

# Bringing technology into our classrooms

"It is so worthwhile to come and see what is available in e-learning and classroom technology. It is the only way to move forward," said Kennia Plaskitt, Principal of Willowmoore High School in Benoni during the SABC Education African EduWeek that took place in Johannesburg earlier this month. "One never has time during term and having the event at the start of the holiday enabled us to send 14 teachers from our school," she said.



At an event that can only be described as lively, interactive and inspiring, more than 2436 teachers and education experts, including Deputy Minister of Basic Education Enver Surty, attended the eighth conference and exhibition at the Sandton Convention Centre from 10-11 July. This is a 165% increase in visitors compared to last year. Some 93 leading suppliers of technology, stationery and content to the education sector created an exciting and colourful expo where visitors were encouraged to touch and try the latest classroom gadgets.

## International education platform

African EduWeek Event Director Tanya Jackman, said, "This event is all about the teachers and how we can empower them to go back to their classrooms with new ideas, insight and confidence to face the daily challenges at school, whether it is about teaching skills or using e-learning tools and educational technology. As an event, African EduWeek has truly come of age - our partnership with SABC Education has taken us to the next level, reaching our target audience in the farthest corners of the country, through its radio, TV and online outreach. We are also becoming an international education platform, where various stakeholders in the industry get together to brainstorm and network."

Platinum sponsor Pearson Education's CEO Riaan Jonck said in a radio interview that African EduWeek was "a wonderful event attended by an enormous amount of people - it's quite exciting to see how people are looking at education today versus the way that we used to in the past."

## Teachers learning about neuroscience

During a very interactive keynote address, Dr Judy Willis, the American neurologist turned classroom teacher, explained how best to stimulate young people's brains to process information into knowledge and wisdom. Dr Willis loves sharing her knowledge with fellow teachers: "It's a joy teaching other educators. It's seeing the 'aha moment' when they realise that their best strategies, things that have been most successful, are indeed highly supported by the neuroscience research."

The next keynote speaker received a standing ovation: 32 year old Sheri Brynard of Bloemfontein who is the first person with Down syndrome to qualify as a teacher. Brynard said, "My dream is for South Africa to become a country where the general population respects, encourages and enables its disabled citizens to make a contribution in life, develop to their full potential, and feel that they have a purpose in life."

## Technology for special needs

Inclusivity was an important theme at African EduWeek this year with exciting technology on display for learners with disabilities and learning challenges, including a braille computer that enables a visually impaired or blind person to go on

the internet, receive and send emails, print to braille, connect to their smart phones and much more. "If I had had this technology when I was still in school, I would probably have become a heart surgeon," said Kyle Williams, a visually impaired IT specialist at Edit Microsystems who demonstrated the device at the exhibition.

Doris Mokhaghane is a teacher from the Makwane School in the Free State that has many learners with special needs. "We definitely need special technology and teaching skills to deal with our learners, many of whom are already in their 20s and cannot read or write. I found this event very interesting and helpful. I will definitely be back next year and bring my principal as well," she said.

## **Literacy - two working languages for learning**

The conference also focused on literacy, including a presentation by Maggie Owen Smith of the Home Language Project who notes that "every learner in a multilingual society needs two working languages for learning: a common classroom language and an own home language. As we don't have a common language, English is the most common language for the classroom."

## **WISE roundtable discussion**

The high-level, roundtable discussion on "Creative Ways of Building Africa's Youth Skills", presented by WISE (the World Innovation Summit for Education) included Deputy Basic Education Minister Surty and Saretjie Musgrave, Head of ICT at the Free State University, who believes that teacher training is the key to success. Musgrave said, "There are so many good things already happening. But if you introduce any form of tech in class, it raises fears for the teacher about whether they know how to use it... it's almost like we give the learner or the teacher a Ferrari but we forget to tar the road."

## **China Day**

African EduWeek also celebrated Chinese-South African educational and trade exchange with a special China Day event at the international pavilion of the CEIEC or the China Educational Instrument & Equipment Corporation, a major supplier of educational and scientific equipment. The festivities were attended by the Deputy Minister, the Department's Deputy Director General: Curriculum Policy, Support & Monitoring, Ubert Matanzima Mveli as well as the Gauteng MEC for Education, Panyaza Lesufi.

Rebecca Tang, Deputy GM of CEIEC, was thrilled with the response. "It is the first time that we are in South Africa and we see great potential, also from other African countries."