

Five future developments in education

By  Nicci Botha

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There is no doubt that there was an 'education spring' in South Africa with #feesmustfall dominating the headlines and social media in 2015, while - in response - the government and universities scrambled to open up access to tertiary education.



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But this doesn't address the massive void in education at school level, and as one of the country's most progressive educators, Professor Jonathan Jansen, Vice-Chancellor: University of the Free State says, "Unfortunately six year olds can't picket Parliament."

Could e-learning hold the key? Here are five trends for digital learning in 2016.

1. Personalised learning

E-learning takes on a learner-centred approach in 2016 with online courses providing individual learning paths based on a learner's need, abilities and preferences.

"A one-size-fits-all approach to learning is no longer necessary or desirable when technology allows for a more engaged learning experience, providing unique content based on the learner's interest and learning style," says Niall McNulty, digital publishing manager for the African branch of Cambridge University Press.

2. Big data

He goes on to explain that the assessment for learning approach, which takes advantage of the growing influence of big data to use assessment to inform teaching and learning, is closely tied to the personalised learning trend.

This is a process by which teachers use data collected through online assessment and interactive exercises to adjust their teaching strategies to support weaker learners and challenge stronger learners.

3. m-learning

A study by education publishers, Pearson, shows that 80% of learners have access to smartphones, says m-learning specialist, Steve Vosloo on his [website](#).

"The potential that mobile devices offer for learning that happens throughout the day in formal and informal contexts, is available just-in-time, is personal, trackable and complementary of other learning formats, is increasingly evident."

"No wonder large-scale tablet implementations are on the rise across the country: from the Gauteng Department of Education's Classroom of the Future initiative that aims to replace printed textbooks with tablets and transform all its schools into digital learning institutions by 2018, to the ICT4RED tablet initiative at 26 high schools in Cofimvaba, a deep rural district in the Eastern Cape," he explains.

But due to limited processing power and limited screen sizes, mobile phones will not be used to deliver core material but will serve to provide assessment and social support through both apps and messaging, says McNulty. Local start-ups such as [Rethink Education](#) are an example of what can be done.

4. Gamification

According to an article on [elearningindustry.com](#) learners become more engaged with material through gamification.

"Some experts claim that the technique can boost learner's motivation to a smashing 90% recall rate. Once learners assume an active role in knowledge reception, they will automatically improve their chances at remembering," it states.

"As a trend, gamification has entered all aspects of our lives, from health care to banking. In e-learning it is also gaining traction with badges, leader boards and rewards encouraging learners to commit to a task or programme and compete against their peers," says McNulty.

5. 3D-Printing

Gone are the days of the tired old skeleton in the corner of a biology class, or tatty models that have passed through the hands of generations of learners. And although it may take some time to reach South African schools, 3D-printing offers a whole new realm of teaching aids.

Take the recent discovery of the Naledi skull, which puts a completely new spin on the origins of mankind, for example. Forbes.com writer and anthropologist, Kristina Killgrove, explains in her [blog](#) how she was able print parts of skull within hours of the announcement of the discovery being made, thanks to the growing affordability and accessibility of 3D-

printing.

"This will allow some schools to incorporate this technology into their teaching strategies. 3D-printed 'surrogate' artefacts allow learners to interact in the physical world with items which may otherwise be inaccessible," says McNulty.

Whatever the futures holds, e-learning provides tremendous potential in meeting expectations of delivering quality education to a greater segment of the South African population.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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