



Windhoek - Namibia

Day 1 May 29th 2013

The theme for this year's e LA conference was Tradition, Change and Innovation - this led to some lively discussions and really great presentations. Omashani and I attended - here is a long-winded account of our experiences.

Opening Plenary

This opening plenary was co-chaired by the Minister for ICT in Namibia, Joel Kaapanda and the Minister of Education, David Namwandi. As is the case with plenaries, obligatory time has to be devoted to the sponsors and government officials with a couple of relevant and interesting speakers interspersed if you are lucky. We were very lucky with this opening plenary because the government representative was the Prime Minister of Namibia who was amusing and did not take himself too seriously. It was clear that a knowledgeable person in the field of ICT in Namibia had written his speech although it was a mystery as to why he mentioned the Microsoft Pathfinder project which had been abandoned as a failure many years prior. Joris Komen who used to run SchoolNet Namibia was quick to point out this fact in a tweet on the conference hash tag. Nevertheless the ministry contribution was not boring or irrelevant as is so often the case.

Another enlightening aspect of the opening plenary was a presentation given by a young entrepreneur from Ghana called Mac-Jordan Degadjor who gave a fast moving, up-beat social media oriented account of what is good about Africa and what the rest of the world has got wrong in its perceptions of Africa. This theme of Africa being ready to innovate on its own was to characterise the thread of conversations for the rest of the conference.



The managing director of Dell, Stuart van Graan, tried to present feel good stories about Dell Africa exploits and to a great extent his theme was well in line with that of Mac-Jordan's. He gave an analogy to illustrate the state of education in Africa about three builders with bricks in

wheelbarrows that each had different perceptions of their role in the construction process. He finished the story on a positive note quoting from the last man who had the greater vision of building for the future.

Sadly Sugata Mitra presented the same stories that we have heard for the past few years now which was very disappointing indeed. In fact I could have delivered the narrative as I have shown his TED talk so often. He was probably acutely aware of the presence of Donald Clarke who was due to be presenting keynotes and workshops later in the conference. More later about that!

The real highlight of the opening plenary was however the final presentation which was given by the Director of Botswana National Library services in the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, Ms. Bobana Badisang. She was a diminutive figure on the stage who had to stand on a platform to reach the microphone. However, she stunned the audience to silence with her rendition of a brilliant poem written about African culture using a range of languages but mainly English interspersed with Swahili.

Day 2 – plenary

Main speakers were Mark East, Microsoft EMEA and Asia, Donald Clark and Dr Monica Weber-Fahr from the World Bank.



Mark East spoke well but made the mistake of demonstrating some devices. He was sufficiently familiar with the devices and his common sense approach to make delegates suitably impressed with his professed intentions to transform learning in Africa through the use of these tools.

Unfortunately for Mark, Donald Clark was next up and wasted no time in not only finding fault with Sugata Mitra's presentation from the previous day but also pointing out that commercial companies such as Microsoft and Dell were "just trying to sell you stuff". Of course, delegates found this highly entertaining and refreshing and were absolutely in agreement, particularly when he blew the Negroponte tablets in Ethiopia claims out of the water the next day.

Donald Clark is an expert speaker who talked a lot of sense; he delighted in being controversial and was rewarded with positive support from almost all delegates. His address was entitled, "***Is mobile the new pen and pencil?***" This title reminded me of the research, appropriately conducted in Namibia on the ineffectiveness of computer literacy for teachers, entitled "*Why I do not want to take a course about how to use a pencil*". Donald was adamant that high school students do not benefit from or appreciate the value of tablets. He gave 7 reasons to support this argument as well as 7 studies related to how tablets actually inhibit learning; he did not deny that primary learners do benefit from the use of tablets - but he did not explore that contention.

