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The Mighty Pen

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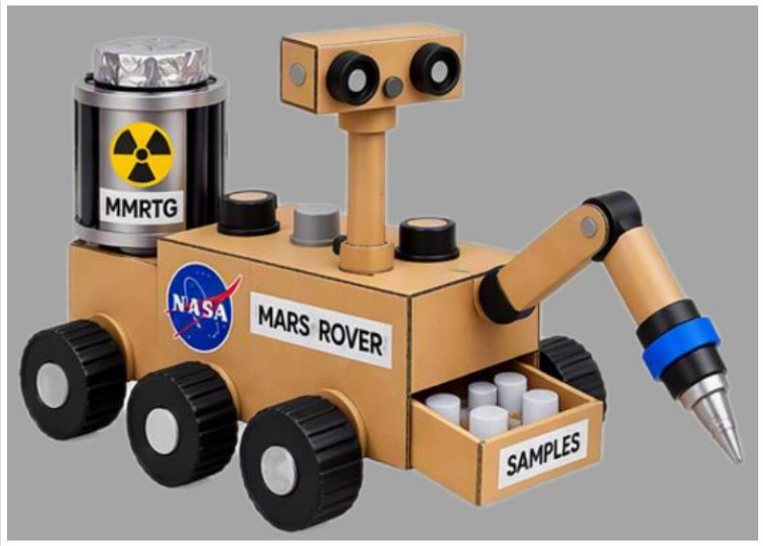
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The Business of Education for School Decision Makers



Reviewing digital skills



Early learning



Degree vs. experience



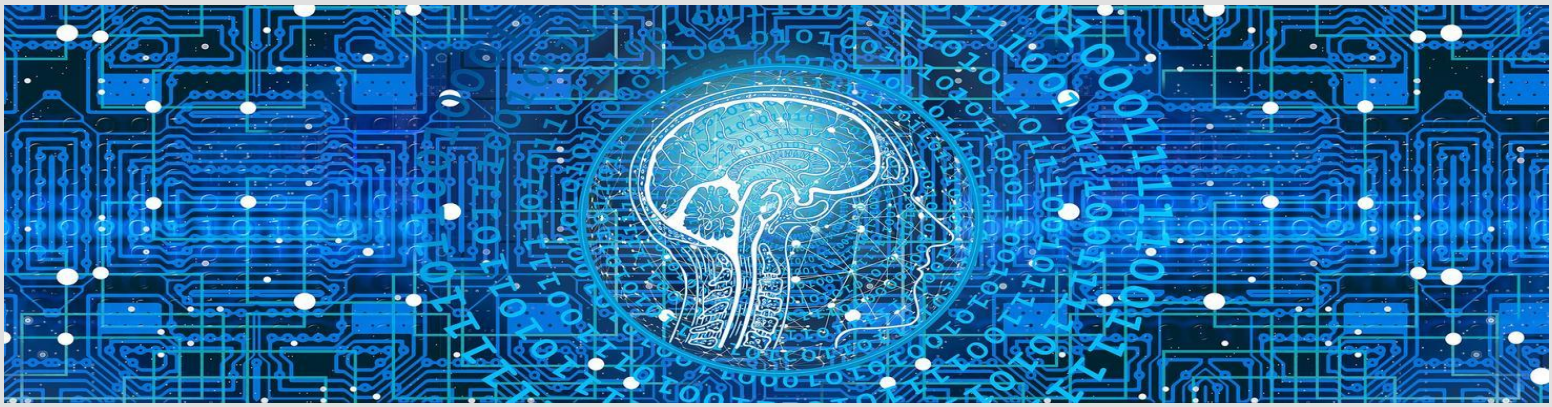
Exam pressure

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Editor's Column

Digital education in SA schools

Digital education is becoming an increasingly important part of South Africa's schooling system. As technology continues to transform the workplace, economy and society, schools are under growing pressure to prepare learners with the digital skills needed to participate meaningfully in the modern world. Skills such as computer literacy, computational thinking, problem-solving, creativity and technological innovation are no longer regarded as optional extras but as essential components of a well-rounded education.

See our Technology Feature exclusive focus that reviews our 3-year coverage of a leading company transforming our classrooms through teacher training and mentoring in coding and robotics.

The success of South Africa's digital education ambitions depends not only on providing schools with computers and other technological resources, but also on ensuring that teachers have the knowledge, confidence and practical skills to use these resources effectively.

South Africa has made significant progress in expanding access to digital technology in public schools. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) reported in September 2026 that provincial education departments had invested approximately R7.1 billion over three years in information and communication technology (ICT), connectivity and teacher training. More than 545 000 learner devices and approximately 30 800 teacher devices had been procured, while over 10 500 classrooms had received ICT equipment. In addition, approximately 388 700 teachers had received some form of digital training.

One of the most significant developments in South African digital education is the planned introduction of Coding and Robotics as a school subject for Grades R to 9. The curriculum is designed to develop learners' computational thinking, logical reasoning, creativity, problem-solving and ability to understand and interact with technology.

The curriculum is not yet mandatory and has undergone extensive piloting and revision, but according to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), more than 1 500 public schools across all nine provinces have participated in piloting activities.

