Introducing combined Activities for Maximized learning in the Competency Based Curriculum

Lessons from Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development Training and Do It Yourself Experience in Taita Taveta County, Kenya

By Armando Ali, PAL Network
May 22nd, 10:00 am

My phone is ringing. Mr. Jona is at the hotel reception waiting for me. Mr. Jona welcomes me to the vehicle that is going to take us to Taita Taveta. Jona is a gentleman of few words. We pass by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) to pick Mr. Antony and then, we go somewhere in the South B neighborhood to get Ms. Subira.

We headed to east. Mr. Antony and Ms. Subira were in long discussions. KICD, politics, family, KICD, politics, family, so and so. I never saw so talkative passengers like them. They were really a good company to Mr. Jona, who was driving us in a very responsible way. I was disconnected. I only see big trucks up, big trucks down all the way. A lot of noise in my head. Noises of trucks overtaking trucks in that never ending road.
May 22nd, 11:40 am

We had a stop in Mtito Andei to eat something. Three plates of *chapati* and *kuku* come to our table. Unfortunately, I couldn’t eat because I was sick. I took a tea.

Suddenly we were interrupted by someone who decided to preach in front of the bar. The sun was shining and it was really hot, but that man was there trying to “save some souls”.

We left the place in a hurry. While sitting in the car, one of the waiters comes running to give us one “expensive mobile phone” left on our table. A shine of hope raised among us. Despite all problems, this country still has many honest people.

We continued our journey, and I continued on my sleeping mode. Suddenly, I woke up scared. We are driving fast, but on our left, a train is overtaking us. It was so fast that I thought I have gone to the heaven. We don’t have that high speed train in my country.

We arrived at Voi town around 7:00 pm and found accommodation in a very sympathetic place.
I took a delicious and refreshing Dawa tea made of ginger, garlic, lemon and honey. That was the best tea I have had ever. We departed to our school guided by GPS on Subira’s mobile phone. It took us 24 km west on Mombasa road. Then, we turned left in a road under maintenance. GPS tells us to turn left again in a place that seemed not to have a road. We follow a narrow dirt road and the GPS tells us that we are on truck. After 2 km, there were no signs of human activity. Instead, we see a big portion of elephant dung. We started asking ourselves if we were in the right way. We decided to proceed. Few minutes late, we saw a person. Some minutes later, we saw a small girl in a school uniform coming opposite to us. We started smiling, we knew the school was near. The little girl in school uniform is Tissy. She was sent home to tell her parents to bring money for a contribution that they owe the school. Tissy does not know how much money her parents owe to the school. We ask her help to guide us to school. She comes with us and leads us to Mlundinyi Primary School. Here we are – she said. It was around 08:20 am. The school has many buildings divided in two parts. The old section has two big buildings plus the administrative block. The new section has two new buildings with four classrooms each. It has two playgrounds and washroom facilities. Veronica Mangeli is the head teacher. She receives and welcomes us and organizes a meeting with all teachers. We explained to the teachers the objectives of our visit...
May 23nd, 07:00 am

We divided our team in three. Mr. Antony was going to observe grade 1. Ms. Subira grade 2 and I, grade 3. Our focus is in English, but we also had a look in other subjects or activities.

My class has 17 pupils. Eight are boys and nine are girls. They are sitting in chairs, in groups of five to six pupils. The classroom arrangement is good, but not used by the teacher to embrace the learners in group activities. They are sitting in groups, but working individually or in a whole class.

The teaching process is the same in all subjects. Teacher make questions and pupils give the answer. It is still teacher centered. He is following the Tusome text book. Makes the questions and gives the answers provided in the book.

On May 24th we continued the observation process. Is more of the same.

In the afternoon, we had a feedback session. The teachers admitted that they don’t scheme the lessons from the curriculum. They are just following the Tusome book because that is what they are assessed by a Curriculum Support Officer (CSO).

We agreed on a working plan for the next week and left the school around 4:00 pm.
Our life in Voi was resumed to work, walk and talk. The town is small but very clean. The roads are tarmac, the market well organized. The bus station is always packed. Motorcycles, Tuktuks and Matatus are all over the town. Many shops are open up to midnight. It’s a small but vibrant town.

We used the weekend for planning. We immersed into the Curriculum and defined the strategy for the next week. The priorities are:

- Training the teachers on scheming and lesson planning
- Training teachers in accelerated literacy and numeracy activities and strategies
- Mentoring the implementation of CBC
The mornings are always fresh. We drove some 20 minutes to reach the school. Children are already in their classes, and teachers are in assembly. They are making their week plan and receiving instructions from the Head teacher – I suppose.