For more detail around his current arguments, we can visit his blog where he adds evidence to the claims he made at the conference and again he concedes that tablets are beneficial to primary school learners. <http://donaldclarkplanb.blogspot.com/>

The final plenary speaker on the second day was Monika Weber-Fahr who is the Director of Knowledge, Learning and Results and the Sustainable Development Network at the World Bank. She was a most accomplished speaker who spoke knowledgeably about the *really* big economic picture. She delivered what was probably the most professional presentation of the conference. Her focus was on world mobility and the deployment of new learning strategies. She included current data around world poverty that turned out to be surprisingly relevant to the themes of the conference.

First workshop session - Day 2



Maria, Sophie and Esther



Half of the room – it was full to capacity



Esther

The first session I chaired was entitled, *Developing ICT competences of African Teachers* and was supposed to have five speakers but one person had withdrawn before the event and another, a teacher and author from Uganda had failed to arrive. He had driven for 6 days only to be refused entry to Namibia at the border post.

The three remaining speakers were Esther Wamuyu Gacicio, Kenya Institute of Education, Maria Augusti, Open University of Tanzania and Sophie Villeret, Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), France.

The session was supposed to be addressing ICT competences issues at pre-service and in-service levels and moving beyond digital literacy to focus on pedagogical integration, continuous professional development and growing 21st century competencies.

Esther's presentation, entitled, *“Moving Teachers' Competencies in Curriculum Delivery to the 21st Century Learning: Kenyan Perspective”* was well researched and confidently presented. She outlined the background to the Kenya Institute of Education and its responsibilities toward the national curriculum and their decision to focus on the promotion of 21st Century learning skills. The challenges to the range of models of delivery had driven the institute to develop a learning management system called Elimika which was an open source, anytime, anywhere mode of learning where they had included values education that comprises life skills and peace education. Elimika had proved to be highly effective in overcoming teacher resistance to change and was the key to transforming teaching and learning in Kenya. Almost all Kenyan schools have computers and their government is currently rolling out a laptop scheme for learners. I got the feeling that it was contentious that laptops were not being issued to teachers, but this was not stated explicitly.

Maria's presentation was entitled, "***Pedagogical Integration of ICT for Teacher Education Quality Improvement: Challenges That Deter Literate ICT Tutors from Pedagogical ICT Integration in Teachers Colleges in Tanzania***" Very unfortunately, Maria experienced a breakdown of the data projector during the presentation. This was disturbing for her as well as the delegates who soon lost interest in the thread of her presentation. The research was based on a study conducted in four colleges of education in Tanzania. While it detailed all the challenges that teachers face, it appeared to state the obvious and did not seem to focus on solutions to the problems outlined. Unfortunately, I had chaired a similar session in Dar es Salaam two years ago when one of Maria's colleagues at the Ministry had made a similar presentation. It is sad that little progress on the ground seems to have been made in this country despite massive foreign investment.

Sophie's presentation was given in French with English translation available via headsets. The title was "***La formation à distance à l'Agence universitaire de la Francophonie : quel public ?***" Sophie gave the origins of her distance education institution and explained how it worked in Francophone countries throughout the world, although it was based in Paris. They had started as a distance programme and still receive donor funding in order to assist French speakers in other countries to complete qualifications, primarily at post graduate level. Sophie provided an array of statistics that illustrated the extent of their work. The distance ethos was clearly outlined along with a deliberate intention to focus on the pedagogy of distance learning. Sophie went on to explain exactly how their courses were implemented, the criteria for admission and gave the profile of their typical student. The institution was fastidious about updating and improving their content. For this purpose they recruit recent graduates to contribute to the development of their programmes.

Omashani was presenting in a simultaneous session entitled, "***Tablet-enabled Learning: a sweet or bitter pill?***" Omashani presented case studies that SchoolNet is currently implementing in 3 primary schools and apparently from the ensuing excitement around her presentation it was a super success.

2nd Session Day 2



Cornelia



Mignon



Donald

How Mobiles Enhance Literacy Development was the title of the next session where there were three presenters; Cornelia Muganda of the Open University in Tanzania, Mignon Hardie from The Fundza Literacy Trust and Donald Clark representing himself.

