



Observatory Girls Primary School, Johannesburg

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Website: [http:// www.obsgirls.co.za](http://www.obsgirls.co.za)
<http://schoolnet.org.za/PILP/scenarios/index.htm>

Country or Region: South Africa

Industry: Education

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School profile: Observatory Girls Primary School has been laying the foundation for girls to succeed in an ever changing world for the past 94 years. Currently 562 girls between grade R (kindergarten) and grade 7 are accommodated at the school. The dedicated teachers at Observatory Girls Primary School aim to develop the “whole child” and to encourage each learner to realise her potential and unique talents.

Under the apartheid government, Observatory Girls Primary School was well-funded and well-equipped. These days, based on the facilities at the school and the proximity of affluent suburbs, the school receives minimal state funding and is expected to charge school fees to cover the bulk of its expenses. Alas most children at the school come from the impoverished inner-city suburbs that are also close to the school. Unemployed parents or parents employed in low-paying jobs means that only 15% of learners pay the R4 800 (+-\$530) a year the school charges as fees. This reduced income means that the school struggles to maintain its infrastructure and to pay the salaries of additional teachers and that ICT resources and professional development opportunities have become luxuries.



Observatory Girls Primary School – Making the most of professional development in ICT Skills

The Microsoft Partners in Learning ICT Skills for Teachers course contains almost 40 scenarios that directly relate to the work of teachers – from basic scenarios such as ‘design a newsletter’ to advanced scenarios such as ‘create a dynamic mark-book’. During training teachers are shown how the step-by-step instructions and tip sheets work and then they decide for themselves which scenarios they want to complete. As participants work through the scenarios they develop confidence in using a range of applications and they also see how their newfound computer skills can be incorporated into their professional work. Whilst the facilitator initially guides teachers, participants are encouraged to look for their own solutions in order to increase their confidence to work on their own once the course is complete. As teachers build up a portfolio of artifacts that can streamline their administrative tasks or enhance their lessons they are encouraged to attempt additional activities that will further develop their computer skills.



In 2011 Sci-Bono Discovery Centre began offering the Microsoft Partners in Learning ICT Skills for Teachers course to public schools in Gauteng. Initially the intention of this project was to train staff from under-performing schools in the province, but the course was also made available to other schools who expressed interest. Whilst ideally the ICT Skills for Teachers course consists of three days of initial training to build confidence, a break to allow teachers to practise their computer skills, followed by two days of further training, budget constraints resulted in teachers receiving only three full days of training or four afternoon sessions through this project. To mitigate the reduced training time, teachers were offered support by Gauteng Department of Education eLearning Coordinators after training and to encourage additional practice, teachers were each required to submit a portfolio of work in order to be awarded a certificate.

As the original developers of the ICT Skills for Teachers course, SchoolNet SA was involved in training Sci-Bono trainers to be able to facilitate this course using the cognitive apprenticeship approach. A master trainer from SchoolNet SA also briefed Gauteng Department of Education eLearning coordinators on the kind of support they should provide to teachers after the face-to-face component of the course as well as on what sorts of artefacts they should gather from the teachers.

In 2011, Sci-Bono trainers facilitated eighty rounds of ICT Skills for Teachers and a total of 1 542 teachers completed training. Whilst this is an impressive achievement, disappointingly 275 teachers failed to attend all of the face-to-face training sessions that

were offered to their schools, or they booked for training and then failed to arrive. Many teachers who participated in the project have submitted portfolios that show a range of well-executed scenarios but more than half of the participants have yet to complete their portfolios of evidence.

This case study examines the ICT Skills for Teachers course that took place at Observatory Girls Primary School in February 2012. This training session was attended by almost the entire staff, few teachers missed sessions, and almost all participants went on to submit pleasing portfolios. The intention of this case study is to better understand what made this training session such a success in order to apply these learnings to future training projects.

SITUATION

Observatory Girls Primary School does not have a state sponsored Gauteng Online computer lab like most public schools in the province. Instead the school's computer room is equipped with twenty old but functional donated computers running Microsoft Office 2003 software. The school's former computer teacher left Observatory Girls Primary School to work in the district office and for some time the computer room was unused and no computer classes took place. In 2011 the school employed Ms Nala Baluza to be a full-time computer teacher. She does not have a formal teaching qualification and instead was employed because she has good computer skills and was able to provide computer classes to each learner for two half-hour periods per week. Principal Ms Tjeane is another new appointment at Observatory Primary School, having only occupied her post from January 2011. Whilst she does not have a long association with this school Tjeane is passionate about providing learners with the best educational experiences possible and lists her personal motto on the school website as being "work hard now, complain later".

