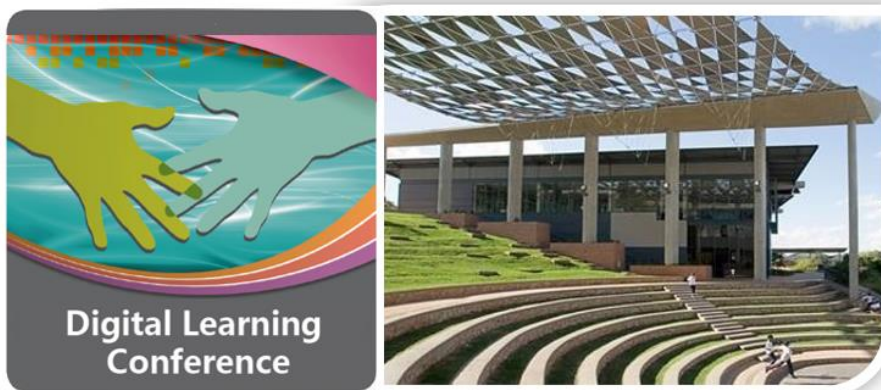# SchoolNet SA 2019 Digital Learning Conference

Lebone II College of the Royal Bafokeng, Phokeng, NorthWest

26 – 28 June 2019

The Royal Bafokeng Institute and the Lebone II College, in partnership with NorthWest Department of Basic Education, hosted the SchoolNet SA 2019 Digital Learning Conference between 26 and 28 June 2019. Four hundred and sixty eight delegates attended the conference, including teachers with a passion for digital learning, ICT coordinators and national and provincial eLearning officials.

Conference attendees enjoyed three days of professional development aligned to the following conference themes:
- Digital Resources in the Classroom
- Cultivating Creativity
- Leadership in Digital Education
- Gaming, Coding and Makerspaces
- eAssessment Strategies and Tools

Ten parallel sessions, presented by fifty facilitators, were offered in each time slot in the programme, thus enabling delegates to select sessions that best suited their needs and interests. These included hands-on activities to use the latest digital tools in the bring-your-own-device venues; lab sessions in the two Lebone II computer labs to try out Minecraft Education Edition, the SA-SAMs school data management system and the Hour of Code; and opportunities to play with Lego, robotics and craft materials in the tinkering classroom. Other sessions in the auditorium, Staffroom (Tablet lab) and various other classrooms provided delegates with information on new trends in online learning from leading technology in education consultants as well as to hear about the first-hand experiences of local North West teachers and school leaders involved in the Telkom Connected Schools project who shared their best practices.


The opening keynote was presented by, Dr Jacqueline Batchelor of the University of Johannesburg. Her thought provoking presentation entitled "Another Industrial Revolution: What the educational ecosystem needs to know" conveyed some of the academic thinking around the fourth industrial revolution, whilst also detailing what this can and should mean for teachers and changes in classroom practice. The panel discussion on "The Fourth Industrial Revolution on Education" included SchoolNet SA's Omashani Naidoo, Anita van Vuuren of the Western Cape Department of Education, Nomusa Keninda of the Mpumalanga Department of Education, and Linford Molaodi, the Technology Enhanced Education National Teaching Award Winner, who were each able to describe some of the challenges and opportunities that the fourth industrial revolution has presented in their contexts.

Oliver (Ollie) Bray of the Lego Foundation described how to "Use technology and play to build a culture of creativity" in his keynote presentation on the second day. Delegates enjoyed creating a Lego duck using the Lego blocks in their conference bags, and they enjoyed reflecting on the value of having fun, seeking multiple solutions, and creating in their roles as educators. In addition to his keynote session, Ollie ran multiple workshops across the three days of the conference that introduced teachers to tinkering, robotics and Scratch programming. These sessions proved to be popular choices with teachers delighting in creating scribbling machines, Lego creatures and learning how to take Scratch programming to the next level.

