



On top of Phahla mountain . . . the group gets acquainted with its history.  
(Pictures by GILL DE Vlieg, Afrapix)

do not understand sophisticated agricultural techniques but they don't mention that blacks possess only 13 per cent of the land. Some suggested that teachers and writers of the prescribed books should be challenged; others thought that students should learn what they are taught and find out the truth after matric. Some students advocated making changes from within existing structures when they are in positions of leadership; others were adamant that change comes from below.

Back at Lobethal, interviewing teams reported on something new they had discovered in their interviews; an interesting story they had heard and something they had learnt about themselves. At the end of the final session the students agreed that history is not only found in books. They had learnt a different way of finding out about the past and had begun to realise that exploring the past helps to build the future.

□ Melody Emmett is the Regional Co-ordinator of Idasa in Johannesburg.



# 'Teaching' white youths politics: it's tough going!

Working with white pupils is frustrating and rewarding in equal measure.

Over the last eight years or so I have watched creative and dynamic initiatives run into the brick wall of hostile school authorities or collapse due to the lack of experience of the pupils.

There are hundreds of initiatives all over the country designed to start exposing pupils to the political realities of life in South Africa. While many of the initiatives are quite different from each other, they are all premised on an important assumption. Children are generally not set into the patterns of racism and violence that characterise our society. Many of them are being channelled in this direction but most are not far enough down that road to be beyond rescue.

Of course pupils are subject to the same divisions and antagonisms as the rest of our society. The black/white, English/Afrikaans, urban/rural and class differences are divisions that ensure that "school student" is not an homogenous category. However, they have in common their youth, their flexibility and their involvement in education.

The particular difficulties in conducting programmes with white pupils are hostility from parents and school authorities, the demobilising effect of spoon-fed education and the generally apolitical environment in which they live.

In the Western Cape we have found we have had to have a different approach in any one constituency or school.

In one school we have a close working relationship with the staff and parent bodies. Here we are able to organise integrated programmes where parents, teachers and pupils meet the same categories of people from a township school. We call this a "twinning" programme because we pair particular schools, classes or parent/teacher bodies with each other. We expect this project to reap rich rewards in understanding and social commitment.

In another group of schools (largely Afrikaans speaking) we have found pupils, staff and parents to be very wary of us. Here we are exploring access to these pupils through their involvement in church youth structures. Our approach in these schools is to organise sporting and cultural exchanges with black schools.

We have found that if Afrikaans speaking white children and African children play a game of cricket or rugby together, this breaks down barriers and inevitably, in the period of relaxation or the picnic afterwards, the discussion will turn to social issues.

On another tack entirely, we are also trying to promote and encourage the growth of independent pupils organisations.

We have had a long and productive relationship with Pupils United for Peace and Awareness (Pupa), a white school organisation in Cape Town.

This group has battled long and hard to establish branches in about 14 schools with a committed and trained pupil leadership. Our role

**There are some exciting and revealing developments in Idasa's work with white school pupils in the Western Cape. NIC BORAIN, Idasa regional director, explores some of the challenges.**

has been to help facilitate their attempts to reach out to black pupil organisation, provide some infrastructural back-up and to help with skills training.

We have had to learn the hard way that it is not good enough to do things for pupils. Pupils have to do things for themselves and in that way they come to treat the experiences they have as their own and not just another classroom handout.

Anyway, pupils understand their constituency a whole lot better than we possibly could. They know the movies, the dances, the music, the crazes, the language and the whole culture of their school environment. They know what will work and what won't — in particular, they know what the attention span will be and they always cut our suggested time allocations by half!

White pupils are, however, at a serious disadvantage as far as taking control of their own programmes is concerned. They have missed out entirely on the rebellious rejection of school authorities and the political mobilisation experienced by their black counterparts.

In comparison to black pupils, white pupils generally tend to accept things without question and wait for an adult to take the initiative.

This difference comes out every time pupils from the different communities are brought together. The black pupils tend to be more assertive, better (politically) informed and much more confident to debate and disagree in group discussion. This alone would make a fascinating and useful sociological study and I think it bodes ill for whites' ability to operate comfortably in a non-racial environment.

One of the things we have found particularly useful and effective as a "change agent" is culture. Pupils learning a traditional dance or song together, jointly workshopping a play about the differences in their education or just teaching each other to play a musical instrument helps to break down barriers and achieve an understanding of each other.

In the last weekend of October we will be working with Pupa to host a big conference/festival that will explore the crucial question of how we come to acquire the beliefs, values, ideas and prejudices that we do.

Idasa's schools programme in the Western Cape is still very experimental and we are learning new lessons from new mistakes every day. We suffer from the fragmentation of the work that is being done in the schools. We realise a lot is happening, but we are seldom able to link up with other individuals and groups that are thinking about and acting in this area.

We would deeply appreciate any feedback, comments, advice and ideas from anyone in the country who has some experience they could share with us. Anyone who is able to contribute in this way, please write to me at 6 Faircape House, Gardens 8001 (Tel (021) 222150; Fax 237905).