

Welcome to your newsletter

Welcome to the first edition of *netnews*, the newsletter for the Thintana i-Learn Project. The newsletter is our way to keep you up-to-date with the Project and let you know how you can benefit from it. In this issue, we bring you a message from the Project sponsors, Thintana Communications, together with information on how your school was selected to take part in this Project and details on what to expect from the training. To help break the ice we feature an interview with one of the Project mentors and introduce you to one of the schools that will be involved in the Project. Please give us your feedback (by post, fax, email, or by visiting our website), and let us know what you'd like to see in the next edition!

Prakash Morar, Project Manager, SchoolNet SA

Discovering a new world



Principal of the Hebron Technical and Commercial High School, Wilson Makgalancheche, encourages learners Masego Nkoane (right) and Maria Letswalo to get to grips with the new computers that have recently been installed at the school as part of the Thintana i-Learn Project. As part of the Project, 14 fully networked computers have been installed at the school and the new facilities are opening up worlds of opportunity, not just for teachers and learners, but for the whole community. See back page for the full story.

A message from Thintana Communications

Joe Rajaratnam, Co-chairman
Thintana Corporate Citizenship
Committee

Thintana Communications is pleased to welcome you to the first issue of *netnews*, and to officially welcome all schools who have been selected to take part in the Thintana i-Learn Project.

The Project aims to connect 198 schools to the information highway in historically disadvantaged areas across South Africa, before the end of this year. Selected schools will receive a supply of computer equipment, networks and internet access. To support this equipment, we have also invested heavily in teacher development and training, both of technical teachers and other key users, on how to make best use of the networks and the internet.

We hope that the Project will empower educators and learners in these schools to use computers to boost learning in their classrooms as well as to sustainably manage the equipment in the longer term.

Thintana believes strongly in the value of providing educational technology to schools, and we are delighted to be able to support disadvantaged South African schools in this way.

Look after the equipment so that it can serve your needs and the needs of those that follow you for many years to come.

Rigorous selection process for schools

So your school has made it! You are part of the Thintana i-Learn Project. To get to this point you will have been through a rigorous selection process to ensure that your school is fit to be part of this important Project.

"Sustainability is key," says Project Manager Prakash Morar. "We wanted to be sure that the schools we selected are ready for the extra responsibilities the new equipment will bring and have the ability to maintain the facilities after they have been installed."

To ensure that schools will get the most out of the Project, the Project team went through a four-step process to select each school:

- 1 A selection committee, appointed by the Department of Education, selected a pool of schools with development plans in line with the overall direction of the Department.
- 2 Each shortlisted school submitted a business plan outlining its management structure and plans.
- 3 On the basis of these plans a final shortlist of schools was drawn up.
- 4 Visits were made to each shortlisted school to make the final selection.

Exactly 198 schools from across the country have been selected to take part in the Thintana i-Learn Project. The schools are roughly evenly distributed across South Africa's nine provinces.

"Now that the selection process is over, the real work begins," says Prakash. "Over the next year SchoolNet will be training teachers in each school, but the success of the Project depends largely on the teachers, principals and governing bodies of the schools. They will have to take responsibility to make all of this computer equipment and network connectivity work for them."

Project Checklist:

What needs to be in place before new equipment is delivered

- A dedicated room to house the equipment with burglar bars, an electronic alarm, a security gate and separate plug points for each computer
- A telephone line with two jack points
- Insurance on the equipment
- Sufficient tables to accommodate the computers and other equipment

Meet Sam Tobias, Project mentor



Mentors will play a special role in the i-Learn Project, providing encouragement, constructive feedback and supportive care to teachers-in-training. *Sam Tobias* an educator at Chelsea Preparatory School in KwaZulu-Natal talks about what motivated him to volunteer to be a mentor

Sam Tobias became a teacher because he loves the interaction between teaching and learning and the close relationship a teacher and a learner have to develop to achieve changes in thinking and worldviews. It is this same love that has driven him to volunteer his services to the Thintana i-Learn Project as a mentor.

"I like to see people finding out that the strength to change lies within them and all they need to know is which key to turn to unlock the power," he says.

With almost 20 years of teaching experience, Sam is well positioned to show others just which key to turn to unleash their potential. He believes passionately that sharing knowledge in this way is what it's all about. "The value of these projects lies in expanding the knowledge base of fellow educators. It is important to share sound practices and skills," he asserts.

