

# THE workplace REPORT

Compiled by Eulalia Snyman  
 - eulalia@worldonline.co.za  
 Edited by Theo Garrun  
 - theo.garrun@inl.co.za

## Playing with your education pays off

The Inspired Teachers' Conference helped many teachers see gaming in a totally new light

EULALIA SNYMAN

**T**EACHERS don't easily jaw drop. They have just about heard it all, seen it all and many boast the proverbial been-there-done-that T-shirt. Yet, most of the teachers who recently attended the Inspired Teachers' Conference did a fair amount of jaw dropping, nodding, chuckling and aha-ing at the event.

The one-day conference presented by leadership development and training company, QualityLife, showcased some of the most exciting and cutting-edge trends happening in teaching. Topics under discussion included "how the heart of teaching is still the inspired teacher", and "the rewards of creativity in the classroom".

Professor Jonathan Jansen, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Free State, explained why poor schools do well while Arthur Goldstuck of World Wide Worx research organisation and Michelle Lissos of Think Ahead Solutions that specialises in education technology, elaborated on how technology is changing the face of education.

"Did you know that a group of gamers deciphered the structure of an enzyme that cures Aids?" With this question Grade 11 learner Adam Edelstein kicked off the session entitled 'what gaming can teach us about learning'. "It took online gamers only three weeks to crack the enzyme secret that stumped scientists for over a decade. What skills do gamers have that scientists don't have? Is it bad to spend so much time on games?"

A keen gamer, the learner from Crawford College, Sandton, claimed from an early age



**GAMING MASTERS:** Sizwe Nxumalo, Adam Edelstein and Andre Odendaal told teachers at the Inspired Teachers Conference about what kids can learn from playing video and online games.

that video games were improving his leadership skills. His parents remained sceptical until his mom read an article about gaming and leadership that appeared in the Harvard Business Review. Now, when ever his schooling allows it, Edelstein shares his insights about gaming with various audiences – and mom and dad don't mind.

"Games are hard word," Edelstein told the teacher audience. "You as a gamer have to learn about strategy and tactics and collaboration."

Playing games, he pointed out, allows him to unleash his imagination and have fun while acquiring some useful skills.

Games typically have a goal (save the princess); define a set of rules (use this shield or that sword); offer set of rewards (gamer can get new sword/more weaponry and gamer is congratulated on performance as well as put on a scoreboard to see how well he/she is doing); and are based on voluntary participation (a gamer can exit whenever he/she pleases). Furthermore, games often require that gamers collaborate with fellow gamers and thus teach the principle that collaboration is crucial to success.

"Contrary to belief, gaming is quite a social thing," he elaborated. "I can talk over headsets or play online with friends

no matter where in the world they may be. Gamers learn that often by collaborating with others they can fare better in a game."

"Games prepare people for failure," Andre Odendaal another panellist at the Inspired Teachers Conference agreed. "Though you may fail, you keep on playing until you reach the next level."

Odendaal is a software developer who has a masters degree in software engineering and spends his free time designing and developing video games as well as board and card games.

Gaming, he pointed out, teaches people how to play in a team and against a team.

Though Odendaal believes that games don't teach skills per se, games give people the opportunity to practice skills, for example, Farmville requires that a gamer do quite a lot of mathematics.

"You don't play a game to increase your knowledge," Sizwe Nxumalo added to the debate. "But it happens anyway. And that is the beauty of gaming."

Nxumalo who is studying Bachelor of Economic Science Honours at Wits University, was named by Mail and Guardian as one of the Top 200 Young People to take to lunch in 2011. He was an avid gamer at school.

"Games make it safe for you



**EDUCATED OPINION:** Some 300 teachers from private and public schools around Gauteng attended the Inspired Teacher's Conference held recently at the African Leadership Academy.

### How Warcraft will hone your child's skills

"COLLABORATION in learning is now becoming even more prominent as we all get thrown together by the big melting pot of the digital economy. In fact, as gaming expert Jane McGonigal told World Economic Forum delegates recently, the 10 000 hours of gaming that the average young person will spend by the age of 21, will be spent honing the mastery of collaboration.

That's why business, leadership and education is looking to the world of gaming for some insights. Young people might be obsessed with an online world that scares the living daylights out of us as parents, but they are also mastering skills we don't know nearly enough about. We know that the ability to work together across boundaries and across cultures is going to be one of the most essential leadership skills for our economic survival into the future." – Debbie Edelstein, mother of Adam Edelstein and conference organiser

## Young make ideal entrepreneurs

**MANY** young people have what it takes to become successful entrepreneurs – they may just not know it yet. That's why, according to Kerry Damons of Boston City Campus & Business College, it is a good time for them to think out the box when it comes to choosing a career.

Seeing that the number of new business start-ups is at an all-time low, according to the Adcorp Employment Index released earlier this week, Damons believes that we should lose no time in encouraging young people to become entrepreneurs.

