Profile 2018

1 CORE BUSINESS

SchoolNet South Africa is an advocate for effective digital learning to be a catalyst for positive educational change. Not only do we promote digital learning for engaging students but also as a motivator of teachers and senior managers to enhance their teaching approaches. SchoolNet SA serves the vital function of changing dialogue around technology in education and is convinced that change leadership is an essential factor in the success of any technology in education initiative in South African schools. Our rationale is closely aligned to Chapter 7 of the national *Action Plan 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025*[1]

Over the past three years the main thrust of SchoolNet's work has been in the following ways:

1. Advocacy related to the effective use of digital learning;
2. The evaluation of learning gains in schools adopting technologies;
3. Nurturing a national digitally-confident professional learning community of teachers;
4. Managing and sustaining high-quality professional development interventions;
5. Developing courseware for teacher education in technology integration across the curriculum, youth development, community centre management, women's empowerment and ICT Leadership in digital learning.

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[1] Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025*, October 2011.

2 RECENT INITIATIVES

SchoolNet has responsibility for major roles in the following sample of current interventions:

1. **DG Murray Trust – Learning Gains through Play**. This research, conducted from 2014 - 2017 tracked the development of two cohorts of Foundation Phase learners and recorded significant learning gains across foundational literacies, most noticeably in English acquisition and gross motor coordination. Learners at project schools experienced a technology-enabled, play-infused learning environment from Grade R. Intel tablets loaded with carefully selected apps and games were integrated into learning activities to stimulate and enhance fine-motor skills and to develop and practise visual literacy and numeracy skills. Xbox Kinect games engaged learning through play, developed gross-motor skills and provided opportunities to reinforce visual and number literacies. Teachers have been excited to discover that digital games have been able to assist them to achieve the outcomes listed in CAPS. Teachers use apps and games to identify teachable moments and stealth learning opportunities which trigger learners' imaginations and target specific literacies. The learning gains in English acquisition are happening at a crucial time, immediately before entry into Grade 4 when the language of learning and teaching suddenly changes from mother tongue to become English. Participant teachers have expressly noticed that their learners are far more prepared for entry to Grade 4. For the second time, The D G Murray Trust has awarded an extended grant to study learner performance in Grade 4 in 2018 to confirm these findings.

2. **Intel Teach** – for the past fifteen years SchoolNet has been the Regional Training Agency for all Intel Teach programmes. Intel were sponsors of SchoolNet conferences and provided funding for training interventions at selected schools nationally. Intel Learn has expanded its programmes to include aspects related to ICT in relation to women and girls, youth empowerment and entrepreneurship much of which SchoolNet has been implementing. In 2015, Intel sponsored professional development of teachers in a national project where the Department of Communication with Telkom and the Department of Education collaboratively installed hardware and connectivity in 1 650 schools and SchoolNet provided the teacher professional development.

3. **Microsoft Partners in Learning** – over more than a decade, SchoolNet has developed materials and undertaken quality assurance for courseware as well as management of the Partners in Learning Teachers' Forum and PIL Network. Microsoft was experimenting with the use of white spaces for connectivity in schools in Limpopo. Workshops have been conducted using Microsoft tablets and a sustained professional development programme for teachers.   Currently SchoolNet is providing professional development in digital learning on behalf of Microsoft for the Eastern Cape provincial education department. SchoolNet is contracted by Microsoft Philanthropies to roll out their Youth Spark programme in South Africa as from 2018. SchoolNet SA has continued to manage the Microsoft Partners in Learning Twitter and Facebook accounts on behalf of Microsoft.

4. **Telkom Foundation** – SchoolNet is responsible for teacher professional development in the ground-breaking Connected Schools programme, which provides ICT infrastructure and connectivity, teacher professional development, digital curriculum content and

electronic administration. This project aims to support learners from Grade 8 to matric and then further to economic empowerment through internships, bursaries and entrepreneurship. The Connected schools programme offers ICT professional development, academic support for learners, and psycho-social support for learners, parents and educators.

5. **KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education** - From 2017 – 2018 the Maths Science and Technology directorate of the KZN Department of Education contracted SchoolNet to run a series of digital learning workshops for its subject advisor officials, firstly for GET (those responsible for teachers of Grades 1 – 9) followed by training of FET (Further Education and Training) subject advisors. Furthermore, the KZN Education Department's ELITS (Education Library and Information Technology Services) commissioned SchoolNet to conduct a course on how to establish a digital school library, to be completed in 2018.

