ICT in the Classroom Conference
St Mary's DSG, Kloof
1-3 July 2015

Teachers Thrilled with Learning Technologies Conference

Over 500 teachers from across South Africa gathered at St Mary's DSG in Kloof for the ICT in the Classroom conference held between 1 and 3 July 2015. SchoolNet South Africa has been hosting this ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) conference for educators, provincial and national educational department officials, sponsors, as well as representatives from other development and training organizations, since the 1990s. The objective of the conference is to share ideas around best practice and teaching methods using technologies in and beyond the classroom.

The Opening

Shafika Isaacs, the former Director for SchoolNet Africa made a superb job of introducing each of the guest speakers at the conference. She drew attention to the most critical educational needs of the country and congratulated the delegates (especially the 150 from the North West Province) for sacrificing their holidays to attend this valuable conference.

The principal of St Mary's Diocesan School for Girls, Mr Jonathan Manley, welcomed delegate teachers to the school and made it apparent that he was a hands-on principal who was fully supportive of ICT in the Classroom and throughout the school. He had recently moved St Mary's administration to a Google Classroom platform.

The conference was due to be opened by the Deputy Minister of Education who has attended a number of the SchoolNet conferences in previous years, but at the 11th hour he was forced to send a representative to read his opening address. This was a most appropriate replacement, the national department's Director for Curriculum Innovation, Mr Phil Mnisi, who delivered the DM's message and also made some of his own observations about the conference and the status of ICT in education in South Africa.

Ms T. Dlamini, KwaZulu-Natal's Department of Basic Education, Chief Director Curriculum gave a well-received address to welcome teachers to the province of KZN. She was also well-informed about the impact of learning technologies across the curriculum and even made mention of the Xbox research project being conducted in the KZN Midlands and the Western Cape.

The opening keynote from Stuart Ball was inspirational as well as humorous. Entitled, "The most dangerous software in the world" it hit just the right note with the delegates and reminded everyone that the true value of technology in education is not what tools and software you have – but instead what you manage to do with what you have. As a former teacher Stuart was very popular with the delegates. He is also a former winner of Microsoft's Innovative Teacher Award and he attended the first ever Innovative Education Forum in Seattle. Stuart challenged how we think about everyday devices, software and apps. He was the person responsible for Kodu winning a BETT award in 2014.

Stuart worked non-stop at this conference so we are very grateful to Microsoft for sponsoring his time with us. Not only did he make the opening keynote presentation but he also ran workshops on Kodu, Sway and Office Mix and did so during almost every one of the parallel sessions. We heard that by Day 2 Stuart had teamed up his daughter's school in Wales with a school in Limpopo and really wants to stay connected to the South African teachers he met at the conference.

Themes

Over the three day conference, presenters and teachers were focused on how to find the best ways to prepare today's learners for tomorrow's challenges. The conference themes were:

- Connecting classrooms - learning activities that use technology to connect classrooms beyond the school's boundaries.

- Learning with tablets - learning activities that are unique to the use of tablets in and beyond the classroom.

- Learning with mobile phones - learning activities that are unique to the use of mobile phones in and beyond the classroom.

- Innovative teaching - any teaching with technology that the presenter feels is innovative.

- ICT leadership in the school - ways in which the presenter has shown successful leadership of ICT integration activities in school generally.

- Curriculum delivery through digital content - how the inclusion of digital content in the curriculum has enhanced teaching and student learning.

Parallel Sessions

At the ICT in the Classroom Conference, parallel sessions were run in ten different venues over the three days in order to cater for the different needs, interests and IT skills levels of the more than 500 delegates and to ensure that each of the conference themes were covered.

The EMIS Section of the national Department of Basic Education, ran a session on 'Making Data work for you' which proved to be so popular on Day 1 that it was repeated on day 2. The session on 'Introducing the UkuFUNda Teacher Communicator App" was also well attended and equipped teachers with the skills to use this mobile app to support communication and knowledge sharing.

The Learning Gains through Play project held three sessions on Day 2. One concerned the approach of the research being conducted around early literacy, the second explored the impact that the Xbox Kinect had already had on Grades 1 and R Physical Education and the third workshop session shared Tablet Apps for CAPS that had been used in the project so far.

A number of the current Microsoft Innovative Educator Experts attended the ICT in the Classroom and they, along with Microsoft's Education Training Manager Victor Ngobeni, ran a number of sessions focused on using Microsoft tools to enhance education. Warren Sparrow covered Office Mix, Sway and Office 365; Phuti Ragophala did a session on Sway; Linda Foulkes showcased ChronoZoom and One Note; Mabore Lekalakala did a session on Teaching with Technology and Mokhudu Machaba covered 21st Century Learning.

Google's educational tools were also showcased in a number of sessions. Sean Hampton-Cole showed how to "Use Google to make kids smarter", Omashani Naidoo and Mathapelo Sehume showcased "Google Educator Groups", Saul Pila presented on "Google Mapmaker" and Kevin Sherman demonstrated how it is possible to "Add culture to your classroom… digitally".