We enter in our respective classes. I observed two classes. Despite the recommendations given in the last Friday during the feedback session with all teachers, the grade three teacher is still conducting the lesson in the traditional way. He just follows the Tusome book and is reading and explaining to the pupils what is in the book. The pupils are passive participants.

I gave one lesson on English activities. The aim was to demonstrate to the teacher how can we apply some activities and strategies to engage and empower pupils and achieve the competences defined in the curriculum. From the strands defined in the scheme, the topic was Wild Animals. The defined outcome was to make pupils capable of using the prepositions next to, under, on, across, over.

I taught a Portuguese song and the pupils taught me a Kiswahili song.

I started a whole class conversation about wild animals they know. We were sitting in the floor in a semi-circle form. They mentioned many of them. Together we defined the concept of wild animal and differentiated them from the domestic animals.

I gave them papers to draw their favorite wild animal. We shared the drawings and appreciate the effort of every child. Together, we chose the three most common in the region. They picked an elephant, lion and snake. I asked the pupils to form three groups representing each of the animals. None of them accepted to be part of the snake group. We changed snakes by Zebras, and they were very happy to be in the Zebra’s group.
May 27th to 31st (2)
I wrote in the blackboard two prepositions: next to and over. Them, draw in the blackboard a big tree, a hill and a lake. I gave one example about the use of the preposition Next to. I was standing next to the window and asked the pupils where I was standing. They gave me the correct answer. Them, I asked every group to write sentences using the animal that represents their groups, any of the images drown in the blackboard and any of the two prepositions. They started working in groups, helping each other’s and making sentences. They were engaged.
This lesson took around 40 minutes. At the end of the lesson, I asked the teacher to give me feedback. He said: The class was good. Children were really enjoying. But don’t you think it takes a lot of time?
May 27th to 31st (3)

On Tuesday afternoon, I presented some literacy activities and teaching strategies. Almost all teachers attended the section. I shared the following activities:

- Story telling
- Flipping the hidden card.
- Making words from the syllable chart.
- Jumping to the syllables to make words

For each activity, we discussed for which group is appropriate, advantages, Do’s and Don’ts.

Teachers started to understand that the main swift with these activities is putting the pupils in the center of the learning process.

While we were demonstrating the activity of jumping to the syllables, the small Victor, who was following our session, started making his own circles and playing the same game. It was a good sign of how children can adopt these activities and learn themselves while playing.
Like in many other schools, Mlundiyni Primary pupils like to play. Some activities are conducted by the teachers. Others are run by the pupils. Teachers are very welcoming. There is a nice balance between the veterans and the youngsters. They assemble in one of the shades for tea and lunch. The learning atmosphere is very nice.
May 27th to 31st (5)

Every day, our team is observing and giving some lessons. Every day we give feedback to the teachers on how they could better deliver CBC from their learning environment. On Thursday afternoon, I gave one more practical lesson on Numeracy for all teachers covering the following topics.

Number Reading, recognition and place value.

Addition and subtraction with regrouping and carry over, using the sticks, bundles and play money

Multiplication

For each activity we discussed the objectives, the Do’s and Don’ts.

They found the activities very interesting. They also mentioned that using play money was complicated.

One of the teachers again raised the question of time.

All these activities are very good. But, don’t you think they take a lot of time? Those people from CSO, when they came here, they want to know if you have given all the lessons.

Mr. Antony took time to explain the core of CBC. He emphasized that learning competences are the most important on CBC. The teaching process must follow the vision of CBC – engaged, empowered and ethical pupils.
May 27th to 31st (6)

It’s Friday, 31st May, the last day of our work in Mlundyini. We spent some time collecting data about book distribution. But, we had enough time to meet our teachers and pupils again. The school is not as vibrant as always – many pupils and teachers are attending county level school sports.

Mr. Antony joins the grade three class and delivers a wonderful lesson on English activities. He shows a short video about wild animals, draws a mind map of one of the animals, divide the pupils in groups and ask them to make a mind map of one animal. The classroom was shining with the CBC spirit: empowered and engaged pupils. My happiness was unmistakable...

After the lessons, class two pupils, leaded by Teacher Rina (what a great teacher), performed some songs and poems for us... My environment, I like you...

In a mix of joy and sadness, we said goodbye to the teachers and pupils with hope reflected in the eyes of many of us. We hope that God and life will make us meet again and celebrate the steps we have walked together.

God bless all Mlundyini children and teachers.

Thanks to all teachers and pupils for the experience.
Thanks to Antony, Jona and Subira for being excellent mates.