As a mentor, the chief message that he will be sending to his group of teachers is that development means change and change means being aware of your own strengths and using it to unleash the power within you. "It is a difficult path to follow because it is primarily about reforming yourself – but perseverance is all that is required to embark on this road. So never lose hope or give up," he says.

If you would like to be a mentor and think you have the right qualities, please contact Janet on janet@schoolnet.org.za. All mentors have to have their own (non-web-based) email address and should be available for a maximum of 9 hours per week at flexible times. All mentors must also complete a distance learning mentor course through SchoolNet.

Teachers connect at internet conference

More than 100 teachers from around South Africa, many of whom are involved in the Thintana i-Learn Project, were given the opportunity to attend the *Africa Connects* conference in Cape Town in July thanks to sponsorship by the Telkom Foundation.

The event gave teachers the unique opportunity to meet and share ideas with more than 1 500 educators from around the world. The theme of the conference was *Education in the Internet Age* and the event featured applications of information and communication technology that have the potential to make education

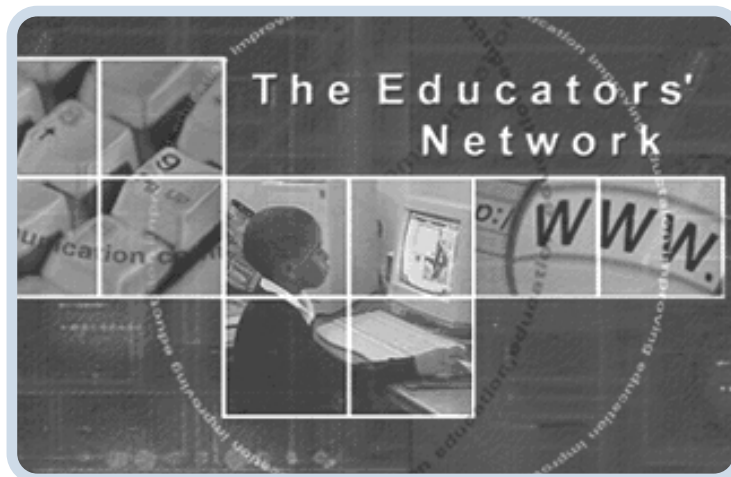
more exciting, interactive and creative.

Telkom's generous sponsorship included travel and all accommodation at the conference and has helped to give teachers involved in the Thintana i-Learn Project a valuable head start by exposing them to ideas of how to use information and communication technology to enhance learning.



Getting ready for training

By Janet Thompson, Training co-ordinator



The homepage of the training CD that will be handed to all teachers. To complete their training, teachers must work through two modules on this CD.

Teachers in many parts of the country will already be up to their necks in training, but for others this experience still lies ahead, and the question that many of you are asking is what can you expect?

Training will take place in stages and will be phased across the provinces. So, when you will be trained depends on which province your school is in. To find out when it will be your turn, take a look at the training timetable below.

The first stage of training will see two teachers from each school receiving technical training. This will equip them with basic network maintenance and user management skills. These teachers are then expected to take the lead in their schools, helping to introduce other teachers to basic email and taking responsibility for the technical side of the Project.

Once each school has its two technical teachers in place, other teachers who have been nominated to take part in the Project, will be trained. SchoolNet trainers will come to each school to deliver a one-day training session. During this session they will give each teacher a CD and guide them through it. The CDs contain a number of training

modules that teachers can work through in their own time via email and is also full of useful tips on how to use a computer.

There are seven modules on the CD covering a range of topics from simple wordprocessing to how to design a website. Each module is designed to take teachers step by step through the learning process.

"We are not learning to use computers, we are using computers to learn"

Classroom based activities also help to ensure that what is learned is applied directly to the classroom. To complete the training teachers must work through two of these modules.

To ensure that teachers don't get lonely learning on their own, SchoolNet has devised a system that will ensure teachers are in good company as they progress through their chosen modules. They will be assigned to a

virtual group – a community of about 15 other learners – who will be going through the same process in selected schools around the country. By sharing problems with the group teachers will also be able to share possible solutions. Each group will also have a specially trained mentor to encourage and guide them.

When they have successfully completed their two modules, teachers will receive a Certificate of Completion from SchoolNet in partnership with Rhodes University. Providing teachers can prove they can achieve the outcomes of the modules, Rhodes will recognise this Certificate as proof of prior learning for teachers wishing to study for an Advanced Certificate in Education.

