

eSwatini's First 21st Century Educators' Conference

On Friday 17 August the Kingdom of eSwatini (formerly known as Swaziland) held its first conference on 21st Century learning at the SEDCO Conference Centre, in Manzini. Local educators were invited to the conference that was hosted by Mawema Consultants and addressed by Dr A.S Simelane of the ICT Inspectorate in the Education Ministry as well as Mrs Janet Thomson, Executive Director of SchoolNet South Africa.

Programme Coordinator, Edward Mawema described the conference as the first of many *“providing teachers in eSwatini the opportunity to upgrade their teaching methods to meet the digital era’s revolutionary technology-based teaching”*. Mawema’s aim was to *“equip teachers with smart skills on utilizing technology for the teaching and learning purposes, in order to help fast-track eSwatini towards Vision 2022 where First World technological advancements will have to be put into use”*.



Dr A.S Simelane of the ICT Inspectorate in the Education Ministry in eSwatini

Dr Simelane explained that teachers should have professional competence in using ICT proficiently, digital competence in integrating ICT strategically in the classroom, and an entrepreneurial understanding in using ICT innovatively in digital classrooms. He referred to work by Dr Hawkins related to the digital divide and particularly the divide between digital natives and digital immigrants. Dr Simelane advocated for 21st century learning that is student-centred, contextualised in the real world, integrated in society and involving active learning experiences.

Janet Thomson shared her presentation via Skype to the audience of assembled teachers. She had been requested to present on the Commonwealth of Learning's Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration (CCTI) which is an online qualification for teachers wishing to improve their teaching and to upgrade their digital learning skills in relation to management, teaching and learning. The activities continually challenge school managers and teachers to reflect on what they do in their schools and classrooms and how digital tools and resources can be integrated into their teaching and leadership styles.

Thomson shared a short background to SchoolNet South Africa and its relationship with the Commonwealth of Learning and the content for this specific qualification. The CCTI had been designed as a distance course and had been initially aligned to the UNESCO Framework for Teacher ICT Competences but was now aligned to the recently published Professional Development Framework for Digital Learning – published in 2017 by the Department of Basic Education in South Africa.



Thomson described the activities of the CCTI as being at the centre of the modules guiding teachers to read supporting content, plan and implement classroom activities, reflect on practice and share their classroom experiences with their online group. She said that the emphasis is on how teachers and learners use technology as a tool and integrate technology into teaching and learning. The focus is not on computer skills or the technology but rather on the pedagogy. She showed a video to demonstrate this point as well as videos from two teachers who were studying the qualification in Uganda.

She added that there are no examinations and that assessment is based on a digital portfolio as well as on the quality of reflection, interaction and collaboration.

The delegate teachers in Manzini were to become the first cohort to receive the CCTI certificate course. After successfully completing at least four of the modules in 2019, the most competent teachers would be invited to train to become tutors of the programme for future student teachers. Thomson explained that in South Africa the course carries the highest number of professional development accreditation points of any of the SchoolNet courses. However the course had been completed by teachers in most Caribbean countries as well as teachers in Uganda, Kenya and Lesotho. Furthermore, selected components of the content from the course had been used by universities in Commonwealth countries and beyond to form valuable parts of their qualifications for digital teaching and learning.

Mawema said that there was a need for learning to move beyond the four walls of the classroom and that he had organised the conference to *"touch on ways in which the education system in eSwatini could embrace this dynamic way of learning, when industry partners and educators come together to change the ways in which students receive and apply knowledge."*