# Uganda Humanist Schools Association/ Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

## 1st National Teachers' Conference
## Working Towards Secular Principles in Education
## Conduct, Attainment & Technology
### Thursday 31st January to Saturday 2nd February, 2013



## Introduction

Uganda Humanist Schools Trust offers support to Humanist Schools which have met the conditions required to be accepted as members of the Uganda Humanist Schools Association. UHSA was set up in 2009 as a voluntary association. Its Management Board includes the Directors and a senior staff representative from each member school, and nominees of other interested parties including the Uganda Humanist Association (UHASSO), Uganda Humanist Schools Trust (UHST), International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), with an ex officio education adviser from the School of Education at Makerere University. The aims of UHSA are set out in its constitution (http://www.ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org/aims/ ). They include:

- Facilitating cooperation and sharing of good practice among member schools.
- Advancing the standard of education in each school by promoting curriculum improvement and professional development for teachers and support staff.

In the early years it has been a constant struggle to maintain an adequate flow of funds for basic infrastructure, essential learning resources and salaries for teachers. The Humanist Schools are still some way from being self-sustaining but considerable progress has been made. The 5 year point seems to be an appropriate time to reflect so UHST felt that allocating some scarce funds towards a first teachers' conference was warranted.

Isaac Newton High School offered to host the conference, as its boarding facilities were free during the school vacation. UHST paid travel costs and an allowance for teachers attending the conference and we covered the costs of food, bedding, mosquito nets and speaker's fees and accommodation. The conference involved over 50 participants including:

| | |
|---|---|
| Isaac Newton High School, Katera | 20 |
| Isaac Newton High School , Mbute Campus | 4 |
| Mustard Seed School, Busota | 15 |

| Kasese Humanist Primary School | 2 |
| Outside speakers | 5 |
| Uganda Humanist Schools Trust | 2 |
| Support staff (including cooks) | 6 |

The specific conference aims were:

1. To orient existing and new teachers to Humanist schools' aims and practices;
2. To provide strategies to enable teachers to improve student  learning and exam performance;
3. To demonstrate how computers could be used to improve learning and convey knowledge about the care and management of computer networks.

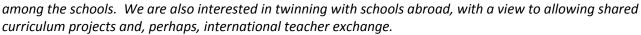Full Conference Programme (attached)

# Conference Synopsis

**1.  Peter Kisirinya and Moses Kamya opened the conference by outlining the aims of the Humanist schools.**
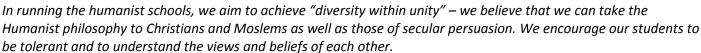
*Humanism is concerned with making the best of this life. Extending education is crucial if we are to empower the current generation of young people with the tools they need to play their part.*



*Uganda Humanists realised they had to go out into the community to spread their philosophy to others and they realised that the establishment of Humanist schools would play an important part in this. The schools seek to develop independent young minds with a capacity for enquiry. They seek to provide an alternative to the indoctrination that is taking place in some of the more strident religious schools.*

*Our schools emphasise science and evidence-based pursuit of knowledge. They encourage free thinking, questioning and a research ethos in all subjects.*

*The Humanist schools in Uganda aim to be a single community, which shares good ideas and fosters cooperation. We aim to encourage teacher exchanges between the Humanist Schools in Uganda. For example, we would like each teacher to spend a term in another Humanist School, so they can get to know colleagues and share expertise and methods. We might also develop special programmes of study which can be shared among the schools.  We are also interested in twinning with schools abroad, with a view to allowing shared curriculum projects and, perhaps, international teacher exchange.*

*In running the humanist schools, we aim to achieve "diversity within unity" – we believe that we can take the Humanist philosophy to Christians and Moslems as well as those of secular persuasion. We encourage our students to be tolerant and to understand the views and beliefs of each other.*

**2.  Moses Kamya gave a talk on the principles of Humanism in Africa, using a Powerpoint presentation.**

This was the first time many teachers, especially the part-time ones, had heard a systematic presentation of what Humanism was all about. There seemed to be general contentment with the liberal and inclusive approach to Humanism which they heard.