In January 2012 District ICT Coordinator Cindy Makgokowa visited Observatory Girls Primary School to conduct an audit of teachers' computer skills and ICT infrastructure. According to Makgokowa, "usually when we go to visit schools we report at the principal's office – but then we sit with the school's ICT coordinator to do the monitoring and support. At this school the principal was interested. She wanted to know more. When the school heard about the training they asked for it".

Ms Tjeane says that when she was told that her staff could get free training in Skills from Sci-Bono "we jumped at it". According to Tjeane, "I've always said to the teachers that we need to incorporate computers into lessons. Teaching is moving away from text books – and they need to surf the net for information and to do their own prep. I saw this course as an opportunity for everyone to learn how to use the computers and, of course, I came myself".

The staff of Observatory Girls Primary say that they were not compelled to attend training. Teacher Rachel Monatisa recalls, "our principal leads by example. When we were told about this course everyone wanted to attend. We saw a need to develop our computer skills and when this course was described to us we knew it would help". In total twenty four teachers (almost the entire staff) attended training for three Saturdays in February 2012, and of these nineteen submitted portfolios that show competence in Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

SOLUTION

Sci-Bono trainer Edwin Moloji recalls that as with all ICT Skills for Teachers training sessions "on the first day I went through some scenarios with the group – whilst allowing those teachers with better skills to work on their own scenarios if they wanted to". According to Edwin "even the more experienced teachers watched the

scenarios being demonstrated – because even if you know, say, Word, there is always something new to learn or some short cut you did not know.” Edwin believes that the appeal of the ICT Skills for Teachers course lies in the fact that the scenarios are specifically tailored to teaching. As he says: “teachers are sometimes reluctant to use technology but when they see it will be beneficial to them and that it is something that will eventually save them time then they say ‘this is what we have been waiting for’. Like teachers who spend hours punching in their marks on a calculator – if they see how easy it is to do using Excel they will want to learn how to do that”. He says the ICT Skills for Teachers course is successful because “if you learn how to do something that you will do every day it will become easier and easier – and you will get faster at it and your skills and confidence will improve.”

According to Edwin most teachers start with the beginner scenarios and it is his job as the facilitator to encourage them to explore beyond what they already know. “Most teachers start wanting to see how to do their admin – or how to make it easier. But when they get more confidence they want to do something that they can do with their learners like the interactive picture in Excel.”

BENEFITS

Observatory Girls Primary School teachers report that the previous computer teacher did do some staff training and that they had also had some computer training offered through Gauteng Online. They say that whilst these sessions did give them some basic computer knowledge what set the ICT Skills for Teachers apart was that it has practical activities that teachers can do. As principal Tjeane reports, “I would recommend this training because it relates to the teaching and learning environment – it is so helpful”.

The principal says that “since the training I have

noticed a change in the use of computers. Teachers used to have their work typed up by the admin clerks – but now they are doing it themselves”. The computer teacher notes “before the training some teachers were using the computers. Now almost all teachers are using the computers. They know that they can come to the computer room and I will help them – but that I am not going to type their work for them”.

After the ICT Skills for Teachers course the principal implemented a rule requiring teachers to type all test papers given to learners. Even if teachers just use a typed cover page and then add in activities photocopied from a textbook they are not allowed to write out questions by hand as they did in the past. Teachers are also required to type their own reports and to submit marks as Excel worksheets. These rules have helped to ensure that teachers regularly practice their computer skills and that more professional-looking documents are being sent home to parents and distributed to learners.

Some teachers have gone beyond the required typed test papers and reports. Rachel Monatisa, the technology teacher, used pictures and content from Encarta to produce a unit of work on bridges. Never Chapepa, the maths teacher, has created folders of past exam papers and sample questions that learners can access to revise for exams. Sandy Holdsworth, a teacher less than a year from retirement proudly announces “now I can make my own worksheets and I was able to show my husband how to make a schedule for his work using what I had learnt on the course”.

Whilst teachers say they would have liked to have had more time with the facilitator and that there is not enough time in the day to get to use the computers at school, many say that since completing the course they have used the Partners in Learning DVD at home to

access additional scenarios and that they are no longer afraid to use the computers to do their work. When asked who would be interested in attending another, more advanced, computer course almost every hand in the staffroom was raised.

The ICT Skills for Teachers course has got teachers at Observatory Girls Primary School excited about the power of technology to enhance teaching. Unfortunately the school does not have funds to buy additional data-projectors at the moment but teachers have realised that it would be beneficial to have these in their classrooms. The principal also says that despite a really tight budget, she realises that the school's pre-paid internet connection is not something that they can sacrifice. To maximise the use of the computers and internet access by staff and learners, the computer room is kept open every afternoon after school for anyone who wants to use it.