The Adcorp Index shows that a typical SA small business employs 12 people (aside from the owner-manager), and that revival of this sector could potentially create 5.3 million jobs.

"I'm not saying that we should paint a rosy picture that downplays the real challenges of running a business," she says.

"Educationalists and parents have a duty to tell it like it is, but if we also make a point of highlighting the unique strengths that the youth of today have, we build their confidence and increase their chance of success. Let's tell our youngsters that these strengths make them ideal entrepreneur material."

In the first place, our young people are well informed. They have all the information they need and want available at their fingertips – they read the news as it happens, stay up



**SAVVY:** Small businesses could potentially create 5.3 million jobs. We should encourage young people to become entrepreneurs.

to date with the trends and can access numbers, figures and statistics at the press of a button. This, says Damons, is an important strength or skill for any aspiring entrepreneur.

"When you are well informed and know how to get relevant information," she explains, "you are better able to research your entrepreneurial idea and put a business plan together."

"In the past, aspiring entrepreneurs had to work hard to get all the facts and figures and sometimes when these were not available they simply had

to rely on calculated guesses." Furthermore, because they are well informed and in touch with developments, young people tend to have a flexible approach – if something doesn't work, they easily switch to something else. They are less afraid of taking risks, not because they are young and naive, but because they know how to find solutions and alternatives.

Another strength young people take for granted is that they are tech savvy. They adapt quickly even when presented with new technology.

### Having what it takes

**THINGS** that give youngsters the upper hand:

- They are well informed and know how to obtain information quickly.
- They are tech savvy.
- They are experts at networking.

- They are flexible and able to adapt to change quickly.
- They are familiar with brands and reputation building.
- They know how to get the help they need.

- They are not afraid to take risks because they know how to find solutions and alternatives.
- They are in touch with the needs and wants of the growing youth and female markets.

And because they are used to change as being the norm, they are not daunted by it.

"In fact, most young people embrace change," Damons points out.

"They seem to be born with flexibility and the ability to adapt, which are two key factors in determining if someone can succeed as an entrepreneur."

Business people consciously put a lot of effort into networking.

To build a good business reputation and get new clients, they make time to rub

shoulders with the right people, to get the word out about their products and services and to be seen doing the "right" thing.

Young people, it seems, are specialists in networking and reputation building. Due to the advent of social media, they know how to create and how to tap into various networks. When they want to spread news or gossip, they do so at the speed that big corporate companies can only dream of.

They know how to create excitement and get people talking about something. Can you imagine how well they can do if they put their minds to selling a product or a service they feel passionate about?

"Also important is that they know how to find assistance when they need it," says Damons.

"Being an entrepreneur can be a lonely road – entrepreneurs don't keep nine to five working hours and there is always the possibility of additional stress on finances and family life.

"Knowing where to find help when you need it can make all the difference and this is yet another reason that young people are well suited to the entrepreneurial road."

*Boston City Campus & Business College offers more than 80 dynamic career qualification, including entrepreneurial studies, at 48 branches nationwide. Call 011 551 2000, e-mail info@boston.co.za, visit www.boston.co.za, or find Boston on Facebook.*

## Class act sees two schools benefit from gear, chairs

**PUPILS** at two impoverished primary schools in Kwagugu Township near Witbank are sitting comfy and pretty for a change thanks to the generosity of two women's organisations and a coal-mining company.

The Xstrata Coal SA Women in Mining Forum at the company's Impunzi Complex, in partnership with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) Women's Structures in the Highveld region, recently hosted an event during which they donated school uniforms and food to needy Kwagugu Primary School pupils. They also donated 100 chairs to Nkonjane Primary School where the pupils had to make do with broken furniture.

Siphiwe Litchfield, NUM's Impunzi Complex branch secretary and full-time shaft steward, describes the gift as historic and a demonstration of what co-operation between workers and employers can achieve in assisting the poor.

"This donation is our attempt to ensure that our kids are able to learn in an environment that is conducive to learning," she says. "The pupils at Nkonjane had to sit in three-legged chairs, some of which did not have back rests. When we saw this, we felt we needed to do something and approached Xstrata Coal who joined us in the initiative."

Xstrata Coal HR manager Sisi Mahobe says the company's participation shows Xstrata's commitment to community development.

"As workers and manage-



**THANK YOU!** Children from Kwagugu Primary School near Witbank show off their new uniforms.

ment we come from the same communities that are experiencing these challenges," says Mahobe. "We desire to give these pupils the opportunity to learn and take advantage of what education can do to change their circumstances."

"While most of these pupils come from adverse backgrounds, such activities give us an opportunity to motivate the kids and instill the value of hard work."

The initiative received the endorsement of the local

municipality and the community, through Emalahleni Councillor, Thandi Mokoena, who was guest speaker at the hand-over ceremony. Kwagugu Primary principal Dumisani Mahlangu thanked both organisations for their generosity and for putting the interest of the kids first.

"This gift will not only benefit the school but will also benefit community members and parents who are struggling to buy uniforms for their children," he said.