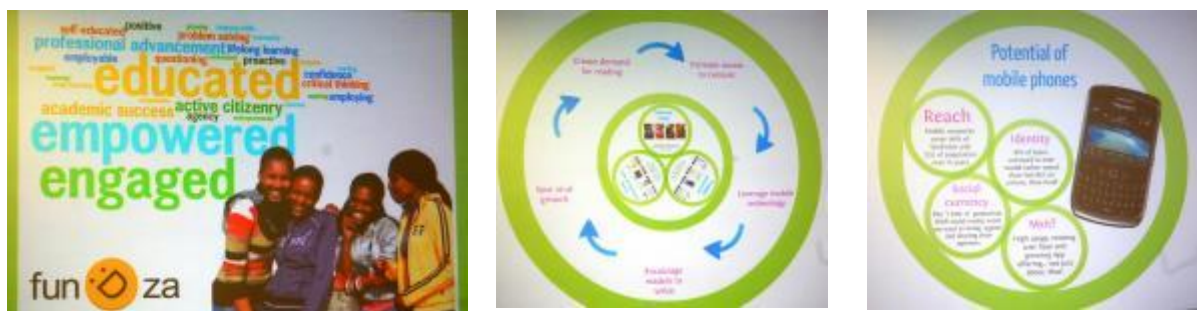
Cornelia's presentation, like Maria's, comprised many slides with many bullets. However, it was concerned with fascinating qualitative research that the OUT had conducted on '***Learning experiences of illiterate mobile users in Tanzania.***' The multifaceted values of a mobile phone to an

illiterate person had been carefully documented. These included gaining literacy skills to some extent, through the use of the alphabet and the camera, linking to the outside world; it increased their power of communication and improved self confidence and self-esteem.

Next up was Mignon Hardie who presented **“The Power of Mobile Technology to Overcome Barriers to Reading and Showcase Creative Writing.”** From previous presentations of Mignon’s I knew we were in for a super imaginative Prezi design and we were not disappointed as she outlined how incredibly popular the Fundza stories have become. Here is part of the official abstract. Fundza’s mobi network (mobi site and Mxit portal) has a reach of more than 350,000 young people. It boasts a growing ‘mini-library’ of quality teen/YA fiction, written specifically for consumption via mobile phones. Every week a new short story is released in serial format (a new chapter each day) encouraging readers to visit frequently.

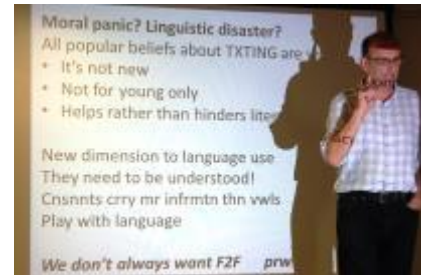
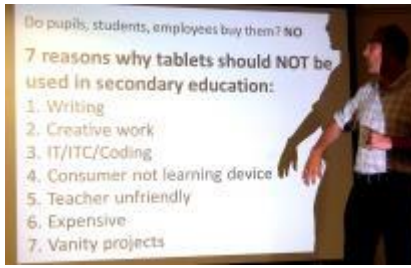
Readers can also become writers and submit their own work for publication in the ‘FunDza Fanz’ section. There is growing demand from aspirant writers to showcase their talent - much of which is written and delivered via mobile phones. Writers report how getting published boosts their self-confidence and improves their writing skills.

The platform encourages interaction: Readers can comment and provide feedback. In addition, FunDza engages with readers to encourage them to read more, to share with friends, and to grow the reading community.”

