



# MENTOR ED

## MAGAZINE

...Connecting educators to what works

*A quarterly magazine for teachers and school administrators*



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*Dear Readers,*

*I am happy to welcome you to our second edition of MentorED, the educational magazine that brings you in-depth information about pedagogical topics and practical hands-on advice for the challenges we educators face every day.*

*Soon after being appointed the lead editor of this magazine, I realized how exciting it is to create this magazine as our contributors are international educators from all around the globe. This is an extraordinary and rare chance as they bring a very diverse perspective to the topics we present when sharing their experience and advice for problems that they encountered and struggled with – perhaps problems that you are facing right at this moment.*

*In this edition, they are sharing with you their experiences related to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. 21<sup>st</sup> century learning is the ‘hot topic’ in the education world right now and we want to make sure that you know what people are talking about when they raise the matter.*

*We will explain what 21<sup>st</sup> century learning is, how it came to life and what distinguishes it from so-called ‘traditional teaching approaches’. A Nigerian educator talks about **implementing** 21<sup>st</sup> century learning in Nigeria and a former student compares the teaching approaches in Nigeria and Ghana. Closely related are tips on how to bring 21<sup>st</sup> century learning into your classroom. As you will mostly hear praise related to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, we also look at both sides of the coin and present articles that reflect critically upon certain aspects of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. As part of the shift away from ‘traditional teaching’, we address subject integration as a possibility to make your lessons more interesting and closer to the problems your students will encounter in real life. We also bring up the relationship between you and your students and the importance of giving up micro-managing as a teacher. Last but not least, we present the efforts of the Columbian ministry of education to bring English language classes of a different sort to children from low-income families.*

*I hope you find the articles as fascinating as I do. If you have any comments, questions or just want to talk to the authors, you can do so by*

1. *Posting in the forum of our online portal: <http://www.thementored.com/discussion-forum>*
2. *Writing us an email: [info@thementored.com](mailto:info@thementored.com) or*
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*Thanks again to our contributors without whom this magazine would not have come to life, thanks to David I. Stevens for his knowledgeable input and Chiara Crisci for the layout, thanks to those who are working hard to make our on-line platform and forum an interesting place with exciting information and thanks to you, our readers, for taking the time to join us in our journey into the education world.*

*Enjoy the reading.*

*Anke Goebel*



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# What is 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY LEARNING?

By David I. Stevens

The term 21<sup>st</sup> century learning is most often used to refer to certain core competencies such as collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem solving that many believe schools need to teach to help students thrive in today's world.

The basis for this belief is that students should be given all the applicable skills needed in today's complex world. The idea is that students, who grow up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, need to be taught

different skills than those taught to students in the past, and that these 'new' skills should reflect the specific demands that will be placed on them in a technology-driven economy and society.

Overview of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning as compared to 20<sup>th</sup> century learning:

20 <sup>th</sup> century classroom	21 <sup>st</sup> century classroom
Time based	Outcome based
Focus on memorisation of discrete facts	Focus on what the students know and can do
Lessons focus on the lower level of Bloom's taxonomy	Lessons focus on the upper level of Bloom's taxonomy (see below)
Text book driven	Research driven
Passive learning	Active learning
Students work in isolation - classroom within four walls	Students work with classmates and others outside of the classroom
Teacher is the centre of attention and provider of information	Student is the centre of attention and the teacher is the coach
Little or no student freedom	A great deal of student freedom
Fragmented curriculum	Integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum
Grades are averaged across all students in the class	Grades are based on what was learned by the student
Low expectations – student is bored with learning	High expectations - independent learning is encouraged
The teacher is the judge of the student's work	Peer and others see and judge student's work
The curriculum and the school is meaningless to the student	Curriculum is 'connected' to interests, experiences and the real world
Print materials are the basis of learning and assessment	Multiple forms of media are used for learning and assessment
Diversity is ignored in the curriculum	Diversity is addressed as part of the curriculum
Literacy is based on the Three R's	Literacy is based on a combination of the Three R's and the Four C's
School is based on the factory model	School is based on a global model
Learning is driven by exams and standardised testing	Standardised testing has its place but learning is not driven by exams
Parent partnership with the school is discouraged	Greater parent partnership with the school is encouraged.

Adapted from: *Pedagogy from perception to perspective*. 2014 Wasil, F.A. and Thawani, H.

In 2001, the American National Education Association (NEA) helped establish the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning or P21, and in 2002 embarked on the development of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning framework that highlighted 18 different skill sets. However, the framework was quickly determined to be too long and complex, so in 2002 the NEA interviewed a number of educational leaders to determine which of the 18 skill sets were most important. Four specific skills emerged: Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration and Creativity. These became known as the “Four Cs”.

Advocates of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning now suggest the “Three R’s” (Reading, ‘riting and ‘rithmetic), used as the foundation of learning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, be combined with the “Four Cs” to form the foundation for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom as learning must reflect the world the students are going to move into.

When elements of the “four C’s” are incorporated into the classroom, teachers can help develop a greater sense of community and encourage students to work and experience success together, so that they can embark on critical thinking and indulge in problem solving. By doing this, learning is transformed and develops creativity and innovation.

In terms of assessment, schools currently do a good job in capturing academic proficiency. However, this is not the case when assessing the skills that students need to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To do this, both schools and teachers must work to develop ways where students are encouraged to become critical and creative thinkers plus problem solvers so they can collaborate and communicate effectively.

The role of the “Three R’s” as the centre of teaching and learning within their historical context is beyond question. However,

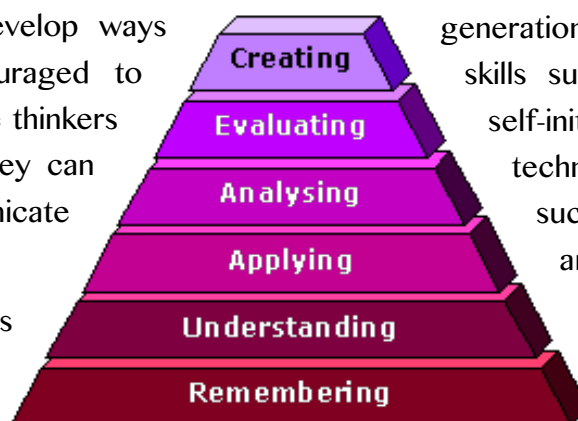
as the world becomes more and more technologically complex, the challenge is to train teachers to be able to incorporate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills into the “Three R’s” classroom and access them appropriately.

Using Bloom’s revised taxonomy as a guide, 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogy also has to move from remembering, understanding and applying to analysing, evaluating and creating. The 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher has to be able to scaffold learning and build on a basis of knowledge to promote a deeper level of learning that includes recall, comprehension, analysing, evaluating and determining possible outcomes and consequences.

Three different perspectives have been identified to help in better understanding 21<sup>st</sup> century learning (Mishra and Kereluik, 2011). These are:

1. Foundational knowledge: Knowledge that refers to what students need to know for the 21<sup>st</sup> century
2. Meta knowledge: Knowledge that refers to how a student works with foundational knowledge in terms of critical thinking and problem solving, and
3. Humanistic knowledge: Knowledge that refers to a ‘vision’ of self in terms of the life and job skills the student will need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Most people agree that students today need different skills than were taught in previous generations, and that cross-disciplinary skills such as writing, critical thinking, self-initiative, group collaboration, and technological literacy are essential to success in the modern workplace, and adult life. However, there is still a great deal of debate about 21<sup>st</sup> century learning from ‘what skills are most important’ to ‘how such skills should be



taught' and their appropriate role in teaching and learning.

One of the biggest issues with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning is that it is interpreted and applied in different ways in different countries and in different schools. This leads to ambiguity, confusion and inconsistency.

Arguments that may be made in support of teaching 21<sup>st</sup> century skills include:

- Information and knowledge is increasing at such a rapid rate that no one can learn everything about every subject. With technological advances and new ways of thinking, new answers are discovered and these new answers often contradict previous answers. What may appear true today could be proven wrong tomorrow. The work that students will do after they graduate may not yet exist. For this reason, students need to be taught how to process and use information, plus apply adaptable skills in all areas of their lives.
- Schools need to adapt and develop new ways of teaching and learning that reflect a changing world. The purpose of school must be to prepare students for life after graduation, and therefore schools need to prioritise the knowledge and skills that will be in the greatest demand.
- Given the widespread availability of information today, lecturing to a class is no longer relevant and teachers need to provide information to students in a more engaging format. Teachers therefore need to use school time to teach students how to find, interpret, and use information, rather than presenting information.

Arguments that may be made against the concept of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning include:

- The debate over “content vs. skills” is not new; educators have been talking about and wrestling with these issues for many

years, which makes the term 21<sup>st</sup> century learning misleading and inaccurate.

- The more time teachers spend on skill-related instruction, the less time they will have for content-based instruction and students may be denied opportunities because they are insufficiently knowledgeable. Students need a broad knowledge base, which they will not receive if teachers focus too much on skill-related instruction or “learning how to learn”.
- Cross-disciplinary skills are extremely difficult to assess reliably and consistently. There are no formal tests for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, so the public won't know how well schools are doing in teaching these skills.

