

UNDERBERGERS CREATE SCHOOLS' NEWSPAPER

Underberg will make its mark on the education map from January when Cheryl Taylor, an Edgewood-qualified isiZulu teacher, will translate a newspaper written for schoolkids into that language. The newspaper, *The Times I Am Living In*, was founded by SA Press Association (Sapa) journalist Duncan Guy, son of Rob and Bella Guy when he created it for his son, Owen, three years ago. It goes out free of charge on Tuesdays and Thursdays, on e-mail, during school terms. "It just grew naturally from then on," said Duncan. "After I introduced it to Owen's school, St James Preparatory School in Johannesburg, school after school said they would like to receive it. Sapa took on the project the Open Society Foundation for South Africa now provides a grant to fund it." Demand from his Afrikaans-speaking friends for an edition in that language led to the creation of *Die Tyd Waarin Ek Leef*, translated by Elsabe Birkenmayer, a parent at Johannesburg's Laerskool Jan Celliers. The newspaper goes out free on e-mail to around 1000 addresses. About half of the addresses are at schools. Other users include literacy centres and environmental education centres." Each issue has a World News story, an Africa story, an Environment story, a Business story and a Sport story. Then there's also a "Today in History" page. "It's written for people at different levels of literacy," explained Duncan. "Each story is first rewritten like a bedtime story a parent would read to a child," he explained. "Then, two quiz questions follow. After that comes the 'adult' copy that is published in newspapers. Kids wanting to seek the answers to the questions can delve into the adult copy without necessarily understanding it. "Difficult words in the adult copy are highlighted and explained in their context in a glossary." The three goals of the newspaper are to encourage reading, promote general knowledge and encourage an interest in current affairs. "Each issue is illustrated by a different school. I send a draft copy a day in advance.

While the newspaper avoids reporting on the horror and violence that one reads in mainstream newspapers it takes care not to avoid important news issues. Kingsley Holgate has been sending letters to the newspaper about his present trip around the entire coastline of Africa. "Schools have been following it very enthusiastically," said Duncan. "They get rather upset when he disappears for periods but that goes with the territory of adventure." "I think kids should be having a marvelous geography lesson through this," said Kingsley on a recent break from his expedition, which had reached Africa's western-most point: Dakar in Senegal. He and his merry group are distributing mosquito nets to the folks most vulnerable to malaria. Duncan said that one his main challenges for his newspaper is to have it reach South Africans "on the disadvantaged side of the digital divide". "There are already one or two cases where a teacher from a school without e-mail has her husband receive it at work and brings it home for her to take to school the next day." He said it would be wonderful if more people, or businesses, could help people without it have access to the newspaper. "It's also distributed to wireless computers placed at rural community centres all over the country through the Digital Doorway project, which is based at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in Pretoria." "Coming from a journalism background, I can provide the news but I have never had the experience of teaching a class.

Teachers are therefore vital partners in this innovation," said Duncan, pointing out former Underberg Primary School teacher Hazel Stanley, now at Treverton Preparatory School in Mooi River as "one of the champions". Probably the most common way it is used is for stories to be placed around a world map; with ribbons connecting them to their datelines. Anyone wishing to subscribe to any of the titles (the isiZulu will be *Izikhathi Engiphila kuzo*) free of charge, can e-mail duncan@sapa.org.za