Better use is being made of the computer periods by attempting to relate the computer skills being taught to work being covered in other classes. At the beginning of each term the class and subject teachers share their term plans with the computer teacher who then looks for topics and activities where computer skills can be incorporated and occasionally class or subject teachers accompany their learners to the computer room. For example, in History learners were required to conduct research about Nelson Mandela and then to write a biography on him. Learners were shown how to use Encarta to look for information as well as how to use the Internet to source additional pictures. Once the research was complete, Microsoft Word was used to type up the projects.

LESSONS LEARNT

When asked what sets this session of training apart from other less successful rounds of the

same course, ICT Coordinator Daniel Tloubatla notes "it starts with the school management. The principal at that school is hands on – during the training she was there every day." The principal's presence is important in terms of setting a good example to staff but trainer Edwin Moloi notes that the principal's attitude to the training affects the tone of the session. "Having the principal in the room can be restricting. Sometimes teachers don't ask questions when the principal is around. But this principal was like any other delegate and was also learning just like the others. As teachers were printing their work she was excited to see what they had done and complimented them on what they had created. No one was afraid to share during the showcase".

At Observatory Girls Primary School, staff chose to attend training because they believed it would be beneficial to them. Whilst some teachers were late on the first day of training – after they realised the trainer would be on time and was offering a quality course all teachers were on time and present for the remaining two sessions. As Moloi reports, "the teachers at this school were committed. At other schools it is like they are forced to be there". Portia Mngenela (Deputy Chief Education Specialist – eLearning) says that self-motivation plays such an important role in boosting attendance that the Johannesburg East District has changed its strategy for offering courses. In setting up training in the past eLearning coordinators used to send out a memo to all schools in the district telling them that training was being offered and asking each school to say send two teachers. She says that using this approach led to only a third of schools responding. Mngenela says, "we no longer call everyone to training – we now say what is on offer and if schools are interested they must book".

Another key factor in terms of ensuring that training opportunities are maximised is effective follow-up. Mngenela says "attendance it is still

not 100% at all sessions. If the principal doesn't follow up with teachers who missed sessions, or if as the district we don't phone the school to find out how training went, then teachers do as they please. We do not get good attendance when teachers are not accountable to anyone and where no one takes them to task if they fail to arrive." In the case of the Observatory Girls Primary training the principal was present at training, and eLearning coordinators motivated teachers to attend the training and came to check that the sessions were running smoothly. Personnel from Sci-Bono also drop in on training sessions from time to time to check that the facilitators are running the course at the level that is expected of them.

In the case of the Observatory Girls Primary training session the trainer, Edwin Moloji received praise from the participants as well as the district officials who have observed many trainers. Tloubatla notes that Moloji "has got a way of getting the teachers to concentrate. He sets them tasks that they can achieve and encourages them to compile their portfolios. This boosts the level of skills and the morale of the trainees". The quality of the trainer is very important in terms of getting teachers to commit to the full duration of training, as Mngenela notes "if the trainer arrives late it sets a bad example. If the trainer has no energy the teachers quickly get a negative attitude to the training and are demoralised if not even the facilitator makes an effort for the session".

In some cases teachers fail to complete training through no fault of their own but rather because they are compelled to attend cluster meetings or curriculum training on days when they were scheduled to be at the ICT Skills for Teachers course. Mngenela notes that sometimes the district is to blame for lack of planning and communication between departments and asked if there was some way that teachers who miss sessions because of other compulsory

meetings can make up sessions and still qualify for certificates. She adds that the delay in some schools receiving their certificates is demotivating to teachers who were promised that they would get certificates upon submitting their portfolios.

A seemingly trivial distinction between the Observatory Girls Primary School training and other less well-attended sessions was that school funds were used to provide catering on the three days of training. Moloji says "when you are busy working you get hungry and tired. After you've eaten you are refreshed you are ready to go again. Break is also an opportunity for people to communicate – sometimes teachers will come and ask me questions over lunch or during lunch they will tell others about what they are working on". Providing catering also sends a message to teachers that the school management appreciates the time they are giving up to attend training and that the school wants the session to be an enjoyable experience.

The Observatory Girls Primary School ICT Skills for Teachers training was successful for many reasons. The courseware was seen as relevant and practical and the training approach developed confidence and self-reliance. The teachers chose to attend the course to boost their own professional skills and completed their portfolios because they were producing documents that they were going to use in their classrooms. The trainer was punctual, enthusiastic, encouraging and approachable. The principal was present and supportive at the training sessions. The district eLearning personnel saw a need at the school, presented a suitable course as a solution and then followed up with the school and supported the teachers. These factors form a good foundation for a school that will become e-mature and are the factors other training sessions should endeavour to emulate.