

Report on AMESA Congress 2007

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INTRODUCTION

The 13th national congress hosted by AMESA Mpumalanga was a huge success. Cathy Seeley our plenary speaker from Austin, Texas was excellent. She made us aware of how learners learn differently and therefore we should create teaching and learning opportunities to cater for each learner. Godfrey Sithole entertained us significantly and of course the Mathematical Literacy and Large Scale Evaluation panel discussions were an experience of another kind of academic world. Michael de Villiers once again amazed and inspired us with his knowledge and insight in the teaching and learning of geometry. Marcia Moremedi from SAMF concluded the congress with her plenary.

Participants were exposed to activity-based teaching and learning. They could even experience how to teach the development of numeracy with drums. I personally witnessed a teacher's delight when he expressed his appreciation for a presentation on assessment. "now the new curriculum makes sense... teachers must attend these kind of congresses".

SUPPORT FROM COUNCIL

The fact that the Council had the insight to assign Alwyn Olivier to liaise with the Local Organising Committee (LOC) contributed hugely to the smooth running of the congress. From writing the first announcement to waiting for invited guests to arrive for the opening ceremony, he was only a phone call away. Probably the most valuable advice from Alwyn was to start with the end activity - to visualise it exactly in your mind - and then to work backwards step by step to plan every minute detail of each event. He emphasised that the programme must run on time, like clockwork, and I am pleased to can say that our registration process ran smoothly, and the whole programme ran on time. He introduced the system of early, normal and late registration that helped enormously with our planning because we had good early estimates of the number of participants. Likewise, the appointment of chairs to regulate the time for each presentation, and the introduction of 5 minutes walking time between sessions in the programme helped to keep the congress on time. On behalf of the LOC I would like to say a big thank you to Alwyn.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMME

The academic programme was of a very high standard. One participant commented as follows: "I was really impressed with the quality of experience and knowledge most presenters had ..."

Mamokgethi Setati, the previous president of AMESA, took the task as academic coordinator,

which included coordinating the review of submitted papers. This process proved to be an enormous task. Once the reviewing process was completed she and her two assistants Nancy Chitera and Anthony Essien compiled the set of printed Proceedings containing all the submitted congress presentations. Thank you very much for your valued quality work Kgethi!

Alwyn then designed the academic programme (timetable) which included 4 plenary presentations, 2 panel discussions, 10 keynote presentations, 20 long papers, 20 short and how-I-teach sessions, 31 workshops, 25 Maths Market presentations, as well as a full programme in the Activity Centre. Many teachers commented that they found it difficult to choose between the presentations in parallel sessions. Some even suggested that workshops/papers should be repeated to enable them to attend all the sessions. This is exactly the reason why the LOC provided each participant with a copy of the Proceedings.

Participants also for the first time received the Proceedings in CD-ROM format thanks to a generous sponsorship from NVA and Alwyn's technological expertise.

SPONSORSHIPS

The exhibitors contributed a fair amount to the congress. Their presence at the congress gave mathematics teachers and educators a different perspective of teaching and learning support material. Exhibitors on the other hand had the opportunity to engage face to face with the users of their materials. On the evaluation forms publishers mentioned that they experience these interactions as very valuable because they gain greater insight in what teachers expect to find in textbooks.

Casio, one of our major sponsors contributed all the prizes for the daily competitions. Old Mutual created an opportunity for participants to reflect on their health and personal lifestyle. STATS SA, an exhibitor as well as major sponsor, also sponsored 50 participants from the ISIBALO project and 17 participants from the Stats4maths project. The Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) sponsored 79 teachers from all over South Africa partially to attend the congress. ABSA sponsored our lovely Congress bags as well as the Cultural Dinner and Dance on the Thursday evening.

ACTIVITY CENTRE

Annemarie Kalwe organised the Activity Centre and presented all the activity-based presentations. She performed this task with enthusiasm that inspired many participants. It would be great if AMESA could make use of the talents of this inspiring woman in future.