Blessings in education

***Janos Bozsik* - editor**

Shaping the next generation – of digital creators

A 3-year review of South African classrooms



(Google Gemini AI-generated example)

Mars Rover prototype - 6 wheels, 1 nuclear battery for power, antenna for computer and radio communication, infrared sensor to study rocks and the environment, underneath sample storage, robotic arm with drill, camera.



Marelize Mostert, IT Teacher:
"Term 4 was filled with creativity and innovation as our Grade R, Grade 1 and remedial learners built sitting and standing humanoid robots. The children loved creating their own designs and enthusiastically tackled the challenge of making their robots stand by testing a variety of legs and feet. This activity encouraged both imagination, engineering and problem-solving skills. The engineering challenge for the higher grades was a prototype inspired by the NASA solar-powered rover."

As from June 2023 we started featuring South African teachers at schools implementing Knowledge Network's technology integration and digital upskilling programmes — and how modern technology impacts students' learning experiences, academic growth and everyday digital lives.

These features afforded us a unique opportunity — a peek into digital skills classrooms around South Africa — we've seen students' work, heard their voices, listened to the teachers who are entrusted with cementing foundational skills, developing the thinking that powers learning and responsibly inviting students — into new worlds like AI.

In this feature, we catch up with the teachers, their schools and students. They answer the important questions: Are we on track? Do we meet the expectations of modern curriculums like CAPS and Cambridge? Do we map well to international digital skills frameworks? How do we fair globally? Is learning balanced? Is the thinking development powered by ILAMM — Integrated Learning and Mentoring Methodology visible in the students' work? Are computational, creative, design, language, logical, critical, metacognitive and lateral thinking evident in projects?

We hear from Mpule Nkoana, Craighall Primary School — our first feature of 2023 — who was a newly graduated teacher in her first years of teaching. She now has an Honours Degree in Educational Technology from Wits, is currently in her master's research module with plans to make a difference in our country's educational landscape:

"I hope to use the knowledge and skills gained through my master's degree and Knowledge Network professional development courses to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of educational technology in South Africa."

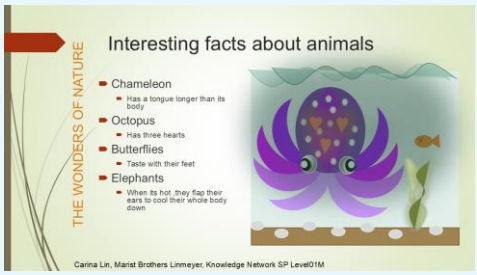
At Craighall Primary School, Term 04 for Grades 4 to 7 is robotics.
"We are introducing MicroPython, exploring simple prototypes inspired by NASA's Mars Perseverance rover, and building 3D environments and scenes. The thinking behind the 3D scenes is simple, if learners are coding robots, they should also have opportunities to explore the environments in which these robots operate. It is about helping learners connect with coding, robotics, design and real-world applications. This year's assessments have also focused on robotic sensing, allowing learners to explore how robots interact with environments through sensors. This moves learning beyond writing code and towards understanding how technology can respond to real-world conditions."

Upscale this and you find yourself on an earth-based mini 3D Mars set. New rover prototyping, humanoids in training, and engineering graduates employed to use skills — the foundation and inspiration for which was gained during their school years.

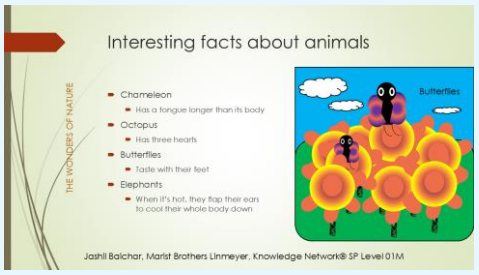
"The growth in digital skills at the school since 2023 has been encouraging. There has been growing willingness to explore technology and digital tools and incorporate them into teaching and learning. One of the most rewarding experiences has been receiving feedback from former students who have returned to visit. Hearing about their experiences and seeing how the skills and exposure they received at school have stayed with them is a reminder that what we do in the classroom can have an impact far beyond the school gates."

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By Carina Lin, Grade 4B: Animals – Octopus. Marist Brothers Linmeyer.



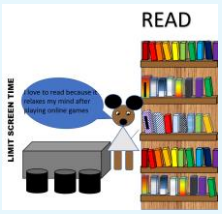
By Jazil Baichar, Grade 4B: Animals – Butterflies. Marist Brothers Linmeyer.



Marist Brothers Linmeyer – Grade 5: 2026 Digital Illustration Winners. <u>Teacher</u>: Tracey Bolland.



By Mackenzie van Muylwyk – Grade 5M.



By Botle Letsoaka – Grade 5C.

Examples of the Award-winning work by the Marist Brothers Linmeyer students.

With the topic – Be Internet Awesome – they had to illustrate what they can do to limit their screen time outside of school.

Math teacher Carol Nzimande started her Grade R to Grade 9 coding and robotics teaching at SBSM Independent School.

This year her Grade 9s are structuring and styling a website using industry standard tools. Website creation is another form of building. Students research content, create their own digital assets — icons, animations and videos. Terrified to teach HTML at first, Carol's passion in digital skills teaching now includes HTML, which is not lost on her students who included it on their 2026 learning wish list. The Grade 9 assessment is a multipage mini website on two futuristic transport systems. This involves own, 3D onscreen scene design and plans, animations and videos. The latest Tesla hover roadster is their animation sequencing challenge this year. Real-world learning at its best.

