



Intel Education: ICT in the Classroom Conference Grey College, Bloemfontein 4-6 July 2007

Background to the conference

For the past ten years, SchoolNet South Africa has been hosting an annual national educational conference and for the past 4 years this has been sponsored by Intel. This year, the aim of the conference was to illustrate uses of Information Communication Technology which could be directly applied to the school situation, hence the theme of the conference. 'Intel Education: ICT in the Classroom'.



The conference has been held in a number of provinces over the years and this year it was held at Grey College, Bloemfontein in the Free State. Grey College is the oldest school in the Free State yet this beautiful, well-resourced school has managed to balance history and tradition with well-equipped computer centers making it a good choice of venue.

Opening Ceremony

The conference was officially opened by the Deputy Minister of Education, Mr Enver Surty on Wednesday 4th of July 2007. Conference delegates were surprised to hear just how well informed the deputy minister was about ICTs in general but particularly about ICTs in education in South Africa. The welcome speeches were given by both the Headmaster of Grey College, Mr JA Volstedt and the Deputy Director General of the Free State Department of Education, Mr M M Sithole. Intel Corporation's Middle East, Turkey and Africa Education manager, Mr Ferruh Gurtas gave an address on behalf of Intel, the sponsors. All of these speakers expressed gratitude for the fact that this conference was providing a forum for stakeholders in education and particularly teachers to share ideas, knowledge and experience with one another.

Conference Delegates

There were 374 educators, education department officials, and representatives from development and training organisations who attended the conference. In fact, registration went so well that the programme had to be redesigned to accommodate more delegates than were originally anticipated and some late comers had to be turned away.

Through the generous donations of Microsoft and Oracle twenty additional teachers were sponsored to attend the conference, who otherwise might not have been able to attend. Many of these teachers were trainers offering the Intel course at schools, or they were teachers who have shown tremendous promise in using ICTs in exciting, innovative ways in their classrooms and in the case of Oracle these were teachers who were successfully using the Think.com programme. These sponsored teachers will no doubt be taking many of the ideas that they were exposed to at the conference back to their schools and communities.



Haiku Hopefuls

In the past year, the Intel Teach Programme Essentials course has started to recognize teachers who submit outstanding projects by awarding them Gold, Silver and Bronze certificates for their portfolios. For this year's conference, Intel sponsored twenty of these high achieving teachers to attend the conference. All of these teachers were grateful for the unexpected recognition and opportunity. Many of these already outstanding teachers said that the conference had empowered them with even more ideas to further enhance their teaching upon returning to their schools.

"The conference was awesome! It really inspired me and made me look at innovative teaching methods more holistically. The Intel team were so well organised. Keep up the grand work."

Abdullah Sujee, Roshnee Islamic

Other teachers (who have not yet completed the Intel course) were so motivated by seeing their colleagues being recognized in this way that they were eager to find out how they too could receive Intel training.



Collecting venue tickets



Intel Teach Silver and Gold certificate holders

In addition to teachers, the Intel ICT in the Classroom conference attracted a number of provincial and national education department officials. Their attendance at the conference helped reaffirm their belief in the value of integrating technology into the classroom and exposed them to a range of strategies for doing this effectively. To provide an opportunity for education department officials to share insights and experiences of incorporating ICT integration training in their provinces they were all invited to an informal meeting where they got to share their experiences and ask questions of Intel and SchoolNet representatives.

Many Intel trainers attend the Intel conference – either to share presentations or to gather new ideas for enhancing their own teaching. This means that the conference became an ideal place for trainers to meet and share experiences. At a lunch time meeting trainers

shared some of the highlights of their training as well as experiences from the projects in which they were currently involved. The meeting also enabled more experienced trainers to share strategies and insights to ensure successful training with less experienced trainers.

Keynote Speakers

Prof Bernie Dodge, Professor of Educational Technology, San Diego State University was the keynote speaker of the conference. Bernie's keynote address was entitled "WebQuest Story – 21st Century Chronicle" and many delegates, who have been exposed to the WebQuest model were very interested to hear his thoughts and experiences with scaffolding and structuring materials that integrate ICTs into education.

In addition to presenting the keynote address, Bernie Dodge also conducted hands-on workshop sessions in the computer labs throughout the three days. These sessions gave teachers and officials an opportunity to put into practice some of what they were learning, whilst receiving guidance and input from Bernie. These sessions included "Identifying Opportunities for Higher Level Thinking in the Curriculum", "Scaffolding within a WebQuest", "When is a WebQuest not a WebQuest", "Blogs and Wikis as WebQuest Tasks" and "Using Google Earth and Google Maps in a WebQuest".