In the final keynote presentation, Jaye Richards-Hill of Microsoft encouraged delegates to "Lead learning through the Fourth Industrial Revolution". Reflecting on the class of 2030 and their needs as they enter the workforce motivated the delegates to take what they had learnt over the conference and to implement new tools, pedagogies and strategies into their classrooms to ensure that the education they provide is relevant and meaningful to youth. Other sessions with a Microsoft focus were presented by Ronelle Klinck and Elsabe Hart, who demonstrated Microsoft's accessibility features, Teams and O365; and who encouraged teachers to apply to become Microsoft Innovative Educator Experts. In sessions led by Microsoft Fellows and Microsoft Innovative Educator Experts, delegates were made aware of the Microsoft Educator Community, the DigiGirlz programme, Skype in the Classroom and The Hour of Code in the hope that delegates will access these programmes to continue their own professional development and to provide opportunities for digital learning to their learners after the conference.
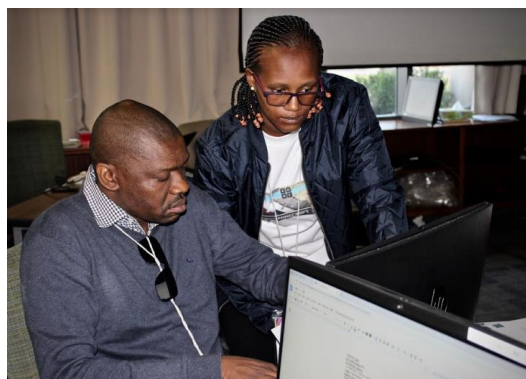
SchoolNet SA was very grateful for the Telkom Foundation financial and the social support towards the conference as well as sponsoring the connectivity and making it possible for teachers and support specialists from the seven Telkom Connected Schools in Ga-Rankuwa, Gauteng and Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape to attend the conference. Telkom Support Specialists provided technical support throughout the conference, whilst at the same time learning tips and tools from the various presentations that they will be able to share with teachers at the schools they support. School leaders, support specialists and teachers from some of the Telkom Connected Schools were able to share their experiences of "Going Digital in a Public School" in which they reflected on some of the challenges and shared some of the learnings and best practices from their schools that other schools could learn from.

Telkom Foundation also sponsored the mocktail event that which took place during the evening of the 27th June, the event was enjoyed by all delegates who were present at the conference and provided a social platform for conference delegates to mingle and talk about their experiences and learnings whilst also exchanging contacts for continuous engaging opportunities amongst themselves and creating communities of learning that will grow even beyond the conference.


Microsoft Philanthropies was also contribution financially towards the conference as well as support offered the Microsoft Education team who shared their expertise as presenters at the conference.

The Lebone II College of the Royal Bafokeng dining hall was transformed into an exhibition area for the duration of the conference. Companies marketing digital resources to teachers displayed their tools and products and teachers were able to try out some of the latest technology available to schools. Some exhibitors, including Pearson, Shuter and Shooter, Oxford University Press, Games Powered by Tangibl and Vibehouse Marketing opted to take a demonstration slot so that they could tell delegates more about their offering. We are grateful to the team at ACER who equipped a classroom with a range of devices for the duration of the conference so that teachers could complete online activities, whilst also getting to experience different technologies. Fybotech provided four interactive boards which were used for the duration of the conference in the staffroom tablet lab, Plenary hall and exhibition hall to display presentations. They also generously donated an interactive board as a prize for a school which was won by Bridget Maruping of Kopana Primary School in Taung, NorthWest.

The SchoolNet SA conference has always been about providing hands-on opportunities to learn about digital tools and their classroom applications. It is a conference largely driven by teachers, for teachers. As coding and robotics are about to be introduced into the national curriculum, a range of workshops aimed to acquaint teachers with free resources that they