WEBSITE

Maggie Verster designed the Congress 2007 website. Even though she is a personal friend, I am very objective in saying that the website was well planned and user-friendly. We had many enquiries from all over the world. An awareness of AMESA is growing internationally and in future we may get more international visitors.

ENTERTAINMENT

The welcoming dinner was as big a surprise to me as to most of the participants. Ronald Cambell and his team from KKS were asked to provide the catering. A teacher from Uplands College volunteered her services to entertain the guests as they arrive and another two staff members of Uplands College decorated the tables and hall with the help of pupils from a neighbouring school. The evening was very enjoyable. Participants also had the opportunity to go on an excursion of their choice. Even though there were a few glitches participants enjoyed the outings. During the cultural dinner and dance we were entertained in true Swazi culture. A traditional Indian dance was performed.

UPLANDS COLLEGE and The Catering Company KKS

The fact that then congress was hosted at Uplands College was very conducive to the success we had. Staff members of Uplands College were very supportive. The principal, Mr. Clark, successfully found a huge sponsorship that was mainly used to sponsor under-resourced teachers.

The contributing role that the caterers played in the success of the congress cannot be overemphasized. KKS were extremely efficient, in fact they managed to serve a full lunch to 560 people in less than 20minutes.

REGISTRATION

157 participants registered early, another 236 registered before 15 June and 138 after 15 June. Together with registered exhibitors, we had 559 participants at the congress. The Department of Northern Cape and Mpumalanga faxed names of participants as well as accommodation needs timeously. Needless to say, the registration process was a dream. Any queries were dealt with quickly and participants in general were comfortable. Thank you to all participants that registered timeously and a big thank you to the AMESA members at the Department of Education that organised the information regarding attendance of participants.



LOCAL ORGANISING COMMITTEE

A core of 10 members met on a regular basis and planned most of the events to the finest details following Alwyn's plan of starting at the end and working backwards. Most of the LOC members could not attend the meetings regularly but tasks that were delegated to them by the core members were performed with diligence and accuracy. Albert Pienaar was seconded by Uplands College as our logistical manager. He did a magnificent task with the help of six Uplands pupils and two pupils from a neighbouring school. All together we made a great team! A special thank you to all the

Mpumalanga AMESA members that picked up all the loose ends and brought everything together.

CONCLUSION

This was a Congress with many firsts. It was the first time that Mpumalanga hosted the AMESA National Congress. It was the first time that we had Maths Market sessions parallel to the academic sessions. It was the first time that the Proceedings were also produced on CD. It was the first time that keynote sessions were presented. It was the first time in recent times that we had panel discussion presentations on

important issues. There were many teachers who attended the National Congress for the first time.

"Mamma ek is trots op jou, die kongres was goed!" were the words of my son on Friday afternoon 6 July as we drove down the hill to Nelspruit where we live. These words and all the words of appreciation from participants, presenters, plenary speakers, exhibitors and colleagues as well as members of the LOC made all the effort that has gone into the organising of this congress worthwhile.



My experience at the AMESA Congress 2007

Brutus Raganya - Palabora Foundation

"This is an individual account of the AMESA conference by one participant, Mr Brutus Raganya, and a testimony of what the conference can offer the participant. Brutus is an Educator Development Coordinator at the Palabora Foundation, responsible for Mathematics in the GET band. He is a regular presenter at Limpopo provincial conferences. He attended an

AMESA national congress for the first time in 2004 (in North West) and has never missed an annual national congress since. But the 2007 congress drove him to write the following account:" - Ray Duba

I attended this congress with ten AMESA affiliated educators from Phalaborwa, Limpopo. This was the 13th Annual AMESA National Congress at Uplands College in White River (Mpumalanga) and took place from 1-6 July 2007. The conference theme was "The Beauty, Utility and Applicability of Mathematics".

