPR activities and is using them now enthusiastically and with great success in his lessons. Patson Mpofo, a Grade 6 teacher at Matopo Primary School, is an old hand at the Teachers' Workshop Days, having attended all of them since the beginning (and has been the main organizer as well). He is especially fond of using stories in his lessons. He also reports on how the teachers who attend the Workshop Days "share the wealth" of their new ideas with others at internal staff development courses, a fact which I find most encouraging, as it shows that our efforts are yielding true sustainability. Finally, Denis Phiri, another Matopo Primary School teacher, was inspired by the idea of making his lessons more child-centered, a theme which was emphasized by Ms. Thabela, the District School Manager, who honoured us with her presence at the last two Workshop Days.

As you can read in these contributions, this year's Teachers' Workshop has once again been a splendid success. I hope you will enjoy reading the Matopo Special Feature.

Our project is changing the way teachers teach while also impacting the pupils' learning experience and having ripple effects throughout the community. I am very proud of it!

**Cindy Hauert**

## The fruits of Cindy's workshops

**Khumalo Nothabo**

I never believed in learning as an adult. Even more, I didn't believe there was something different I could be taught about teaching after obtaining my Certificate in Education. It never even crossed my mind that a one-day workshop could change or improve my teaching. But, from the very first quote of the workshop's handout, I changed and told myself, "I would rather learn from Cindy and ETAS how to teach English than to teach 10,000 birds how to sing."

The Teachers' Workshop Day absolutely changed my view of my daily teaching. Just as Cindy has quoted in the handout, I now look at teaching from a different view, this time with passion "to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of students". Although I had been teaching pupils with different levels of ability before, I have since added the provision of a warm, welcoming atmosphere in the class. This enables my pupils to interact with me as a teacher, freely and openly.

Although some of the activities and methods were familiar to me, it was amazing how Cindy came up and presented them. They sounded totally new and awesome. A great lesson came with framework stories as they brought new ways of teaching comprehension to pupils. The language analysis and some of the classroom activities that were introduced in this workshop helped me a lot. I now see the possibility and validity of teaching a story or comprehension passage step by step, helping pupils to understand that every word in the passage means something within a context.

Still on the framework stories, the methods of expanding them helped me to understand that enabling pupils to infer a story from context enlarges the pupils' vocabulary and creativity. This also activates the spirit of competition in pupils as each group expresses their framework expansions in turn.

Not only did I gain the above skill from framework stories, but I also learned to differentiate fluency from accuracy. The teacher activity that we did in the workshop helped me to understand definitions better. Now it is easier for me to use the methods and activities that cater to one of the two concepts that I'll be aiming to develop on pupils at that particular time, for example drilling irregular verb forms to improve accuracy while achieving the L1 target language.

If I were a child, I would certainly enjoy learning through Total Physical Response (TPR). In my classroom, I've seen the value

of using that approach as pupils have acquired more language and understanding of the meaning of new vocabulary because the language is more contextualized. I've often ignored the importance of giving pupils instructions, but not anymore. I now do it at home and at school with pupils in day-to-day activities. Most of the TPR activities help the pupils to keep alert and attentive at full capacity. These activities involve every pupil in the lesson while creating a learner-friendly environment. Believe me, pupils really become so motivated, their attendance in school has become regular.

TPR and other teaching activities are also helpful when teaching different language structures, for example, when teaching verbs and opposites:

whisper – quietly    cry – quietly  
shout – loudly      laugh – loudly

where *whisper/shout* and *cry/laugh* are verbs and, at the same time, opposites.

With this approach, there's a lot more being taught than just getting pupils to respond to the sentences. They are 'sweet' activities that can be used for teaching not just English but also mathematics (the *Five Little Monkeys* poem) and other subjects, too.

Ever since the Teachers' Workshop Day, I'm delighted to say that the teacher-pupil rapport in my class has greatly improved. Pupils now participate fully as they are motivated by the different exciting activities that pop up during the day's lessons. Changing from one lesson to the next is no longer a stumbling block to me as more warm-up and cool-down activities have been added to the ones I already had.

If those of us who attended the workshops had decided to keep this special information to ourselves, we would have been rated "selfish". Staff development programmes were conducted at our school based on the workshop, and every staff member confesses that the workshops have made the reading lessons a success. Teachers are no longer frustrated when teaching English reading and comprehension now that they have been introduced to more interesting methods.

The school administration also acknowledges that the pass rate in the school is changing for the better now that the number of those who had problems with reading and comprehension is on the decline. With the help of these regular workshops and other activities, the school percentage pass rate will surely increase yearly.

On behalf of the school, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Cindy and the other organisers who support the programme. They come all the way from Switzerland with the heart to educate and the aim to uplift the standard of English in Zimbabwe. For us, this is a great lesson of

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love, passion, and sharing. I wish that all of us have such hearts growing from within us, so that the world may bloom with knowledge and see the glory of the Mighty Creator.