"I am just excited to see what the learners do. This time of year shows where I started and how much I have grown. The development from primary is the biggest reward, this also shapes their subject choice into CAT. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to take them this far."

Foundation phase grades do assessment projects too. These little learners celebrate their learning year drawing, painting, tracing, coding and building. Topics include trains, bunnies and their healthy foods, squirrels collecting acorns, an eight-armed octopus, riverside fish eagles, underwater with sound and a bubble-blowing pufferfish, humanoids, 3D beach, farm and city scenes.

Tracey Bolland, a Marist Brothers Linmeyer ITC teacher ends her year with Skills for Schoolwork assessments.

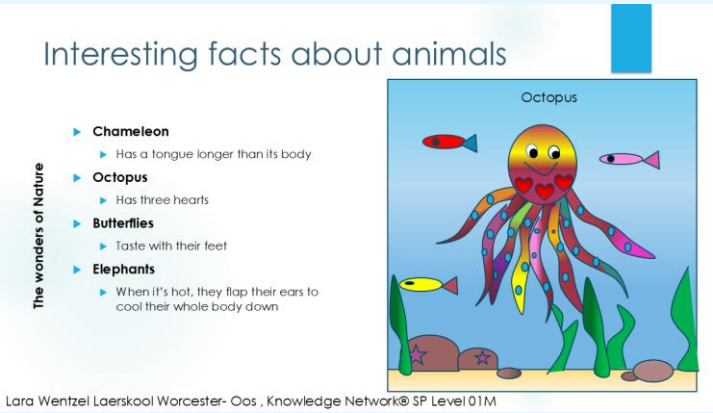
Her topics are: Grade 4: Wonders of Nature – Chameleon, Octopus, Butterflies and Elephants; Grade 5: Be Internet Awesome – with an illustration of an offline activity to limit screen time; Grade 06: Costing of a Zoo Day – with a poster of The Pickersgill's Reed Frog, Wattled Crane, or Owl Education conservation projects; and Grade 7: How computational thinking can be applied to trampolining, with visualisation.

Tracey's Grade 5 and 6 students are the first to win an award for Digital Illustrating – this is a new concept. It fits perfectly into current times where student agency, independent thinking and authentic work – with digital artifacts credited to students – is rewarded. In the AI-generated era, our students are learning the power of human-generated work. We are building digital creators, not just consumers. Students understand that their thinking, digital skills, and very humanness are the value.

"I have taught ICT for many years and I have noticed that certain students have a flair for designing something very creative using basic digital skills. I decided to recognise this talent by choosing a few visually appealing examples and awarding a special certificate for those students irrespective of the overall Knowledge Network assessment results. I encouraged students to add to their illustration if they had time once the assessment was done. I have also spent a lot of time trying to get them to add detail to anything graphic created during the lessons. Recipients of this certificate were extremely proud of their achievements, and I will continue with this initiative."

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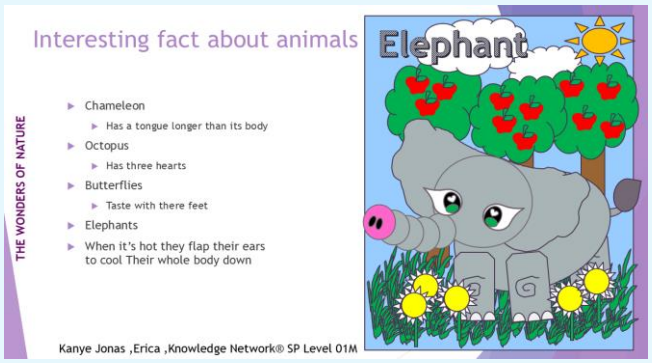
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By Lara Wentzel - Grade 4A.

Laerskool Worcester-Oos.

<u>Teacher</u>: Renee van der Riet.



By Kanye Jonas - Grade 04 - Erica Girls' Primary School.

<u>Teacher - Rebecca Chambers</u>:

"Growing into the role of Knowledge Network mentor, beginning of last year, has injected joy into my every day. It has provided the refresh in lesson creation, the reconnection with learners across different grades and the reset my soul needed, and this cannot be underestimated."

A new norm is evolving.

Academic achievement, alongside outstanding performance in sports, chess and debating, is no longer the only benchmark being rewarded. Excellence in digital skills is now being noticed, acknowledged, and celebrated.

Thinking types — creative, computational, metacognitive, critical, language, and visual — together with data-illustrating skills, are being identified and honoured. Students who were rarely seen on the podium now have their place in digital world achievement. Students are finding excellence in their digital passions: illustrating, icon design, animations, video creation, prototyping, building 3D robotic scenes, digital info display, scriptwriting for storytelling, coding, designing game interfaces and technology integration in school projects are all gaining recognition.

The Mighty Pen's digital skills three-year showcase has featured awards for digital prowess. Christian Brothers' College, Boksburg, has a floating trophy for Knowledge Network Technology Integration. And Alma Mater International School has awards for school-wide robotics competitions. Traditional school-entrance display cabinets, digital newsletters, and social media spaces are being populated with student-created digital assets. Digital literacy is no longer a technical skill set – it represents student identity, pride, recognition, self-awareness and belonging. Mastery follows.