On the opening day, Monday 2 July, the college principal welcomed everyone. The college music learners fed us with live and interesting music. The Deputy Director General of Mpumalanga Department of Education, Ms Lucy Moyane, was the guest speaker at the opening ceremony. She indicated that mathematics is one of the priority subjects and she was worried about the high failure rate of this subject in our country. She said that the Mpumalanga DoE was delighted to learn that Mpumalanga is hosting the conference and hopes that, from it, ideas will come out on how we can solve the problem of high failure rate in mathematics. It became clear to me that the high mathematics failure rate is really a national challenge, which needs great minds and implementers to make sure that mathematics is highly prioritised and is treated in a very understandable and acceptable manner. Resulting from this, there will be improvement in learners writing maths in higher grade and there will be improved results.

I had an opportunity to listen to mathematics icons like Professor Tamsanqa Kambule, Dr Godfrey Sethole, Dr Marcia Moremedi, Cathy Seeley (Texas), Aarnout Brombacher, Dr Hamsa Venkatakrishnan, Mrs Dipuo Sekoboto, Alwyn Olivier, Michael de Villiers, Professor Renuka Vithal, Dr Caroline Long, Dr Anil Kanjee and Michael Khan, not forgetting the National President, Ray Duba, during the key and plenary sessions. It was really a dream come true for me to listen to all these speakers, thinking that one day I would like to be one of them. It really needs dedication, determination and discipline to achieve that.

Different sessions were organised for different phases. I was able to choose which sessions to attend according to my preferred phases/topics. All plenary speakers and presenters were well and professionally organised. Each participant was given a CD of conference proceedings for the first time. There were ten parallel sessions to choose from every day excluding excursions and entertainment. The college learners were ushering through

the conference, helping participants find their sessions. Those of you who attended the sessions with me will agree that they were fantastic. I chose sessions that were relevant to my daily work, especially the session titled "A creative way to teach 3-D problem solving 2-D geometry" by Ms Eva Biebuyck. In this session, we were given paper cubes to fold and join, ending with a 32 sided figure. I enjoyed it because I presented a paper dealing with 3-D shapes during the Limpopo provincial conference in April this year. I truly gained more knowledge and am hoping to share it with educators within our schools in Phalaborwa. It was really an interesting and practical activity.

The sessions that I did not like much were the sessions with publishers. Some publishers were advertising outdated textbooks. They even acknowledged that these text books were published before the new developments in assessment. They were still relying on the first version of National Protocol on Assessment instead of the most recent Mathematics Assessment Guideline and National Policy on Assessment and Qualification for schools in the GET band, which was gazetted on 27 February 2007. One publisher issued a learning station booklet which could help in the three levels of planning viz Learning Area Framework, Work Schedule and Lesson Plan. It is a good book but it needs to be aligned with the recent changes of the NCS implementation, especially assessment.

On Friday 6 July, during the closing speech, the National President thanked Mpumalanga Local Organising Committee and sponsors for the job well done. It was sad when he mentioned that Alwyn Olivier is resigning as the National Deputy President. Prince from Eastern Cape was elected to replace Alwyn Olivier. Mathematics quiz competition results were announced during the closing ceremony and two of the teachers from my area, Phalaborwa - Mr M V Modika of Selwana Primary School and Mr L M Veale of Modume Primary School - won a CD and Casio calculator respectively.

The Eastern Cape Congress 2008 presentation was done by Prince Jaca, the new National Deputy President. This was a good chance to show the audience what they can expect to see from their province in 2008, as they will be hosting the 14th Annual Congress. It was a good presentation which lobbied everyone to see himself/herself in the Eastern Cape in 2008.

I have learnt a lot and hope to implement what I have learnt from the conference in schools around Phalaborwa. The educators thanked Palabora Foundation for being so generous and sponsoring them to attend the conference. They were highly motivated and told me that they have also learnt a lot from mathematics experts, and in turn they will develop the learners back in Phalaborwa.

I would like to thank the Palabora Foundation for sponsoring these ten teachers to attend the conference, and I would like to challenge all NGO, business and provincial governments do the same.

