

Retired teachers fill maths gap with easy-to-use dictionary

SPHUMELELE MNGOMA

FOR many years, retired teachers Sandy Edwards and Dawn Williams, who taught together at a primary school in Kloof, worked well together.

Like well-oiled machines, Williams would take over pupils in grade seven whom Edwards had taught the previous year.

Since both teachers had a similar teaching style, involving the regular revision of old concepts, they found their pupils' grasp of mathematics would be so advanced that they could move to grade eight work long before the year was over.

But it was upon their return to the education melting pot, after being asked by former colleagues to teach advanced classes in the afternoons, that the women realised there is a gap in the system.

As a result, the pair, with 60 years' experience between them, have teamed up once again and devised a maths dictionary and a set of mental challenges.

"We found that teachers were teaching maths, but with no reinforcement done in chunks building on previous knowledge," said Williams.

This meant they have to explain concepts all over again, which has proved to be time-consuming.

This led to them thinking that if children have some reference handy, it would help to reinforce concepts.

"We thought it could even help parents get involved with homework because they won't be intimidated.

"They will be able to brush up on



Former teachers Dawn Williams (left) and Sandy Edwards, who created a dictionary and a challenge book.

PHOTO: MARK WING

what they have forgotten," Edwards added.

Already, 4 000 copies of the dictionary have been printed.

While most of the buyers have been private schools, some former model C schools are showing an interest. Edwards and Williams have conducted

presentations and workshops at these schools.

They also aim to take their dictionary to rural schools, where they believe it is needed the most.

They have approached a sponsor and have identified a need to translate the dictionary into Zulu.

Williams said it was their passion to eradicate the fear of maths that pushed them to develop the new maths tool.

"When you look at those little faces, mouths open and eyes glazed over whenever you introduce something new, you realise they have no confi-

dence.

"And they won't be able to receive anything you say from that point on because they think maths is difficult," said Edwards.

She told of their visit to Howick Preparatory School to do a demonstration.

She says a group of grade six girls decided they would not bother bringing money to school to buy the books since they were hopeless at maths.

"They looked at us in horror, but when we assured them that we would talk them through the exercises, they realised they could actually do it.

"All they could say was 'we are not so stupid'," said Edwards.

The dictionary, which is stocked by a number of book stores, sells for R100.

Williams said it is easy to use as it is simple, with short sentences.

"It's like an A-Z maths guide filled with diagrams.

"You get an explanation of what it is and how to do it as succinctly as possible," she added.

For further information, call Sandy Edwards at 074 132 6296 or visit www.dawsansmathsdictionary.co.za

• The dictionary is devised for grades four to eight. However, the mental challenges are allocated levels based on the child's progress, and they are pitched quite high.

• Questions in these challenges are interlinked. To be able to answer the next questions, pupils must have answered the preceding correctly. However, the challenges are filled with clues.