

"What's Next?" Two Little Words That Carry a Lot of Weight

The words, "What can I do next?" have been a constant in Edith Gooden-Thompson's life, and a credit to her achievements. "I guess achievement is something that premieres in my life," she says. By constantly striving to reach new heights and motivated by a simple and direct goal, Edith Gooden-Thompson has evolved as a consistently flowing force through education. She is driven to contribute to the development of the young, growing mind.

A native of Fort Lauderdale, Gooden-Thompson attended Walker Elementary and Dillard High School, then continued her education in South Carolina at Benedict College, in the fields of English, languages, history and the arts. She began her career teaching rural high school children. When she returned to Florida in 1969, she continued teaching middle school and then moved to the high school level, where she taught for the next 13 years. She then accepted a position as assistant principal at South Plantation High and later went on to South Broward High School.

After a decade, she developed her famous itch, and asked, "What can I do next?" She went after the role of principal and was hired at Miramar High, where she remained for three years. Finally, she moved to New River Middle, where she ended her career in what, for her, was a personal blaze of glory by planting the seeds and then facilitating the first-ever marine magnet school in Broward County. She is now bringing the wealth of 32 years to her community as a volunteer for several associations



in which she has special interest and exceptional experience.

The Broward County arts and cultural industry is now a benefactor of this wealth. As a Broward Cultural Council member appointed by Commissioner Josephus Eggleton Jr., Gooden-Thompson is dedicated to increasing the arts in education in the county. "From my experience in schools, usually if there is a cut of any type from the state, you try to keep the academics intact. The first thing that gets cut out or cut back is the arts and this really pained me as a principal," she says. "I applaud the principals who make the extra effort to find other ways of bringing the arts into schools and to making sure that kids have a well-rounded education. I wish to contribute to continuing to make that happen," she adds.

Additionally, Gooden-Thompson involves herself in *Floridaleaders.net*, an organization that is mentoring principals, particularly new principals, in the process of integrating technology into the curriculum. Working toward the goal of having computers in every classroom and laptops for every teacher, the organization is formatting a new way of

material presentation. "We are going beyond the teacher standing in front of the class and just talking to the children. They are now doing hands-on things and learning how to use technology for research," notes Gooden-Thompson. "But that brings another set of challenges with integrating the various levels of computer competency with the teachers, and integrating the presentation of this new technology."

As an active participant in the Cultural Council's arts education, cultural diversity and finance committees, Gooden-Thompson stays personally involved in grant reviews and focus groups. She feels her contribution is a way of giving back to her community by helping underserved groups to gain more exposure and allowing them to become part of the wholeness that distinguishes Broward County.

"The Broward Cultural Council brings artists and people to organizations that otherwise wouldn't have access to a lot of places to perform and money to facilitate performances. This helps to make sure that more groups have access through grant funding and workshops," Gooden-Thompson says.

So, "what's next?" for Edith Gooden-Thompson and her achievement-based priorities? She states that she intends to continue spending her time as a professional volunteer, doing the things that she loves, wearing different hats and custom-making her timetable to suit the diversity of her community involvement. "It's all about the children," she says. ★

By Samantha Rojas, public relations writer for the Broward Cultural Division