

Deputy Minister defines national plans for digital learning

Before opening the SchoolNet SA 2017 ICT in the Classroom Conference, the national Deputy Minister, Mr. Enver Surty, sat down with Janet Thomson, Executive Director for SchoolNet South Africa to discuss the DBE's approach to digital learning.



The Deputy Minister thanked Thomson for “the enormous contribution by SchoolNet in the ICT domain” asserting that “ICT is becoming more critical and central to the facilitation of teaching and learning”. Surty then demonstrated the department of education’s holistic approach to digital learning by describing the various streams of the Operation Phakisa framework as well as government’s efforts to digitise content effectively and in an interactive format.

In relation to the vital teacher development component of Operation Phakisa, Surty noted the vital role of education centres, stressing that ICT was central to the future development of educators. He pointed out that *The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa*, specifies the Provincial and District teacher development institutes and education resource centres and their contribution towards teacher development in the future.

The DM revealed his knowledge of the value of the type of professional development that SchoolNet has always advocated, by noting that he was not referring to the computer literacy of teachers but rather to the higher, innovative levels of teaching, integrating ICT “into the curriculum”.

The Deputy Minister discussed the strides that the national department has been making around school administration and the use of data-driven decision making. In particular he noted the Learner Unit Record Information and Tracking System (LURITS) which aims to collect data for each learner in South Africa. Interestingly and crucially, the DM mentioned the ability of LURITS to track the impact of teacher absence on learning and learner achievement.

The Deputy Minister pointed out that the department had listened to stakeholders and experts in the field whose interventions had shown the positive impact of ICT on learning. When asked what support would be provided to provinces that were not making progress in crafting plans for implementation, the DM outlined the digital resources that were available to all provinces and said that his department was fully aware of challenges facing the so-called “Cinderella” provinces. Surty pointed out that whilst Western Cape was the most effective out of all provinces at monitoring the use of the interactive workbooks other provinces had made notable strides including the Free State which had broken “the ceiling of 90% matric pass rate”. The Deputy Minister made reference to two previous SchoolNet Conferences that he had opened in the Free State province during the previous 10 years.

Thomson asked how the new Professional Development Framework for Digital Learning, being disseminated by the national DBE, was going to benefit teachers, bearing in mind that teachers seldom access policy documents. The Deputy Minister was quick to acknowledge that both teachers and learners must have access to both technologies and connectivity. He went on to explain the impetus for the professional development framework and the need to standardise and reach a common understanding of minimum requirements, in teacher competences for digital learning, particularly pedagogical competences, across all interventions and initiatives in all provinces. This would include minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications.

The Deputy Minister responded to the final question which was about the SACE (the South African Council for Educators) process in continuing professional development and the awarding of professional development points by indicating that SACE was independent from the DBE. However he proceeded to clarify the need for service providers for professional development such as SchoolNet and the reliance on corporates such as Microsoft and Intel to support teachers and provide opportunities for their further professional development.

The full interview is available on the SchoolNet YouTube Channel:

<https://youtu.be/uK9xWnkAZk>

The Deputy Minister then walked through the conference exhibition area and proceeded to the Opening Plenary in the main hall of Brescia House school. Speaking from the heart, rather than from the script, the Deputy Minister of Education, delivered a most engaging and

informative opening address. Delegates felt they were being treated to a real-life insight into the national department's thinking. Not only was the address directed at teachers and the most critical issues facing them currently but it also outlined the forward planning and wider policy development around digital learning for South Africa. The Deputy Minister included a tribute to Oliver Tambo and conveyed a broader message for our overseas presenters who were most appreciative of the national and continental context provided by the Deputy Minister. The tweet from Ollie Bray from Scotland, who was at the conference to present various sessions, provides some sense of the impact of the Deputy Minister's words,

“@olliebray Oct 5 impressed by @DBE_SA Dep Min Enver Surty speaking at #SNSA17 about vision & values without the political rhetoric that we often get in UK.”

The full opening plenary address by the Deputy Minister can be viewed here: <https://www.facebook.com/maggieverster/videos/10155929274194994/> It was live-streamed via Facebook by Maggie Verster, the popular Maths Education and social media guru. A comprehensive album of conference photos is available from this link <https://photos.app.goo.gl/k0ggFcOdEEmspvoF2>

