Xstrata investing in computer smart teachers

E-Skills4Teachers, an initiative by Xstrata Alloys and Kagiso Active, has brought computer skills and technical confidence to teachers around Rustenburg.

The programme is aimed at equipping teachers in rural areas so that they can be more productive and efficient educators and so they can transfer computer skills to their own learners. With the help of the North West province's Department of Education, 50 schools have been selected for the project that has seen a dramatic improvement in teachers' abilities to operate a computer.

The first phase, which was launched in August 2010, also created jobs when trainers were recruited from the communities to assist with the project.

There are 13 trainers who dedicate their afternoons to travelling to schools around Rustenburg and teaching computer literacy to educators. Xstrata has sponsored R2 million for the training phase of the project, which includes making sure that all the necessary hardware is available in the schools so that the training can happen without a hitch.

Dieketseng Mofokeng from Kagiso Active, says the first phase of the project has been a success. "We have learned a lot in terms of scheduling our time properly so that we don't clash with the activities of the department, and how to maintain and manage the computer labs so that everything is functional," said Mofokeng.

The second phase of the project, which started in June 2011 with a budget of R4.3 million.

"When we first started with this programme, most of the teachers didn't even know how to hold or use a mouse. We needed to start from scratch," said Mofokeng. Now most of them can now type their own question papers.

"It is great to see the wonderful and positive difference that this programme has brought to the schools," adds Mofokeng.

The Department of Education has offered its facilities for training purposes and they keep a record of attendance to make sure that the selected schools participate.

The programme, offered in both English and Tswana, currently provides a total of 27 sessions per teacher for three hours a day. At the end of the training the teachers will be expected to write an exam. Those who pass will get a certificate accredited by the British Computer Society.

"The reason for this is to make sure that we reach our programme target of 85% pass rate," said Mofokeng.

Since joining the programme in January, Bontle Katane, one of the programme's dedicated trainers, offers training to 81 teachers and principals from schools around the Modikwe village.

"When I first began with the training, the teachers were very discouraged. Some of them were even scared to touch the computer, it was a foreign concept to them," said Katane.

But with her friendly and fun approach to teaching, she has managed to replace their fears with confidence and positive thinking. "I made them confess their fears and face them head-on. They all pledged that by the end of the programme they will be computer fundis, and that approach worked miracles," explains Katane.

Her biggest challenge, she said, has been trying to teach older educators to let go of their insecurities and accept that they need help to improve their teaching methods.

Her ultimate goal is to see all her students type their own question papers and use technology to make teaching fun for their learners.

"I've taught them how to use projectors and do PowerPoint presentations to make learning easier and fun. Some of them didn't even know that such programmes were available," adds Katane.

Thato Mohibidu, who trains a much younger group than Katane's, says she attributes her success to promoting the culture of teamwork.

"I don't stand there and bark instructions, we all work as a team and that helps eliminate the chances of someone getting lost during the class," said Mohibidu.

She says the programme has not only helped improve the quality of teaching in classrooms, but has contributed to the community at large.

"Some of these teachers are community leaders and church elders, so learning how to do presentations and organise documents has helped them in other aspects of their lives," she adds.

The trainers are hoping to soon see all their hard work in exam papers typed by computer savvy teachers.