

April 2010

Microsoft works to empower educators across Africa

Educators throughout the world understand the power of sharing ideas. And today, through the power of technology, educators have unprecedented opportunities to exchange great ideas, best practices and proven methods with each other and their students, transforming how the next generation of students engage with the world around them.

Fostering education remains one of the most important pillars of Microsoft's commitment to Africa, and as a result the company has worked closely with teachers, students and governments throughout the region to deliver innovative teaching solutions utilising technology.

Innovative Education Forum

A prime example of this is the Pan-African Innovative Education Forum (IEF) which brings together teachers from across Africa where they can interact with their peers and showcase best practices on integrating ICT into the classroom as a tool of teaching and learning.

In 2009, 50 teachers from 15 countries gathered at the second Pan-African IEF in Mauritius. In addition, 40 policy implementers from nine countries across Africa were also present and attended a workshop organised by the World Bank, Cisco, Intel and Microsoft intended to assist Ministries of Education translate policy to execution in the area of teacher development.

Lalita Ramsewak, a teacher from Mauritius who attended the IEF, firmly believes that teachers need to take the first steps to adopting technology as a teaching aid.

"Policymakers and governments are doing a lot of good things in the educational sector, but if you have to rely on them, you're going to wait a long time to get programmes up and running. Why wait? You can start right now in your school," she said.

"After all," added Fiona Beal, a teacher from South Africa in attendance, "We have to teach to our children's' future, not to their past."

During the forum the teachers' technology-driven methods and solutions were assessed and winners were selected to represent Africa at the worldwide Innovative Education Forum (IEF) held in Brazil in November 2009.

At the worldwide IEF in Brazil, selected teachers from South Africa, Mozambique, Uganda, Ghana, Lesotho, Nigeria and Mauritius were given the opportunity to collaborate and share their experiences with 250 teachers from over 60 countries.

After four days of seminars, teacher exhibitions and evaluation, 12 teachers were recognised by an internationally renowned panel of education experts for the contribution they made to education in their respective countries and for their innovative use of technology in the classroom.

The worldwide winner of the Educators Choice award was Africa's very own Moliehi Sekese, who hails from the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho.

“Winning the Educators Choice award is certainly a great honor,” said Moliehi Sekese of Lesotho who won for her project Indigenous Plants. “It was exciting to meet teachers from around the world with whom I can now communicate and collaborate. I learnt so much from the team that I was part of – teachers from Canada, Norway the UK and Singapore. Now I know people who I can work with on other projects – they were also so interested in what I was doing.”

Dr Cheick Modibo Diarra, Chairman of Microsoft Africa, said that the IEF is all about delivering the real-world benefits of technology in the classroom.

“Since IEF was introduced five years ago, we’ve been introduced to some incredible talent in the educational sector, and the results are showing as we see more engaged and knowledgeable students making their way through school and into the working world across Africa.”

Africa PiL Network

While so many teachers were gathered at the IEF in Mauritius, Microsoft launched another initiative to support their important work in the classroom, called the Africa Partners in Learning (PiL) Network.

The Africa PiL Network is a virtual community for educators who want to transform their classrooms into technology-rich learning environments. In addition to active discussion forums where educators can connect directly with each other within Africa and with teachers worldwide, the PiL Network includes a wealth of information, content, tools and resources which provide guidance in using technology more effectively in classrooms.

The Africa PiL Network is the first network offering educators the opportunity to interact and collaborate in a secure environment across Africa.

“The Africa PiL Network provides a unique and powerful way to connect educators from Africa to educators around the world and offers them an accessible forum dedicated to the exchange of ideas, educational tools and collaboration,” said Dr Diarra.

The network demonstrates our continued focus on empowering educators to engage their students more deeply,” he added.

Shape the Future Initiative

For the past 24 years, we have been engaging with governments to build rich public private partnerships and have learned that no matter if it’s a [child in London](#), a [teacher in South Africa](#), or a [Senior Citizen in Argentina](#), putting technology in the hands of someone who did not before have access is a powerful thing.

