Innovation Africa

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AfricanBrains
The Home of Intelligent Networking

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

Welcome

Mr Donald Grant
Minister of Education,
Government of the Western Cape

Western Cape
Government

BETTER TOGETHER.

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Speech by Minister Donald Grant
Innovation Africa Summit
6 October 2012

Fellow Ministers
Government representatives
Delegates
Honoured Guests
Ladies and Gentleman

Good Morning.

I am delighted to be here today at the Innovation Africa Summit.

Yesterday was World Teachers' Day – a day where across the world we recognised and celebrated the important role that our teachers play in providing quality education at all levels.

Teachers are traditionally and importantly the primary facilitators of learning. And this is no different in a world where we are beginning to place greater reliance on systems and technologies to support the development of our education system and the learning of our children. Without the support of our teachers, the introduction of new systems and new technologies into our schools would have little chance of succeeding.

If our education system is to support our social and economic development, we need to work better and smarter to ensure that our learners leave the education system with relevant knowledge and skills and are better placed to pursue higher education opportunities and participate meaningfully in any working environment.

John Dewey, an American philosopher and educational reformer, once said that "If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow".

It is no secret that there are many challenges facing the world's education systems, particularly in developing countries like South Africa where we face the great challenge of expanding access and improving quality for all learners.

The extent to which learners have access to a quality basic education is a driving factor in determining a country's competitiveness and, in turn, a country's growth potential.

According to the latest World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report, South Africa achieved an overall competitiveness ranking of 52 out of 144 countries. While this ranking places South Africa as the highest-ranked country in sub-Saharan Africa, the Report highlights the urgent need for South Africa and other countries on the African continent to increase the number of *educated people* who are able to participate in and contribute to the economy.

For example, the quality of South Africa's basic education system ranks 132 out of 144 countries with the quality of its higher education and training system ranking 140 out of 144 countries. South African also ranked 143 out of 144 countries for the quality of its maths and science education – key subjects in any growing economy. This is simply not an acceptable or sustainable situation.

In a world where information and communications technology (or ICT) has made it possible for more people to access, generate and share ideas and in a world where ICT is playing a greater role in the way that we do business than before, we urgently need to consider how our basic education system can maximise these new possibilities.

Today I would like to share with you some of the strategies that the Western Cape Government has developed to integrate ICT into the provincial schooling system.

In the Western Cape, the provincial government made a commitment in 2009:

- to improve the literacy and numeracy levels of learners throughout the system;
- to increase the number of learners who complete their schooling and the number of learners who leave school with the option of pursing higher education and training opportunities; and
- to reduce the number of under-performing high schools in the province.

We are pleased to be seeing a positive trend in the performance of our public ordinary schools, particularly in the results achieved over the last two years in the National Senior Certificate examinations which are written by our learners in their final year of school.

However, we still face many challenges which include expanding access to quality ICT teaching and learning resources to all schools in the province, particularly those serving our poorer communities.

We therefore recognise that if we are to progress as an education system we need to decide *not if but how* we will use ICT in its various forms to support and improve the provision of a quality education at all our schools.

The Western Cape Government has therefore taken the lead in prioritising the delivery and roll-out of ICT infrastructure to strengthen and support quality teaching and learning in our schools.

In preparing learners for the future, the Western Cape Education Department has developed an e-Education Vision that will see the expansion of our existing technology base and digital resources and the introduction of appropriate solutions that are responsive to changing education needs.

The Department envisions significant adaptations to the way in which teaching and learning is currently conceptualised.

This involves a shift from traditional methods of teaching and learning in conventional education environments where appropriate to e-Teaching, e-Learning and virtual learning environments where digital resources and systems are more readily available to schools and the engagement between educators and learners is more enhanced than before.

We believe that e-Education is primarily about learning and teaching, and it is the 'e' in e-Education that supplements and enhances teaching and learning experiences in the classroom. The 'e' in e-Education is therefore not a *substitute* for our teachers but is rather a *resource* intended to aid our teachers in the important work that they do.

In 2007, Bill Gates made this important point about technology in our schools:

> *"It is important to be humble when we talk about education, because TV was going to change education and video tape was going to change it and computer-aided instruction was going to change it.*
>
> *But until the internet exploded 10 years ago, technology really hadn't made a dent in education at all. Learning is mostly about creating a context for motivation. It's about why you should learn things. Technology plays a role, but it is not a panacea."*

The Department's e-Education Vision recognises that there are a number of technology trends that challenge the conventional curriculum delivery models that we have become accustomed to in the provisioning of education.

From mobile learning, cloud computing, one-to-one computing and teacher managers to redefining learning spaces and smart portfolio assessments, the Western Cape Education Department is alive to these trends and will do what is necessary and possible to align its curriculum delivery models accordingly to improve education outcomes.

The Western Cape Government's vision for ICT in education is therefore one that will see:
- teachers and education managers who are empowered to use technology effectively and innovatively;
- learners who are empowered to use technology effectively and innovatively;
- models, methodologies, pedagogies and digital content that are responsive to the education needs of our learners;
- robust and reliable ICT systems that support e-Education;
- technology-enriched environment that enable effective learner-centered e-learning; and
- robust and reliable ICT systems that will reduce the administrative burden that is often associated with planning and management.

