



www.thutong.org.za

Making Learning Better

Reflecting on how online tools can enhance teaching and learning

The Quality Teaching and Learning Campaign was launched in October 2008 by Minister Pandor. The campaign calls on individuals and organisations to assume responsibility for improving the quality of education. How can ICT (information and communications technology) help in this regard?



Over the past year the Thutong education portal has been highlighted in the Teacher through a series of articles. The intention of these articles was to ensure that teachers can find ways of using ICT to enhance their lessons. ICT is merely a tool that provides a different dimension to teaching, allows for improved information access and better communications. With the advent of the Internet and in particular the interactive 'read write web' of Web 2.0, sharing and collaboration can come into its own. If political groups, both locally and overseas, have recognised the potential of this form of communication then education should not be far behind.



Access to computers and connectivity are perennial issues which are in the process of being overcome and there are strategies afoot to provide at least an offline version of Thutong. It is always remembered that nothing replaces a good teacher and the indiscriminate use of technology does not necessarily make a poor teacher a better one.

The question is, how worthwhile have these articles been to teachers? Have you found any of them useful? Would you like to share your ideas on how you have used the different tools in your subject or learning area? Below is a list of the articles with a short excerpt from each. The full version is available on the Thutong website in the ICT space at <http://www.thutong.org.za/LearningSpaces/ICT.aspx>. Just type in the word teacher in the search box and they will all be listed.

April 2008 – What is Thutong?

This was a double page spread designed to form the cover for all the subsequent articles. It described the vision of the revised Thutong, in particular the communication and collaboration aspects.



May 2008 – A picture is worth a thousand words: using images in teaching

So how does this translate to the classroom? Where can teachers find the images they need? What about the ethical use of using images that somebody else has produced? Where does one find quality material in the South African or African context?

June 2008 – Using blogs and online forums including Netiquette

The Internet has evolved from a passive repository of information to a place where people can communicate, collaborate and contribute. With that ability, we are witnessing a growing confidence in the use of ICT and also an excitement in being able to share thoughts and ideas. We have therefore introduced exciting new communication and collaboration features on Thutong. These are newsletters, notice boards, discussion lists, weblogs or blogs, online forums, RSS feeds, podcasts and Wikis.



July 2008 – Using the resource sharing facility on Thutong

The Thutong Education Portal <http://www.thutong.org.za> has many resources created by and for South African teachers. This is an important platform for teachers to share, not only their news and views, but education resources that they themselves have developed.

August 2008 – Using wikis and podcasts

In the classroom, one can create a wiki on any topic and have learners access it and add entries or comments. This allows learners to critically read what has been said, think about it and then respond and contribute. Learners learn about collaboration - the ability to work effectively in a group...

September 2008 – News and views: creating lessons based on news and events

One of the many advantages of using the Internet is the currency of information available online. It is so easy to upload any sort of story, be it in a blog, a wiki, or even onto a website. Finding information is equally easy, although one must be quite discerning about what one chooses to use! Find out how to use the news in your teaching...

October 2008 – Mobile Learning: the good, the bad, the ugly

Mobile Learning has become a bit of a buzz word in education with the proliferation of mobile technology through our society in general, and being particularly noticeable amongst our tweens and teens. How can cell phones be used to enhance teaching and learning?

November 2008 – Teachers who share: tools, tips, information and conversations online

Beyond providing access to current information and a platform for quick and easy communications the Internet

also offers an amazing range of tools for teachers. There are templates for reports, mark books and lesson plans, timetable and rubric creation tools and even citation (recording resources) applications. Which sites offer help to teachers?

January 2009 – Travel, books, reading and the Internet: hints and tips for encouraging reading

One assumes that in the face of technology people stop reading. This could be the case especially if people have not developed the habit in the first place but the bookshops don't seem to be closing down, in fact just the opposite... How can the Internet be used to encourage reading?

February 2009 – Does your school have an e-Safety net?

Access to information and communication brings with it a certain responsibility because as much as the world opens up digitally so does it open the darker side of human nature. A couple of issues are that there are many 'inappropriate' websites that are easily accessible; moreover people use technology to abuse others. How does a school manage these problems?

March 2009 – How can the Internet encourage thinking skills?

The South African National Curriculum is based on a sound pedagogy which encourages learners to think about what they are learning. Developing life long learners who have retained the spirit of enquiry is a basic tenet of the system. How can ICT support thinking, evaluating and most importantly how can teachers avoid inviting plagiarism?



With view to recognising excellence in teaching practice the Department of Education is now in its 10th year of celebrating the National Teaching Awards. This is a provincial then national event and there are a number of categories in these awards. The emphasis is on honouring dedicated, creative and effective teachers and thus also the teams within their schools. The Thutong education portal supports this initiative, indeed there is a space dedicated to it <http://www.thutong.org.za/LearningSpaces/NTA.aspx>, and the aim is to highlight past award winners as well as the event as a whole.