High achievement in the computer classroom is now publicised. A by-product of thinking-powered, project-based, integrated, focused, delivery-driven learning is the development of human skills — often referred to as soft skills or social and emotional skills — a value-add noted by principals and parents. These are the very same human qualities that appear as essential future skills in international frameworks: persistence, perseverance, responsibility, self-control, starting at the beginning, tolerance, open-mindedness, emotional control, learning from making mistakes, confidence, collaboration, trust, engaging with others, energy and pride.

Renee van der Riet, Principal of Laerskool Worcester-Oos retires this year:

"What a wonderful year it has been in our Grade 04 Knowledge Network class. At the beginning of the year, many of our learners had never used PowerPoint before and were unsure of where to start. Today, they confidently create presentations and digital drawings that highlight their creativity and growing computer skills. The improvement in their artwork has been especially impressive. From simple first attempts to detailed, colourful creations, their progress has been amazing to watch.

"Most importantly, they have developed confidence, perseverance, and a willingness to try new things. I am incredibly proud of how far each learner has come. Their enthusiasm and hard work have developed them into young, talented digital creators, and it has been a privilege to be part of their journey. When we have a few minutes to spare in class, we do speed drawing, which has become a great favourite."

Cont. p. 5 ...

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Kayla Marques, Grd 00 to 7 Coding and Robotics Teacher and proud ex-student of Ashton International College Benoni:

"This term's robotics scene building has been such an exciting and rewarding experience. It has been wonderful to see the learners bring their creativity and imagination to life by transforming their Scratch coding projects into 3D physical scenes, with learners from as young as Grade 00 getting involved. The students were incredibly enthusiastic and proud to see their digital creations come alive, and as a teacher, I have thoroughly enjoyed watching their creativity, confidence and problem-solving skills grow throughout the process."



Creating digital illustrations within a strict, self-imposed time offers several profound developmental benefits that extend well beyond just artistic technique. Because time is severely limited, students cannot afford to fixate on mistakes. This forces them to accept imperfection, embrace "little accidents", and push through frustration — building a strong tolerance for creative errors. A student's understanding of time is essential in the production of digital work, especially during assessments, class projects, and home learning time.

Imagine: 60 minutes for reading, typing, understanding, interpreting, translating text to visuals, computer work, and finishing. Fostering computational thinking is an unexpected outcome. It requires you to break down a complex, detailed subject into its simplest structural components (decomposition) and identify the core shapes or lighting patterns (abstractions) to convey the image efficiently. By working this concept back and applying computational thinking — students can type a data sheet, use their language thinking to read and understand the data, and apply creative thinking to complete the illustration of a chameleon, octopus, butterfly or elephant in its natural habitat – all without the on-the-day pressure and stress.

ILAMM – Integrated Learning and Mentoring Methodology — is powerful. Integrated learning, as opposed to learning in insolation, adds impact. E-learning gifts students with the necessary background knowledge, and vocabulary for easier understanding. With the emphasis on thinking before, during, and after, students can remain focused — keep their eye on the prize — and master what they are learning.

Eleni Zachariou, Grade R to Grade 3 Coding and Robotics teacher at Ashton International College Ballito, comments on her and her students' growth from 2023 to 2026. She is excited and inspired:

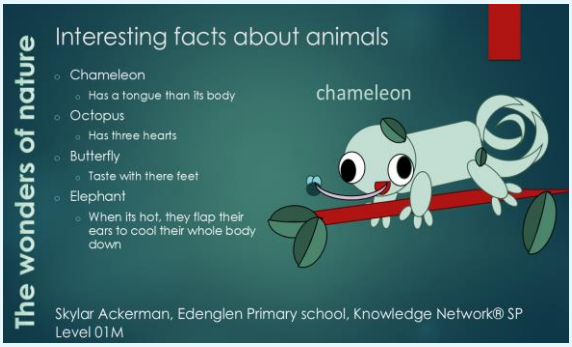
"Over the past three years, I have loved seeing the growth in our learners' confidence and understanding of coding and robotics. They have developed a much clearer understanding that coding is about breaking a goal down into logical, step-by-step instructions to achieve the outcome they want. It has been wonderful to see them become more confident problem-solvers who are willing to test, make mistakes, debug, and try again."

In storytelling coding, students need to understand what they are coding. This understanding leads them to the end of their coded story. They watch a video together, discuss the details of the story, sometimes act out the narrative, and problem-solve before they even start coding. The story is the solution, and the coding tools are the stepping stones.

