

# Deep Rural - Eastern Cape Teachers are embracing new teaching approaches

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'Deep Rural' is a term that is used carelessly these days but it is very appropriate when referring to the schools participating in the CSIR initiative in Cofimvaba. This photo taken from the veranda of a row of classrooms at Zamuxolo Junior Secondary School shows one of the three mud rondavels that are still used for teaching.

One could be forgiven for assuming that teachers at this school might not be familiar with technology and might not readily adapt to an intervention that requires them to use android tablets in their classrooms. How wrong that assumption would be. On the contrary, the achievements of these teachers at Zamuxolo Junior Secondary have surpassed all expectations.



Cofimvaba, a very small town in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, this week saw great gains being made for learning by teachers who expertly demonstrated that they had been making effective use of technology in their teaching. The week marked the stage in this ICT4RED (Information and Communication Technologies for Rural Education Development) project when teachers were assessed on progress they had made in the intervening weeks since the professional development workshops they had first attended.

ICT4RED is the result of a unique partnership between a number of government departments, namely the Department of Science and Technology, The Department of Rural Development and the Department of Basic Education, both National and in the Eastern Cape. The conceptualisation of the project has been undertaken by the CSIR who have cautiously and painstakingly devoted their research resources with the intention of refining best practice for technology in education programmes. The project team has endeavoured not to allow this initiative to become just another instance of technologies being dumped in schools with little guidance on their effective use in the classroom, while learners and teachers are exploited for political or commercial interests. This project team are “getting it right” because the focus of this intervention is firmly on the noblest of educational objectives - to improve learning.



Hlengiwe Mfeka is a former teacher from a similarly disadvantaged area in KZN and she is the project manager for SchoolNet SA who is charged with responsibility for the professional development of teachers for this initiative. SchoolNet South Africa is a non-profit NGO whose mission for the past 16 years has been “*Creating communities of teachers and learners using technology to enhance learning*”. Mfeka says that although SchoolNet SA has experience of teachers readily embracing new technologies and being able to adopt and adapt them in their classrooms, she has never before experienced this phenomenon among a whole school staff - and in such a short period of time.



The key to this success appears to be the use of targets and rewards as deployed in badges-based learning. The badges concept has been developing world wide over the past three years and involves students (anywhere, anytime and of any age) gaining recognition for their skills achievements through the allocation of badges according to prescribed criteria. In order to “earn” badges, the teachers in ICT4RED have to prove they had have matched the criteria by showing evidence such as a video of a local person describing a story about their local area, digital mind maps of learning topics, photos of

