

# SACE Seminar on Online Teacher Professional Development

SchoolNet SA was invited to participate in a seminar which took place on September 29 at the SACE offices in Centurion. VVOB the Flemish Development organization facilitated the seminar which was about online courses for educator professional development. This report relies heavily on the report written by Mr. Stefaan Vande Walle (Education Advisor, VVOB).

SACE is anticipating an increase online teacher professional development and had contracted VVOB to develop a quality assurance rubric for assessing such courses. There was an acceptance that the power of online teaching and learning can sometimes be better than face to face simply due to the unique affordances it provides.

The seminar explored how online teaching and learning may inform and improve the accessibility to and quality of teacher professional development. What implications the rise of online modes of study have had on quality. What organizational impacts and how online teacher professional development has affected equity. How SACE can fulfil its mandate to guard the quality of teacher professional development against the background of a changing provider landscape, internationalization of professional development and changing conceptions of learning.



SACE and VVOB gave an overview of the existing quality assessment framework for professional development activities and how this rubric may be expanded for online activities. Mr Rabotapi from DBE gave an overview of the activities DBE is undertaking with regards to making teachers more ICT literate, underlining that technology shouldn't replace a teacher, but rather complement. Ms Trudi Van Wyk from DHET stressed that an online course might not be the most appropriate mode of

delivery in all circumstances. Many subjects require also work-integrated learning. We should also be aware that technology and online learning are not an 'easy street'.



In the session on current issues & debates, Ms Goodwin-Davey from UNISA underlined the need for appropriate and continuous training of tutors for online learning courses. Mr Tony Mays from the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) unpacked the concept of open licenses and pleading for making Open Educational Resources (OERs) an integral part of online courses. Dr Johan Hendrikz from the University of Pretoria presented fascinating results about research done with participants in an online teacher education programme, showing the massive need for investing in strengthening teachers' basic ICT literacy skills.

Two educators recalled their experiences with online learning in the next session. Ms Phuti Ragophala talked about her experiences with Microsoft, whereas Mr Graeme Holloway talked about initiatives by Hatfield Christian School to bring online learning of maths and science to disadvantaged learners.



SchoolNet SA's Director, Janet Thomson had been requested to speak about SchoolNet's experiences in online teacher professional development over the years and what she saw as critical issues for the quality of online learning. Issues that are often overlooked such as the quality of the writing, the 'emotional design' and the accessibility of support were identified as crucial aspects in the learner experience. SchoolNet's experience dated back to the late 1990s and included a spectrum of courses that ranged from short informal courses such as Adobe youth Voices through the online curricula of Intel, Google and Microsoft to full qualifications such as the UKZN ACE and the Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration.

Mindset showed how they develop videos of teaching in context and thus create learning objects which are well suitable to integrate in online courses. Mr Malcolm Mooi talked about the Zibusa project, an initiative to promote online communities of teachers, using digital rewards to stimulate teachers to create and share materials. This initiative is funded by Investec.

Dr Jacqueline Batchelor from UJ provided the audience with some critical observations. Do many online courses make sufficiently use of the unique affordances or opportunities the internet allows? Technology can indeed be very dangerous if used as just another layer on top of the traditional course. One such affordance is designing for choice.



Another is integrating elements from games into courses, such as badges and providing safe spaces for trying out things. Another is bringing in an international dimension, pointing to the motivating aspect of Massive Open and Online Courses (MOOCs) for many teachers. Jackie gave a shocking example of an April fool's day prank video from the BBC about flying penguins being used in a class by one of her students on teaching practice. Her student assured her learners that penguins can fly.

In brief: the seminar was an eye-opener for many and yielded a lot of food for thought!

The day after the seminar, SACE staff and CPTD evaluators worked together to review a draft quality framework for online courses and discussed which criteria SACE should use to determine whether an online course should be endorsed or not. A draft rubric and guideline is available and can be requested from VVOB ([Stefaan.vandewalle@vvoob.be](mailto:Stefaan.vandewalle@vvoob.be)).