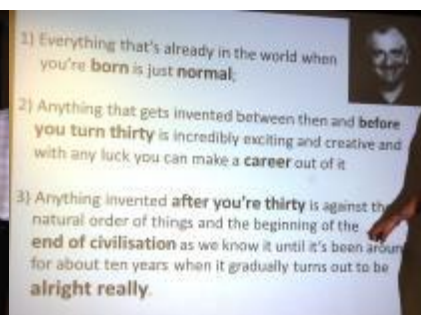
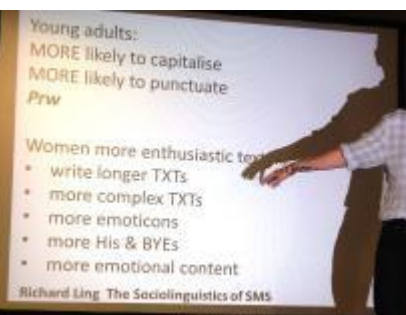
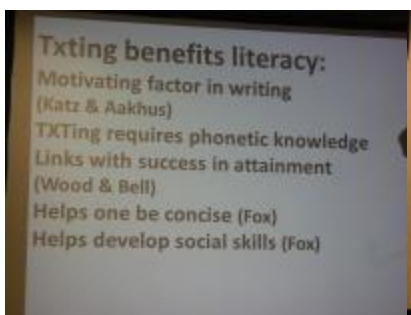


Donald Clark’s presentation seemed to have two titles, **“Mobile, Tablets, and Laptops: Not All Devices Are Equal in Literacy”** and **“From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg”** Here Donald was able to expand on his theme from the plenary but also to focus on literacy and to provide concrete evidence to support his and other research, even citing his own two sons as examples of teenagers and their preferences for technology use. It could be argued that experiences of two British boys growing up in a first world environment were not relevant to the African context but no doubt some aspects of their behaviour are universally applicable. Here are copies of the relevant slides:



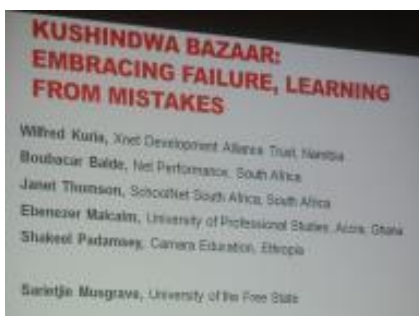


I particularly liked the way that Donald was able to not take himself too seriously and I really loved the quote from Douglas Adams which Donald seemed to be applying to himself (below right). His argument that texting among students actually promotes literacy is a laudable one that has gained a good deal of support in recent months.



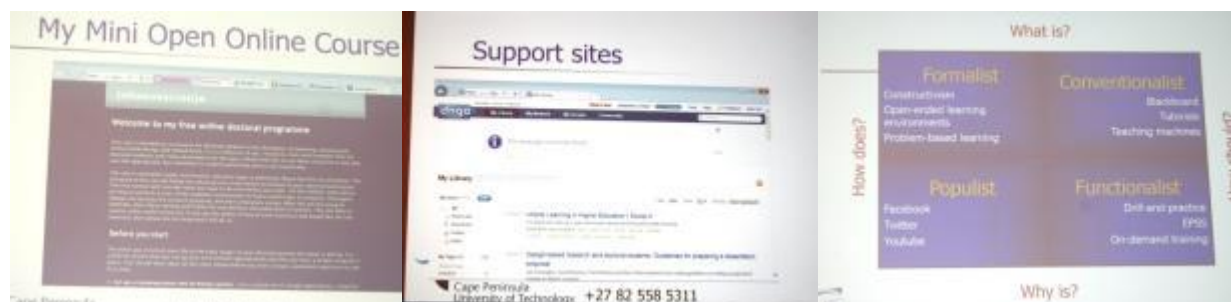
Final session - Day 2

The Kushindwa Bazaar: Embracing Failure, Learning from Mistakes. Saretjie Musgrave was the facilitator and as usual made the most brilliant job of sparking off ideas, reflecting, stimulating honest discussions and then pulling all the threads together.



Day 3 – plenary

Johannes Cronje from CPUT gave a humorous presentation on the final day plenary with the theme, **“Doing it for Free”** and certainly presented a range of tools, platforms and courses that are available at no cost.



