

Breaking down more barriers in the E Cape

What might have been just another Idasa scholars weekend broke new ground when 40 students met at the Tsitsikama Lodge in May.

Among the group, drawn largely from the prefect bodies of previously "white" schools in Port Elizabeth and from the SRCs of schools in the local black townships, was a school-girl from Port Elizabeth's most conservative Afrikaans school in the heart of Algoa Park – the PE stronghold of the Conservative Party.

In addition, the weekend's agenda (drawn up by the scholars themselves) made no attempt to skirt the sensitive educational and political issues which have been stifled in secondary schools for far too long.

Whether it was a discussion of the crisis in education, a debate about a single education system, the one-act play each



PE students: working things out together.

group had to produce, or the rules of volleyball, the students' enthusiasm never flagged.

They proved how effortlessly they could transcend the problems created by the past and how little fear, and how much trust, can be generated when the political matters in our lives are confronted head on in honest and open debate.

A senior Afrikaans teacher, Ms Lauraine Nordin, who joined in the weekend's activi-

ties said it had been fascinating to see how the initial suspicion and tension had given way to open discussion.

For herself, the willingness of black students to talk about their experiences and frustrations and to admit to their own mistakes had been a pleasant surprise.

"I was more or less prepared for attacks on myself, because I represent the regime, I represent the Afrikaner, and I was

pleasantly surprised to see that they were opening their discussions, that they were also prepared to listen to me. That I found very interesting."

Commenting on a conversation she had had with the lone pupil from Algoa Park, Ms Nordin said she had noticed how the other students' understanding had helped her dispel many of her fears.

"I spoke to her again at the end of the weekend and asked her outright: 'Is jy nou nog so bang soos wat jy Vrydag-middag was?'"

"She said: 'Nee, ek is nie meer so bang vir hulle nie, want ek sien hulle nou as gewone mense en ek sien hulle nou ook as vriende.' That means so much, because I think it has opened up a whole new world to her, and hopefully she'll discuss this with the others." □

Keith Wattrus
Regional Director

Thoughts from a passing foreigner

On our journey we heard this somewhere: "Foreigners who spend a week here write a book about South Africa; those who spend a month here write an article; those who live here for a year keep their mouths shut." Our visit was brief, but it was far more powerful than classrooms and lectures, and we are grateful to Idasa for arranging our programme.

We had been quite affected by the 24 meetings with 35 consultants focusing on apartheid from various perspectives – journalists, politicians, theologians, church leaders, activists, scholars, public servants and others in human services.

We visited people living in the townships of Manenberg and Soweto; we stayed with families in Mamelodi for three nights and worshipped at All Saints Parish. Gracious white

A psychology professor from North Park College, Chicago DR HADDON KLINGBERG recently visited South Africa with five students who had raised their own funds for the trip. Idasa's Pretoria office arranged their itinerary. Here are some of his impressions.

families hosted us in their cities.

It is natural for us to reflect on South Africa since our return home. But we now view ourselves and our own country in a new light. America has its wonders and problems, and we have become more aware of both.

We agree that the best part of our trip was the people – "coloured", black, white – especially those who opened their thoughts, hearts and homes to us. We wish we could be more like many we met.

In a township I interviewed a black student and had tea with his family in their home. They appeared both stunned and joy-

ful when I invited the young man to apply for admission to North Park. We are now processing the application, hoping that he will come to our college in Chicago.

The family told me that this offer is a great gift, and I tried to explain that it would be a great gift for us also: the chance to have someone from South Africa stay with us for a time, help us feel our own need for understanding across barriers, help us rethink our own self-satisfaction, and kindle respect and affection for those whose pilgrimages can teach us so much. □

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Shelagh Gastrow, author of *Who's Who in South African Politics* is providing a service through Idasa for people and organisations committed to ensuring that South Africa becomes a democracy in which all points of view can be articulated.

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