Honestly, I would urge all teachers to participate in workshops such as ETAS workshops in order to gain more methods of helping the young, innocent souls to grasp information without difficulty and frustration.

**About the Author**

Khumalo Nothabo teaches Grade 6 at Lukadzi Primary School. She holds a diploma in Education from the United College of Education in Zimbabwe. She is the secretary of ZIMTA, a teachers' association.

### Teachers' Workshop Day training

**Teddy Hadebe**

Nearly all workshops that Cindy facilitates inspire passion and enthusiasm in the participants. Although I would like to comment on virtually every aspect of the language and the exciting methods highlighted to deliver lessons, I feel compelled to respond to the three items which I found extremely touching and informative.

**a) Analyse the language**

This technique is not only effective but also provides interesting feedback from pupils. Although I used to employ this method, a lot

of flesh was added by the energetic Cindy, whose explanations left me satisfied. From the comprehension passages that I teach, pupils are now able to extract lots of language aspects like prepositions, adverbs, word meaning, and punctuation.

Having learned to analyze how language is used in the stories, pupils have shown marked improvements in their comprehension as well as enhanced skills in skimming for particular information and identifying sentences. I have witnessed better marks and seen how the "ah-ha" point is achieved. If this method was a weapon, certainly it would be a bazooka.

**b) Respond to the word**

I now use this approach both in my speaking and reading lessons. The approach is very rewarding to pupils as it boosts their listening skills. Pupils simply love this. The activities in the stories provoke a lot of excitement. I recall one lesson when a passage entitled *Bitten by a Snake* was done. Pupils enjoyed this lesson very much.

Repeated words in the passage were identified and pupils were made to respond to their prescribed words. It really changed the complexion of the lesson. And the comprehension work was done well. On the other hand, some pupils had problems with words with the same sounds but different spellings. They made some errors as they responded to the wrong words.

**c) Exploring the language of songs and poems through listening**

This activity is gaining a lot of ground and popularity with pupils. It encourages them to be active participants and enjoy poems. As they listen and respond physically, they get involved in the learning activities. In one of my lessons, I taught rhyming words successfully. Pupils also did well in a spelling test.

In conclusion, I could have responded to many more of Cindy's and ETAS's language activities as they are quite beneficial to pupils and teachers. Nevertheless, let me say: "Hats off to Cindy and the ETAS family!" May the training sessions continue unabated. We will remain vigilant and vibrant in the quest for glory and paving the way for our pupils' success.

**About the Author**

Teddy Hadebe teaches Grade 6 at Silobi Primary School. He is also the school athletics coach and Healthmaster. A leader of the Ecology Club, he loves writing stories.

### Teacher Training in Matopo, Zimbabwe

**Patson Mpfu**

I am a teacher at Matopo Primary School in the rural area of Matopo Hills in Zimbabwe. This region, which is arid and hilly, is not ideal for agriculture and has been marginalized economically for many years.



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Schools in this southern part of Zimbabwe are backward and have not been well supported by the government since independence in 1980. Hence, the realization of quality education for the betterment of both pupils and the country's development has been severely hampered. So teaching English under such circumstances is extremely challenging. We lack teaching and learning resources as well as teacher training and development programs. To overcome these challenges, teachers of English as an L2 must be resourceful, innovative, creative, and motivated in order to make headway with their learners. But how can we achieve that when we are faced with indifference from our own government, while many of our pupils come from poor and broken homes?

During the past five years, teachers here have benefited immensely from the ETAS English teaching workshops facilitated by Cindy Hauert.

The fifth ETAS-sponsored Teachers' Workshop Day, held on 30th July 2011 at Matopo Primary School, carried on with the original objectives: to equip teachers with the appropriate strategies, methods, and approaches that lead to effective teaching and learning. These workshops are always filled with hands-on activities, action-oriented tasks, and motivating ideas

that have empowered me to become a better teacher of English for my Grade 6 pupils.

My Grade 6 class, who are 11 to 13 years old, numbers 43 pupils. It is a mixed-level class that includes mostly children from poor backgrounds, many of whom are orphans or live in child-headed families or with aging grandparents. Some have learning disabilities. They are not exposed to English at home. The community rate of illiteracy is higher than the country average, making it difficult even for gifted pupils to reach their potential for lack of support.

For these pupils to learn language skills effectively, I must therefore be self-motivated in order to motivate them. Cindy's workshops have helped me to find that motivation, along with many practical applications that I can take to my classroom.

Here are some of my favourite ideas drawn from the workshops I have attended over the years.