can use in their lessons as well as ideas and experiences of teachers who have already been teaching coding and robotics for some time. These sessions ranged from basic introductory sessions such as "Scratch for Beginners", "Demystify Coding" and "You can do the hour of code" to more advanced workshops including "Taking Scratch to the Next Level", "Using Code.org to Teach Computer Science" and "Coding with Youngsters: On and Offline". We trust that these sessions left teachers better prepared to implement the new curriculum effectively in their classrooms in a way that both covers the basic principles of computer science whilst also developing skills such as creativity, collaboration and communication.
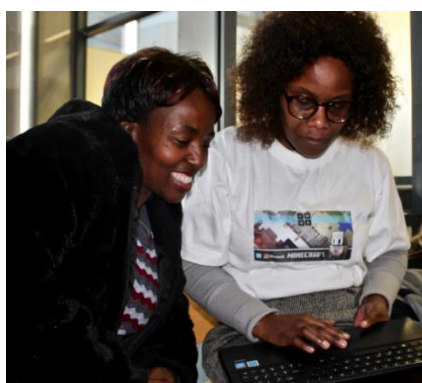
At the closing workshop, delegates were asked to create and share how they will be integrating digital learning into their teaching. We look forward to the #DigitalLearningDay call to action by the Department of Basic Education, and know that these will be used to help build a repository of local ideas from South African teachers that will continue to inspire other teachers. Finally, in the spirit of digital learning, delegates were asked to respond to a Mentimeter poll which captured delegates impressions and learnings from the conference in real time and displayed these on the screen. When delegates were asked to list the key skills they learnt during the conference, the following skills were listed (with the words appearing larger font, indicating a higher number of people citing the same skill):
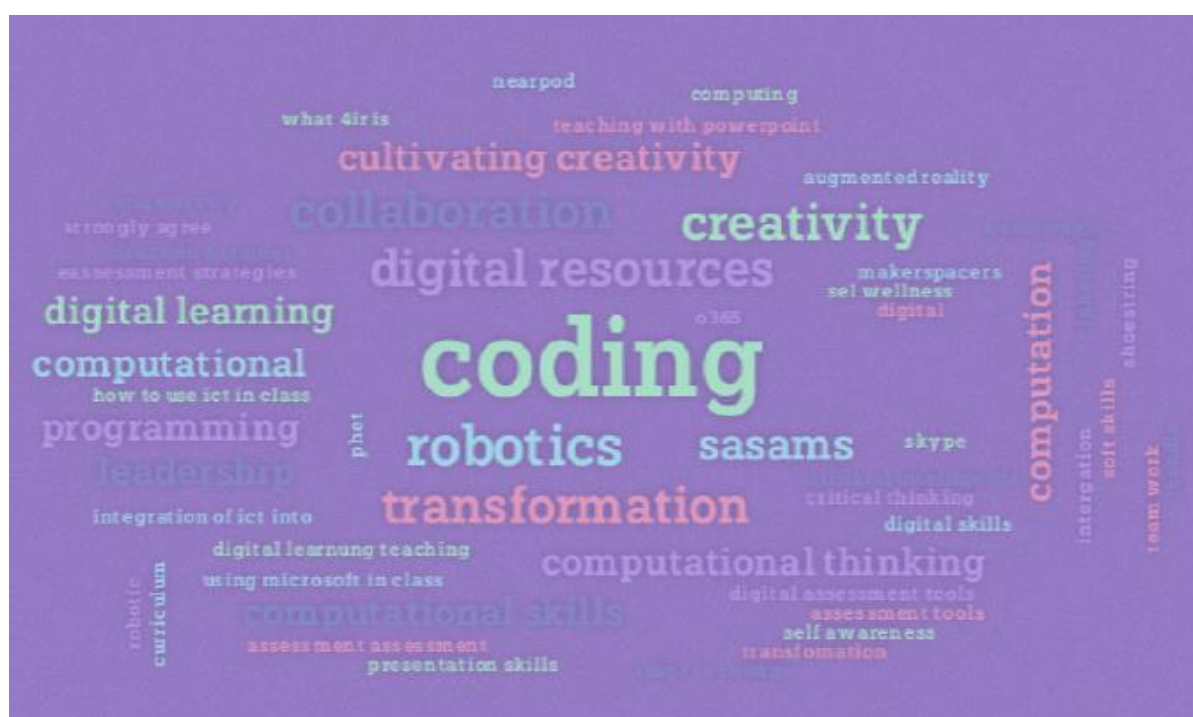
Below are some of the contributions of delegates who were asked to reflect on their learnings from the conference:

It was a wonderful conference where I learned a lot technology in teaching and learning

Informative, be ready for change

I have learnt a lot especially on integrating ICT in teaching and learning

Being an art and a language teachert i absolutely looooooove the tinkering class and all the digital reading workshops

How to deal with different challenges on the implementation of ict in classroom.

Thus was so informative and a great eye opening and advancing

It was very refreshing and learnt new ways to learn and teach, as well as that technology in class is not bad.

Whilst the feedback related to the workshops, plenary keynote sessions and panel discussions was overwhelmingly positive, the true success of any professional development session lies in the degree to which it brings about positive changes in practice. Based on the responses below, we anticipate that the 468 delegates who attended the 2019 SchoolNet SA Conference are returning to their schools enthusiastic about implementing digital learning for better teaching:

What are you going to do differently?
Mentimeter

Collaborate with others

Teach teachers to embrace technology more.

Change my teaching style

Offer support to more schools

Lesson preparation

Involvement with other ict activities

Implement the use of digital tools

Implementation of learnt skills

Let thelearners create and be innovative

Engage other teachers

Be involved in conversations more.

Digitally infused teaching and leading

Will start using some of the tools I got here and train my learners to grow with me

Interact

Implement lesson using gadgets...

To share the outcome with my collegues. Explote and initate

Use integration of ict and collaborate more and develop, workshop my fellow colleagues

Organise more effectively

SchoolNet SA is grateful to the National Department of Basic Education for their presence at and support of this conference, in particular, Boitumelo Butjie, the Deputy Director of Curriculum who launched the conference. Various sessions at the conference, presented by the DBE, helped raise awareness of the Professional Development Framework for Digital Learning; the role that SA-SAMS can play in implementing the fourth industrial revolution; preparing to offer coding as a subject; and contributing to a Digital Idea Bank.

Finally, we express gratitude to The Royal Bafokeng Institute and the staff of Lebone II College for hosting the conference in their world-class facilities. The teachers of the North West province have supported the SchoolNet SA conferences in their numbers over many years in other provinces and we are thrilled that the conference has finally been hosted in the North West. We are grateful to the officials of the North West Department of Basic Education, Dr Tholo and his team, who helped bring the conference to this province and who ensured that so many local teachers were able to experience digital learning on their doorstep.

Megan Rademeyer
Programmes Manager
1 July 2019
www.schoolnet.org.za