THUTONG

SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION PORTAL



www.thutong.org.za

Thutong Portal Questionnaire

Please complete and fax to: 012 321 2490

To find the online version go to the Thutong home page
 <http://www.thutong.org.za>

Name:

1. User Profile:

Teacher

2. School:

Learner

3. Town/City:

Parent /Guardian

4. District:

Other

5. Province:

Section 1: Use of Portal

(tick the relevant box below)

6. Do you use the Thutong Education Portal?

yes

no

7. If no, why not?

didn't know about it

no connectivity

no need

can't find relevant resources

can't register

Other, please comment

8. If yes, how often?

daily

weekly

monthly

seldom

Other, please comment

(tick the relevant box below)

9. How do you usually connect to the Portal?
(ask your IT staff if you are not sure)

dial-up

yes

no

ADSL

broadband

Cell-phone

Other, please comment

10. Where do you usually connect to the Portal from?

home

school

work

Internet Cafe

Other, please comment

11. What do you mainly use Thutong for?

education resources

policy documents

exam papers

communication with colleagues

Other, please comment

Section 2: Navigation

12. Can you find what you are looking for easily?

yes

no

13. What search method do you use?

tags

learning outcomes

assessment standards

free search within a learning space

global search from the home page

Other, please comment

(tick the relevant box below)

Section 3: Content

yes

mostly

no

14. Do you think you can generally trust content and/or resources downloaded from Thutong?

15. Do you find the resources useful?

16. Does the depth and/or range of resources available cover your subject/learning area adequately?

17. Are there enough resources for your needs on the portal?

18. Do you find the resources relevant?

19. Do you find the resources current and up-to-date?

20. Do you find the resources at the right level?

Section 4: Resources

yes

no

21. Are you aware that you can share resources on the portal by downloading and uploading them?

22. Are you prepared to upload resources e.g. websites, lesson plans

23. If no, what is the reason

poor connectivity

no time

unwilling to share

too shy

Other, please comment

24. How would you encourage your colleagues to upload resources onto the Portal?

Section 5: Communication tools

25. Do you participate in any of the communication tools

yes

no

Blogs

Online forums

Discussion lists

(tick the relevant box below)

Section 6: Advocacy

yes

no

26. Are you aware of the regular columns on Thutong in the Teacher newspaper?

27. Have they been of use to you?

28. What topics would you suggest for future columns?

29. How should Thutong be advertised more broadly in the education community?

30. How do you think the Thutong education portal could be made more relevant?

31. Would you be prepared to be a critical friend on the Thutong education portal?

yes

no

If yes please supply your e-mail address

32. Would you be prepared to contribute to the Thutong column in the Teacher?

yes

no

If yes please supply your e-mail address

Other comments or suggestions

M&G Repro

Thutong Portal Questionnaire

Please complete and fax to: 012 312 2490

The information in the box below is optional:

Name:		
Teacher		School:
Learner		Town/City:
Parent		District:
Other		Province:

Section 1: Use of Portal

Please tick the relevant box

Do you use the Thutong Education Portal? yes/no		
1. If no, why not?	didn't know about it	
	no connectivity	
	no need	
	can't find relevant resources	
	can't register	
	Other, please comment	
2. If yes, how often?	daily	
	weekly	
	monthly	
	seldom	
	Other, please comment	
3. How do you usually connect to the Portal? (ask your IT staff if you are not sure)	dial-up	
	ADSL	
	broadband	
	Other, please comment	
4. Where do you	home	

12.Do you find the resources relevant?	yes/mostly/no
13.Do you find the resources up to date?	yes/mostly/no
14.Do you find the resources at the right level?	yes/mostly/no

Section 4: Resources

15. Are you aware that you can share resources on the portal by downloading them?	yes/no	
16. Are you prepared to upload resources e.g. websites, lesson plans	yes/no	
17. If no, what is the reason	poor connectivity	
	no time	
	unwilling to share	
	too shy	
	Other, please comment	
18. How would you encourage your colleagues to upload resources onto the Portal?		

Section 5: Communication tools

19. Do you participate in any of the communication tools	
Blogs	

usually connect to the Portal from?	school	
	work	
	Internet Cafe	
	Other, please comment	
5. What do you mainly use Thutong for?	education resources	
	policy documents	
	exam papers	
	communication with colleagues	
	Other, please comment	

Section 2: Navigation

6. Can you find what you are looking for easily? yes/no		
7. What search method do you use?	tags	
	learning outcomes	
	assessment standards	
	free search	
	other	

Section 3: Content

8. Do you think you can generally trust content and/or resources downloaded from Thutong?	yes/mostly/no
9. Do you find the resources useful?	yes/mostly/no
10.Does the depth and/or range of resources available cover your subject/learning area adequately?	yes/mostly/no
11.Are there enough resources for your needs on the portal?	yes/mostly/no

Online forums	
Discussion lists	

Section 6: Advocacy

20. Are you aware of the regular columns on Thutong in the Teacher newspaper?	yes/no
21. Have they been of use to you?	yes/no
22. What topics would you suggest for future columns?	
23. How should Thutong be advertised more broadly in the education community?	
24. How do you think the Thutong education portal could be made more relevant?	
25. Would you be prepared to be a critical friend on the Thutong education portal?	yes/ no
26. Would you be prepared to contribute to the Thutong column in the Teacher?	yes/no