It is clear that not all of the knowledge and skills identified as 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills are limited to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, job and life skills etc. have long been associated with academic achievement and are skills that are required for successful learning and achievement in any time, including the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The key however is to integrate and regulate students' needs and goals with that of the larger society so students can navigate the 21<sup>st</sup> century successfully.

**“Taxonomy”** simply means **“classification”**. Bloom's taxonomy is an attempt to classify forms and levels of learning in the cognitive domain. The taxonomy is organised as a series of levels or pre-requisites where students cannot effectively address the higher levels until those below them have been covered. The original taxonomy was revised by Krathwohl and Anderson in 2001.

*Adapted from*  
<http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/bloomtax.htm>

# Interview with Michelle Emogware: Opinion on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning

1. Thinking about the schools in Nigeria, what is the most urgent issue facing teachers today? Tick all that apply.

- Lack of quality student assessment
- Professional teacher development
- Up to date curriculum
- The classroom learning environment

2. 21<sup>st</sup> century learning is quite a vague term. What do you think it means? Please comment in the space below.

This is a system of learning where children are groomed (if you like) to be all round learners. Here academics are not the focus anymore. Students are challenged cognitively, physically and socially. There is the use of technology in the lessons. Students are taught to think for themselves; sometimes there are no right or wrong answers in class. It's a question of what they think and how they can justify it using evidence available or evidence they can show.

21<sup>st</sup> century learning really is educating the whole child. It is very broad and cannot be quantified in a few words.

3. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills are a set of abilities that students need to develop in order to succeed in the information age. The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills lists three types:

Learning skills	Literacy skills	Life skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical Thinking</li> <li>• Creative Thinking</li> <li>• Collaborating</li> <li>• Communicating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information Literacy</li> <li>• Media Literacy</li> <li>• Technology Literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility</li> <li>• Initiative</li> <li>• Social Skills</li> <li>• Productivity</li> <li>• Leadership</li> </ul>

Looking at the above table, do you think the implementation of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, literacy and life skills will help improve the Nigerian school system overall?

Will it help in: It will help in all three areas.

- Improving your professional development?
- Up-dating the current curriculum?
- Up-dating classrooms and the learning environment as a whole?

Or do you think:

- That things will pretty stay the same?

Please tell us more about the reason for your answer in the space below.

- To educate the 21<sup>st</sup> century child, as a professional, I certainly would need to develop myself in order to inspire the child to be all he can be. If I don't know what the 21<sup>st</sup> century child should look like how do I ensure that my students are been exposed to the right environment and knowledge and opportunities to become this learner? So yes it will mean that professionally, I need to develop myself.
- The learning environment needs to support 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. An example would be the sitting arrangement in typical classrooms. Where each child is seated to face the teacher not giving room for collaborative learning. The environment should also take into consideration the need for say kinesthetic learners to be engage. As a teacher I should understand that it's okay to allow children move around necessitating the need to arrange and re-arrange my tables and chairs.
- The curriculum should include subjects that teach skills and teachers should interpret creatively this curriculum.

4. Education is critical to society as a whole, however the demands of the world are changing very quickly. What, from your personal perspective, would be some of the core subjects that students would need to study in order to support such a society in Nigeria? Please tick all that apply.

- English
- Math
- Science
- World languages
- Fine arts
- Qur'anic studies
- Technology
- Music
- Other

If you ticked other please list the subjects you were thinking about below.

5. Traditional education is typically focused on facts, memorisation, reading, writing, math and test taking. But has not focused on the development of creativity and innovation. This is changing in 21<sup>st</sup> century, learning and education and countries worldwide are beginning to put creativity and innovation as a high priority for student learning. How will the introduction of creativity and innovation into the regular classroom impact you as a teacher in Nigeria? Please comment in the space below.

As a teacher, it means I do not have to be the reservoir of knowledge talking down like a sage to expectant learners. It means I can encourage the learners to reach out to that fountain of creativity they have to express themselves. It means I can encourage learners to take ownership of their own learning by facilitating.

6. What are some of the things in the Nigerian educational system that will have to change if or when 21<sup>st</sup> century learning is introduced? Please comment in the space below.

The idea that the teacher knows it all. The idea that if the child must express himself / herself the way the teacher wants.

7. Twenty first century learning is organised around personalised learning. It focuses on providing all students, regardless of their economic, geographic, or ethnic background, with the skills they need to participate in a 'modern' knowledge-based society, while also allowing them to explore other educational opportunities best suited to their interests, their capabilities, and their chosen future. Such a vision has been advocated before and small steps have been taken towards reaching this goal. But the advancement of technology and the move toward a knowledge-based society now makes such a vision both more achievable and more important. But this would mean moving away from the traditional education model.

*Part 1: Do you think Nigeria should move away from a traditional education model?*

The traditional education mode currently involves not just the academics but emphasis on morals. In that sense, Nigeria should not move away entirely. Morals are important and must be emphasized. However, in terms of lesson delivery, there needs to be a major shift from teacher centered learning to student centered learning.

*Part 2: Do you think the average teacher in Nigeria will want to, or be able to, move away from a traditional education model? Please comment in the space below.*

Moving away from a traditional educational model requires change. Change is never easy and is often resisted. However, if the teacher sees how beneficial this change is, then certainly it will be embraced. Note however, that there will be many hurdles to cross starting with policy makers perhaps at the government level.

8. Research shows that students remain more interested in learning if the content is relevant and current and ensures they are properly engaged in the learning process. This means that teachers will have to focus on how to find and use relevant content for their lessons rather than lecturing to students and having them take notes. This significantly changes the role of the teacher however from a person who delivers 'learning', to a person who guides students through the learning process. Do you think this change in the role of the teacher should be specifically addressed in teacher training or just left to the individual teacher to pick up the skills on their own? Please comment in the space below.

Addressed in teacher training. It should be addressed in teacher training. During teaching practice, teachers must have the opportunity to guide students through the learning process. As the teacher gains more experience, it must become a part of their teaching experience. Left to the individual teacher to pick up on their own.

9. When people speak about 21<sup>st</sup> century learning they talk about skills such as writing, critical thinking, self-initiative, group collaboration, and technological literacy.

*Part 1: Do you think the average Nigerian teacher is ready to teach these skills?*

The Nigerian teacher is ready to teach these skills. The average Nigerian teacher is NOT ready to teach many of these skills. An example is critical thinking.

*Part 2: If you think the average Nigerian teacher is not yet ready to teach the above subjects what MUST happen in the school system in order to get teachers ready?*

Teachers must be fully trained before they are allowed to teach. Teacher training schools must prepare teachers to teach these new skills. A teacher must be a person who is able to communicate fluently in the country's lingua franca both verbally and in writing.

10. In today's world the work of the teacher is subject to increasingly critical appraisal especially in the urban areas of developing countries. While teachers are criticised as just being transmitters of knowledge, they find a new and impossible task thrust on them that of helping students interpret contradictory information taken from a variety of different sources over which the teacher has no control. Teaching then becomes less a task of delivering a well-defined body of knowledge and more a poor attempt to bring order to disorganized information. Is this a situation you find yourself in? Is this something your colleagues find themselves in? Please comment in the space below.

I am not sure what is meant by 'contradictory information' here. However, Students can be taught to determine what sources are credible and which are not be being taught about the provenance of sources and how to determine reliability and usefulness of source. These skills will help students decide what sources to trust and which not to.





# Content-based Knowledge *versus* Learning and Innovation: Comparing Nigeria and Ghana

By Temilola Alanamu, PhD

Learning and innovative skills are crucial to the success of every student in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The abilities to think independently and creatively, propose innovative solutions to modern problems, and communicate and collaborate around the globe are indispensable to surviving in the job markets of today. As such, these skills should be integrated into learning and teaching in all institutions around the world. In Nigeria, however, these skills seem to have been relegated in favour of content-focused knowledge.

Having studied in both Nigeria and Ghana, I have noted the differences and challenges in learning and teaching in tertiary institutions in the two countries. While neither system is perfect, what gives Ghana its educational edge over learning and teaching in Nigeria is its emphasis on student-focused learning rather than a teacher-focused model. When I arrived as a fresher at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile Ife in 2003, I enrolled as a student in Politics, Philosophy and Economics (P.P.E). These courses were entirely content-focused and in classes I was told interesting facts about the world.

Every time I stepped into a Politics lecture, I heard the professor wax lyrical about Nigerian independence, the events that led to the Nigerian civil war, government models around the world and the bane of colonialism. In Philosophy, the lecturer conveyed the ideas of Heraclitus, Plato's caves and Socrates, but macro- and micro-economic theory sums up the little I remember of economics.