A number of the sessions were hands-on computer lab sessions where teachers had an opportunity to try out software that they can potentially use in the classroom. These computer lab sessions included Claire Dean's session on using Oracle's Alice to introduce primary school learners to programming; Justice Tyobeka who showcased the Vodacom eSchool resources; and Mark Horner who demonstrated how Siyavula can be used for the effective implementation of practice for mastery.

In other sessions, teachers were asked to "Bring Your Own Device" and were then encouraged to use it to try out the tools being demonstrated by the session leader. Sean Hampton-Cole shared some ideas for using gamification in the classroom; Ron Beyers demonstrated how virtual Lego makes an effective teaching tool, Peter de Lisle proved that you don't need 3D dinosaurs to teach well; and Elaine Smallbones showed how "Explain Everything" can enhance a lesson.

A number of sessions were devoted to teachers sharing their experiences of using ICT in their contexts so that others could learn from their successes and challenges. On Day 3, teachers and subject advisers from the ICT4RED project in Cofimvaba took a two hour session to explain how their role as change leaders had not only impacted positively on the success of the ICT4RED intervention but also how it had changed their lives and their outlook on education and on their district. This was a very popular session with the lecture hall full to capacity. The Cofimvaba team did not disappoint.

Similarly Mary Lou Berndt spoke on the Stirling Primary experience of a 1:1 iPad deployment; and Hawa Dawood Patel talked about how she had had to overcome resistance to digital change experienced with her colleagues.

A number of exhibitors took up the opportunity of running a demonstration slot in the programme to showcase their products and services to teachers who were interested in learning more about these. These sessions were well received as it meant that those who were interested in something could see it in action or try it out themselves.

It is impossible to list all of the more than 70 presenters who shared their skills and expertise at the conference but we are grateful to all of them for their contribution to a comprehensive programme that stayed true to the conference objective of sharing practical strategies for integrating technology into the classroom to promote better teaching and learning.

Day 2 Keynote

Day two's keynote speaker was Holly Clark who is a technology and innovation specialist from San Diego, California. She is a Google Certified Teacher and holds an MA in Technology in Education from Columbia University. Holly delivered a powerful presentation underlining how quickly cultures and technologies change and how important it is for us to remain in tune with our learners. Holly's lively presentation made excellent use of contemporary examples and short video clips to illustrate

the points she was making as well as anecdotes from Holly's own experiences as a teacher that

resonated with teachers in the audience. In addition to presenting this keynote address, Holly also ran workshop sessions on "The Google Infused Classroom" and "The iPad and Google: A friendship made in the Clouds"

Microsoft Cocktail Function

The Microsoft Cocktail Function which took place on the second day (2 July 2015) was a conference highlight. It began with Stuart Ball talking about Minecraft – but in a context of how it is important for teachers to use technology in a way that is relevant and meaningful to children. This presentation alerted teachers to the reality that their children were learning without them and that teenagers are particularly obsessed with Minecraft. It was the perfect presentation for the cocktail evening and highly entertaining. Megan Rademeyer then gave a brief overview of the Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert process and encouraged teachers to apply. Thereafter delegates celebrated at the Microsoft Cocktail Party with refreshments, music and networking, culminating in a steadfast group of the attendees dancing the night away.

Conference Social Media #SchoolNet2015

As Twitter is consistently ranked as the number one professional development tool for teachers, an effort was made to get conference delegates to make active use of this social media tool and to include the hashtag #SchoolNet2015 in their tweets. SchoolNet's Megan Rademeyer ran a 'Twitter for Beginners' session as a pre-conference workshop to assist those who were new to Twitter with the basics of this tool. The unexpectedly high volume of teachers wishing to attend meant the session was oversubscribed before the start resulting in it having to be repeated on Day 2. The Twitter stream was shown during some conference plenaries and some active back-channel engagement took place.

The tweets from the conference have been captured in the following Storify Tweet Collections:

- [Tweet collection from day 1](#)
- [Tweet collection from day 2](#)
- [Tweet collection from day 3](#)

The following posts on the SchoolNet SA blog provide a summary of each day's events. A number of the conference presentations have also been turned into blog posts so that they can be shared more widely with SchoolNet members.

- [SchoolNet Conference Day 1 (1 July 2015)](#)
- [SchoolNet Conference Day 2 (2 July 2015)](#)
- [SchoolNet Conference Day 3 (3 July 2015)](#)

Highlights

Whilst most delegates will agree that the three keynote presentations were the highlights of the conference, some other activities added to the fun of the event. The first half of Day 1 was preoccupied with registration and photo booth experiences. This allowed teachers to get into the spirit of the event by taking "selfies". At the end of Day 1, project-sponsored teachers and guest speakers were treated to an evening at Moyo's restaurant on Durban beach front. This enjoyable evening provided an opportunity for delegates to network with one another and to have one-on-one conversations with the keynote speakers. The TeachMeet session held on the third day gave teachers an opportunity to present a brief five minute overview of a tool they had used or a project they had run in their classroom. A countdown timer and random name picker kept this session moving along swiftly so that those in the audience could see ten short sessions before voting for their favourite.