6. SchoolNet currently offers, through its various projects, free professional development opportunities for teachers. These include webinars on many interesting topics for teachers and advocates for the pursuit of professional growth through professional learning communities. SchoolNet continues to support teachers through hosting discussions across its social network platforms including Twitter, [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#) and the [SchoolNet Blog](#). [Reports on all SchoolNet initiatives](#) are accessible from our website.

3 COMPANY DETAILS - SCHOOLNET SOUTH AFRICA

SchoolNet South Africa is a non-profit company, as well as being registered as a Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) and is tax exempt.

3.1 OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

Current SchoolNet activities fall into the category of educator ICT professional development and capacity building among senior management and government officials in South Africa as well as in other countries.

3.2 METHODS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

The method of implementation used by SchoolNet is usually dependent on the needs expressed by a particular project or initiative and where possible in consultation with educators and management at the institutions concerned.

Professional Development currently has many meanings; it can mean attending meetings and conferences, being exposed to new ideas, or it can be one-size fits all training session that dulls the brain and crushes the soul. Research has shown and our practice depicts that

professional development should engage teachers and school administrators as learners themselves, and accompany them on the path as they grow, both personally and as professionals, to do their jobs even better, and make a difference in the lives of children.

SchoolNet facilitators are trained to use the cognitive apprenticeship model of training so that teachers cohesively gain technological, pedagogical and content skills and are not at a loss after the professional development workshop. Shaping and fading techniques are used to encourage teachers to develop self-reliance in order to become independent learners. The instructional design of our materials is framed by the context of the teacher as an adult learner and always attempts to scaffold just-in-time learning strategies and not just-in-case.

At SchoolNet, we are sceptical of educational software that does not require 21st Century learning skills. Furthermore, we are wary that some m-learning projects merely provide content with little, or weak pedagogical design. Where possible the emphasis during SchoolNet training is on the pedagogical and not just on technological considerations; how the technology can support instructional or learning objectives. 21st-century teaching and learning as well as project-based learning feature prominently in SchoolNet philosophy.

SchoolNet SA has welcomed the publication of the national Professional Development Framework for Digital Learning[2] that was first released in September 2017. SchoolNet fully endorses and aligns itself with the principles and recommendations for teacher competences within the framework.

SchoolNet monitors teachers' implementation of what they have learnt during our courses, where possible. Where SchoolNet is not expected to conduct its own research, external evaluations have been commissioned for almost all initiatives implemented. A reliable indicator of success is that funders and sponsors have asked us to implement more projects after the successful implementation of initial projects. Other indicators include examples of teachers progressing through the learning pathways to work in their classrooms at the seamless higher levels of ICT integration and achieving awards for innovation at national and international levels. However, unless we can see impact, specifically on student learning, we do not view a large volume of teachers trained as an indicator of success in itself. In recent projects, impact of success has been measured through attendance of professional development, portfolios of evidence attesting to mastery of skills through implementation and finally through in-classroom support with focused suggestions for improvement in the integration of ICT in teaching and learning activities.

3.3 TECHNICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CAPABILITIES

SchoolNet SA has the following resources at its disposal:
- A full-time staff of 12
- A capacity of 292 contracted part-time trainers based in all provinces.
- Mentoring and tutoring capacity to facilitate online courses or blended courses.
- Quality-assured and SACE or MICT SETA accredited course materials

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[2] Department of Basic Education, *Professional Development Framework for Digital Learning* (2017)

SchoolNet operates across all nine provinces and often undertakes projects in neighbouring countries. SchoolNet's office-based staff members can operate in almost all South African languages. In addition, the linguistic diversity of our trainers means that trainers are often able to train in both English and the preferred local language of participants.

SchoolNet partners with a number of universities in South Africa, often providing curriculum content as well as advisory services. The work we undertake for the Commonwealth of Learning involves liaising with ministries and universities in Africa as well as in the Caribbean providing services which include digitisation of existing university qualifications, tutor training and administration associated with online ICT Integration qualifications for teachers. Most recent higher education partners have included Kenyatta University in Kenya, The University of Fort Hare, Busitema University in Uganda, University of Limpopo and a MOOC with the African Virtual University.

Government departments both national and provincial have contracted SchoolNet in the past several years to undertake a wide spectrum of professional development initiatives. Reports on each may be found on our website: http://www.schoolnet.org.za/schoolnet-at-work/reports/