Throughout my time at OAU, lecturers gave little indication of how the subjects taught were relevant to current real-life situations and my future career. Nevertheless, when exams came around, I did what nearly all my colleagues did, I crammed the lecture notes to the best of my ability and I could almost be certain that the closer I could remember the exact wording of the lecture notes and handouts, the better my grades would be. By the time I transferred to the University of Ghana, Legon, in 2005, I was on the Upper Second-Class Honors list. Unfortunately, I remembered very little of what I had been told in classes.

In Ghana, there was no P.P.E option. So instead, I studied History and Information Studies, which combined my love for history and politics and the more contemporary skills of technology. For the sake of comparison, I will focus only on my experiences in History, which, being an Arts course, was closest to the social science P.P.E Degree. The History course in Ghana had a very different teaching model to what I had experienced in Nigeria. Rather than lectures alone, History was instead taught with a combination of lectures and tutorials. In lectures we learned about Peter and Catherine the Great of Russia, we read about the world wars, American Independence and the American civil war, Ghanaian History and the Colonial state, to name a few. While this may also sound quite content-focused, the difference between Legon and Ife was that in Ghana, I was not simply told about events in history which I then reproduced on exams, I actually learned how history and historical models were directly relevant to my life and future. The monologues of the Nigerian lectures were replaced with engaging discourses. The teachers began every other sentence with a question. “What do you think...?” “How do you suppose...?” “Can anyone speculate...?” “Who has heard about...?” “What can we deduce...?” and most importantly, “Any questions?”

In a course called *Intellectual History*, I learned how the Enlightenment and the Renaissance shaped my thinking today. In the USA and Russia course, I understood how the debates of the American civil war are still relevant in the fight against modern-day slavery. In Ghanaian history, I understood how I, as a person, was a product of a colonial past that dictated the country from which I originated, the clothes I wore, the language I spoke, the food I ate and even the people with whom I associated. In tutorials, the teachers were there only to guide the discussions and hardly spoke. We, as students, were challenged to think for ourselves and discuss historical phenomena and how this influenced current affairs. We also grasped how the simple historical model of recognising a problem in history, understanding the solutions previously proposed and the suggestion of new innovative solutions could be applied in all spheres of life from scientific research to journalism and even job interviews. I completed my education with a First class Honours Degree and moved to the University of Cambridge for my Masters. Many others in my year went on to obtain scholarships in prestigious universities around the globe and other high-flying jobs, perhaps evidence that the Ghanaian teaching model is a largely successful one.

While content-based knowledge is important to the framework for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, it is the foundation on which to build the key skills of learning and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity, communication and collaboration. The last time I studied in Nigeria was a decade ago, my brief return as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Ibadan in 2012/2013 confirmed that many Nigerian institutions are still unwavering in their pursuit of teacher-focused content-driven learning which is fast becoming obsolete in today’s world. Only by actively pursuing teaching methods where students are encouraged to think beyond their lecture notes and hand-outs and in essence, think for themselves, can Nigeria begin to produce the caliber of graduates required to make the country competitive in today’s world.

# HOW TO INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEARNING

Effectiveness can be defined as the degree to which an effort is successful in producing a desired result.

Increasing effectiveness in the classroom is dependent upon both the teacher and the student. Teachers can be more effective by making the effort to review and revise the currently accepted teaching methodologies and learning activities. Students can make an effort by working hard to solve given exercises and problems from the currently accepted or revised curriculum.

Developing a more effective learning environment in Nigeria can be reached by taking the following steps:

## 1. Divide a big class into groups:

It is very difficult to carry out learning activities in Nigeria, especially in northern Nigeria where space for learning is limited and the disproportionality between teachers and students makes teaching and learning difficult. Creating student groups that work together can help reduce these problems. For example, if there were 100 students in a group:

- Put together a number of study groups from the same class.
- Put students of a similar age and skill level together to create a fair learning environment, solve problems and obtain results.
- Divide the large group into 10 small groups. Divide each group equally (age, ability to understand the material, leadership skills, as well as problem solving skills).
- Once divided into small groups, the teacher provides the material according to the group levels.

Dividing students into small groups helps when there are students who do not understand the lesson. They can ask a classmate in the same group or the group as a whole can discuss problems with other groups and teachers.

The groups take turns explaining and discussing the material with the other groups and the teacher. Each person in the group must participate in explaining the material. The purpose of the explanation and discussion is to ensure that 'deep' learning takes place and results are secured.

## 2. Variation in learning:

This will keep students focused and active and therefore the lessons will be more interesting. In a primary school class, a monotonous class will make the student bored quickly. Varying learning methods makes the classroom atmosphere become alive. Hopefully, you have already applied this method in your class in Nigeria.

Here is what you can do:

- a. Help students memorize the material by singing songs.
- b. Sing the national anthem every day or at least three times a week so that the students know more about their own country and develop a feeling of belonging to it.
- c. Give a gift to those who can answer questions or be active when learning. BUT REMEMBER! You have to tell the students that the gift is in appreciation of their continuous progress in learning, not as a way to get them to be active just when given a gift. Gifts do not have to be goods or money, the best gift may be a compliment, or even applause. These are simple gifts which can provide the motivation to learn.

## 3. Parent support:

The success of learning is based not only on the optimism of the students and the support of the teachers, but also on the encouragement of the parents. Nigeria has much in common with rural Indonesia. Residents are paying little attention to education. This is a major obstacle when trying to develop an advanced nation. Community work has gradually convinced parents of the importance of education. Although community work might seem to have a small impact and is hard work, it has definitely helped to raise awareness of the importance of education.

## 4. Government support:

The main role of the government is to encourage the improvement of education. The Nigerian government should allocate more money to education and the improvement of international relations to support the growth of learning in Nigeria. Alas, the state government has suggested that people use state funds as best as they can. As the population is experiencing a variety of problems, e.g. low standards of education, safety issues and a poor economy, human rights need to be taken serious and become more developed.

## 5. Reduce child work:

The mindset of the rural population of Nigeria and Indonesia are the same in that way that the parents would rather have their children stay home to help than go to school. One idea is to reduce the time in school and still have the same learning activities. If this was done, it could change the minds of the population and have them allow their children to go to school. And after school, children could help their parents.

## 6. Cooperation between all parties involved:

A strong relationship between the government, teachers, students and parents is a relevant factor in the fight for a better education in Nigeria. Parties concerned should support each other. If one party cannot give the support needed, it is likely to have a negative impact.

It is my hope that some of the propositions developed in this article can be applied to the situation in Nigerian schools as a support for the advancement of education in Nigeria. Hopefully, the above methods can help Nigeria become a better country.

# Core elements of effective 21<sup>st</sup> century Education Programs

By Suruchi Khamesra, PhD

“The fact is, that given the challenges we face, education doesn't need to be reformed - it needs to be transformed. The key to this transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions.” (Robinson and Aronica 2009).

Increasing the use of technology makes the distribution of knowledge more effective, thus supporting learners' growth and reducing pressure on the teacher, however the use of educational technology has also widened the gap between developed and developing countries in terms of its education system. In developed countries students and teachers have access to every new emerging technology but developing countries are still struggling to get basic education. But by adapting some universal core elements in education programs one can reduce the gap and improve the learning experience.

## Applicable lesson plans

Effective education programs must be accompanied by applicable and relevant lesson plans for use in the classroom. The key elements for 21st century learning are global and research based content, designed to create opportunities for interaction and an authentic learning experience along with digital tools and summative and formative assessment. Learning becomes uncorrelated when learners don't get the chance to develop their learning based on what they already know. That is why it should have 'functional connection', real application and be meaningful to local needs and the real world. Learning must also be supported by identifying and supporting new ideas and skills.

## Well researched lesson plans

To cope with changing resources, research can help with the design and execution of lesson plans for teachers. Good research results in the

development of universally applicable content tailored to the students' level where he or she can explore different perspectives. Well researched lessons make for a democratic, accurate and balanced approach that can include contradictory views and learning theories plus have a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach. Inquiry and project based lesson plans encourage students to use information and communication skills, thinking and reasoning skills such as problem solving, and personal skills like collaboration, project planning and development.

## Effective instruction

In earlier times learning was based on memorizing facts and completing worksheets. Today however students need to be trained how to find, acquire, process, interpret and apply information in all areas of life. Effective instruction enhances innovative thinking; effective communication, creativity, curiosity, imagination, and productivity. 21st century learning is student centred and encourages independent application, interpretation and explanation. There is no space for irrelevant and unrelated facts. Instruction must incorporate creative and innovative teaching strategies backed by research.

## Effective learning tools

Learning tools help students reach their desired learning goals. By using technology, information and digital literacy one can create effective learning tools for 21st century learning. Search engines, social networks, internet videos, free video calling and message applications, multimedia, electronic whiteboards, online learning communities and resources can be considered as 21st century learning tools through which the learner is not limited to class room boundaries but exposed to other global information.

## Community participation

Community participation's biggest benefit is that it can maximize limited resources. Participation of community members at various levels of learning

improves social relations and education policies. There are many avenues where communities can involve people such as funding, labour and materials, attendance at meetings and consultation. Volunteer programs for various departments are an excellent opportunity to increase the sustainability of schools. Through participation members can keep an eye on policies and regulations. Community participation can be strengthened through information and communication.