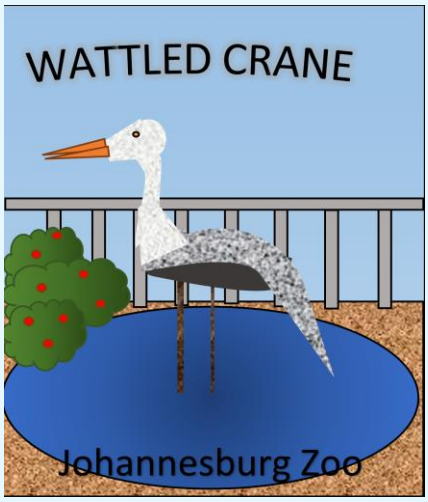
The three-year glimpse into classes where upskilling via Knowledge Network is taking place is an eye opener. It showcases how modern curriculums can work. At the end of 2026, the *CAPS Coding and Robotics Curriculum,* not yet a timetabled subject nationwide, integrates a broad range of literacy skills for all students. It includes extensive digital skills, even if not explicit in the name. It's about much more than code and robots. For schools, this provides an excellent entry to the subject over time, using existing equipment, their current timetable — led by existing enthusiastic and committed teachers, with background curriculum mapping quietly taking place.

Cont. p. 6 ...

... from p. 5



By Skylar Ackerman - Grade 4E.
Edenglen Primary School.
IT Teacher: Clive Patterson.



By Ayesha Moosa –
Unicorn Preparatory School.

Faranaaz Gani, IT Teacher (Coding and Skills for Schoolwork), Grade R to Grade 7, Unicorn Preparatory School:

"2026 marked my first year as a Knowledge Network mentor. I was an intern, the IT teaching post became available, I applied, was ecstatic when I was selected, and determined to give my best. Technology is not just about computers; it is about creativity, problem-solving and discovering what is possible. I started the year feeling terrified, questioning whether I could do it, I am ending the year feeling proud, confident and excited. Seeing students take the skills they have been taught and transform them into creative pieces of work is incredibly rewarding."

Mpule Nkoana, featured in the first article of 2023 and at the start of this article, has a message for teachers who will follow her:
"I consider myself fortunate to have found a school that gave me the opportunity to grow, and a Knowledge Network mentor who believed in my potential from day one of my ILAMM training course, who supported me and was prepared to stand up for me. Sometimes, all someone needs is one person who sees their potential, gives them an opportunity, and is willing to advocate for them. My advice is: be willing to learn, embrace opportunities and never underestimate the difference that a person can make. I hope my journey encourages other young educators to recognise that they can become teachers and innovators. We have the opportunity to shape how the next generation experiences technology and prepares for the future."

Ian Houston, Headmaster of Unicorn Preparatory School summarises his tech journey for us, how the qualities of his selected tech teachers drive the process, and how his entry Grade R and exiting Grade 7 students have been positioned for the next part of their life in the digital world:

"At Unicorn Preparatory School, our journey in digital education has evolved significantly, embracing three interconnected pillars: Digital Literacy, Coding and Robotics. What began with information technology lessons through Knowledge Network has developed into a comprehensive programme that equips pupils from Grade R to Grade 7 with skills needed to navigate an increasingly digital world.

"A significant part of this success is due to the exceptional commitment and enthusiasm of our two **teachers Ms Faranaaz Gani and Mr Shima Mphahlele,** who embraced this journey wholeheartedly, completing extensive online (virtual) training and developing their skills at an extraordinary pace.

"Their progress in just one year has been remarkable, and this is reflected in the confidence, competence and achievements of our pupils. Our Grade 07 learners are leaving primary school with digital skills reportedly comparable to Grade 10 level, giving them an excellent foundation as they move into high school. Equally exciting is watching our youngest learners in Grade R begin their journey through storytelling, introductory coding and engagement with humanoid robotics.

"We recognise that our children are growing up in a world where digital literacy is no longer an optional extra, but an essential part of education. However, while we embrace technology and innovation, we remain equally committed to nurturing creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and above all, the human qualities that technology can never replace. We are immensely proud of what our teachers and pupils have achieved, grateful for the partnership with Knowledge Network and excited to be part of shaping a generation of confident, capable and responsible digital citizens."

Let's make learning easier and fun!

Partner with Knowledge Network® to give your students the best chance to successfully master technology.



This is Marty. Marty can talk, walk, dance, translate, sense and learn.

We use Marty to test code already learned through Knowledge Network for unplugged, ScratchJr, Scratch and Python, and we progress from there. We do machine learning, add microcontrollers and use AI like text-to-speech. Progression per grade is built in.



This is a microcontroller. A micro:bit – a great starter tool to teach how circuits work, how to connect different **robotic** elements, how electricity flows through materials, coding and robotics for indoor and outdoor use. We use it for AI, machine learning, to use with robots like Marty, and for creating **DIY** robotics like windmills, fans, turtles and other. Extensions like sound, recording, servos and microturtle **grids** are excellent teaching tools for little learners too.



Coding. We integrate all the different learning areas into coding. Students code stories, games, shape drawing, animation, calculations and data storage like game scores. They **design** characters for animation, use art and graphics to **create** backgrounds, game interfaces and develop websites.

They do research for photos and images, make music for stories and games, edit sound and record voice. They make videos, **invent** new games and code apps. They learn how to manage their files. Little learners improve their vocab, communication and thinking skills through storytelling **coding**.



This looks like AI. A companion for students and teachers learning **Skills for Schoolwork**. AI is a valuable study companion and **research** assistant. AI can help with full APA-style **referencing** and proper citing.

AI can support writing, provide math help and study guides, and assist students with revision by helping with translations, grammar checks and language conversational practice.

Let's teach students how to use it correctly and safely. Teachers also use it during class to make learning easier.