The next speaker was the wise Professor Kwesi Kwaa Prah who is the Director of the Africa-wide Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS), based in South Africa. His address was entitled, ***The Language Factor in the Integration of ICTs in African Education, Training and Development***. Prof Prah epitomises the erudite anthropologist and proceeded to impress delegates with his scholarly knowledge of all African languages and peoples. The other interesting presentation in this plenary was from Mark Pilgrim of N Computing who tried to provide case studies of work that his company was doing around Africa. Unfortunately as SchoolNet is familiar with some of the schools and projects identified, he made a number of oversights and claims that were not quite accurate but overall one could tell that they were at least trying to make a positive impact.



Day 3 first session

Omashani and I both felt compelled to support Merryl from Meraka as she was presenting on the Cofimvaba initiative that is so close to our hearts. The session was entitled, **“Going to scale and going local - with Laptops, eReaders and Tablets.”**

Merryl was up first and made an excellent presentation entitled, **“Designing and implementing a large-scale e-textbook initiative in South Africa.”** She explained that the initiative is a collaboration between the Departments of Science and Technology, Basic Education and Rural Development and Land Reform. Their research is underway to test innovative technologies that directly support and

impact education and also on technology interventions in other domains that have an indirect effect on education. This holistic, systems-based approach would include a focus on a range of technologies and would involve the domains of ICT, Health, Nutrition, Water & Sanitation, renewable energy as well as teacher and learner support.

Merryl outlined the objectives of the intervention as being to:

- Design systemic and sustainable approaches to providing access to digital content by learners at poor and marginalized rural schools in South Africa;
- Design, develop, test and improve new and evolving educational technologies, devices, platforms and processes that support the access to digital content for rural school environments;
- Measure the effect of this project on the 21st century skills of learners; and
- Use the evidence from the research within this context to inform policy in an integrated and coherent manner.

The project targets 25 schools, their teachers and approximately 6 500 learners who will each receive an android tablet.



The next speaker was Nkubito Manzi Bakuramutsa, from the Rwanda Education Board who spoke about, ***“Creating an Information Society Through the Insertion of Technology in Primary Education”***. He outlined his government’s plans to roll out one laptop per child with the ultimate objective being to create a first world knowledge society.

Jay Ramnundlall spoke next – he was from PC Training & Business College in Durban, South Africa and was one of the sponsors of the e LA conference. His presentation primarily explained the activities of his organisation which were considerable. It was entitled, ***‘Mobile Learning: A Holistic African Solution’*** but in fact included a comprehensive account of their business model and some of the many projects that PC Training and Business College are rolling out. This included a higher education project that has so far provided 16 000 tablets, in 2012, to tertiary students and 7 000 in 2013 (Tarsus Onyx) with over R100 million rand being budgeted for this 3 year project.

An interesting additional speaker had been slotted into the programme, Bibhya Sharma from Fiji, who provided some cool maps and infographics while he explained the educational technology situation among the South Pacific Islands.



The final speaker was Chi Jin, from UNESCO based in China whose presentation, ***New Media and Women's Leadership: Pilot and Practices in China*** would have been far more engaging if she had not densely populated each slide with tiny bulleted text. The research tried to establish the difference in ICT usage between boys and girls in Africa and found that although the differences were diminishing, research must remain focused on gender with regard to ICT usage. The reason for this was that without specific inclusion of gender issues in ICT policies, the majority of rural women would be excluded from access. Here are some of the less dense text slides from her presentation – please enlarge to read the text if necessary:



Day 3 afternoon session

E-learning In Rural Schools: Highways, Biways and Potholes was the title of the afternoon session which comprised the following presenters:

Justin Munyaradzi Mupinda, ***Computers for Zimbabwean Schools***, Affordable and Appropriate Solutions for Transforming Education: A Case Study of Computers for Zimbabwean Schools.

