



# Stanford Lake College

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## To One Laptop per Child

I was asked by OHOT and Thusanang Trust in 2008 to assist with providing technical support for the OCOL project to three very poorly resourced and needy rural schools in our district. As an experienced Information Technology teacher at a private school in South Africa, I could see many challenges ahead when the project was introduced last year. I also have experience of supporting similar schools with introducing and donating new and old computers which often, after a few months, are kept locked away from children.

While most of the activity happened in 2008, 10 days ago I knew that the OHOT (OLPC) project was working in at least one of our schools – Katane. Shelley and I arrived unannounced during the afternoon at the school to inspect an Internet breakdown issue. On the way through the community there was a group of children sitting under a tree in the veldt spontaneously playing with their XO's while on their way home. It was a thrill to see.

Things move slowly in our part of the world. Internet access is indeed a problem at two of the schools. Or rather, the one school (Driehoek) has Internet access but no electricity except for a generator purchased by OHOT. This poses the problem of dirty power that threatens to blow the Internet equipment. The other school (Mmaweshi) has just had electricity install to the village but cannot get an Internet signal as it is tucked behind a hill. This would seem the easier problem to solve. We are working on solutions.

The OLPC program is however still in place and is very much alive in this remote and rural part of the world. The children that have received these laptops have already hugely benefited in that they have been exposed to technology concepts that will help prepare them for life. They have had a window of opportunity opened for them that many millions in this country will never have. For these children (the ones blessed with laptops), the 'Digital Divide' will not be such an issue. We know that children exposed to computer technology early find it easy to adapt to technology later. It is rather like language skills learned early. Possibly these children do not yet realize the 'gift' that they have been blessed with. The real benefits will come later. I sat in on a class of children who own the laptops; they were excited to show me all that they could do. If one child would show me how to do something, five others would film and record the explanation (and me trying to learn), just as would happen with some novelty lesson done with 'privileged' children. The only difference would be that they would film and record it with their cell phone cameras. Children respond the same way.

It would be wonderful to see this program grow and to see more children benefit from the window of opportunity that these laptops offer to the meager lives of these children.

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