

## Working together to integrate technology into schools

By Rodwyn Grewan, CEO SchoolNet SA

Welcome to the second issue of *netnews* the newsletter that aims to keep you up to date with the Thintana i-Learn Project. The Project is now well and truly under way, but, as many of you are aware, it has not all been plain sailing. There have been delays to the Project as well as some technical challenges to overcome. This has meant that in some areas, teacher training has been delayed. But we are confident that most of these problems have been sorted out and teacher training is set to begin again in earnest early this year. Once teacher training is completed, the main challenge facing us will be to ensure that teachers start to integrate ICTs into the curriculum successfully. This is crucial if the Project is to become sustainable.

I salute each and every person involved in the Project – teachers, trainers and mentors. We are working towards an ambitious goal and together I think we can get there. Remember that Schoolnet is here to support you. Please contact us, question us and challenge us as we work together to integrate technology into our schools.

## Winning websites



*Top team: Gold medal winners at the 2001 ThinkQuest SA web design competition from left, Prosper Mthembu from Mpophomeni High School, KZN; Mduzuzi Magagula, Rossburgh High School, KZN and Marc Katzwinkel from Hilton College, KZN with Deputy Minister for Education Mosibudi Mangena (second from left) at the special award ceremony in November last year. The competition is sponsored in South Africa by the Telkom Foundation and implemented by Schoolnet SA. It recognises the efforts of learners between the ages of 12 to 18 from diverse backgrounds in creating educational websites. A record number of websites were entered for the 2001 ThinkQuest SA with Judge Co-ordinator Gerald Roos noting an improvement in the general standard and educational quality of the web designs. Prizes totalling R50 000 were awarded to the Gold, Silver, Bronze and special mention team members, and their schools. See page 2 for details of winners.*



## Excitement over project grows

By Joe Rajaratnam, Co-chairman Thintana Corporate Citizenship Committee

In early December I was fortunate enough to attend the launch of a new computer lab at one of the Thintana i-Learn schools in Kimberley in the Northern Cape. The excitement at the event was tangible – even the MEC for education turned out for the occasion.

And this excitement is not isolated. The feedback we are receiving from teachers and pupils taking part in the i-Learn Project is that everywhere people are excited about their new computer classrooms. We at Thintana are also very excited with this Project and how and what can be done to help South Africans have access to computers and the information world.

But as the excitement of the new dies down – we need to turn our attention towards programmes to be run and the sustainability of the computer laboratory. How can we make sure that these precious computer resources are properly managed and don't fall into disrepair? This will be one of our main focuses this year. Let's work together to get the most out of your computers. Thintana wishes you all the best for an exciting 2002.

## From the front line...

We are now several months into the i-Learn Project and all schools have their new equipment installed. A large number have also undergone training and are already putting their machines to good use. *Netnews* spoke to some teachers to find out how they were getting on with their new-found skills and equipment.

"At first I had little knowledge about word processing. I have never produced any document before. I can now produce anything I want. Last month we were having graduation ceremony for Grade 3 and Grade 4. The certificates given to them were produced by us!"

– Jabulisiwe Mtshali, KZN

"Module 1 has motivated us all to promote a learner centred environment in the classroom and our computer skills have been developed and for some of us improved. Our Grade 4 learners are computer literate now!"

– Buhle Ngubane, KZN

"Although the daily workload was heavy I made time to do the assignments. I was looking forward to the next assignment, because each assignment was relevant to the work we do in education. It was really a learning experience and I enjoyed it and that helped me to cope. I feel motivated and inspired and this was made possible through this course."

– Shirley de Jager, Northern Cape



"I was impressed to know that I can make a link with people outside my Province through computers. During the holiday an educator will visit me from the Northern Cape. All this was due to the modules we were doing together."

– Sweetname Nkabinde, KZN

"I knew *nothing* about PCs a few months ago, and was absolutely terrified when we met for the six-hour 'introductory training session' in August. I had never even typed before. I did not think that I would *or* could cope at my tender age of two months short of 60 years, yet here I am, experimenting on and 'playing around' with the keyboard in the knowledge that I'll not damage the machine in any way!"

– Joy Redlinhuys, Western Cape

"My mentor (Rik) was a very supportive person. He always helped me when I experienced some problems and encouraged me to go on with what I was doing. He is a special person, always willing to help. I was thinking of giving up but my mentor always encouraged me to go for it."

– Phelelile Xulu, KZN

## Behind the screens at the Educators' network

The Educators' Network, SchoolNet's e-learning system, works hard behind the scenes to ensure that the i-Learn Project runs smoothly. The system relies heavily on modern technologies to operate effectively including extensive use of email, a database, and a website.