Sarietjie Musgrave, University of the Free State, ***Daily, Interactive Lessons Between Schools in South Africa*** and

Aiman Badri, Ahfad University for Women, Sudan ***Rural eLearning Among Nomadic Children in Sudan, Challenges of Implementing a Self-Learning Approach.***

An additional presentation was made in this session by Samsung's Kea Modimeng on their Solar Powered Internet School, e-learning centre and Smart school. A real live version of the whole school solution was showcased with the bright blue well-equipped container being available through the conference in the car park.



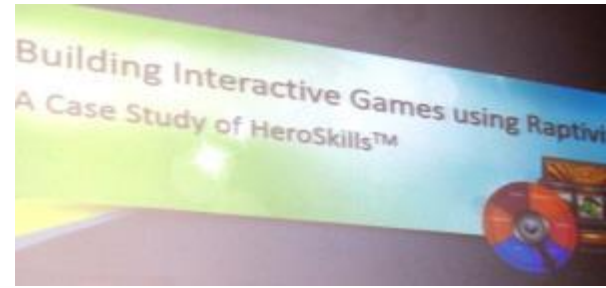
All the presenters outlined their respective case studies of current ICT-related activities in rural schooling environments. Speakers had been required to share how they had overcome barriers in challenging contexts, which they did. However, the barriers studied by the speaker from the University of Sudan surpassed all others in the extent of their extreme adversity, ranging from stories of children at war, child soldiers, young children engaged in manual labour, malnutrition and families torn apart by war.

Day 3 late afternoon session



The final session of the conference that we attended dealt with games for learning and social change. Each presenter raised issues around the neurological effects of gaming as well as the social and many other benefits. We attended this session because it was related to our Xbox Kinect initiative. The session was entitled ***Game On! Top Tips to Take Learning to the Next Level.*** Presentations in this session were Wouter J. Grove, University of the Western Cape, ***Competencies for Utilising Online Serious Games in Leadership Development;*** Shravan Kadvekar, Harbinger

Knowledge Products, India ***Building Interactive Games Using Raptivity: A Case Study of Hero-Skills***, Anne Githuku-Shongwe, AFROES Interactive Learning, South Africa, ***M-Powered to Lead! Re-Shaping the Mindsets of Young Africa through Gamified Interactive Learning***.



Each of these presentations was excellent in their own right and definitely confirmed our conviction that we must pursue our Xbox endeavours. The best quote from this session was that online learning through Learner Management Systems is designed so that learners can be bored in their own time. That indicates that this session was all about the tremendous intrinsic engagement when learners are involved in gaming.

Final event – conference debate

The grand finale to the conference took the form of a debate around this statement, “This ***house believes that sustainability is more important than innovation for education in Africa.***”