Skills for schoolwork: we all need excellent skills in all areas of computer use, from writing, drawing, layout, research and referencing to charting, number crunching, animation, sound, video, presenting data for projects using business-standard and newly released tools.

Integrating technology in teaching and learning is the key to mastering all these new skills for schoolwork, coding and robotics. It also develops **computational** thinking, **creativity, problem-solving, teamwork** and collaboration - key abilities students also need to prosper in the digital age.

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NPOs under pressure – sustainability & survival

Indicative of a critical evolution in philanthropy, donors are increasingly transitioning from transactional, once-off funding models, toward relationship-driven partnerships focused on measurable impact.

This according to Precious Mulambo, Philanthropy Advice Specialist at Nedbank Private Wealth, speaking at the annual *ThinkGood* event recently held at Inyathelo's Sustainability Hub in Cape Town. Held under the theme "Under Pressure: Breaking Down and Managing Pressure Points," the one-day conference was a collaboration by the NPO Service Provider Network, that provided a vital platform for sharing, learning, inspiration, and connection.

With NPOs navigating mounting financial constraints, shifting funding landscapes, and organisational fatigue, the sector welcomed this platform. The event tackled the harsh realities facing civil society head-on, offering participants a safe space to acknowledge systemic pressures, ranging from funding shortages and inadequate infrastructure to administrative strain and staff burnout, while equipping them with actionable tools to build resilient, future-proof organisations.

Feryal Domingo, Acting Executive Director of Inyathelo, highlighted the phenomenal response from attendees who welcomed the opportunity to talk openly about sector-wide pressures.

"We feel the pressure, but sometimes we can't mention it, note it, give it a name, or talk about it because it depends on who's listening," Domingo reflected. "Today was that safe space, i.e. sitting amongst your peers where you don't have to be shy to acknowledge, 'I have the same issue, I'm under pressure because I don't have the right staff in place, I don't have enough staff, I don't have the financial resources, or even the infrastructure to do and live the mission of the organisation."

Throughout the day, participants engaged in robust discussions and plenary panels featuring community leaders such as Sher'Neil Savel of the 9Miles Project, exploring how NPOs navigate developmental milestones and organisational maturity.

Shifting the mindset from internal dialogue to community connection, Hani Du Toit, Inclusion Specialist, Executive Coach, and founder of We Belong Africa, addressed psychological and operational roadblocks. She emphasised that navigating external pressure must begin with an internal shift, encouraging participants to examine their own mindsets, self-talk, and conditioned biases.



NPO sector leaders, specialists, and practitioners.

Adding a veteran sector perspective, Professor Eric Atmore, Director of the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD), addressed the structural vulnerabilities facing NPOs, pointing out that survival demands proactive strategic planning rather than reactive crisis management.

"All organisations are under pressure to some degree, but pressure doesn't just occur - there's a build-up," Prof. Atmore stated. Drawing from decades of experience in the ECD sector, he warned against short-term thinking. "If you're not thinking about the year 2030 now, you're not going to be around in 2030."

With a call for collaborative resilience, the conference concluded with closing reflections and practical break-away workshops covering governance and risk management, business models for social enterprises, mindfulness under pressure, intelligent recruitment, and organisational responses to burnout.

As NPOs face an increasingly complex socio-economic landscape, events like *ThinkGood* serve as a crucial catalyst, reminding civil society leaders that while systemic pressures are real, they can be met with collective wisdom, strategic innovation, and unyielding community resilience.

LEARNERS WHO BENEFITED FROM THE ALATEEN PROGRAMME

Below are some comments from school children in the Alateen programme

(Names are changed to protect members' anonymity)

My daughter has changed so much in the past year since attending Alateen. There's a new confidence, a renewed happiness, and more openness. She has the courage to share in AA meetings, and to engage with people outside of them. She's growing into an amazing person, and I couldn't be prouder of her. ***"Proud Mother".***

It's amazing how much honesty there can be in Alateen when alcohol is full of lies. ***"Maria" age 11.***



Alateen has relieved me of the stress in my life. I have more focus on my schoolwork and I have stopped overthinking everything. I have serenity in my life for the first time as I have stopped worrying about my Dad's drinking and am more confident. ***"Jabulani", age 11.***

I have been told by my friends & family I am much more relaxed, calmer and more mature. I have been going to Alateen for nearly three years and I don't worry so much about my Mom and am not so negative. ***"Lucy" now age 13.***



Alateen has helped me stop worrying about what might happen at home if my parents are drinking and fighting. ***"Ray" age 12.***

Alateen has helped me deal with the stress at home and my school marks have improved. I didn't want to go to meetings at first, but now I look forward to the weekend meeting and seeing my friends there. ***"Rebecca", age 15.***

Before Alateen I found it very difficult to talk to other people at school. Now I feel freer, am much more confident, and understand it's not only my family that has this problem. ***"Mark" age 14.***

I used to bottle up my feelings about everything, until my anger would explode. At Alateen I learned a better, calmer way to share discuss any problems with my group. ***"Jay" age 16.***



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Matric mental health – pressure in perspective

The final year of high school is considered one of the most defining periods in a young person's life, as it plays a large part in determining their path and options for the future.

For hundreds of thousands of students each year, this reality carries immense weight: university admissions, career paths, family expectations, and societal success all seem to hinge on Matric exam performance.