## Evaluation

Evaluating the effect of 21st century instruction and learning tools is a demanding task. The main objective is to learn how well schools are executing research based lesson plans and to determine the impact of new theories on students' academic and behavioural outcomes. Evaluation methods are usually made up of appropriate tasks, theory-based or experimental design and data analysis. Benefits of evaluation include program effectiveness, improvement in programs, acceleration of research and promotion of innovation.

As virtual classrooms open the doors for students of all ages without discrimination, we can expect that the gap will soon be reduced between the educational programs of developed and developing countries. It is the high time that we discard old traditions and embrace 21st century core elements. Real world tools, resources and methodologies supported by research and community increases global awareness, knowledge, skills and participation.

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# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teaching Skill for Teachers

By Annette Francis

***“The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil.”***

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

In an age where sources for information are ever on the rise, what sets a teacher apart from other sources of information?

*Content, delivery and style.* It's not about the amount of information being conveyed, it is the manner in which it is delivered that ensures that you have the undivided attention of your class. A dry monologue combined with a couple of presentations is not enough to ensure that you retain the attention of your students. Think of the teacher as a performer in front of an audience of students. Students demand humour, wit, suspense, and a plot. Even calculus, if taught with the right flair, will have the most laid back student in the class hanging on to the edge of their seats.

Next, how do you know what is the best form of content delivery? Well, the key here is to **know your audience**. There are three different types of learners – auditory, visual and kinaesthetic. In order to ensure that class efficiency is always high, it is important to customize your lesson plan such that it is suited to all learner types. An auditory learner will prefer a lecture where the teacher does most of the talking, while a visual learner will require the assistance of pictures, drawings and mind maps, a kinaesthetic learner will want to try out things. When it comes to logistics, it is not possible to arrange different learning situations for each student. But modifying your class plan to include a little bit of everything will ensure that it caters to the needs of everyone. The best part is: This is possible for *any subject, any topic, any theme*.

For example, let us take a case where we have a group of very knowledgeable

science students sitting in a History class. These students are logical learners who work best with puzzles, quizzes and experiments. If you have to teach them about the French Revolution for example how would you go about it? Here's an idea. Research the ideals that led to the French Revolution such as the concepts of popular sovereignty and inalienable rights. Present these ideals as a list of parameters. Let the students analyse which ideals are in line with the existing political system (an absolute monarchy) and which contradict it. The students will then be able to logically figure out where tensions could arise and how these tensions could find their expression in society. By doing this, the students will develop a deeper understanding for the historic events of the French Revolution using their analytical thinking skills. With simple modifications like this, the class experience as such can change significantly.

What sets apart a teacher from a web browser is the fact that he or she has a lifetime of real life experience to share, which is something that no technical tool can replace. The trick is to convince your students that you *alone* are the best information source and that your class hour is the *only* way through which they can learn best. This cannot happen simply by boasting about your life achievements. Rather, when you are thorough in the subject knowledge, then you will have the ability to deliver the content in an interesting manner using the right tools, thus ensuring that the students have the perfect take away, while the teacher enjoys the satisfaction of a good class. The greatest achievement for a teacher is when the students willingly walk into your second class.

# A critical view of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning

By Anke Goebel and David Stevens

21<sup>st</sup> century learning is a term that you encounter everywhere, it's become the flavour of the month, it's new, it's hip and it's different — finally, you think, we have a modern workable approach to teaching and learning, something that we did not have before.

You find 21<sup>st</sup> century learning in America, in Europe and all over the globe — including developing countries that struggle with a lot more basic problems. Everyone wants to jump on the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning bandwagon and be part of it. But this is what people do when a new fashion comes up.

However when we look behind its fancy façade, we have to look back to where 21<sup>st</sup> century learning comes from. And that leads us to the United States.

Teachers in US public schools use a lot of methods that do not appear to help students excel. For example teachers lecture, schools advocate rote learning and teach by the book following the precise numbers of pages as prescribed by the school district. Testing and more testing seems to be the order of the day. However, such testing does not appear to help students succeed in the technology-driven economy and the society of the new century.

These issues are part of the reason why 21<sup>st</sup> century learning has become a big hit. It stresses collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving and leads away from other teaching approaches. It also uses catchphrases like digital literacy, effectiveness and outcome-based results. And this is what brings us to the heart of the issue.

When you look at 21<sup>st</sup> century learning terms,

you might begin to wonder if the education system has been transformed into a company setting. Outcomes, effective, collaboration, critical thinking — these are skills you list when writing a job application. Have we exchanged the so called 19<sup>th</sup> century factory model of school for a 21<sup>st</sup> century factory model? Is 21<sup>st</sup> century learning turning our children into future employees? Are they no longer children, but seen under the umbrella of how employable they will be when they are finished with their learning?

Toffler (1970) notes in his book “Future Shock” that:

*«...Mass education was the ingenious machine constructed by industrialism to produce the kind of adults it needed. The problem was inordinately complex. How to pre-adapt children for a new world — a world of repetitive indoor toil, smoke, noise, machines, crowded living conditions, collective discipline, a world in which time was to be regulated not by the cycle of sun and moon, but by the factory whistle and the clock.»*

What has changed? Perhaps the smoke, noise and crowded living conditions have changed somewhat, but people today still work in a world of repetitive indoor toil, working on machines for far longer each day than they did previously, and are still subject to collective discipline.

This issue is especially critical in developing countries that are often dominated by

international conglomerates with financial means far exceeding the financial budget of their host country's governments. These companies are in need of employees with certain skill sets to function in specific work areas. What these companies need are people who collaborate to resolve work issues, solve up-coming problems while exploring expansion plans and creatively lower HR costs. What these companies do not need however are people who use their critical thinking and research skills to point out that the very same companies are destroying their country through mining, pollution or deforestation or that they are using their communication skills to point out that local workers are paid or trained far less than immigrants.

Education is much broader than skill sets, standards and outcomes. Education includes the formation of the whole person as the process of understanding the mind, the heart and ones' identity. Education has to address personal and cultural maturation that includes philosophy, art and music, along with the understanding of self as part of a community with all its social implications, historic roots and responsibilities.

America has always had a strong emphasis on skill development for practical reasons — especially financial ones — but before buying into 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, you have to understand that it is a program made in America by Americans with its emphasis, as **Alexis De Tocqueville** noted:

« [In] most of the operations of the mind, each American appeals to the individual exercise of his own understanding alone. »

(*Democracy in America*. 1840. Volume 2, pg. 2)

And when you look into an American classroom, you see students working on exercises in a book,

rarely do you see group discussion or a common effort to solve a given problem, a more common sight in European classrooms.

There has always been tension between education and learning a skill, but 21<sup>st</sup> century learning does not appear to take the broader definition of education into consideration. And although the developers of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning do everything to spread their views, it remains an American educational program — made to address American problems within the American culture and setting.

Consider those theories that actually promoted student-centeredness and progressive learning: John Dewey (an American who took the student so seriously that he let them chose what they wanted to learn as did A. S. Neill in England), Waldorf, Montessori and Klafki all stress student-centeredness, collaboration, creativity, a curriculum that is tailored to the students, subject integration and higher level learning (analyzing, evaluating and creating).

But does an educational system created in a developed country really take into account the situation in a developing country? Does the system respect the developing country's history, roots, culture, experience, or identity? Is the system able to be adapted or do schools, teachers and students in the developing country have to adapt and bend until they cannot find themselves any longer?

Do not think that all that comes from developed countries will be for the better. Most times, it does not fit the situation or take into account the wishes, dreams, abilities and needs of local people into account.

Take what works and make it your own — without denying your own identity.

# When “21<sup>st</sup> Century Schooling”

## Just isn't Good enough: A modest Proposal

*By Alfie Kohn*

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Many school administrators, and even more people who aren't educators but are kind enough to offer their advice about how our field can be improved, have emphasized the need for “21<sup>st</sup> century schools” that teach “21<sup>st</sup> century skills.” But is this really enough, particularly now that our adversaries (in other words, people who live in other countries) may be thinking along the same lines? Unfortunately, no. Beginning immediately, therefore, we must begin to implement 22<sup>nd</sup> century education.

What does that phrase mean? How can we possibly know what skills will be needed so far in the future? Such challenges from skeptics – the same kind of people who ask annoying questions about other cutting-edge ideas, including “brain-based education” – are to be expected. But if we're confident enough to describe what education should be like throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century – that is, what will be needed over the next 90 years or so – it's not much of a stretch to reach a few decades beyond that.

Essentially, we can take whatever objectives or teaching strategies we happen to favor and, merely by attaching a label that designates a future time period, endow them (and ourselves) with an aura of novelty and significance. Better yet, we instantly define our critics as impediments to progress. If this trick works for the adjective “21<sup>st</sup> century,” imagine the payoff from ratcheting it up by a hundred years.