3. **Peter Kisirinya spoke about school discipline in the special setting of a boarding school.**

He described the forms of corporal punishment and personal chastisement which had previously been common in Uganda. The psychological and social damage that such coercion can cause was outlined and Peter asserted that such coercive discipline has no place in Humanist schools. After allowing teachers to express their anxieties about how they would maintain discipline if all forms of corporal punishment were disallowed, Peter presented mentoring and guidance strategies, drawn from the "Guidance not Violence" workshop run by VSO volunteers at Isaac Newton High School in 2010. It was agreed that, as a first measure, student could be suspended from a lesson and sent to the teacher on duty. Emmanuel Otim, from Makerere College School, explained how they involved parents and guardians immediately a pattern of indiscipline emerged from individual students. It was agreed that UHSA would organise a future meeting to draw up a code of conduct on discipline. Each school will have a disciplinary committee comprising staff, students and parents representatives.

Robert Bwambale argued that press coverage of International Humanist lobbying of the Ugandan Government on the proposed change in the law regarding homosexual acts was beginning to rebound on Humanist schools. Some Ugandans now mistakenly believed that the Humanist schools promote homosexuality. It was felt that no specific rules concerning homosexuality in schools needed to be drawn up as all schools have a blanket ban on all sexual acts on school premises.

4. **Dr Christopher Mugimu, Head of the College of Curriculum, Teaching and Media at Makerere University drew on research evidence to advise on raising student outcomes in rural schools.**



He argued that, while all schools aim for good exam results, it is essential to give students the "soft skills" they need for employment and life.

It is also important to remember the importance of value added. The top urban schools in Uganda select only primary student entrants with Grade 1 in primary leaving and aggregates of 7 points. In rural schools, by contrast, the standard on entry is much lower. At Isaac Newton the best student had 9 points in 2012 but the school also accepted students with primary aggregates up to 35 points (high points relate to lower standards of achievement). Yet the O-level results for 2012 show that students at both Isaac Newton and Mustard Seed Schools have been gaining grades in O-level which are far higher than might be predicted by their primary leaving results. The schools are therefore performing very well when it comes to adding value.

Dr Mugimu examined in detail how a number of issues contribute to overall performance, including: teacher quality, student quality, school leadership, parental support and the provision of learning resources. See Powerpoint presentation.

5. **The following presentations were given by experienced O-level examiners from top schools**



   a. Improving Performance in Science
      Emmanuel Otim, Chief UNEB Examiner and Head of
      Chemistry, Makerere College School          Powerpoint

   b. Improving Performance in English
      Paul Lwere, Head of English and Senior Manager,
      Kyambogo College School                     Powerpoint

Issues were discussed in groups. Both arts and science groups agreed that getting good results depended on many factors, but, above all, they picked out two key ones:

- Teachers doing all they can to promote self-esteem and confidence in their students

- Marking student work regularly and providing detailed feedback on how students can improve.

**6. The third day began with a workshop on how using books can raise performance.**

Steve Hurd summarised the international research on the relationship between books and the performance of rural school students in developing countries. There is strong evidence of large gains from making books available to students and making sure they "use them". Steve described a "book flood" experiment in South Africa and explained how it had influenced the decision by UHST to provide the resources to create a book-rich environment in the Humanist Schools in Uganda. This was already resulting in the Humanist schools outstripping neighbouring schools in examination performance. Teachers from each school discussed the strategies they were using to encourage students to use books.



Strategies for getting students to use books at Isaac Newton include:

 a. Setting regularly the task of students finding specific information from books

 b. Setting research tasks where topics are covered by student reading and note making

 c. Letting boarding students borrow books from the library for periods of 2 days at a time. Day students have to use them that day. At present day students are not allowed to take books home.

