



*Bukeka Mandlantse*

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Bukeka Mandlantse seems like your ordinary school principal. She oversees the running of her school, manages her staff, takes care of all administrative duties and substitutes when a teacher is absent. What makes Bukeka extraordinary is the way she runs her preschool with pride and precision despite the many struggles facing the impoverished community.

It is a typical winter's day in Cape Town; however, for residents of Khayelitsha's Site C, conditions seem extra dreary due to a bad drainage system. "Sorry about the water. We have been inside all day," Bukeka says while ushering us off the muddy street and into Zizamele Educare. The preschool and aftercare centre, which cares for approximately 50 children under the age of seven, is housed in a corrugated iron building. Although the rooms battle the weather, the atmosphere is bright with children's posters covering the walls.

"I have always loved children," the married mother of two explains when asked why she chose to work in the early childhood development field. "I noticed

there were lots of children playing on the streets. I wanted to make sure they were protected from harm, like abuse and kidnapping."

Bukeka started working at Zizamele Educare in 2000 and was soon appointed principal where she got the school registered as an Early Childhood Development facility; however, like many other teachers in the area, she lacked any formal ECD qualification in the field. "I knew it was important to study but I could not afford it. Thankfully I was able to do a Learnership for free."

Bukeka has recently completed her ECD Level Four Learnership through Sikhula Sonke and says she learnt to do many things that will help her to run Zizamele more smoothly. "I learnt how to create and fill in application letters, and now 47 of the 50 children are subsidised and there are 20 Grade Rs who are registered." Other valuable skills have included lesson-planning; how to respect and manage her staff; and how to always remain professional. "But it still isn't always easy.

My staff is often absent which means I have to fill in for them which is frustrating. We have a Code of Conduct, but they don't listen to it," Bukeka explains, and then quickly adds, "But it isn't all of them, some of them work hard."

Bukeka expresses her deep gratitude to the supportive community that she works in. "The parents care about their children. They always come to school meetings or volunteer as teachers' assistants, and many of them help with fundraising so that we can better our school." Bukeka is also grateful to the local ward councillor, who works closely with the school.

Despite the communities' help, Bukeka still has many struggles facing her as the principal of a school where many of the parents struggle to survive. "We have very little money to work with which is frustrating." Bukeka does not have a fixed salary. She gets what little money is left over after her three teachers and the

school's cook are paid their salary each month. "I am not paid well and I hardly get any leave." In fact, when her baby was born seven months ago Bukeka was only able to take two weeks of maternity leave before having to return to work full time. "If I could ask Naledi Pandor anything, I would ask her to give ECD principals proper principal salaries because we do proper principal work," Bukeka laughs.

Her dedication to her school is obvious. Not only does she accept her low and inconsistent salary; she also travels from Samora Machel to school every day, which is a timely process. "I have to wake up very early every morning so I can prepare my children for the day before I leave for work. And sometimes I get home very late."

Even though each day presents itself with new challenges and Bukeka looks like she could do with some rest, her lips curl into a smile as she comments on her favourite part of the day. "I love telling the children

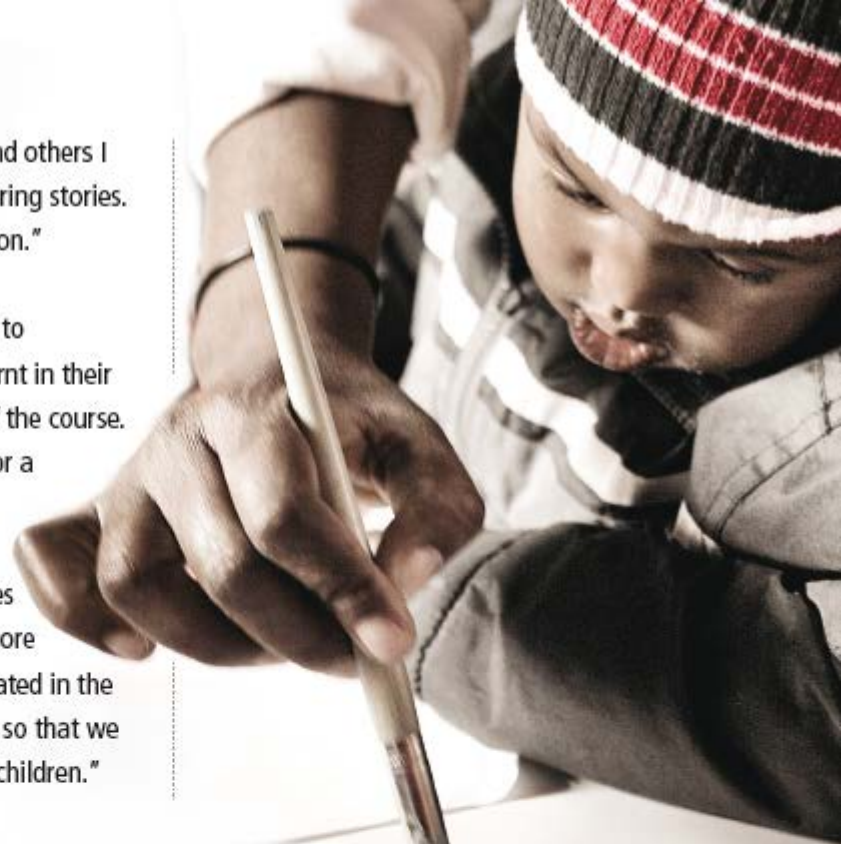


stories. Some of them I read and others I make up. The children love hearing stories. I think story-telling is my passion."

Bukeka urges all ECD teachers to implement what they have learnt in their training and not to drop out of the course.

"If you have the opportunity for a Learnership you must take it."

This busy principal plans to finish her ECD Level Five studies in December and hopes that more study opportunities will be created in the future. "We need to go further so that we can be better teachers for our children."



*Zizamele Educare, Site C,  
Khayelitsha*