To describe schooling as 22<sup>nd</sup> century, however, does suggest a somewhat specific agenda. First, it signifies an emphasis on

competitiveness. Even those who talk about 21<sup>st</sup> century schools invariably follow that phrase with a reference to “the need to compete in a global economy.” The goal isn't excellence, in other words; it's victory. Education is first and foremost about being first and foremost. Therefore, we might as well trump the 21<sup>st</sup> century folks by peering even further into the future.

You may have noticed the connection between this conception of education and the practice of continually ranking students on the basis of their scores on standardized tests. This is a promising start, but it doesn't go nearly far enough. Twenty-second-century schooling means that just about everything should be evaluated in terms of who's beating whom. Thus, newspapers might feature headlines like: “U.S. Schools Now in 4th Place in Number of Hall Monitors” or “Gates Funds \$50-Billion Effort to Manufacture World-Class Cafeteria Trays.” Whatever the criterion, our challenge is to make sure that people who don't live in the United States will always be inferior to us.

This need to be number one also explains why we can no longer settle for teaching to the “whole child.” The trouble is that if you have a whole of something, you have only one of it. From now on, therefore, you can expect to see conferences devoted to educating a “child-and-a-half” (CAAH). Nothing less will do in a 22<sup>nd</sup> century global – or possibly interplanetary – economy. To cite the title of a forthcoming best-seller that educators will be reading in place of dusty tomes about pedagogy, *The Solar System Is Flat*.



In addition to competitiveness, those who specify an entire century to frame their objectives tend not to be distracted by all the fretting about what's good for children. Instead, they ask, "What do our corporations need?" and work backwards from there. We must never forget the primary reason that children attend school – namely, to be trained in the skills that will maximize the profits earned by their future employers. Indeed, we have already made great strides in shifting the conversation about education to what will prove useful in workplaces rather than wasting time discussing what might support "democracy" (an 18<sup>th</sup> century notion, isn't it?) or what might promote self development as an intrinsic good (a concept that goes back thousands of years and is therefore antiquated by definition).

How can we redouble our commitment to business-oriented schooling? If necessary, we can outsource some of the learning to students in Asia, who will memorize more facts for lower grades. And we can complete the process, already begun in spirit, of making universities' education departments subsidiaries of their business schools. More generally, we must put an end to pointless talk about students' "interest" in learning and instead focus on skills that will contribute to the bottom line. Again, we're delighted to report that this shift is already underway, thanks to those who keep reminding us about the importance of 21<sup>st</sup> century schooling.

This is no time for complacency, though. Not everyone is on board yet, and that means we'll have to weed out teachers whose stubborn attachment to less efficient educational strategies threatens to slow down the engine of our future economy. How can we rid our schools of those who refuse to be team players? Well, we can insist that all classroom instruction be rigorously aligned to state standards – a very effective technique

since most of those standards documents were drafted by people steeped in the models, methods, and metaphors of corporations. We can also use merit pay to enforce compliance by stigmatizing anyone who doesn't play by the new rules. (Come to think of it, here, too, we're already well on our way to creating 22<sup>nd</sup> century classrooms.)

The final distinguishing feature of education that's geared to the next century is its worshipful attitude toward mathematics and technology. "If you can't quantify it or plug it in, who needs it?" Of course, the reason we will continue to redirect resources toward the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects (and away from literature and the arts) isn't because the former are inherently more important but simply because they're more useful from an economic standpoint. And that standpoint is the only one that matters for schools with a proper 22<sup>nd</sup> century mindset.

One last point. We will of course continue to talk earnestly about the need for a curriculum that features "critical thinking" skills – by which we mean the specific proficiencies acceptable to CEOs. But you will appreciate the need to delicately discourage real critical thinking on the part of students, since this might lead them to pose inconvenient questions about the entire enterprise and the ideology on which it's based. There's certainly no room for that in the global competitive economy of the future. Or the present.

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# Old story, new sentiments: **Challenges** facing Education Systems in developing Countries

By Alisa Kryvaruchka

Be it a child, a teenager or an adult, beyond any doubt one understands that 'an investment in knowledge pays the best interest' (Benjamin Franklin). But does everybody adhere to the same idea? While developed countries have jumped on the modernization of education bandwagon, smaller Eastern European countries are now witnessing the greatest challenges, lacking even the basic understanding of how an education system should work.

This issue is made harder by a number of factors and to tackle the challenges, one should apply a comprehensive approach. One could argue that social and economic implications of education frailties are the trickiest to articulate and hardest to pin down. However, more often than not, we are dealing with hard facts, not feelings. Assertions that can be backed up with evidence, and not based on gut instinct or prejudice. For this reason, let us handle this issue thoroughly by examining real-life examples.

The first thing to consider is that control of the education system lies with the government. Many of the leading Eastern European educational establishments are state-owned and therefore state financed. The academic society is anemic at best and crucial decisions lie with Ministries and local governing bodies. Many times the government would prefer to appoint a highly-disciplined manager for an

administrative position in education rather than promote a skilled specialist who has cut his or her teeth on teaching. The consequences could not be more disturbing: after an attempt to carry out education reform by cutting the number of years students have to spend in school, they are the ones who suffer most, finding themselves obliged to cram in the double material of a 'reformed' course.

There is also a growing tendency on the part of the ministry officials to expect accelerated results from educators. Thus, teachers are forced to put aside quality teaching in the pursuit of reporting fruitful results in the shortest time possible. What ministry officials appear to lack is the understanding that the process of education must be consistent, logical and cohesive.

Secondly, the system itself is too conservative and rigid. It's hard to believe that in the present era of technology, someone doesn't support the idea of purchasing e-books, online magazines and data bases. Again ministry officials insist on supplying print books by local authors that were first published in the 1980's and simply republished in 2015. In that way, the smaller Eastern European countries are turning their back on unique and valuable sources of modern research and scientific advances and are reluctant to accept new concepts and trends. This means that the information resource is old

and rigid while the system becomes one of an exclusive nature. It doesn't provide even for basic needs such as up-to-date and constantly renewed sources of information.

Thirdly, the education system is becoming more and more money-centered. As funding is low, many universities struggle to capitalize on extra-budgetary revenues. There are an ever-growing number of universities that offer a fee-based education for the lowest grades possible. Furthermore, in order to keep attracting money, universities tend to be lenient with students who have a poor GPA. Thus, instead of concentrating on talented and promising specialists, the universities go out of their way to keep those who bring in money.

Moreover, the first ministry to see cuts in funding is education. Many Eastern European academicians suggest that when a country spends less than one per cent on funding science education, it is a serious barrier to the country's progress and prosperity. And that is exactly what appears to be happening in those countries that are at the lowest stage of development. Needless to say that the teacher's profession is one of the lowest paid jobs in such countries.

There are also other associated challenges. Since there is little chance to earn good money, in teaching men opt for different occupations to be breadwinners and women remain in the classroom. By keeping wages low few teachers follow up

on their studies to acquire postgraduate degrees. Thus, when it comes to university accreditation, statistics show that the number of highly qualified specialists is steadily decreasing. Meaning the education system is suffering from a 'brain-drain'.

But what is even more alarming is the decline in the respect shown towards the teaching profession itself. No longer do you see praise and approval of the teaching profession by the government and society. This is vividly exemplified through applied salary policies, none-existent social grants and poor overall teacher support. Teachers often feel trapped in the classroom when demand for good education is high but the reward is poor.

Pretty rhetoric and good intentions from education ministries have proven to be ineffective. It's too early to speak about making the education system of a developing country a competitive one. For now, the education system should become the focus of renewed scrutiny and commitment in the wake of technological breakthroughs. Breaches in the existing system should be determined and openly admitted and problems clearly articulated. Their needs to be country wide projects financed and launched that will transform poor educational systems into ones more suited to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

Following Mr. Franklin's words:

***“If a man empties his purse into his head no man can take it from him.”***



# Subject Integration: Pieces of a Puzzle

By Samantha  
Moffatt

If someone was given a number of essential pieces to a single puzzle but was not given the means nor the opportunity to link these pieces, then these once essential pieces become merely separate entities unable to create any connections nor form any greater picture. While each piece may maintain part of its own merit, it has lost its most intrinsic value.

Now while there are many puzzles in the universe, let's more carefully examine one particular puzzle: student education. The education of a student revolves around countless different elements, or pieces. Of all the numerous pieces of education, there are four essential pieces, which are most commonly represented in most corners of the world: language, mathematics, science, and social studies. Within each of these subjects, there are often distinctive learning goals, lesson plans, teachers, classrooms, departments, etc., more often than not working separately from each other.

Language teachers will construct language learning goals, mathematics teachers will follow the mathematics curriculum, science teachers will hold meetings with other science teachers, and social studies teachers will develop lesson plans suitable for social studies. However, if it is assumed that the greater picture of this puzzle is to ensure that every single student receives the best education imaginable, is it truly ideal for each of these

subjects to work independently of each other?

Imagine instead if language teachers constructed learning goals incorporating the other core subjects as well, if mathematics teachers examined the other subjects' curricula to see how they overlap, if science teachers met with mathematics, language, and social studies teachers, and if social studies teachers developed lesson plans that included mathematical equations, scientific theories, or grammar. These are just a few broad examples of subject integration with the goal of connecting independent pieces in order to create a united whole.

