

A Competency-based Curriculum in the Context of Africa

A Handbook for Teachers



Why are we starting a book about the school curriculum with a picture of young people who are not in a classroom? Are they learning anything? Can this be part of a curriculum? From their uniforms, these young people seem to be at school, but where is the teacher? And what does this have to do with a competency-based curriculum?

The fence-building activity was actually part of a Maths unit that combined measurement with ratio and percentages. After learning about these in class, the young people worked in groups to calculate how many lengths of bamboo would be needed to complete different sections of fence and what the difference



would be if the ratio were altered. The Maths unit linked to science through investigating the sorts of plants that are most suitable for fences, and to citizenship through the aspect of working together on a community project. The young learners then applied their learning in the very practical situation of re-building the school fence, and realized that Maths is not just a matter of numbers in books, that

science can be really helpful in real life, and that when we work together as good citizens, we get things done!

All across Africa we have learners like these who are enthusiastic and determined to succeed. And we have teachers who are finding good opportunities to provide the education that young people need and deserve, and are often having to overcome barriers to do so.

Sometimes it seems to us as teachers that the barriers can be great, and it can seem difficult, if not impossible, to find good opportunities for learning. We may have large classes and seemingly scarce resources with little support, and opportunities seem few and far between. This book will show how the enthusiasm of young people such as these in the picture can be harnessed and how we can use whatever resources are available to us locally to create the educational opportunities that they need.

You might be teaching in a well-equipped school with small classes and excellent facilities and ample resources (in which case, you are one of the lucky ones!) – and that will certainly make many things much easier. But you will know that even these very favourable conditions do not, of themselves, guarantee learning. Teachers always have to do something to ensure learning – that is why we are there in the classroom! (Or, as the picture illustrates, something has to be done even when learning is taking place outside the classroom as well.) Wherever we are, this book will explore what that “something” is and how it relates to a competency-based curriculum.

You must be interested in the idea of a “Competency-based Curriculum” because you are looking at this book! Perhaps you are already engaged in such a curriculum. Perhaps you would like to. Perhaps you think that it would be too difficult or that it would not work in your context. Wherever you are coming from and wherever you teach, this book will help clarify what is meant



by a ‘competency-based curriculum’ and how it can be applied in a classroom – whether that classroom is old or new, well-resourced or basic, with many or few learners. And as the picture suggests, the book will also look at how it can be applied outside of the classroom as well.

The book will show the sort of learning outcomes that can be achieved, and how this will greatly enhance the success for learners. It will look at the teaching and learning approaches that it entails and how these do not necessarily create more difficulties – in fact it will show that they can make life easier for the teacher, and make learning more meaningful for the learner!

One teacher who engaged in a competency-based curriculum in a change from a traditional, formal, teacher-centred one, said of the new approach, “I could just stand back and watch them learn!” (perhaps that is what the teacher is doing in the picture!) Of course, as we shall see, she was only able to “stand back” at that point because of the way she had prepared the lesson.

You may have noticed that the map of Africa on the cover of the book is filled with leaves and hands. The significance of the leaves on a competency-based curriculum will soon become apparent – but what about the hands? How are they significant? You will find out by reading on!

This book is dedicated to all those teachers across the continent who are overcoming barriers and seeking opportunities to find success for their learners. We hope that the book will make this task easier, and provide some ideas and approaches that show a route through to success.

We hope that after reading this book, you, too, will be able to ‘stand back and watch them learn.’

Brian Male, Vikki Pendry & Tizie Maphalala

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Endorsements

A comprehensive book on competency-based curriculum with essential perspectives from a range of African countries. This book successfully deconstructs the curriculum through rich information drawn from world-renowned curriculum pioneers, blended with essential perspectives from African scholars. A roadmap to competency-based curriculum linking teaching and learning with 21st century skills, demystifying quality and context notions, presents relevant cases through thought-provoking questions and a good mix of activities and stories clearly depicting varied African contexts. A valuable guide for teachers!

Professor P.L. Mabunda, Deputy Executive Dean, College of Education, University of South Africa.

This excellent book focuses on the curriculum in the context of Africa but illustrates principles that apply across the world, and are at the heart of the approach taken by OECD to the '2030 Future of Education and Skills'. This book should be read everywhere.

Professor Mick Waters, University of Wolverhampton, former Director of Curriculum in England.

This Handbook for teachers explains the benefits of a curriculum that focuses on how young people can apply their learning in their lives. The design process that is mapped out so well in this book will help help teachers to create a curriculum that will make learning exciting and that will meet the needs of learners from a wide variety of backgrounds and circumstances such as we have in South Sudan. I am pleased to endorse this book for all teachers who want to make learning meaningful and enable all learners to reach their true potential.

Omot Okony Olok, Director General of Curriculum Development, Ministry of General Education and Instruction, South Sudan.

This Handbook will encourage and enable teachers to design a curriculum that will equip all learners with the knowledge, understanding and skills to thrive in the 21st Century. Through the design process presented in this book, teachers will increase their own competencies in creating learning experiences that will help learners to develop attitudes and attributes to navigate through our rapidly changing world. Each Chapter takes a teacher through essential stages of curriculum design, importantly ensuring that principles of equity and inclusion are promoted and that the local context is recognised to be the foundation for success.

Grace K Baguma, Director of the National Curriculum Development Centre, Uganda.

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