



## SchoolNet SA nominated for National Science and Technology Award

Today's research... tomorrow's innovation

SchoolNet South Africa will be attending the prestigious National Science and Technology (NSTF) Awards ceremony on the evening of June 29<sup>th</sup> 2017 as a nominee for the esteemed NGO Award.

The National Science and Technology Forum Awards provide national recognition to a range of contributors. SchoolNet South Africa has been nominated in the category of Non-governmental organisations (NGO) for an outstanding contribution to science, engineering and technology (SET) and innovation in South Africa over the last five to ten years. The Awards are intended to recognise and celebrate individuals and organisations for outstanding contributions in science, engineering, technology (SET) and innovation. They are awarded for a range of purposes including the achievement of sustainable economic growth for South Africa, improving the quality of life of its people, promoting excellence among SET and innovation practitioners and in research and development.

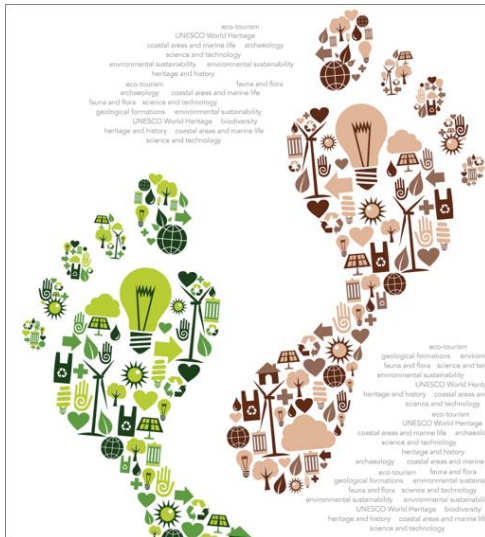
One of the strategic objectives of the NSTF is:

*To promote and celebrate excellence in research, SET capacity building and education, SET communication, innovation and SET activities that can have a positive impact on society and improve people's lives, and SET activities that contribute to sustainable development*

The NSTF has been celebrating achievements in the field of Science and Technology since 1998 and acknowledges organisations and individuals at an annual Gala Dinner where the awards are made by the Minister of Science and Technology who is the Patron of the event. The Awards Gala Dinner also aims to raise funds for the NSTF's non-profit activities and projects.

At last year's awards, the Minister of Science and Technology, Naledi Pandour explained how technological innovation, infrastructure creation and research affect economic growth, without which development would be stunted and poverty alleviation would remain a dream in South Africa. She added that, "*Our success hinges largely on our ability to develop new products, technologies and services through research and innovation...*"

This year's Awards will celebrate **Sustainable Tourism for Development**, as the theme and in recognition of the 2017 International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development (#IY2017) declared by the United Nations. The importance of science, technology and innovation in creating a sustainable tourism industry will be a highlight of this year's awards ceremony.



SchoolNet South Africa’s contribution falls under the umbrella of “Technology transfer activities associated with research and experimental development and contributing to the dissemination and application of scientific and technical knowledge.” This nomination relates to one of SchoolNet’s projects called, Learning Gains through Play (LGP) which was funded by the D G Murray Trust.

Regular readers of our Newsletter will be familiar with this project which focuses on the development and practice of foundational literacies in Grades R and 1. Intel tablets loaded with carefully selected apps and games were integrated into learning activities to stimulate and enhance fine-motor skills and to develop and practise visual literacy and numeracy

skills. Xbox Kinect games have engaged learning through play, developed gross-motor and have provided opportunities to reinforce visual and number literacies.

Teachers have been excited to discover that digital games have been able to assist them to achieve the outcomes listed in the national curriculum (CAPS). Teachers have used apps and games to identify teachable moments and stealth learning opportunities which have triggered learners' imaginations and targeted specific literacies. Our key finding currently is that Oral English skills can be improved simply by teachers engaging learners with the tablet apps and video games which use English. The learning gains in English acquisition are happening at a crucial time, immediately before entry into Grade 4 when the language of learning and teaching suddenly changes from mother tongue to become English. Participant teachers have expressly noticed that their learners are far more prepared for entry to Grade 4.

The LGP project has impacted positively on project schools, teachers and learners as well as the district officials involved in the programme. Not only have the teachers been supported throughout their journeys with the integration of technology into their teaching but they have engaged with the national curriculum in order to more fully understand its terminology and its value. New teaching strategies have been readily adopted and regularly used in classrooms. In addition to the findings around English acquisition there has been an emphasis on the value of motor coordination and its relationship to improved cognitive development. The evaluation of LGP has been mapping improved learner performance in project schools to those teachers who have been making extensive use of the Xbox Kinect, aiming to make a direct correlation to cognitive skills such as sequencing, perception, laterality and spatial reasoning.

SchoolNet SA has been fortunate to secure an extension of funding from the D G Murray Trust in order to disseminate findings from the project. The DG Murray Trust firmly believes that a communications campaign will influence government messaging related to the effective use of learning technologies and should lead to an increase in the strategic use of play in primary schools for deeper learning.

Wish us luck!