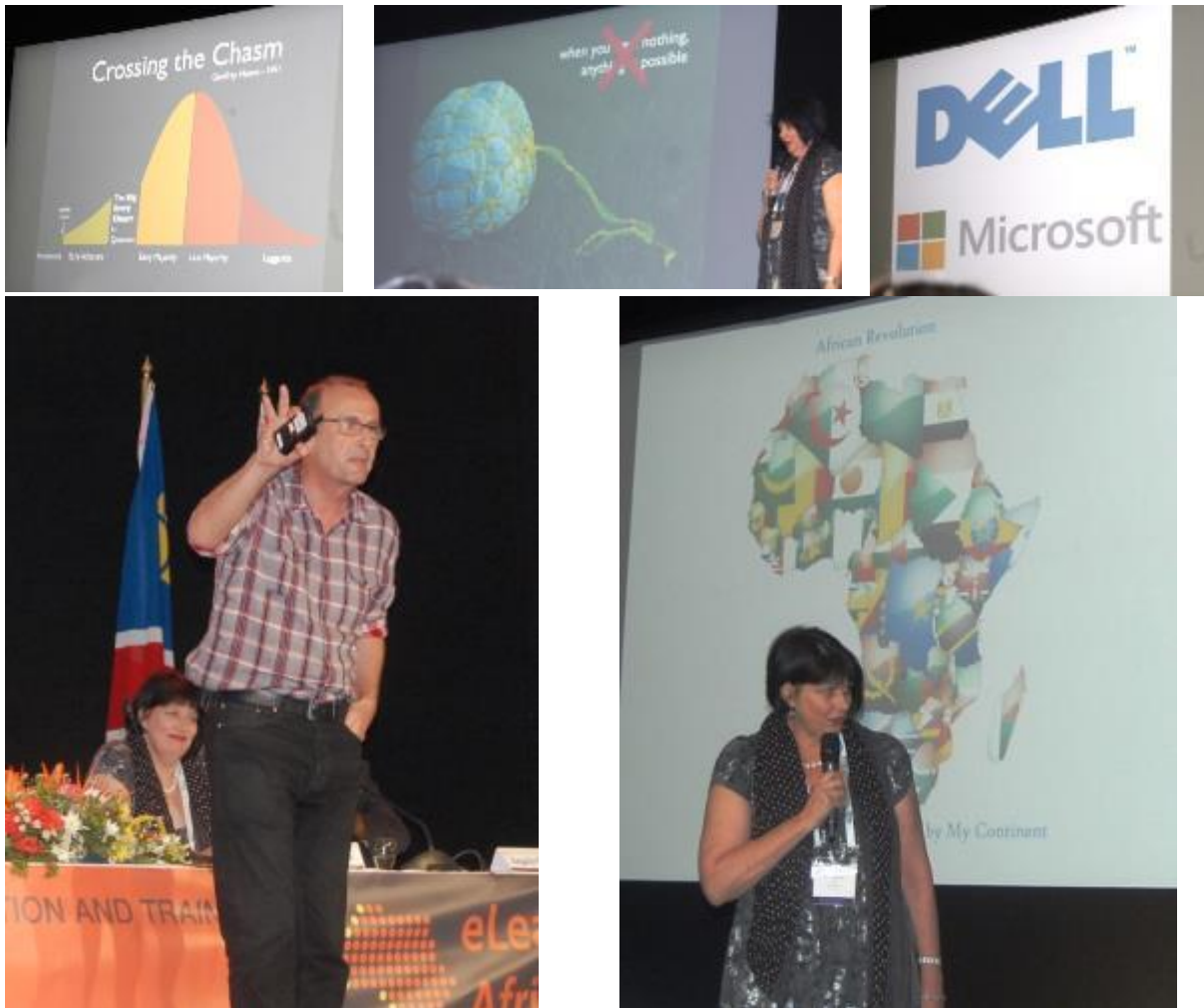


The contenders supporting the motion were Donald Clark and Dr Maggie Beukes-Amiss. Opposing the motion were Dr Adele Botha and Angelo Gitongo. The debate took place in a very light-hearted atmosphere with the body of delegates entering into the spirit by asking clever and thought-provoking questions and in the main taking one side or the other in a very voluble and humour-filled debate.

Donald’s presentation followed the same vein as that of his previous pronouncements but this time was more explicitly anti-conglomerates, naming Microsoft and Dell directly but with more vigour and humour. He used an excellent analogy of a tortoise versus a mosquito for sustainable projects versus unsustainable flash in the pan type projects. This time he had a quite serious period where

he cited details of research from a number of studies that had found serious faults with Sugata Mitra's research. His slide on the chasm of despair holds true for a number of learning experiences so overall nobody could find fault with any of his assertions.

Despite the sensible arguments Donald put forward and his excellent delivery, Adele Botha outshone everyone else with her superbly dynamic and expertly comic presentation.



The closing plenary followed this debate. Delegates were treated to an entertaining choir and a stunning soloist, Ms Jolene Louw, who brought the house down.

Overall this was definitely the best eLA so far, without a doubt. My only criticism would be that there were far too many worthwhile sessions that meant one could not attend all of them.

Janet Thomson
Omashani Naidoo

June 2013