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KwaZulu-Natal outstanding teacher wins UCT 2020 Stella Clark Teachers' Award

Every year the University of Cape Town (UCT) honours a high school teacher who has been nominated by a former learner who is now studying at UCT. The learner sends a motivation to a committee stating why their teacher is suitable for this accolade. This year, the winner of the 2020 Stella Clark Teachers' Award is Mr Hebert Muzi Gumbi, who teaches Accounting at Mathunjwa High School in Vryheid, KwaZulu-Natal.

The Award rewards outstanding high school teachers who are making a difference in the lives of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds in South Africa.

UCT Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng commented: "Teaching is not just about delivering a lesson at the chalk board. It's about making a difference in the lives of learners. Every year, the Stella Clark Teachers' Award reminds us of the qualities of good teachers."

For the past seven years, Gumbi's accounting classes received 100% pass rates, and some pupils emerged among the top achievers in the province. Gumbi was nominated by his former learner, Simosenkosi Tshambi now a BCom student, specialising in economics and finance at UCT.

"Mr Gumbi is an amazing teacher whose passion for teaching is evident in the way he makes learning a fun and positive experience. He spends a great deal of time helping students not only to improve their minds, but their character too," Tshambi said. Gumbi's unique teaching style and his ability to connect with students despite their academic level makes him "an inspiration, an A+ teacher" and the deserving recipient of the 2020 Award.

Added Tshambi: "Mr Gumbi is always eager to do more and does a superb job with a large number of students in overcrowded classrooms. There were 68 students in my grade eight class with the other classes being forced to accommodate 68 and 70 students. Despite all the hardships teachers in public schools encounter, Mr Gumbi always had a special way of making all of his students feel important and recognized."

Parents are not left behind. At the end of each term Gumbi hands parents evaluation forms to help assess their children's progress. He also bases his teaching model around real-life

practical examples and often takes his accounting class to the school tuckshop to conduct a stocktake and to help investigate if the business is profitable or not.

For Gumbi, teaching is second nature. "The task is not as easy as people perceive. Indeed, it's quite challenging," he said. The trick to having happy and engaged learners is to always treat them with respect and compassion – Gumbi's top priority. More than that, he said that he tries to understand each learner's individuality, as well as their preferred method of learning. Often, and much to his delight, he also acts as an in-school parent and provides learners with support and advice to help them succeed in other areas of their lives.

"I don't just teach them by equipping them with the skills and knowledge in my subject. I also teach them to be independent, responsible citizens." Gumbi said he is "proud and honoured" to receive the award and committed to always placing the well-being of his learners at the top of his list, to help them achieve "a high degree of success" far beyond his classroom.

In the face of the pessimism about the failure of the public schooling system, remarkable individuals such as those who have come through the Stella Clark Teachers' Award are a reminder of the excellence, creativity and dedication that does exist in the system. These are resilient individuals who have persisted in the educational system for many years and have succeeded despite their circumstances.



Hebert Gumbi outside his classroom in Vryheid in KZN.

Photo: Supplied.

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