



**Help Desk training in Three Clusters:
Bergville, Bloemfontein and East London Clusters**

Sponsored by Microsoft

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In 2006 a lack of capacity meant that hardly any HelpDesk training was conducted. To address this, in 2007, SchoolNet employed a full time Technical Training Manager, Themba Mabaso, to be responsible for rolling out the HelpDesk programme into schools and to conduct some of this training himself. In keeping with the idea of offering additional training to schools in areas where some Partners in Learning training had already been successfully conducted, three clusters were chosen to receive Help Desk training as part of the 60 Sessions project, namely:

Bergville, KwaZulu Natal, Bloemfontein, Free State and East London, Eastern Cape.

It is hoped that through providing Help Desk training to schools in these clusters that ICT integration will be more sustainable at these schools as they will be able to solve first line computer maintenance issues themselves. In time these schools are also encouraged to offer technical support to other schools in their areas.

Listed below are the schools that were included in this project:

Province	School	Training Dates
KwaZulu-Natal	Amangwane High School Bangani High School Thsanibezwe High School Mafu High School Insukangihlale Primary School Bambanani Primary School Nogaga Primary School Tabhane Primary School Mqedandaba High School	24 - 28 September 2007
Free State	Kaelang High School Lereko High School Bernards High School Eunice Secondary School (host) Tsosetso	26 and 30 September 2007
Eastern Cape	Qhasana Sandiswe Sinikiwe Umtiza Vukuhambe	5 – 7 and 20 – 21 September 2007



Bergville HelpDesk Training

Four secondary schools and five primary schools were included in the Bergville HelpDesk training. One teacher and four learners (from grade nine to grade eleven) were invited per secondary school and one educator per primary school was invited. In describing the trainees, the trainer commented:

“trainees were as if they have been thirsty for such knowledge for quite a long time. They were concentrating and participating in all activities as if they depended on it. By so doing, they ended up

surprising themselves in so many ways. No body could tell that there was a mixture of educators and learners sitting behind the desk. During previous trainings, it was noticed that educators became somewhat reserved next to their learners probably because they did not want to say anything that would embarrass them. This class was so different.”

When it came to the practical demonstrations, the trainees realised just how valuable the skills they were learning are. To practice dismantling and reassembling computer components the host school provided computers that weren't working. By the time the groups had finished working with these “broken computers” they all worked! The trainer was able to use this experience to prove that sometimes components just need to be reset and that a technician may have charged a lot of money to fix computers that they could easily fix themselves.



When it came time to demonstrate networking the trainer produced the switch and cables he had bought with him to network the lab that he had been told was not networked. It was then discovered that the computers were in fact networked with two network switches, but one of the switches was off. The trainees were so impressed that they had been able to help solve the problem and realised again the value of knowing how to conduct their own trouble shooting.

The comments below show just how much the trainees enjoyed this training:

“Training run successful. In this training I've gain more like supporting hardware and installing certain think even printer. As I have said that before I was not confident with technical ICT skills but not I'll gain more. I was not open the PC before but now I will open the CPU identified the problem inside then correct certain mistake”.

“I have the very nice time with my trainer and he teach me more about the computer and technician. So I think he must carry on with his course and do the best to others as he did to me”.

“The whole course was very interesting and exciting and practical for matter. The facilitator was informative, friendly and determined and willing to help in one way or the other. We, then, request more of this training to keep us sharp and useful in helping and sorting out problems both our, community and the country at large, interests. Thanks Guys”.

“The course was very useful to us. We gain a lot from this course but we need a support workshop for technical workshop because the workshop was very short. Thanks you very much Themba keep it up with your work”.

“This course was very much impressed to me, because I'm confident to find solutions to problems consarning computers. I suggest that the DoE must find such projects because it is very usefull to the schools in order to minimized the lots of money used by schools to pay technicians.”



The trainer suggested that more HelpDesk be offered to schools in rural areas as:

“in these areas it is hard to find technical people to look after their computer labs. Even if one finds a technician, one will have to pay a lot for him/her for a small thing like re-sitting RAM. These trainees got just one week’s training but they left that host school lab as a fully functional computer lab. If more trainings are offered to other learners, not only that they will save their schools’ money for maintaining their labs but they will also have something that they can use to earn some money when they finish school if they cannot afford to further their education.”