“Shape the Future,” seeks to work with governments to help create smart, sustainable and inclusive technology programs– including not only affordable access to devices and software, but technology skills training and technology assistance. With digital inclusion programs aimed at students, teachers, families, and citizens in general, African countries can help stimulate student centered learning, entrepreneurship and access to information, thus accelerating local innovation and competitiveness in the global economy.

Through “Shape the Future”, Microsoft has already helped close the digital divide by facilitating access to a PC for more than six million people worldwide.

Africans are looking to their leaders to deliver on the promise of a better quality of life, and Microsoft’s Shape the Future initiative can help deliver on that promise.

Innovative Schools Programme

In addition to the virtual community of educators, Microsoft is also investing in the community of schools around the world that have a common interest in transforming education.

Called the Innovative Schools programme, Microsoft helps schools to move beyond the limits of the classroom and traditional learning models. By sharing experiences and goals, the program aims to create models that any school, any system, can use to prepare children for success in an evolving global economy. For the schools involved, Microsoft delivers technology expertise, development tools, as well as online and regional training.

In order to become a Pathfinder School, a rigorous application process is completed that includes written and video documentation, interviews with the school leadership and an assessment. The programme is open to any school in the world and every school that meets the criteria will be considered.

Microsoft also identifies Mentor Schools among the Pathfinder Schools, which have already achieved a level of change within their education systems and are viewed as leaders in their countries or regions. .

Microsoft is expanding its Innovative Schools programme from a pilot to a full-scale global programme, with the addition of 30 new Pathfinder Schools and 12 Mentor Schools, representing 35 countries. To date, 30 Pathfinder schools and 12 Mentor schools have been chosen to participate in the programme for 2010. An additional 30 Pathfinder Schools will be selected by Microsoft on a yearly basis until 2013.

“By working hand in hand with the Microsoft Innovative Schools programme, the education community can bring improved understanding of what students need to advance in a global economy,” said Dr Diarra.

“We are very proud to announce that of the 30 Pathfinder Schools chosen, three are from Africa - South Africa, Ghana and Mauritius. In addition, we are thrilled to name the Aga Khan Academy from Kenya as a Mentor school,” he said.

“It is an honour for us to be named as the only Mentor school in Africa for 2010,” said a spokesperson for Aga Khan. “The Microsoft Innovative Schools initiative has given us the resources we need to provide the best education available to our students in Kenya and we look forward to working with Microsoft and other schools in the programme to identify ways in which we can equip our students with knowledge, a drive for innovation and a passion for technological discovery.”

Shared Resource Computing for Classrooms

To help make technology more accessible and affordable for the type of schools involved in the Innovative Education Forum, the Africa PiL Network or Innovative Schools Program, Microsoft is also investing in an emerging category of technology called shared resource computing, which allows multiple students to simultaneously use one computer.

Called Microsoft Windows MultiPoint, this family of shared resource computing solutions translates into significant savings for schools, based on lower hardware costs and ongoing operating expenses.

Expressly designed for non-technical professionals to be able to set up, manage, and use, educators and students can spend more time and resources on what's important: creating, teaching, exploring, collaborating, learning, and developing.

- By tapping into a single computer's excess power to support a number of users at once, Windows MultiPoint Server 2010 allows a teacher and a number of their students to each use their own screen, keyboard and mouse in the classroom.
- Windows MultiPoint Mouse Software Development Kit (SDK) 1.5 is a free SDK that enables developers to create interactive educational applications, allowing up to 25 students, each with their own mouse, to interact on the same PC.
- Microsoft Mouse Mischief is a free tool that seamlessly integrates with PowerPoint to let teachers create interactive presentations that engage their students in the classroom. Teachers can create multiple-choice, matching, and drawing question slides that students, each with their own mouse, can answer on a single display.

Conclusion

While technology like Windows MultiPoint itself plays a key role in promoting economic growth and digital inclusion across Africa, Microsoft believes it must be combined with sustainable education programmes to have a lasting impact. The evolution of the PiL programme through the Innovative Education Forum, the Africa PiL Network and Innovative Schools Program, is a reflection of the company's ongoing commitment to expand the world of learning through technology and empower students and teachers throughout the world.