

Sanele Dube engages in a KwaZulu-Natal Newspapers in Education project.

Picture by Nash Narrandes of *The Natal Witness*



Nearly 300 publishers, editors and Newspapers in Education (NIE) specialists from 34 countries world-wide met in Sao Paulo, Brazil, recently to explore "Reading in the electronic age: the challenge for newspapers". The delegates examined successful NIE projects that have captured the interest of young readers, debated whether Internet represents "hope or damnation" for the young, and looked at new editorial strategies and projects for young readers. Randal Allan, Editor of the *Evening Gazette*, UK reports on a few of the dozens of NIE projects from around the world.

Reading in the electronic age

A **Brazilian** newspaper has introduced theatre, cultural and environmental packages for children through sponsorship. The newspaper produces special NIE teaching guides for the schools and the sponsors give appropriate support. Special openings of museum exhibitions and morning and afternoon theatre performances are exclusively linked to the paper's NIE programme.

A **Korean** newspaper runs joint workshops for parents and children at the paper. But courses have become so popular – they are booked for a year ahead – that they have been set a limit.

In **Thailand**, a national newspaper set up a foundation and uses the interest from \$100 million capital to build schools in rural areas of the country. In 28 years the foundation has built, and now services, 101 schools. Many other big businesses support the fund.

In **Japan**, the Department of Education and the Japanese Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association are working together to create a newspaper museum in Yokohama for the Millennium. This will be the ultimate NIE facility and will host national teacher training seminars, research facilities and various other attractions for schools and for the public. It is being called a News Park.

A **Stockholm** newspaper has opened a news centre where groups of children become reporters for a day. Various locations are set up which the "reporters" visit to get information. The whole operation is computer controlled (with a virtual reality editor) and run by a staff of four. The centre has been amazingly popular with schools and is fully booked. There are a number of story scenarios so that the pupils can come back again and again. It is now being copied in other countries. A similar concept in Denmark signed up 16 000 pupils in three weeks. It is called the Mediarium and uses the same software package as the Stockholm centre.

"Elect to connect" was the title given to an **American** project linked to the last American elections. Supplements were produced as invaluable teaching and learning aids, with activities to get the pupils involved in understanding the issues and results.

A newspaper in **Uganda** has launched a writers' club to encourage reading and writing in primary schools – 35 schools are now signed up. One teacher champions the idea at each school. The paper publishes the best of the material and there is payment

in goods for every item published. The scheme has raised the levels of interest and the quality of writing among the pupils.

A **Belgian** newspaper has launched a Cyberbus – a converted bus equipped with 10 PCs, printers and educational software. The bus goes round schools and spends a week at each location. It is fully booked beyond the year 2000! The whole project has been sponsored – including the maintenance of the bus.

"Stay at School" is a new reward scheme being used at some **American** newspapers to encourage children not to play truant. A certificate is presented after six weeks of perfect attendance.

Mon Quotidien is a children's newspaper in **France**. It sells 40 000 copies a day, mainly by subscription. The paper covers the day's news selected and written for youngsters. Each page has a dictionary panel to explain more complex words. The paper boasts "news for kids", not a youth version of adult news.

The *Evening Gazette* in **Great Britain** has opened a Community Classroom in a converted schoolhouse. It features a state-of-the-art classroom with 16 computers, scanning equipment and digital camera. The unit is a self-contained newspaper production system. The classroom is expected to generate a revenue of around 100 000 pounds in 1998: sixty percent of the production costs were covered by sponsorship.

While many newspapers (and schools) are encouraging use of the Internet it is still at an early stage of development. Penetration of computers in schools remains very low – even in America there is only one computer for every 33 pupils.

According to a World Association of Newspapers 1997 survey, at least 35 countries have NIE programmes, three times as many as picked up by the survey in 1995. Jan Vincens Steen who conducted the survey defined the objectives of NIE as: aiding critical reading, helping strengthen democratic attitudes and familiarising the young with newspapers. The full survey is available from Dr Aralynn McMane, WAN director of educational programmes. Email: mcmene@wan.assoc.france.

The second international NIE conference was organised by the World Association of Newspapers and the Brazilian Association of Newspapers, in co-operation with the Inter-American Press Association. This report is reproduced with permission from WAN.