"The pressure on our young people is tremendous, with long study hours, fear of failure, comparison with peers, and uncertainty about the future creating a perfect storm of anxiety and stress. Many parents and students feel it deeply, and the toll on the mental health of both the Matric student and their families can be significant during this time," says Pertunia Nkomo-Mofokeng, Deputy Dean of Teaching and Learning at Rosebank International.

The key is to maintain a healthy perspective about the exams and the future.

Nkomo-Mofokeng says a healthy mind improves focus, memory retention, problem-solving, and resilience under pressure. Chronic stress, on the other hand, impairs cognitive function, leads to burnout, and can turn manageable challenges into overwhelming crises. Students who neglect sleep, nutrition, and emotional balance often find their study efforts less effective, creating a vicious cycle.

Advice for students

"Remember that this year is part of your journey and your life, whatever may come after – not the final judgment about your value and potential. You will always have options, and just knowing this will help lighten the load," says Nkomo-Mofokeng.

She says students should create and stick to a realistic study schedule for the current finals, and then trust that consistent, quality effort every day will take them further than exhausting all-nighters or last-minute cramming ever could.

When the weight of expectations starts to feel too heavy, or even impossible to manage, pause and care for your mind. Practise deep breathing, try short mindfulness exercises, or use a meditation app for just a few minutes a day. Journal your thoughts, get some exercise, share your worries with a trusted friend, or simply step away from social media where comparison steals your peace.

You are running your own race, not anyone else's highlight reel.



Advice for parents

As parents, we want nothing more than the very best for our children, and it can be deeply challenging to see them struggling under the weight of Matric exams pressure. The late nights, the anxiety, and the fear of not being good enough can feel overwhelming, for them and for you, says Nkomo-Mofokeng.

"While parents can't 'fix' this season for their children, there are a number of ways in which they can support them. It starts by creating a calm and supportive home environment and reducing unnecessary pressures where possible. Aim to offer genuine encouragement instead of criticism, and practise the art of truly listening, without immediately trying to find solutions or fixes."

Nkomo-Mofokeng advises parents to stay gently involved by monitoring their Matric child's wellbeing without slipping into micromanagement.

Encourage regular breaks, family time, and moments of rest. Most importantly, model the balanced behaviour you wish to see. When they watch you manage stress calmly and prioritise health and maintain perspective, it gives them permission to do the same while focusing on the task at hand.

Child-led learning – transforming early education





Education is rapidly transforming worldwide, and in the early childhood years, there is a marked shift toward child-centred, joyful models over rigid academics.

This global momentum was underscored at the recent *Reggio Emilia International Conference* in Italy, where educators from 47 countries, including from South Africa's leading private education groups, gathered to advance a philosophy that empowers young students as creative thinkers and co-creators of knowledge.

"The *Reggio Emilia* approach, particularly within the Early Years (infant, toddler, preschool, and primary phases), is grounded in the belief that children are capable, curious, and rich in potential. It promotes inclusive learning environments that support students' wellbeing, encourage meaningful social interaction, and foster a strong sense of belonging. Central to this approach is a shared responsibility to the community, one that embraces diversity, promotes collaboration, and nourishes a creative culture for teaching and learning," says Darren Purdon, Head of Academics at Advtech Schools.

Interactive learning

At the heart of the *Reggio Emilia* approach lies the understanding that education is not self-sufficient. Learning does not happen in isolation - it emerges through resources, experiences, theories, dialogue, and relationships. Children do not learn by themselves, but through interaction with others and through engagement with thoughtfully designed environments.

As a result, *Reggio Emilia* classroom spaces are intentionally equipped to reflect what is being taught, ensuring that the environment itself becomes an active participant in learning, often referred to as the "third teacher."

Children are seen as natural researchers who explore ideas through encounters with peers, materials, and experiences. Through thinking, acting, listening, and questioning with curious minds, they co-construct knowledge together.

"It is therefore important to note how accessible, everyday materials, such as paper, natural objects, and recycled resources can play an important role in these learning experiences. These materials invite creativity, exploration, and critical thinking. This means students can engage in practices such as observational drawing, while teachers carefully document learning through photographs, notes, and displays. Documentation makes thinking visible and honours children's learning journeys, allowing reflection for both student and teacher," notes Purden.

A key principle of the *Reggio Emilia* approach is seeing each child as an individual with rights, resulting in personalised learning being evident in every classroom. The teacher's role shifts from instructor to guide, listener, and co-learner, creating space for each child's voice to be heard. As Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the *Reggio Emilia* approach, famously stated:

"There is no learning without joy."

"Learning, therefore, should be joyful, playful, interactive and filled with discovery," concludes Purdon.

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The SA job market – a Catch-22



By Daniel Orelowitz, MD at Training Force

South Africa's youth unemployment rate rose to 47.4% in the second quarter of 2026, with 264 000 more young people joining the unemployed ranks.

Currently, 5 million young South Africans between the ages of 15 and 34 are looking for work but cannot find it. Behind these figures sits a frustrating Catch-22: companies want workers with experience, but young people cannot get experience unless someone takes a chance on them. For millions of capable young people, this cycle keeps them locked out of the job market. It also brings up a bigger question: if a qualification alone is no longer enough to prove someone can do a job, what is?

