

# Teaching in South Africa: A Survival Guide

Aim: Teach a class of about sixty Zulu children a chemistry lesson without boring, misleading or fatally injuring anyone

Apparatus: Chalk, if you're lucky. And an ill-considered makeshift hairband that'll come back to haunt you when you see the photos.

Method: ...run?

Okay, so I managed to hold my ground, but only just. The sight of a classroom full of expectant faces looking up at you as if you were the fount of all knowledge is intimidating. Add to that the pressure of being in a different culture, being conspicuously white, not knowing exactly what you're meant to teach and being a little worse for wear after the "getting-to-know-your-group" session the previous night went on a little longer than was probably sensible, and you have good reason to make some excuse and head back to the (relative) safety of the building site.

However, make it past that first moment's panic and you realise just what an incredible experience teach-

ing can be. Far from the bored rabble that was my own high school classroom experience, the children were eager, willing to learn and game for anything. Whether it was sprinting around their classroom while learning about the pulse or running a gauntlet to act out part of the digestive system, they were always glad to indulge in whatever strange schemes we devised to make up for the lack of equipment, and when we could get the equipment for an experiment they took part with so much enthusiasm that Kate and I had trouble keeping up with them. Two boys almost came to blows over whose turn it was to use the magnet and iron fillings. Seeing people fighting for the chance to learn was not an overly common occurrence during my school years...

Almost without realising it we grew closer to the children and their teacher and when it came time to leave it struck us exactly how much we'd bonded with them. When the school had an assembly to say goodbye, Kate and I had a cheer from the class we'd taught, and I think we both left with a lump in our throats. The whole point of the projects is, after all, to provide opportunity for education. I can't speak for the children we taught, but I know that I've never learned more in my life.