The workshop leader for the conference was Travis Smith, Assistant Principal, Frankston High School, Melbourne, Australia. As ICT director at a laptop school, Travis shared hundreds of ideas about how ICT can be integrated using normal PCs. As his keynote address, Travis gave background into the use of computers in education by discussing his school, which is a laptop school, as a case study. Amongst the workshops which Travis led, one presentation entitled "Death by PowerPoint" showed delegates a range of innovative uses of PowerPoint. He also shared a range of teaching and learning strategies using freely available or commercial educational software. Of special interest to delegates using or considering purchasing tablet PCs to use with data projectors was the workshop on "Tablets in the Classroom".



Presentations and Workshops

In addition to the keynote speakers, SchoolNet and Intel called on delegates to submit presentations for possible inclusion into the conference programme. This enabled a broad range of presentations to be included which catered for a range of interests, and offered delegates a choice of six presentation venues at a time. A further advantage of the choice of presentations was that many of the sessions were attended by smaller groups of participants who could then gain first hand experience of using the applications being discussed.



The presentations fitted into one of the following themes.

- Classroom and the Community
- Inter-Classroom Collaboration
- Learning with Projects
- ICT in the Classroom

This meant that there was something for everyone – no matter what their needs or interests of delegates or the current state of ICT integration in their schools or institutions.

Gala Dinner

On the second night of the conference, a gala dinner was held at the Ilanga Estate on the outskirts of Bloemfontein. The evening gave conference attendees the opportunity to network and share experiences in an informal way, whilst enjoying a delicious meal and dancing to the music of a local jazz band, Fever. For many delegates this was a highpoint of the conference with many people expressing thanks for being treated to such a lovely evening.



Travis and Kelly Smith at the Gala Dinner

The guest speaker at the Gala Dinner was Mr M S Rakometsi, The Superintendent General of the Free State Department of Education. Mr Rakometsi was entertaining and was clearly an accomplished speaker but was particularly appropriate to be speaking at an ICT conference dinner seeing he is currently engaged in online research for his doctoral thesis and explained that he regularly uses Skype.



Sarietjie and Ferruh on the dance floor



The SchoolNet staff at the Gala Dinner

Exhibitions

On the second day of the conference, the school hall served as an exhibition venue. The exhibition gave teachers, school managers and departmental officials an opportunity to see what products and services are available in the market place for facilitating and promoting the use of ICTs in educational contexts. In some cases delegates could try their hand at using demonstration equipment and software and some exhibitors gave conference attendees trial or sample materials to take back to their schools. Exhibitors made contact with potential customers and promoted their products and services to their target audiences.

Feedback from attendees

An analysis of the conference feedback forms by the independent Intel programme evaluator, Neil Butcher and Associates confirmed that an overwhelming majority of respondents thought that the conference was well organised (96.7%), that the conference theme was worthwhile (98.9%), that the presentations were useful to them as teachers (95.6%), that they had picked up ideas for engaging their learners using ICTs (97.9%) and that they were pleased with the quality of the presentations (98.9%).

The most commonly heard comment from delegates was that they were amazed at the synergy between presentations from a university professor from the USA and the father of WebQuests which dovetailed so brilliantly with the workshops presented by a deputy principal from a laptop school in Australia; they both preached the same gospel.

This sample email below expresses the general sentiments of conference participants:

May I please give a word of thanks and gratitude for the wonderful conference in Bloem. I was very much impressed and happy to be part of the sponsored few to attend the conference. Thanks to the staff and management at SchoolNet as a whole. I had the fortune too to win one of the cool prizes during the conference. If all big business can support generously like Intel I'm sure the plight of the innocent child down there in the classroom would be the thing if the past. My humble thanks to Intel for giving us at school a chance to develop and change our stagnant ways of teaching in the class.

Conclusion

The 'Intel Education: ICT in the Classroom' conference was an overall resounding success and a tribute to Intel's continued support of the development of education in South Africa. It is hoped that in future years Intel will continue to sponsor this conference and that other countries may adopt similar initiatives for educators to share best practices for incorporating ICTs into teaching and learning.

For a detailed conference programme and links to the complete photo gallery, please visit www.school.za/conference