The new era of e-Education in the Western Cape is a natural progression from the ICT solutions that have been introduced by the Western Cape Education Department over the last 10 years.

We are currently supporting e-Education through a number of channels including:

1. The provisioning of technology to new schools and the upgrading or advancement of technology in existing schools;
2. Researching and evaluating the use of e-Education methodologies and cutting-edge technologies;
3. Training in ICT for educators;
4. The sourcing, procurement and provisioning of digital resources through multiple access points; and
5. On-going support of e-Education at schools.

Earlier this year, the Premier of the Western Cape, Helen Zille, made an exciting announcement in her State of the Province address regarding the establishment of a Special Purpose Vehicle or Public Private Partnership to bring broadband access to schools, as well as provincial and municipal government facilities, in the Western Cape over the next two and half years.

It is our view that high speed broadband connectivity is the foundation on which ICT can be integrated into our schools, making equitable access to the information highway possible for all users, regardless of location.

High speed broadband connectivity will enable the Department to improve the quality of education in this province through the provisioning of high quality curriculum material and teaching aids, improved communication and remote technical support.

The Department has already developed an e-Education platform in the form of a curriculum website and a Learning Management System.

This platform currently houses a repository of educational digital resources and provides facilities for teachers, learners, and departmental officials to communicate and collaborate with each other in support of teaching and learning.

The Western Cape Education Department's e-Education platform is being supported by the curriculum directorates at the Department's head office, the curriculum advisors and e-Education personnel in the districts, and educational partners.

To date we are able to use this platform to access over 400 free digital learning objects, a collection of free software for educational purposes and a collection of apps for tablets which can be obtained in formats such as documents, videos, animations and simulations.

As part of efforts to integrate ICT into our schools, we plan to provide schools with appropriate new technologies in innovative and appropriate configurations and architectures. This will include Wi-Fi technology in all schools to expand access to the broadband network.

For schools offering IT-orientated subjects, we plan to refresh their computer laboratories so that they may deliver a better quality curriculum than before.

We also plan to convert existing computer labs into multimedia learning hubs and upgrade classrooms to include appropriate classroom-based technology (including mobile and hand-held devices).

We are currently investigating the possible use of hand-held tablets or devices at schools with various role-players. Some of our schools have already introduced these tablets into the classroom and are piloting projects within their schools in partnership with the private sector.

We are also in the final stages of procuring over 1,520 tablets for all our principals which will improve the way in which we communicate with and provide support to our principals. The Western Cape Government values the work that our

principals do to improve education outcomes in the province and it is our hope that the provision of these tablets will help them work smarter.

The mere existence of computer laboratories, high speed internet access and electronic resources in the classroom should not be envisaged as an end in itself, but rather the beginning of another process.

We need to ask ourselves whether there is a link between the use of ICT in schools and learner achievement and, if so, how can we maximise this link.

Studies show that at best where you see more ICT use in schools you tend to see a mildly positive correlation in test scores. The more directed the better is the correlation.

What these studies also show is that there are clear indications that the real difficulty in linking ICT use in schools to learner outcomes is our failure to *incorporate* ICT into a whole school strategy. In this sense, the failure comes when ICT is used as a stepladder to reach the blackboard.

It is therefore important that we have teachers that are supportive of and who further our efforts to introduce e-Education into their classrooms.

To this end we need teachers who are trained and who have the skills to integrate technology meaningfully into their lessons. It is also important that we update the teacher training curriculum regularly to ensure that it reflects the latest developments in ICT-based education.

To ensure that we keep up with international developments in e-Education and are able to maximise the benefits of e-Education in the classroom, we will conduct research into e-Education methodologies and how these can be used to improve education outcomes. We will also ensure that the integration of ICT into our schools is carefully managed and customised to the needs of each school.

My presence here today – along with senior e-Learning officials of the Western Cape Education Department – is an indication that we take the integration of ICT in education seriously.

In order to achieve our goals in e-Education, we also need the support of the private sector.

Progress can be realised only as the product of partnerships between government, citizens, civil society and business. Each has a role and specific responsibilities. That is why the Western Cape Government has adopted the slogan "Better Together" to capture and convey its message to the people of the Western Cape.

Partnerships are central to the fulfilment of the Western Cape Government's mandate.

When we assumed office in 2009, the Western Cape Government decided that *responsibility* would be one of the new government's key themes: from accepting its own responsibilities as a government to emphasising the responsibilities of individuals and communities.

Each organisation represented here today can become an active citizen in the growth and development of e-Education in our province.

As a government, we are open to discussing and exploring the ways in which partnerships can be forged to improve access to quality education in this province.

I welcome any ideas that you may have in this regard and look forward to the possibility of working with you to accelerate the roll-out of e-Education to our schools.

Investing in education is the best investment one can make in this country and contributions from the private sector and civil society to the improvement of education outcomes are invaluable not only to us as Government, but also to the learners themselves.