Subject integration, or interdisciplinary integration, presents a more holistic view of education where students are able to see the big picture instead of learning within the constraints of each separate discipline. With this approach, the boundaries set by traditional disciplines disappear, and students are able to explore education both within and across various subjects. Its' applications can appear in numerous forms extending to include any level of education or any subject.

Let's explore the idea of subject integration in more detail by examining several applicable examples beginning within the context of a single classroom. For instance, a mathematics teacher may incorporate the science topics of protons, neutrons, and electrons while discussing negative and positive numbers. Or

perhaps a history teacher may include geometry to find the surface area of the Egyptian pyramids or the volume of the Roman colosseum while talking about ancient history. Even within the constraints of one classroom, a teacher's options on subject integration are numerous, but if you expand this among more than one classroom, the options multiply.

Teachers may partner up with another subject or multiple subjects to collaborate and reinforce common concepts. For example, a mathematics and a science teacher may discover that balancing scientific equations overlaps with solving both linear and non-linear equations, or that astronomy overlaps with functions, or that genetics overlaps with probability and statistics. But perhaps this partnership can be extended even further. While the science and mathematics teachers are teaching genetics and statistics, maybe the history teacher is talking about evolution and human development, and the language teacher may have the students read a biography about Charles Darwin. And of course, whenever possible, these partnerships can expand to include additional subjects such as art, music, physical education, etc. The potential for subject integration is limitless!

And once these connections are made, teachers are able to incorporate learning goals from multiple subjects. However, subject integration can be taken much further than just teaching subjects in classrooms. Teachers may also try to arrange for similar planning or meeting times to discuss integration, plan to teach these overlapping units at the same time to maximize learning, develop collaborative projects or assignments to further comprehension, arrange for relatable field trips to show real world applications, create displays clearly outlining connections, develop curricula to align with addition topics or subjects, and more.

With subject integration, as each new connection is created, the benefits for students vastly expand. While pieces of the puzzle begin to come together, the greater

picture becomes clearer, establishing a greater in-depth comprehension of topics and building critical thinking skills. The continuous reinforcement of ideas across disciplines will also bolster learning and allow for greater knowledge attainment. Along with increases in knowledge and understanding, students' confidence in school will rise, generating more student participation and higher achievement, ultimately resulting in higher attendance rates. When the subjects become interconnected, it cultivates further appreciation for all areas of study, making the topics more relevant and more interesting for the students, constituting a rise in their curiosity. Furthermore, many real-world problems are multi-faceted in nature, so subject integration will better equip students to solve them and develop problem-solving skills.

It is time to stop providing students with merely separate pieces of the puzzle, but to provide them with the means and opportunities to connect the pieces in order to create a stronger educational foundation, which will prepare them for the more interconnected world of the twenty-first century. With the completion of the puzzle, students will receive the best education imaginable.



## or creative ones?

Mrs Ling stepped into the classroom. We all stood up. “Good morning, Mrs Ling,” the class monitor said in greeting. “Good morning, Mrs Ling,” the rest of us chanted in unison.

The sound of chalk squeaked across the blackboard, followed by a chorus of lead against parchment. Any talking would render a welt on our palm with the long rattan cane, lying ominously on the teacher’s desk.

At the end of the class, we are given homework. We circle the page numbers in our workbooks that we have to complete before tomorrow. We have already accumulated five pieces of homework today, including three pages of Chinese handwriting, two pages of Malay handwriting, two pages of maths, one page of English, and now, two pages of science. Sometimes, we end up with up to twenty pages of homework a day.

In Malaysia and many parts of the world, teachers are the unquestionable authoritarians. We were always taught never to disrespect teachers, to do what we were told, and not to question their practices. Students sat in rows with their workbooks. Teachers wrote on the boards. All our learning was through listening, memorizing, and written practice.

The first Australian classroom I stepped into was a Year 1 classroom. I was astounded by the amount of children’s art work up on the walls, clipped onto string that was criss-crossed in the centre of the room. The students sat at desks that were pushed together into groups. For each subject, the students had at

least five different hands-on activities to work with. These included plastic counters or teacher-made games on cardboard. There were puzzles and dice and counters of all kinds: bears, insects, animals. Laminated cut-outs seemed to be a staple in the classrooms.

After that initial encounter, I went home, sat down, and thought hard. I had graduated from university and become a Kindergarten teacher.

I had met people with an Asian background who lamented how Australian children were difficult to teach, because they were not obedient. They lamented how the education system in Australia was easy and that students were not given enough homework.

Three years into my teaching, I started seeing a pattern: Students that were taught using direct instruction and a top-down teacher approach were more obedient, but they also grew up to become adults that did not question authority and society. Controlling discipline generates in students less initiative and persistence and less engagement in learning (Porter 2008). The students that were taught with more democratic approaches would naturally question authority. While that may pose a challenge to the teacher, it does result in a society of active thinkers that will question the world enough to want to change it.

Because the top-down approach sees the teachers as the unquestionable authority, the natural assumption is that teachers are omnipotent, and will also provide the students with all the answers. Reverse this, and the

teachers become the learners alongside the students. As teachers, it is more important to help facilitate the students’ own learning, instead of telling them the answers. One way of doing this is to encourage them by asking “Why do you think this is happening?” and “How can we find out?” This approach helps students develop the skills to figure things out by themselves. Our role as teachers is to help them actively construct meaning by building on background knowledge and experience and reflecting on those experiences (Taylor, 2011). Help them think outside the box, instead of putting them in the box. In the real world, new problems arise all the time to which no one knows the answer. Encouraging students to find the answers themselves will result in active thinkers that are able to tackle the world’s problems.

In rethinking our teaching approaches, it is imperative to ask ourselves: Do we want to make the teaching profession easier, or do we want to create a generation of people able to stand on their own two feet?

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# Give the Students more **Autonomy!**

by Anke Goebel

You know the following situation? You come into your classroom, greet the students, take out your paperwork, sit down, record absences and then start the lesson. An excellent lesson on a complicated topic, you worked through it till quite late last night, you put structure to it, got it all together, it's well written, well summarized. You are prepared. Or so you think.

And then it happens – again: Agu stares out of the window, Efe writes a note to a friend, Ife starts talking with Mobo and Mfoniso is tapping a little rhythmic song on the desk while Charles is tipping his chair.

And so the noise gets louder by the minute until you cannot hear your own words.

What next? Do you get angry and start screaming and try to get the attention back to you? 'What a horrible class!' you think.

Well, let's turn this around.

Have you ever been sitting in a long meeting or at a conference? In the beginning, you try to listen, but at some point, your neck starts to hurt, you are tired because of all the work you had to do until late the night before, your clothes are too tight, your feet hurt, you can't really hear the speaker because you got in at the last minute and all you could find was a seat in the corner. You really were interested in the topic when you signed up but now you only want to have a coffee and get it over with. Know that situation, too?

That is how your students feel.

'How is that possible?' you think.

So, let us do the unthinkable and compare the two situations:

*There is someone else who tells you where to be and when.*

*There is someone else who tells you how long you have to be there.*

*There is someone else who tells you how to behave.*

*There is someone else who structured the subject.*

*There is someone else who even chose the subject.*

*There is someone else who is organizing, creating, talking, participating –*

## **AND YOU HAVE NO CHANCE TO DO ANYTHING!**

That is exactly when your thoughts drift away. No one pays attention to you, your input is not wished for, is not needed, everything is ready, everything done, everything prepared, no one asked you about any of this stuff! Why should you even try to pay attention? Participate? Create?

As soon as the main task is taken out of your hands, it gets kind of boring. You have nothing else to do than sit and listen. And you can do that for a while, as you are a grown-up. You learned how to be disciplined, are able to remind yourself of the benefits that actually come with paying attention to a lecture you signed up for and might force yourself to focus on the interesting things: something new, something different, something that helps you cope better in your later life. Or ... you just endure.

These are skills you developed over a long time. They are grown-up skills.

When kids are forced to sit still and listen, they do not have these skills. Their attention span is much too short. At some point, their instincts kick in. And these instincts tell them to do something totally different. Run around. Move. Explore. Laugh. Hang upside down from a tree. Everything that helps

their brains learn to judge their world. Which is not always compatible with sitting still and listening.

Child development research shows that preschool children are able to stick with one activity for approximately 10 seconds. Then they usually drop whatever they were doing and go on to the next thing they want to explore. That is why a lot of preschools nowadays offer their students a lot of different activities to choose from at the same time. Sometimes you will see students come back to a former activity and continue where they left off, only to switch again after a short amount of time. When the children get older and go to elementary school, they still should not be expected to do one activity for longer than 10 - 15 minutes. Elementary school teachers therefore try to build lessons that switch activities and work forms and give their students a break from time to time, going from discussions in a seated circle to partner work in math to reading quietly in the book nook and run around in the school yard.