Closing Plenary

The closing plenary keynote was given by Shelley Shott who is well known to South Africans because she was the first Intel facilitator to visit us back in 2003 and has been a frequent presenter at our conferences ever since. As Intel's Global Education Specialist, Shelley now drives the development and strategy for basic education around the world. A former middle school teacher and current university lecturer, Shelley understands the impact that quality teacher professional development can have. Shelley's keynote was well received by delegates who had remained in force even though it was now late on the final day of the conference.

Prizes and Thanks

At the end of the conference Janet Thomson from SchoolNet called the organising teams to the stage to thank them for the effort put in to making the conference such a success. First to be thanked was

St Mary's for hosting the conference; an orchid was awarded as a token of appreciation to Sheryl Gordon. The caterers were thanked for doing a wonderful job of feeding well over 500 people for each meal on each day. Mustek was thanked for donating a laptop lab for the duration of the conference. All the sponsors were then thanked as well as those exhibitors who had donated prizes. Delegates were reminded that they had all qualified for a 10% discount for the Google Summits coming up in Cape Town in October.

The following prizes were the awarded to delegates:

- 3 delegates received mini Shox speakers for their answers to the question "What are you going to do differently as a result of attending this conference?"
- Samsung digital cameras and Nokia Lumia phones were awarded to the group who had done the best presentation at the Adobe Youth Voices session
- 2 Iconia Windows 8 devices were awarded to members of the Learning Gains through Play SMT members
- 1 Iconia Windows 8 device was awarded to the teacher who received the most votes for her TeachMeet presentation
- 1 Iconia Windows 8 device was awarded to the "Best Tweeter" of the conference via a random draw
- 4 Google Gadget packs and 1 Google Power Packs were awarded to teachers who had visited all exhibits and submitted their stamped sheet into the lucky draw
- 4 Google Gadget packs and 1 Google Power Packs were awarded to teachers who answered questions about the exhibitors and who entered the lucky draw
- 2 Dell 8" Tablets (32GB) were awarded to lucky delegates via a random draw
- Kolok Education presented a laser printer to a delegate who had entered the competition they had run at their stand

The closing plenary finished with delegates being requested to look under their seats, Oprah-style where they discovered a range of gifts such as Oracle sports kit bags, power packs, computer gadget packs and Google Goodie bags.

Sponsors

The main sponsors for the conference were the Department of Basic Education, Microsoft and Intel Corporation who have been the main sponsors for this conference over the past twelve years. We were also grateful to Mustek for the loan of 50 laptop computers which allowed us to set up a large temporary computer lab and Kolok Education who sponsored a laser printer as a prize. Telkom Foundation and Coza Cares Foundation each sponsored delegates to attend the conference and Oracle Academy and GEG South Africa contributed prizes.

A number of companies exhibited products as services related to educational technology at the conference. Their displays exposed teachers to a range of products that are available for enhancing teaching through the use of ICT as well as an opportunity to speak to representatives from the various companies. We are grateful to the following companies who were part of their exhibition: Department of Basic Education, Mustek, Extramarks, Edit Microsystems, Via Afrika, NetLearn, Macmillan Education, Computers4Kids, 2Simple, Kolok Education, Sinotec, My Cyberwall, Pearson and IT School Innovation.

SchoolNet SA is grateful for the contributions made by all of the sponsors and exhibitors as their funding makes it possible to keep the conference affordable to delegates from schools.

Conclusion

We believe the 2015 ICT in the Classroom conference was a success and that delegates benefited from the sessions that they attended and enjoyed the networking and camaraderie of meeting up with other teachers. Whilst there is always room for improvement and tweaks to the programme that can be considered, the following comments from some of the delegates indicate that the conference was well received and that many teachers, presenters and exhibitors would attend another SchoolNet SA event.

"I have been exhibiting at the SchoolNet ICT in Education conference over the last few days. Congratulations to your team on a well-run event."

"I enjoyed the Key Note presentations by exceptional presenters. I also enjoyed the break-up sessions where you could learn new skills"

"Really Good international presenters (Shelley Shott e.g.). I enjoyed meeting people. I enjoyed working with people who needed help and who participated 100%."

"Keynote speakers motivated me a lot."

"I enjoyed the opportunity to attend both Google and Microsoft presentations and hear from teachers using these products the pros and cons. Thus the opportunity to compare products."

Photos are posted in 3 albums on the SchoolNet website www.schoolnet.org.za under >Gallery and videos are available on the SchoolNet YouTube channel.