

Bridging gap in learning through virtual education

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In today's classroom, slick technologically advanced tablets are quickly replacing blackboards and chalk, as teachers and students now engage in virtual education. With the use of video conferencing, distance learning has never been easier and students across the seas can now interact with their teachers and peers with the simple click of a mouse.

Video conferencing was one of the technologies showcased at the second Virtual Educa Caribbean Symposium 2014, held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Port-of-Spain. Themed, Technology Driven Learning Environments, the two-day workshop programme, which concluded on May 20, attracted scores of primary and secondary school students and was hosted by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the Organisation of American States.

blink | bmobile – a platinum sponsor of the event – displayed how the company uses video conferencing to bridge the gap between students and educators and helps to facilitate communication across borders. Although the event was held at the Hyatt, with the use of technology, blink | bmobile facilitated students and teachers from the Bishops High School, Pentecostal Light and Life Foundation High School and Goodwood High School in Tobago, as well as industry experts from the US and Canada to participate in the discussions.

A Polycom presentation, titled Video for Learning: How Are We Changing the Way We Teach?, highlighted the revolutionised way in which educators teach and students learn. Polycom is the world's leader in voice communication solutions and boasts High Definition quality video, unprecedented ease of use and security. Polycom's Global Director for Education, Marci Powell, who joined the discussion from the US via video conferencing, said a student pursuing welding or agriculture, for instance, can simply use the technology to communicate with his/her educator on the job site. Powell said it was one thing for students to have the right equipment but it was also essential for them to be able to interact with their teachers anywhere and at any time. Powell, an industry expert in the field of educational technology and telecommunications, said students can also use CAPspace, a collaborative video conference project funded by Polycom, which provides an opportunity to learn with another school or classroom. CAPspace is a social networking tool for educational video conferencing and students from anywhere in the world can login to find colleagues and schools interested in collaborative video conference projects. There are currently 14,151 educators from 56 countries registered with CAPspace.

Lecturers at the Manhattan School of Music, who also participated in the panel discussion, agreed. They noted that in today's classrooms learning can be fun and easy, as students use various devices and software to collaborate, work on projects, participate in problem-based learning, at a remote site or while travelling. The Manhattan School of Music boasts a distance learning programme that spans from primary, secondary to post graduate level and across many international partnerships. In another panel discussion, video conferencing was also used to bring together participants from Trinidad, Tobago and Canada to showcase a software application called Pete the Pan Stick, which teaches people how to play the steelpan. This interactive and innovative application is already implemented at Corpus Christi and St Georges Colleges and also allows the user to learn the history of the pan, hear music from popular arrangers and learn more about TT's culture.

Panelists included Gia-Marie Holder, Library Assistant 1 Heritage Department, NALIS, Karen Rosemin, Director of the Distance Learning Secretariat, Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, Professor Clement Imbert, Mechanical Engineer/Metallurgist, Steelpan Educator, Patricia Adams and Rolph Young, Team Leader, Corporate Business Development, blink | bmobile.