**Email** is used to enable educators to communicate with each other and their mentor through email groups.

A **database** is used to keep track of which educators have registered, which modules they are engaged with, and within each module, which activities have been completed. The database also keeps track of email messages. This allows SchoolNet to keep tabs on how actively educators are participating in the training programme, and can also work as an early warning system to detect and solve any technical problems that may crop up.

The Educators' Network **website** (<http://edn.schoolnet.org.za>) is where all the action takes place online. The website is used for:

- Registering your details to participate in the Educators' Network. When you fill out the registration form for the first time, you are allocated a login name and password, which you can use to log onto the website later on.
- Selecting a module to study.
- Completing a course assessment and evaluation form at the end of the module.

You can also use the website to change your registered email address, or even add a second address if you have email at home, and want to complete and submit activities when not at school.

### Need to repeat a module?

As part of the Thinana i-Learn project, teachers have to complete two training modules. If for some reason you are unable to complete a module and would like to repeat it, you will need to arrange this with Schoolnet.

In general, modules can only be repeated if there is a genuine reason for failing to complete them first time around such as:

- a technical failure or stolen equipment;
- extenuating personal reasons including: ill health, bereavement, and/or transfer to another school.

Lack of access to the computer room because of over-control or poor scheduling or failure to pay telephone bills and organisational reasons such as exam-related work pressure or staff disputes, are not good enough reasons.

If you are having any problems completing a module and want to know if you will be eligible to repeat it later, please contact Janet Thomson on [janet@schoolnet.org.za](mailto:janet@schoolnet.org.za) for more information.

### Getting ready for pre-introductory training

Introductory training courses will not be scheduled unless teachers and venues have been fully prepared. To get yourselves ready please ensure that:

- Names of teachers have been entered on the school computer network.
- Teachers have registered for the project via the website.
- Teachers have confirmed that email and internet are working.

## Establishing online communities of teachers and learners in South Africa

# Putting our (virtual) heads together

By Gerald Roos, Educational ICT Consultant



**Do you find that you cannot wait to get back to your computer to see what the rest of your group has to say about the latest stage of your learning on the Thinana i-Learn Project? If so, you already know how powerful learning in a group – or community – can be.**

The evidence is strong that a community of learners – encompassing both educators and learners – provides a very powerful and effective learning experience. It is for this reason that one of the main strategies of the i-Learn Project is to create such learning communities.

To do this, the Project has to overcome one major difficulty. The Project participants are scattered all over South Africa – many in rural and disadvantaged areas characterised by immobility and a poor resource base for professional development. In the past, initiatives to develop teachers in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) across such areas have left them unsupported once initial training has been completed.

SchoolNet's strategy in the i-Learn Project breaks the paradigm by building communities of learners as a core activity in its training programme. To overcome the geographical obstacles, the Project makes use of technologies such as the email and internet to introduce teachers and learners to the power of collaboration and the learning experience that a community provides – online.

*The evidence is strong that a community of learners provides a very powerful and effective learning experience*

But how is such an online community created? Within 24 hours of introductory training, participating teachers are put into groups of about 10-15 educators from around the country and allocated an e-mentor. This group then proceeds to work on the training materials over a 5-6 week period, communicating via email and the internet. An important

part of most activities is participating in online (email) discussion with the group.

Learning in such a way provides teachers with the opportunity to:

- Reflect, or think about their own teaching and learning;
- Experience different learning opportunities;
- Invent and share ideas;
- Share problems and their possible solutions;
- Share resources.

Using the internet means that the learning community does not have to be in the same place at the same time. Online learning communities provide us with valuable new opportunities to link educators from all over the country, giving them the opportunity to meet and support each other across cultural boundaries.

This article is an edited version of a short paper that was presented at the Barcelona Symposium on learning communities in October 2001. The full paper can be found online at: [www.schoolnet.org.za/edict/impact/forum2004-1.htm](http://www.schoolnet.org.za/edict/impact/forum2004-1.htm).



*Quest for excellence: Deputy Minister for Education Mosibudi Mangena was a guest speaker at the 2001 ThinkQuest competition.*

## ThinkQuest winners 2001

### Gold : Where the River Runs:

<http://library.thinkquest.org/C0124721/>  
Marc Katzwinkel from Hilton College, KZN. Prosper Mthembu from Mpophomeni High School, KZN. Mduduzi Magagula, Rosburgh High School, KZN.