Why a qualification is no longer enough

A degree or diploma is an achievement, but it does not automatically prepare a graduate for the demands of a workplace. A qualification can demonstrate subject knowledge, but employers also need evidence that a candidate can apply that knowledge in a practical working environment.

Formal education provides theory, while practical experience develops the ability to apply it. Without time in a workplace, graduates can enter the job market with the right qualifications but little evidence of how they will perform when faced with real deadlines, systems, colleagues and workplace demands.

Why employers look for experience

From an employer's perspective, a qualification answers one question: does this candidate have the required knowledge? Experience helps answer another: how will this person perform when that knowledge must be applied?

That distinction matters when teams are under pressure to meet deadlines, serve customers and deliver results.

How learnerships create the first opportunity

For someone entering the workforce for the first time, one of the biggest challenges is having something to put on a CV beyond a qualification. A learnership can provide that missing piece. By combining structured learning with workplace experience, learnerships give young people an opportunity to develop their skills in a real working environment. Over seven to 12 months, learners gain exposure to workplace expectations, systems, processes and the day-to-day responsibilities of a job, while working towards an accredited qualification and receiving a stipend.

The experience gap cannot be left to young people to solve on their own. Education providers and employers both have a role to play in creating opportunities to gain practical experience.

Education needs to connect more closely with work

Universities, TVET colleges and training providers should build meaningful workplace experience into more qualifications. Time spent in a business gives students an opportunity to apply their knowledge, understand workplace expectations and develop skills that cannot be learned in a classroom alone.

Employers need to think further ahead

Businesses that know they will need new skills in the coming years can work with government and accredited training providers to develop that talent before the need becomes urgent. This creates a more deliberate route from training into employment.

Experience needs to be passed on

Many technical industries have experienced employees approaching retirement. Structured workplace training can give younger workers access to the knowledge and practical skills built up over years, while helping employers retain that knowledge within the business.

Closing the experience gap

Creating that first opportunity through structured workplace experiential learning can give young people something a qualification alone cannot: a track record.



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SA needs job creators – to curb unemployment

By Leigh-Ann Revill, CEO at Chartall Business College



South Africa's unemployment crisis has reached a point where incremental solutions are no longer enough. With the official unemployment rate climbing to 33.6% in Q2 2026 and millions of discouraged work-seekers no longer actively looking for work, the country cannot continue viewing education solely as a pathway to employment.

Education must also become a pathway to entrepreneurship, self-employment, and small business growth. For decades, success was measured by how effectively qualifications prepared students to enter the corporate workforce, but in an economy where formal job opportunities are shrinking, that model is no longer sustainable on its own.

South Africa does not simply need more people searching for jobs. It needs more people capable of creating them.

Breaking the academic factory line

Shifting the national mindset requires educational institutions to move away from producing compliant employees and focus instead on developing capable employers. Education must be treated as a tool for economic empowerment and ownership, rather than a conveyor belt designed to feed corporate machinery. Learners must enter training with the explicit goal of gathering actionable skills to build their own enterprises.

To drive this shift, training providers must embed entrepreneurial thinking across every single educational module. Curricula need to deliver rigorous, practical expertise across core business functions including finance, marketing, human resources, operations, and management. This technical knowledge gives individuals the essential tools to launch, run, and sustain business ventures.

Balancing human agency with technical skills

A major flaw in the current educational mix is that accredited qualifications move too slowly to match the rapid developments of the marketplace. While degrees remain important, agile micro-learning and focused short courses offer a powerful way for individuals to plug specific skills gaps and implement those capabilities immediately.

Despite the rise of technology and AI, the business world still runs on human interaction. Developing leadership, sales ability, critical thinking, and emotional strength alongside financial literacy gives business owners the tools to survive tough economic times.

Unlocking the true scale of the micro-economy

South Africa possesses no shortage of raw entrepreneurial energy. The informal sector is home to a booming micro-economy of street vendors, second-hand clothing markets, community childcare facilities, and localised transport networks. Systemic failure is not a lack of drive, but a lack of scalability.

Practical business education provides the exact bridge needed to transform a survivalist sole trader into an employer capable of hiring three or four additional people.

A tri-sector economic imperative

We cannot build a generation of job creators through isolated efforts. Solving South Africa's unemployment crisis requires meaningful collaboration between education providers, business, and government.

Training providers must deliver practical, market-relevant learning quickly, without allowing regulatory delays to slow the development of critical skills. Corporates need to move beyond tick-box CSI initiatives and provide genuine mentorship, workplace exposure, and high-value internships that prepare people for the realities of business.

Government, meanwhile, must create an environment where entrepreneurs can grow through reliable infrastructure, supportive policy, and accessible funding for micro-businesses often excluded from the formal banking system.

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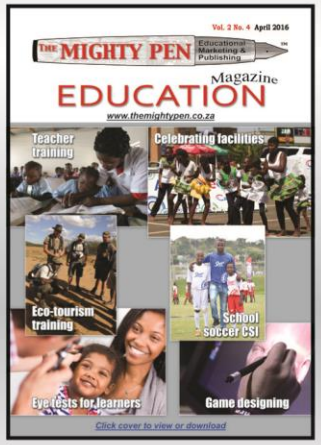
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