This is the beginning of an exciting new phase for education in South Africa. We are building an Educators' Network that will benefit not only schools involved in this Project but others across the country and beyond. We are not learning to use computers, we are using computers to learn.

I wish all schools the best of luck with training. If you have any questions or comments feel free to email me at janet@schoolnet.org.za.

Training checklist:

What needs to be in place for training to take place at your school

- At least one computer per teacher to be trained must have been installed
- Two teachers per school must have received technical training
- All equipment and programmes must be in full working order
- All staff who will be attending the one-day introductory course must have been introduced to the basics of receiving and sending e-mail

Dates to diarise: Training timetable

	Tech Training	Introductory Training
Gauteng:	2 & 3 July	<u>1st cycle:</u> July 28 & 29
North West Province:	5 & 6 July	August 4 & 5, 2001
Kwa Zulu Natal:	16 & 17 July	
Mpumalanga:	23 & 24 Aug	<u>2nd cycle:</u> Sept 8, 9, 15 & 16,
Northern Cape:	3 & 4 September	2001
Northern Province:	1-2 October	<u>3rd cycle:</u> Jan 26, Feb 2, 3 &
Western Cape:	4 & 5 October	9, 2002
Eastern Cape:	5 & 6 November	
Orange Free State:	10 & 11 November	

Making a difference: Wilson Makgalancheche, Principal of the Hebron Technical and Commercial High School, stands proudly in the school's new computer lab (right) while (far right) teacher Johannes Tause helps learners to unlock the potential of the new equipment.



A world of opportunity

The community of Hebron Village, just North of Pretoria is excited because their local School, the Hebron Technical and Commercial High School, has been selected along with 198 schools around South Africa to be part of the Thintana i-Learn Project.

The Project will boost computer facilities at the school by providing it with 14, fully networked computers. For a community as poor and under-resourced as Hebron, these new computers represent a whole world of opportunity, not just for the students at the school and their families, but for each and every person in the area.

"With these computers we will be able to train learners and educators – even members of the community. That is our plan," says Johannes Tause, one of the teachers at Hebron Secondary. "Everyone is greatly excited about this, in fact we want to get in there and get to work as soon as possible."

"This project has come at just the right time," agrees Principal Wilson Makgalancheche. "It has long been our aim to introduce computers at our school. Everyone thanks Thintana very much for this opportunity. We promise

them that this project will yield results at our school. We are going to use these facilities fruitfully."

With 1 360 children at the school alone, Makgalancheche agrees that it is going to be a feat of timetabling to make sure everyone gets their chance to learn at the keyboard.

"This project will yield results at our school. We are going to use these facilities fruitfully."

To help ensure that as many people as possible benefit from the facilities, the school is working hard to ensure that all of its 45 teachers are trained to use computers. As part of the Thintana Project, 14 teachers received one day of official training in July. Each of those teachers has been tasked with imparting their new found skills to at least one other teacher. In this way, all teachers at the school will be able to master the skill of computers. "There is a great willingness among the

teachers to be trained," says Makgalancheche.

With the computer system now up and running and most of the teachers feeling confident about their new skills Makgalancheche says they hope to get down to the business of teaching soon.

The new facilities will make a great difference to the lives of many students such as Grade 12 learner Lionel Khoza who would like to study computer science next year. He hopes that the new computers at his school will give him a good grounding in this field.

For many like Lionel, the new facilities will also mean that they no longer have to attend fly-by-night computer colleges that cost a lot but don't deliver skills.

This is just one of the positive benefits Makgalancheche expects to flow from the new facilities. In time he says the school would like to expand the network and the service it can offer, using funds generated by hiring the facilities out to the community.

"We may just be a drop in the ocean," says Makgalancheche, "but we will make a difference."

Keeping an eye on best practice

As teachers complete their training modules, they will be generating new ideas for teaching and lesson plans as well as evaluating educational websites. This will generate a wealth of useful resources for other educators to use.

To capture these good ideas, SchoolNet SA has created an educational web portal – a kind of online library – where teachers can publish their experiences and ideas so that other educators can benefit from what they have learned. The web portal will be called the Educators' Network. In each issue we will print the best idea or tip so make sure you send us your good ideas. We will let you know how to access this facility as soon as it becomes available.

In the meantime, for more information you can go to the SchoolNet website <http://www.school.za>.