



Pauline Skosana – 21st Century Learning Dimensions



Overview

Country: South Africa

Location: Bronkhorstspuit, Gauteng

Industry: Education

Software and services:

Microsoft 21CLD Course

Websites:

education.microsoft.com

Partners:

SchoolNet SA: www.schoolnet.org.za

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Hlolisa Primary School is situated in a dusty township in the rural area of Bronkhorstspuit in Gauteng. Some of the parents of children who attend this school work in the nearby factories or mines, but many more are unemployed. According to teacher, Pauline Skosana, only about 10% of parents assist their children with homework activities – some are illiterate and cannot help with help with homework and others simply don't see the need to assist with schoolwork or are completely absent from their children's lives.

Pauline Skosana has been teaching for 30 years. She originally completed a two-year teacher's training college course but has since upgraded her qualification to a Higher Diploma in Education by correspondence through the University of South Africa. Pauline has participated in the Microsoft Innovative Teachers program, the ICT Skills for Teachers course and the Microsoft Innovation Workshop.

Pauline attended the Microsoft 21st Century Learning Design course to find out how to structure her lessons to ensure that they not only cover the topics included in the curriculum, but that they also help to develop 21st century skills such as collaboration, self-regulation and effective communication. She found that whilst this course went through some examples of how technology could be used to enhance learning, the overall focus of the course was on developing skills which are essential life skills. This appealed to Pauline as her school does not have much access to technology but she believed she could apply the learnings of the course to any lesson whether or not it would use technology.

Following on from the 21CLD course, Pauline aimed to revise her existing lesson plans to ensure that they could also develop 21st century skills as far as possible. One lesson which she tackled was a grade 4 English lesson about different types of texts. The original lesson, which Pauline adapted was taken from the South CAPS curriculum teacher guide and learner textbook. It involved learners reading instructions for making a butterfly mobile from their textbook aloud and then discussing the features of the procedural text.





"The most important component of a successful lesson is providing an activity that learners will enjoy. The main thing is they must enjoy learning. Once you lose that you miss the mark."

"I am often told I will fall behind and that I should just teach the lesson like the book says. But I want to make sure that my children get through the syllabus AND that they learn skills that go way beyond the content of the lesson."

- Pauline Skosana
Hlolisa Primary School

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Adapting learning to include skills

In her version of the lesson Pauline felt that it was insufficient for students to learn about following instructions just by reading a set of instructions and that they should actually make the butterfly mobile that was described. To prepare for the lesson, the children were shown the list of materials needed to make a butterfly mobile and they determined who would bring which resources to school. Some of the materials such as butterfly shaped pasta and sandwich bag ties proved to be difficult to source in a township but learners were able to come up with alternatives and shared their resources.

When the lesson began, the teacher handed each group a set of instructions for making the butterfly mobile but instead of them appearing as an ordered list as they did in the textbook each instruction had been stuck on a separate piece of cardboard and the groups needed to read the instructions to determine the correct order. This task involved reading the instructions aloud (as the original lesson prescribed), and it required the learners to discuss the correct order of procedures, for example to measure the string before cutting it.

As the lesson was taking place the teacher informally drew the children's attention to the features of the list by saying for example "do you see how the requirements are right at the beginning? It would be silly to start making the mobile if we didn't have everything we would need. This is also why a recipe lists the ingredients at the top, so you can get all the things you will need before baking a cake". Learners were also asked why they had put the instructions in the order they had selected and had to explain their decisions to the teacher.

As the learners worked on making their mobiles the teacher reminded them that they had limited time in which to complete

the task. This provided an opportunity for the groups to self-regulate and for the various tasks such as cutting, decorating and tying to be divided amongst the group.

Whilst no technology was used in this lesson the teacher provided an opportunity for genuine collaboration as each group member took responsibility for different components of making the mobile. The learners had opportunities to figure out for themselves how they were going to source the equipment and who was going to do which component of the task. The teacher did not simply list the characteristics of a procedural text, but rather the learners had an opportunity to construct knowledge by working with a set of instructions and thinking about why they were written in the way that they were. In addition to providing an opportunity to read aloud, the task allowed for skilled communication as learners had to place the instructions in the correct order and then they had to be able to explain their reasoning to one another and to their teacher.

Learnings for teachers

Instead of being praised for taking the standard prescribed curriculum and producing lessons that managed to cover the required content and build 21st century skills at the same time, this teacher says she is often criticised for going off script or for doing activities that are not prescribed in the textbook. Despite this criticism, Pauline says that what she has learnt from the 21CLD training is that she can be creative, but that she needs to plan ahead to make sure she covers both the required work and builds some skills at the same time. She also says that developing critical thinking is not just something children should be doing, but that the 21CLD course has made her realise that she needs to reflect on her own teaching and be willing to adapt tasks to make sure that they build skills beyond the content of the lesson.