As you see, with the change from subject-centered learning to student-centered learning, the role of the teacher in the classroom changes drastically. It requires a whole different approach to teaching. The teacher will become the moderator, the person who leads the process of learning, accommodates discussion and brings up new clues when this process stalls. But the teacher will always keep in mind where the students are developmentally in the learning process.

So therefore, you provide the work for the students, you provide the problem and then you give your students the chance to participate, think, structure, create, all that to try to solve the problem you have given them in the beginning. And when you hit the spot and the problem is not too easy and not too hard – which can both lead to extreme frustration – you will notice that all your cries for tips and tricks for a better classroom management will disappear.

‘Why?’ you ask. ‘Why now?’

Because you gave away the work that you have been doing on your own all along. Because you decided to give your students the autonomy to solve the problem on their own: to find the information necessary to tackle the problem, see what information is missing and how to deduct or get it, create their own structures to solve it, discuss strategies, and ‘figure it out’ – simply said to ‘own their own learning’.

And by doing so, you tell them something that is even more important: you tell them that you trust in their ability to solve these problems on their own.

### Students’ comments: What happens when the teacher talks a lot ...

*Leo, 8 years, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade:* ‘Sometimes, the teacher talks a lot. Then I stare out of the window. Or I pretend to pay attention and I just think my own thoughts. It is easy to pretend, just keep your eyes on the teacher.’

*Rachel, 11 years, 5<sup>th</sup> grade:* ‘It does not happen often. But when it happens, I am listening. Listening and doodling.’

*Dario, 10 years, 4<sup>th</sup> grade:*  
Question: ‘Does it happen in your class that the teacher talks a lot?’  
Dario: ‘Sometimes, but not often.’  
Question: ‘What do you do when that happens?’  
Dario: ‘I fall asleep.’  
Dario: ‘Wait, are you writing that down?’  
Question: ‘Yes.’  
Dario: ‘Are you going to publish that?’  
Question: ‘Yes.’  
Dario: ‘AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!’

Hello children!  
We would love to hear from YOU!!!!  
What are YOU doing when the teacher talks a lot?

Let us know by sending your email to:

**MentorED**  
Suite 4, Wing A, 2nd Floor  
Deo-Gratias Plaza, Abuja, Nigeria  
P. O. Box 8901, Wuse  
Abuja, Nigeria

Or email us:  
[noble\\_missions@yahoo.com](mailto:noble_missions@yahoo.com)





# Are you a controlling Teacher?

## How letting go can help you and your Students

By Emily R. Sheppard

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Before we can begin to discuss control in the classroom, we need to be honest. Ask yourself: Am I a controlling teacher?

Answer *Yes* or *No* to the following questions on how you would most likely act or be as a teacher:

1. Do you believe that your role as a teacher is to make sure students follow the rules?
2. Do you insist that students copy every word on the board at the same rate as you write?
3. Are you the focus of your students' learning?
4. For learning to occur, must you be talking and the students listening?
5. Do you feel that you always have the right answers and they never do?
6. When there is a behavioural issue, do you immediately yell to deal with the situation?
7. Do you threaten students with negative consequences in order to get them to focus and pay attention to the lesson (i.e. "If you don't pay attention to me now, you will have to write lines!")?
8. To be a good teacher, must you always know what every student is writing, saying and thinking?
9. Do you yell at students if they do not

raise their hands or stand up from their seats?

10. Are most of your words negative towards students (i.e. "You never pay attention in class!", "No, that's wrong, erase it and write it again.") ?

If you answered *Yes* to 4 or more of these questions, you are a controlling teacher. However, do not panic, we have all been in scenarios that can bring out our controlling tendencies. This article will hopefully help reshape your thinking and approaches so that you and your students will grow.

### Try classroom management, not classroom control!

Controlling teachers struggle, get frustrated and stressed out; most probably burn out and quit before long. Shifting from control to management of a classroom is the way to ensure that you enjoy teaching and don't burn out. You are only competent as a teacher if you take care of yourself and are able to be positively present for your students.

Throughout my teaching, I have learned that there are two simple ways you can make this shift.

#### 1. Let go of your need for control

Re-think your role as an educator: Is it to be in control, like an army sergeant, of every movement and word in the classroom or is it to guide your students through their learning process and allow them to develop their potential and skills? The latter is where we

want to shift to when we speak about classroom management and letting go. I know it is difficult to change or accept that you may be a controlling teacher. I understand that you may believe it is important to control the classroom, students and lesson; but you are only doing a disservice to yourself and your students by controlling so much. First, understand that the physical space of the classroom is not YOURS, but EVERYONE'S. It is a learning space for students and teachers. Share the space with the students and understand that you are a manager, rather than a controller. Every time that I have approached a scenario with the need to control the outcome or process, I have battled and lost. I have become frustrated, stressed out and my students have shut down, built barriers to my presence and they have never learned the content of the lesson.

My need for control stemmed from my fear of losing it – what may happen to my classroom if I wasn't micro-managing – and my belief that I was the source of ALL knowledge. I believed that my answers were the correct ones and that students would ONLY learn in my classroom if they sat still, paid attention and copied down my writing. If you can relate to this, then you are a perfect candidate for this shift and I beg you to take time to examine your beliefs, ideas and approaches to your role as an educator. Let go of this need for control and you will start to see how much you and your students will enjoy coming to school.

## **2. Plan and prepare your lessons**

Often teachers, who are not well planned and prepared, tend to “wing it”. “Winging it” refers to improvising the lesson and activities in the moment. Doing this will not only lessen the quality of the lesson, but will bore the students and cause more behavioural issues thus making you feel like you need to control. Letting go of your control is possible when you are well planned and prepared for the lesson.

Nunan and Lamb (1996) state:  
“...a firm basis for effective classroom decision making and management must be laid well before the teacher sets foot in the classroom. If you have not planned and prepared your lessons, you will enter the classroom unsettled, frazzled and unable to execute effective learning activities for all your students. Feeling unsettled, frazzled and unprepared will lead to a need to regain control – this is what we should shift away from. Plan, prepare and manage learning activities, and naturally you will see that control is neither needed nor beneficial for you or your students.”

Remember, students enter the classroom with previous experiences, concepts and knowledge. They intrinsically generate ideas, questions and are wonderings about the world. Students can be a source of knowledge for teachers, for their fellow classmates and themselves without realizing it. Once teachers let go of control, every learner (including the teacher) will begin to love learning, improve their skills, and be encouraged to strengthen their commitment to learning. Mark Barnes (2013) notes that “letting go of control may be the single most important part of creating a successful classroom”.

If you are looking for more information and pedagogical techniques from fellow educators, visit the website [www.teachingchannel.org](http://www.teachingchannel.org).

Nunan, D. and Lamb, C. 1996. *The Self directed Teacher: Managing the learning process*. Cambridge University Press.

Barns, M. 2013. *The 5 Minute Teacher, How Do I Maximize Time For Learning In My Classroom?* ASCD Arias Publications.

# Do you see me?

## A child's need to be recognized and valued by teachers

By Emily R. Sheppard

In teacher's college you are trained to teach subjects, write lesson plans and organize a classroom; however, you are not trained on how to build a rapport with each child, validate their interests, nor value them as unique individuals with endless potential. This is not taught, yet it is the core of your role as a teacher and determines your impact as an educator.

Why is this important and how do you achieve it? Firstly, it is crucial to rethink your role as a teacher – you are not simply a source of knowledge whose job it is to fill students' brains with information and then walk away. You are, most often, the only reliable, stable and positive learning role model in a child's life. The moment a child walks into your classroom, he/she is seeking validation, recognition and a sense of belonging. Before learning can even begin, these psychological and emotional needs must be met, otherwise, the child will develop barriers towards learning and you as a teacher. To illustrate the importance of a child's need to belong and be valued by a teacher, *Beck and Malley* state:

***The psychological sense that one belongs in a classroom and school community is considered a necessary antecedent to the successful learning experience. In an era when traditional sources of belonging have diminished due to changing family and community demographics, the school plays an increasingly important role in meeting this need. There is evidence that conventional classroom practices fail to engender a sense of belonging, especially among at-risk students. Indeed, conventional practices may exacerbate feelings of rejection and alienation and place these students at higher risk for dropping out, joining gangs, or using drugs. Schools can increase the sense of***

***belonging for all students by emphasizing the importance of the teacher-student relationship and by actively involving all students in the life of the classroom and the school community.***

Throughout my teaching career I have observed those children who come from homes that struggle to provide a sense of belonging, safety and value. These children are looking to have these needs met elsewhere - most often at school. As we know, children who have not eaten cannot focus and learn. The same applies for their emotional needs. You may ask, why is this the teacher's job? It isn't necessarily, however, where else will a child find a sense of belonging and value? When teachers spend often more hours with students than family, teachers must understand the central importance of belonging and value in the learning process.