### Using stories

Culturally, our children are used to folktales and stories, so Cindy's ideas on how to exploit stories to teach language skills really struck a chord with me. I have seen my class improve their reading skills as well as becoming more independent and creative. For example, pupils made up their own stories using story frameworks, fleshing out

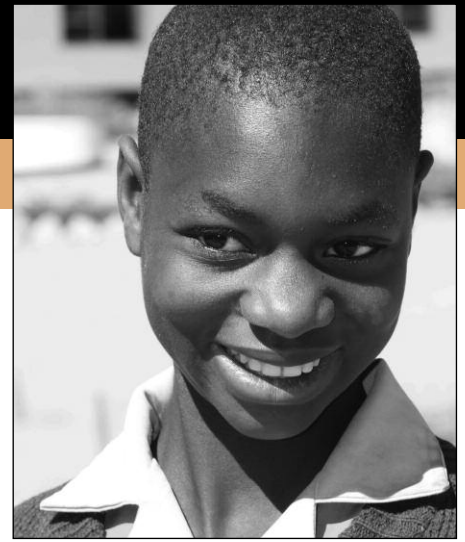
the bare bones of "Once there was a little boy/girl who...wished..." and so on.

Picture stories have enabled even the slower learners to actively participate in class. Pictures are effective because pupils talk about what they can see. Puppets, which were hand-sewn by a local women's cooperative and donated by ETAS, can be used for games, drama, and songs to capture the interest of my young learners, and the results have been astounding. We have used these ideas to build vocabulary and applied them to creative writing tasks. Finally, stories, mimes, and games add fun and joy to the lesson and give the pupils the opportunity to express themselves. This has also strengthened the bond between the learners as a group as well as with me, their teacher.

### TPR

This was a new concept for my colleagues and me when Cindy introduced it at our latest workshop. This method has helped my class to contextualize words, express themselves better, be more disciplined, stay alert and motivated to learn and explore new things. Quite an accomplishment! TPR has resulted in nearly 100% pupil-to-pupil interaction and participation in a friendly, child-centered atmosphere. Most of my pupils are doing better in spelling, dictation, and sentence construction. I especially like





that I can use this method for subjects besides English, and have applied TPR in teaching science, Ndebele (the local language), mathematics, and social studies.

#### Sharing the wealth

To keep the fire of the workshops illuminated at school, we have conducted staff development courses in order to share our experiences with other teachers. Teachers are as a result no longer demotivated when teaching English as a Second Language, and the transition from one subject lesson to another has been simplified. We have even gone beyond the borders of our cluster project to spread the word throughout the region wherever possible. The ETAS Teachers' Workshop Day also inspired me to found ZETA, Zimbabwe English Teachers Association, which is now an associate of IATEFL.

#### Concrete impact

The number of non-readers has dropped from 40% to 10% at Matopo Primary School, and we are aiming at 100% literacy rate by the end of the year. This would mean close to a 100% pass rate in our Grade 7 results as well.

On behalf of Matopo Primary School, the project cluster, the district, province and all of Zimbabwe, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Cindy and all ETAS

members who support the Teacher-to-Teacher Project. These workshops have truly empowered teachers and liberated us to become the best we can be. In turn, our pupils have become active learners who see the value of acquiring an education and skills that will equip them for a better future.

#### About the Author

Patson Mpofu is a Grade 6 teacher at Matopo Primary School, and has 24 years' experience in teaching both at primary and secondary levels. He has coordinated the ETAS sponsored Teachers' Workshop Day for five years and is the founder of ZETA, the Zimbabwe English Teachers Association, which is an associate of IATEFL.

## Teachers' Workshop Day training – responding to the word

#### Denis Phiri

Teachers' Workshop Day training has been an inspiration because of its diverse techniques, which have made an impact on my teaching. Most of the methods I have learned from the past three years attending the workshops have affected my teaching one way or the other.

My pupils have seen this in their studies as far as English language is concerned. The Workshop Days leave me a step ahead in my teaching as they provide me with new ideas which enable me to break new grounds in my teaching and help my pupils excel in their studies. My way of teaching has been enriched tremendously. I find my lessons are now more interesting as my own ideas merge with those approaches I have learnt from the workshops. My pupils are responding and performing well.

Because English is a second language to my pupils, I faced a number of challenges in executing some lessons. For instance, reading short stories was an area of concern to me. Most of my pupils were not doing well at comprehension, could not answer questions, least of all retell the story. It had been a challenge for me to make a breakthrough in this until the workshop introduced me to the method called *Responding to the word*.

In this method, the teacher picks repeated words from a selected story. The pupils are grouped according to the key words of the story and are required to make a sound as a group if their word has been called while the teacher is reading out the story. In my class, pupils responded very well to the making of sounds. This method promoted a lot of pupil activities like groupwork. The four major skills of English language are covered.

Yet, at first, pupils did not understand the story as they could not answer questions or even retell the story. After repetition, however, most pupils were attentive and were responding to the words with their sounds as the story was being read. Everybody was involved in the lesson.

Because the approach is pupil-centred, the class responded well and enjoyed the lesson. The approach left my pupils asking for more. The morale in the classroom was boosted and pupils are gradually performing to my expectations.

I believe with time my pupils will do better.

#### About the Author

Denis Phiri teaches English at Matopo Primary School.

