

# Developing pupils' digital literacy in an increasingly digitised world

Pauline Hanekom

IN 1907 a teacher from the National Association of Teachers complained that "students today depend too much upon ink".

"They don't know how to use a penknife to sharpen a pencil. Pen and ink will never replace the pencil."

This quote resounds into the 21st century school where many teachers still see information and communication technology (ICT) as a threat to their teaching and the pupils' learning. But is this fear rooted in fact or fiction? Should teachers be enabled to use ICT, or is it a nice-to-have for those interested in computers and the internet?

The 21st century pupil needs to be educated and empowered to become a 21st century worker. But what is a 21st century worker and what skills does such a worker need?

According to Unesco, pupils who are being prepared for the 21st

century workplace will have to be, among others, innovative, problem-solvers, collaborators, information and media literate, critical thinkers, creative and civically engaged.

This is also in line with one of the targets of Unesco's Sustainable Development Goal 4. This particular target is aimed at equipping young people and adults with the relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, to find decent employment by 2030.

So where do ICT skills fit into this framework? The short answer is EVERYWHERE. In the pre-21st century classroom choice was unheard of, teachers and pupils were rigidly forced into a set of facts, texts and products that pupils had to produce.

But now ICT tools allows teachers and pupils the freedom of choice to investigate the facts using global texts and to create interactive, innovative products collaboratively with other pupils across the globe at



**21ST CENTURY PUPILS:** Social media has opened the world to teachers and pupils to political, scientific and economic news globally.  
Picture: BONGANI MBATHA CLERENCE PRIMARY SCHOOL

any time and place.

A personalisation of learning with regards to space, content and pedagogy is therefore taking place.

Social media has opened the world to teachers and pupils to political, scientific and economical news globally.

This has resulted in a crucial need for critical thinking, communication and consciousness skills to traverse the myriad real and fake news options. Collectively all these skills are referred to as digital literacy skills, which are important to operate in digitally mediated societies.

Digital technologies are expanding rapidly and are changing our world in unprecedented ways, but according to the World Bank, digital dividends – that is, the broader development benefits from using these technologies – have lagged behind. In its 2016 Development Report, the World Bank points out that poor digital literacy limits the productive use of digital technologies.

Thus, it seems that despite the positive impact of the digital revolution in some parts of the world, many people still lack the knowledge and skills to truly benefit from this. No wonder then that one

of the key objectives of Unesco's 2017 International Literacy Day (on Friday) is to explore effective literacy policies and programmes that bridge this gap. The theme for this year's celebrations is "Literacy in a digital world".

In an increasingly digitised world, the question is thus not any more whether digital literacy skills should be included in the curriculum for teacher training, but how best to address the dire need for these skills. Skills in ICT should also be integrated within a teaching curriculum, as they do not replace the non-ICT skills but enhance them.

South Africa's National Development Plan names ICT skills development as one of four key variables for economic growth. A good place to start would be to focus on blended learning models that can address the need for ICT integration through blending face-to-face with online lectures, formal and informal learning environments, virtual and physical

worlds and individual and collaborative product creation.

In this regard, Stellenbosch University Centre for Pedagogy (Suncep) is playing its part by offering in-service, blended model, and practice-based professional learning programmes for teachers in natural, life and physical sciences, mathematics and mathematical literacy and management and leadership programmes for principals and school management.

All of these programmes include a focus on developing digital literacies that will help prepare pupils to find employment in a digitised world and reap the benefits of current and future digital technologies. As we continue on this quest, we realise that for technology-enabled interventions to work, we also need to invest in physical infrastructure.

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