My first year teaching, I found it difficult to manage my students' behaviours and their learning. Daily, I would try different strategies to improve their behaviours, however, my frustration and despair grew – I felt like I was failing. After venting my frustration to my mother, who is also an educator, she reminded me that every child wants to feel valued. Make them feel safe and valued with you and then your problems will be lessened. Wiser words had never been spoken. I had forgotten how essential it is to build a rapport with students at the beginning – and due to this, I had been fighting the current all year long. It was up to me to change this culture and begin to establish a sense of belonging and value for my students, only after could I begin to teach.

Warm and responsive relationships, which make the child feel seen and appreciated, are quite easy to establish. However, they require explicit initiative and daily effort from the teacher. How

do you foster this in your classroom? Here are a few easy ways you can ensure that all students feel a sense of belonging and worth when they are in your classroom:

- ✓ Greet all students with a warm smile and salutations first thing in the morning. Paying close attention to any detail in their demeanour that may have changed and ask how they are (i.e. a haircut, new earrings or a particularly sad face one morning).
- ✓ Learn about your students' interests, hobbies, and aspirations.
- ✓ Learn about your students' families and invite parents to the classroom to see their children learning. This will validate their students' learning as well as show the parents how valuable their child and his/her education is to you.
- ✓ Ask students to bring in one artefact that is personal and special to them. Allow them to do an oral presentation on the item, "Share with us what makes this item special to you". As a teacher, share an artefact in your life, showing students that you are human and have interests, likes and emotions of your own.
- ✓ With students who are at-risk for behavioural issues or are harder to build a rapport with: Sit down during lunch with them and have lunch with them. Share and talk about non-academic topics. Play card games with them during recess or participate in sports with them. This will demonstrate that you care about their WHOLE lives and not just their academics.
- ✓ Learn the "triggers" to each student's bad behaviour outbursts and try to prevent with positive redirection and alternative activities. Students will see that you know them well and are looking out for them, setting them up to succeed with their emotional control.
- ✓ Do the following:
  - Learn to call your students by name.

- Arrive to class early and stay late - and chat with your students.
- Reward student comments and questions with verbal praise.
- Be enthusiastic about teaching and passionate about your subject matter.
- Lighten up - crack a joke now and then.
- Be humble and, when appropriate, self-deprecating.
- Make eye contact with each student - without staring, glaring, or flaring.
- Be respectful.
- Don't forget to smile!

Now that we have discussed the fundamental importance of recognizing, appreciating and building a rapport with students and we have outlined a few easy ways to cultivate a sense of belonging, I would like to reiterate the teacher's value in a child's life. Students spend more waking hours with teachers than other adults; often teachers provide the missing piece in the healthy development of each child. As educators, it is our calling to ensure that every child feels, beyond a shred of a doubt, that he/she is safe, valued and appreciated within the physical walls of the classroom. To quote a seasoned grade 1 teacher of 26 years, Mrs. Anne Valcov, "You don't know what students just left at home, who was just yelling at them or if they even ate in the past 24 hours, so here (in my classroom) they know it's always calm and positive. They feel safe, secure and loved. That's the foundation, that's the secret to being an educator."

Furthermore, even if the outside world is difficult, unstable, unreliable and frightening, each child knows that a teacher looks forward to seeing him/her at school. This sense of belonging and care will give the child an additional reason to attend school.

In conclusion, teacher's college teaches you that teachers help students academically. However, I have learned that academics take a back seat to recognizing, valuing and appreciating your students for who they truly are as individuals.

# LINGUA VENTURAS

How the Secretary of Education of Bogotá attracted foreign Students to teach English to low-income Kids and Teenagers.

By Pedro Valença Viana de Melo

It was a last-minute decision that would shape my life for years to come. I had just subscribed to the **AIESEC** platform, a youth-run NGO who provides internships and exchange projects around the world, but I was still looking for that perfect opportunity. My application to a job in a kindergarten in Wrocław, Poland, had been declined and I had accepted a job as a teacher in Omsk, Siberia, but I was unsure about it. It was only when I got an email from the local AIESEC manager at the Bogotá office inviting me for an interview for the *Linguaventuras* project that I knew I had found what I was looking for. I dropped out of college for a semester and bought a ticket to Colombia.



*Linguaventuras*, they explained, was an ambitious proposal of the secretary of education in Bogotá, a city familiar with innovation and forward thinking. During 2013, the first year of the program and the year I participated, they selected about 30 young men and women from all corners of the globe to teach English in public schools around the city. I worked with and made lifelong friends with people from the USA, Germany, Haiti, Nigeria and Russia, among many others. Today the goal is to hire 200 teachers and impact more than 20.000 students.

While the logistics of doing a project of this scale is very troubling, the secretary of education took it immediately as a priority. We had a meeting with the secretary of education himself, who bought ads on TV to inform the population about our project. Some of the teachers were interviewed on local radio and they explained what the *Linguaventuras* (a combination of the words "Language" and "adventure" in Spanish) consisted of.

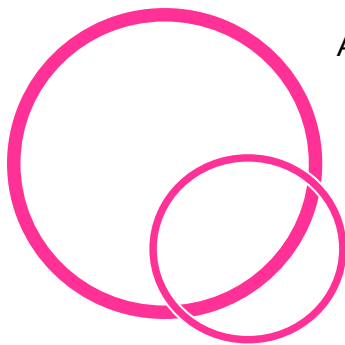
To summarize, we would give extracurricular English classes to students who wanted them. We would focus on vocabulary building and in-class socializing instead of traditional grammar and exercises. Our priority was to create a learning environment in which students from ages 5 to 18 would practice and perfect the English they already learned in school, albeit with a different method. We would use games, videos and

other multimedia platforms to make the students interested and to distinguish our classes from their usual English classes.



But also, and even more importantly, *Linguaventuras* wanted to make a connection between children in low-income areas and the international community. Many of our students hadn't seen a foreign citizen before. We were not only teachers, we were ambassadors of our countries and we were encouraged to bring things to class and present our homeland. We not only taught them English, but also talked about the place we came from and made them interested and curious about the world they live in. This was to help increase the students' self-esteem and their sense of self-awareness as citizens of the world. These students, often living in marginalized communities, were finally introduced to a global community and encouraged to be an active part of it.

I was assigned to two different schools: El Paraíso de Manuela Beltrán and Nydia Quintero de Turbay. El Paraíso is located in the deep south of the city, in Ciudad Bolívar, one of the lowest-income areas of Bogotá. It was a notoriously violent neighborhood in the 90s and its murder and teen pregnancy rates are still significantly higher than in other areas in Bogotá. As a citizen of a developing country myself (I'm from northeast Brazil), I was familiar with the kinds of problems encountered in Ciudad Bolívar and I was ready to work around them. They brought me kids from ages 5 to 13. The secretary had invested in projectors and computers and I was able to bring games and touch screen technology to the kids, who grew very fond of drawing on the electronic board.



Afterwards, I was assigned to Nydia Quintero de Turbay School, in a more affluent part of the city. I had nine groups of students aged 5 to 18 and some of them I will never forget. I had a class with some 13 year old girls who signed up for classes because they wanted to learn how to chat to the members of *One Direction*. I had an 18 year-old guitarist who wanted to write lyrics in English. I had a very clever 18 year old who was also studying French and was very eager to chat with foreigners (we still keep in touch). I had an 18 year old girl who would accompany her little sister to class to learn more with the young ones. I had a hyperactive six year old girl with whom I had to be very patient, who gave me a drawing on our last day of class. I've had a lot of memorable students. I asked them about their dreams and why they'd signed up for classes. I listen and I learned.

To me, this experience was invaluable. It was a privilege to have this kind of outside the box job and to have my first contact with teaching. Afterwards, I became a strong advocate of social changing by teaching and I believe many other cities in the world, especially in developing countries, can learn from the *Linguaventuras* project. We must insert our youth in the globalized community and teaching is the best way to do it.

*Note: AIESEC was originally a French acronym for "Association internationale des étudiants en sciences économiques et commerciales" however, the full name is no longer officially used as members can now come from any university background.*



# MENTOR ED



## ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

Mentor Ed Magazine is a teacher's magazine published by Noble Missions for Change Initiative. Mentor Ed Magazine is specifically designed for primary and secondary educators in Nigeria. While we expect that our readers will be mainly teachers and school administrators, we also hope that Mentor Ed Magazine serves to be purposeful amongst parents, policy makers and other individuals involved in the process of educating a child.

Our target readers are both public and private educators, therefore we strive to provide content that are relevant to both settings. The long-term goal for Mentor Ed Magazine is for it to be the choice professional development tool for educators in Nigeria. We hope to achieve this by connecting educators in Nigeria to knowledge, skills and mindsets that have been proven to produce results, hence our motto of "Connecting Educators to What Works".



ABOUT

## NOBLE MISSIONS FOR CHANGE INITIATIVE (NMI)

NMI works primarily to ensure that children from underprivileged communities in Nigeria receive access to quality education. Under its Noble Education Fund programme, the organisation helps these children to gain admission into public schools and provide school supplies such as writing tools, uniforms, bags, stationeries and other necessary school necessities. In 2014, 61 students from 21 families in the Gwagwalada area received assistance via the NEF programme.

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