At Mustard Seed School they were using the following:

 a. Both staff and students can borrow from the library. The only condition is that students must be up to date with their fee payments.

 b. The library is open every day from 7am to 9pm. The school has a day and an evening librarian.

 c. Checks are made to ensure that all students are regularly using the library. Those not borrowing books are called in to find out why – and non-use of books can lead to suspension from 2 lessons.

 d. Teachers are beginning to set aside some topics that are not taught formally but students are expected to research themselves. The teacher then monitors understanding by a short test activity.

**7. The final session introduced teachers to the resources from the ELATE PROJECT ([www.elateafrica.org](www.elateafrica.org))**

This British Council funded project was designed to help young teachers by providing syllabuses, past exam papers, schemes of work, lesson plans and activities for students.

Dr Mugimu, Co-Director of Elate, gave a general overview of the project.
Emmanuel Otim introduced the Chemistry materials.
Paul Lwere introduced the English materials.

The full set of ELATE materials have been installed on the school computer networks.

Teachers at Mustard Seed School have already been making extensive use of them and finding them valuable.

**8. On the final day Daniel Stern and staff from U-Connect ran a workshop on using the Computer Network**

This included talks, demonstrations and hands-on sessions covering:



- Understanding the computer network

- Care and management

- Using Open Office and comparison with Microsoft Office

- Managing student and teacher files

- Introduction to RACHEL and making effective use of it

- Using videos and e-books on the network

One teacher from Isaac Newton School and one from Mustard Seed School gave examples of how they are using computers to assist learning. These include:



a. Formal courses in school to ensure that all teachers can use open office suite software.

b. Mustard Seed has 13 students taking Computer Studies as a subsidiary subject in Senior 6. At present no students are entered for O level, but computer studies is nevertheless taught to all students.

c. Mustard Seed plan to open up their computer network to community use in the evenings to foster good relations with the local community.

# Conference Evaluation

The conference was hailed as a great success. Teachers from Mustard Seed School had travelled 7 hours to reach Isaac Newton School and the two from Kasese Humanist Primary School had undertaken a 5 hour journey by bus. It was the furthest distance most of the teachers had travelled from their home regions and, as such, the journey alone proved a great adventure. Meeting teachers from other schools led to new friendships being formed and the professional learning taking place was tangible. Here are some of the comments made by participants:

*"I learned how to make more use of books with my students." "The ELATE materials will help me."*

*"I learnt how to use books and to raise student performance."*

*"The conference has built my esteem. This is mostly after receiving wonderful talks from different people who I think have been role models in my life."*

*"I have learnt more about Humanism and I have gained new friends."*

*"It has enhanced my computer knowledge." "I have learnt about other Humanist Schools."*



*"I have learnt more leadership skills, ICT skills and socialisation."*

*"Tips and good practice for improving exam results of students. Learnt more computer knowledge. Got new friends."*

*"Through computer use you can get more information you want."*

*"Great knowledge of how to get students to use books. Discovery of new material on Elate and Rachel."*

*"How to use modern technology to access educational material that can help teachers and students."*

*"How to handle students." "It has opened the eyes of our teachers to Humanism." "Learnt techniques for improving performance from UNEB examiners." "Helped to bring together staff from Humanist Schools to share experiences."*

*"The workshop has allowed me to network fully with other Humanist Schools in Uganda."*

*"I have learnt about corporal punishment and how it can be avoided by applying alternative soft forms of disciplining children." "I have equipped myself with more Humanist knowledge." "Lots of educational insights."*

*"I have seen a hopeful tomorrow and acquired lots of friends."*

*"I have learnt the best ways of handling student discipline." "I have also learnt how Humanists are supposed to behave in life and towards others."*

*"How to work hard with students and parents to achieve good results." "Encouraging students to use books to raise performance." "How to handle students in class without discriminating between bright and dull ones."*

*"How to treat well students in school." "Creating a friendly atmosphere between teacher and students to enhance proper learning."*

**The picture below shows food being prepared at the conference. Cooking for 50 on open fires is quite challenging!**