### Silver: Whales and Whale spotting:

<http://library.thinkquest.org/C0124382/>  
Poul Vendel from Penryn College, Mpumulanga and Bennie Joubert from Penryn College, Mpumulanga.

### Bronze: Healing the Nation 2001:

<http://library.thinkquest.org/C0123265/>  
Guido Penzhorn from Hilton College, KZN. Lunga Ngubane from Mpophomeni High School, KZN and Yvonne Maingey from Rusinga School, Kenya.

### Special mentions:

**Water Hyacinth:** Sandi Barrett and

Asmaa Mohamed from Greenfield Girls' Primary School and Jason Jason, Jurie Hayes Primary School.

**The Drug Explosion:** Siseko Sodlaka, Masiyile School and Lulama Kene, Uxolo High in the Western Cape.

**Child Abuse:** Zola Sodlaka, Masiyile School and Tembisa Nozombliile, Yomelela Public Primary School, Western Cape.

ThinkQuest is a global network that is dedicated to exploring youth-centred learning on the internet. As part of the competition young people have to work together in teams, use the internet to research a topic and publish their research as an educational website. **For more information and to find out how to enter the 2002 ThinkQuest SA go to [www.thinkquest.org.za](http://www.thinkquest.org.za).**



## makes the connections

The Thintana i-Learn project is about more than providing disadvantaged schools throughout South Africa with computers. The key to this project is that the computers are also networked. This means they can talk to each other and, most importantly, connect to the world wide web – opening up worlds of opportunity that until now have been off limits to educators and learners at participating schools.

Helping to make these all-important connections is US-based networking company 3Com. 3Com has donated almost US\$1-million to the i-Learn project in the form of vital networking equipment, network interface cards and modems.

Founded in 1979, 3Com is a pioneer in the computer networking industry and is one of the top two network providers in the world today. Its heritage is in providing robust networking solutions that are functionally rich, cost-effective and simple to use. In essence, it simplifies how people connect to information and services through easy-to-use connectivity products and solutions. The company also provides access infrastructures and IP service

platforms for network service providers.

But what leads a networking giant like 3Com to sponsoring something like the Thintana i-Learn Project?

"This is our way of giving something back to the community," answers Maurizio Zussa, New Business Development Manager at 3Com South Africa.

*"This is our way of giving something back to the community"*

"We at 3Com are very conscious that there is a skills shortage in South Africa and this demonstrates 3Com's commitment to the upliftment and growth of information technology in South Africa," he says.

"There are numerous educational initiatives on the go in South Africa at the moment and our hopes are that this project will work alongside others such as *Gauteng online* as another step towards a computer literate society and all the benefits that this brings."

For more information on 3Com products and services check out their website [www.3Com.com](http://www.3Com.com).

## How to use the help desk

Follow the steps below...

### Step 1

Have the following information ready before calling:

- 1 Identify the problem (ask someone with technical knowledge to assist you in determining the problem).
- 2 Write down any error messages you have encountered when experiencing the problem.
- 3 If the problem is hardware-related, write down the model name of the component and its serial number. Eg Memtek mt0102023475.
- 4 If the problem is software-related, write down the programme that you were using that caused the problem. Eg Windows, Internet Explorer, etc.

### Step 2

Call the Help Desk at **021 674 9140**

- 1 Identify the name of the school you are calling from.
- 2 State your problem.
- 3 Your call will be logged.
- 4 Insist on a call identity number (Call ID) if you do not receive one.
- 5 The technician will assist you telephonically. If the problem cannot be solved immediately the technician will call you back with a solution. The help desk will also give you the progress/status of your call if it has been outstanding for more than a day. This status report will be done as we receive updates regarding your logged problem.

### Step 3

If you want to query your call, telephone the Help Desk at **021 674 9140** and quote your Call ID number.

## Not to be missed: *The Star* ICT Africa 2002 Exhibition

5-7 June 2002, Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg

In South Africa, the government is totally committed to investing in educational technology and has already begun to roll out information and communication technology (ICT) in several provinces. Parastatals, private sector companies and donor agencies have taken up the challenge in other provinces. **This is the future of education and training in South Africa.** In recognition of this, ICT Africa 2002 will become part of *The Star* Human Resources Development Exhibition – South Africa's premier education and training

show. The exhibition attracts a high calibre audience so if you are a supplier in the ICT sector, this is the place you need to be! Educators and learners are also encouraged to come along and learn more about ICTs and how they can be used to enhance education.

For more information or to reserve a space please contact the exhibition manager Tel: 011 835 1565, Fax: 011 496 1161 or email: [charlene@specialised.com](mailto:charlene@specialised.com)