East London HelpDesk Training

This training took place in the Sinikwe 20-seat lab. The trainer reported that the internet was available but slow and the lab was an “ergonomic danger zone” with desks that were too high for the keyboard to be reached comfortably and with little place for the teacher to stand behind learners.

Although the learner trainees were all CAT learners in grade 10 and 11 their skills were quite weak. To overcome this the trainer focused on making the course as practical as possible such as repairing a computer when it crashed and loading and running anti virus software. One computer did not have the correct software installed, so the learners plugged it into the data projector and two of them installed software. Other hardware practice was carried out on defunct computers to avoid damaging working equipment and groups from each school dismantled and reassembled the PCs. On two machines network cards weren’t working, and we attempted to download and reinstall drivers. The printer also would not print, and trainees had a go at repairing the connection. Although they did not manage to fix it, the trainer noted that “it was a learning opportunity too good to miss”.

Less successful were the more theoretical chapters as few learners had a deep grasp of Windows and changing network setting was something “quite foreign”. The group did not cover installing the database, as the learners had only a vague notion of what the database would be used for and none of the schools had bought a computer to install the database on as instructed. The trainer suggested that to overcome this “the database and its operation should be built into the course flow, and not left to be attached at the end, when everyone is tired”.

In conclusion the trainer reported that:

“The learners tried hard and were attentive and interested, but I felt that a lot of what we discussed was beyond their experience and some fundamentals were missing.

One HUGE positive is that the teachers attended and participated in the training themselves. Often the teachers drop their learners and leave the venue, or hold a conversation or read the paper while the training is going on.”



Bloemfontein HelpDesk Training

The trainer reported that the Eunice Girls High School's Computer Lab was the ideal training venue as it is equipped with modern fast IT equipment and also provided old computers to take apart during the practical sessions.

Four of the five schools taught Computer Applications Technology (CAT) as a subject and decided to send these learners to attend the helpdesk training. This stood in vast contrast to the fifth school whose learners had little to no previous exposure to I.T. or CAT. The trainer found that this disparity in skills "made training difficult to juggle between those that understood the content of the course and those that did not".



As in other HelpDesk courses the learners enjoyed the practical components. This trainer divided learners into groups and each one had to take a different type of computer apart, competing to see who could do it successfully. After demonstrating how to load Windows "the students were then divided into their groups and did it themselves. They really enjoyed this and the look on their faces when Windows was fully loaded was amazing to see – what satisfaction."

Trainees also were "amazed to learn about the specialist tools available in Windows XP. They enjoyed being empowered to learn about "Safe Mode" in Windows XP. Another part of the theory that really made an impression on learners was using strong passwords for security reasons and finding out about the Microsoft Management Console. After training, "all the educators agreed that implementing a hardware and software inventory and security policy is a must. The HelpDesk database was installed and configured on one computer and demonstrated to the Educators. However errors occurred when trying to log into the database. These problems were brought to SchoolNet's attention and have been rectified.

The trainees positive reaction to the training is demonstrated by the following quotations:



"I felt like a technician when Mr Edward wanted us to open the box and remove the inner parts of the box e.g RAM, INFO cabel, etc and happy with my knowledge".

"I enjoyed each and every second of the course, I even made new friends and learned more about I.T. I also saw that it takes a lot of things to become a technician and it's characteristics. I even saw another humble side of myteacher, which I don't normally get to see. So I was one of the privillaged. But non-the-less...I enjoyd theexperience"

"The training will help me a lot even though I was already computer literate. Software set up was the most fun for me and the technical side was not that bad too."

"I really enjoyed attending this course as it enriched my knowledge on computers & how to manage hardware and softwares. Also it made me more interested into learning further about computers. Wish it could be conducted for a longer period."

“This course was a real eye opener; it was fun, long, but very interesting. I do believe that it is unfair to have exposed all the boys/ girls to the same level of training as some of them already know most of these things, although recapping isn’t a bad thing”

In summing up the course, the trainer noted that more attention should be paid to selecting learners with similar levels of expertise which will “make the class more balanced and in turn will save on time being expended on explanations (so) more time can then be spent on the practical side of the course”. He also said that some learners got bored during the theory of HelpDesk because they knew the terms already however they really enjoyed the “practical side of things, such as disassembling a P.C. and putting it back again and loading Windows XP”.

A conscious effort is made to ask schools to nominate female learners for this course and the trainer noted: “I was presently surprised at the enthusiasm displayed by the female students and they often got things right before their male counterparts did – really great stuff for the ladies.”



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