

# UNESCO partners with the University of Pretoria in a teacher training project

**A special teacher training initiative funded by UNESCO was launched in rural KwaZulu-Natal recently. This was initiated by staff in the Department of Informatics at the University of Pretoria (UP), assisted by staff in the Department of Information Systems and Technology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.**

Last year, 24 teachers from Lobethal Independent School in Tugela Ferry, a small rural village in KwaZulu-Natal, were trained in practical information and communication technology (ICT) literacy. The two five-day courses covered practical competency in basic office applications, as well as how ICTs can be used to support teachers in their day-to-day tasks. In addition, a computer appreciation course was conducted in the afternoons to introduce active community members to the basics of computers, office applications and e-mail.

Tugela Ferry has been identified as one of the most economically disadvantaged communities in South Africa, and is in dire need of various forms of development and support.

According to the project leader, Mr Kirstin Krauss, "it is our responsibility as academics to combine ICT research and teaching to support community development." For this reason, the certificate course, Basic Computer Literacy, which is presented by Continuing Education at the University of Pretoria (CE at UP), has been specifically tailored to

empower teachers in a developing community context to do their work better and ultimately reach the community as a whole. CE at UP facilitated logistic arrangements and ensured quality control and certification for the courses.

UNESCO supported the teacher training financially. The initiative is also guided by UNESCO's ICT competency standards for teachers policy framework, which advocates knowledge creation, acquisition and sharing in the field of education. According to UNESCO's policy, professional development programmes for teachers currently in the classroom and programmes for preparing future teachers should provide technology-rich experiences throughout all aspects of education.

UNESCO emphasises the importance of information literacy and proposes three levels of ICT literacy in all components of the education system. These are technology literacy, knowledge deepening and knowledge creation. According to Mr Krauss, "Our interaction with the Tugela Ferry community highlighted the importance



→ *The first group of teachers of Tugela Ferry who attended the information and communication technology training.*

of knowledge transfer skills and sustainability in information literacy. We realised that basic computer literacy should address three aspects: IT competence for first-timers, traditional basic office applications and information literacy to help teachers in their educational and administrative tasks, and, finally, the ability to also impart ICT knowledge to others." In that way, knowledge and ownership will be expanded in the community.

This very successful teacher training initiative can now be seen as a pilot project for future ICT and empowerment projects in similar developing community contexts. "Several lessons were learned and additional initiatives started," he added. "Part of the course included a train-the-trainer initiative where teachers who successfully completed the course were trained to assist with facilitating future and similar continuing education courses."

**"Our aim is to primarily empower teachers, so that more people may be empowered, and developing communities as a whole may be reached in the long run."**

Most ICT project failures in rural communities do not stem from the implementation of technology, but its sustainability or continuous use in the community. To alleviate this problem, the project group set two objectives for themselves: firstly, the train-the-trainer initiative, in which the group aims to ensure that knowledge is kept in the community and remains in the



→ *The train-the-trainer initiative proved to be very successful and has resulted in the planning of training projects for other members of the community.*

community after the course has been completed. The second objective is to tailor the course in accordance with the needs of the teachers, so that they will apply it in their day-to-day work and life situation. The project team tried to gauge the success of the project based on these two objectives.

"We observed that the teachers were enthused and already started to create office solutions to real situations that are related to their work," said Dawit Asmelash, one of the academics from UP. Mrs Gugu Khumalo, the headmistress of the school, said that the two-week collaboration caused a vibrant excitement in the community.

As a result of the train-the-trainer initiative, the school is now planning weekly informal computer courses to help other teachers and community members to also benefit from the initiative. The school, in collaboration with the Department of Informatics, is planning a similar course in basic

computer literacy for a number of health workers from Philanjalo, a local hospice and non-governmental organisation working with HIV and TB patients. Mr Krauss added that they hoped to visit the region soon to present another course for teachers. Staff at the Department of Informatics will also continue to guide ICT training and ensure quality.

"The Department of Informatics believes in a holistic approach to ICTs in a developing context and values ethics highly in any community engagement initiative. The department therefore places a strong emphasis on relationships, empowering community workers, facilitating social development, addressing poverty and creating ownership, motivation, hope and liberty in people. Sound academic research informs all community engagement and the department hopes to diligently document lessons learnt for future and similar projects in South Africa." 📍