

# CREATIVE GUIDES

become one of us





creativity  
is the  
ability  
to make  
new  
things  
or think  
of new  
ideas

MERRIAM-  
WEBSTER'S  
LEARNER'S  
DICTIONARY

# FOREWORD

*Dear friend,*

If you are reading the Creative Guides Booklet, we assume that you do the most important job in Africa.

Your work puts you in front of a class of young people daily. You probably spend more active time with them than their parents do. Everybody's expectations are terrifyingly high – you are supposed to guide them through education and towards a better life, for themselves and for their country.

A bit scary, isn't it?

Indeed, what people commonly call “teaching” is much more than passing on knowledge and facts. You have immense power in your hands, and the future of your students is up to you.

For example, what if that troublemaker is nothing more than a sharp mind that happens to be bored to death? Will you find some time for him and try to engage him?

Or that girl who never manages to produce a proper answer... What if she wants to find an answer by herself and doesn't like to cram pre-prepared solutions? Doesn't human kind need exactly that – new answers to endless problems?

Finally, what about the quiet majority of youngsters in your class? Does it make you satisfied that they are passing exams?

Or could you add a touch, a spark that would take them to new heights?

We hope this booklet is going to both raise and answer some critical questions. It was produced in Uganda and uses local case studies but it should be easy to utilise anywhere in Africa.

You will notice examples from all levels of formal education and we encourage you to keep an open mind while reviewing them. No matter what ages you are teaching, most of Creative Guides' ideas and techniques can be applied to your situation.



“Why is it that we still see young people coming out of schools without the right mindset, the right skills and the right attitudes to actually create jobs and be effective workers?”

**AMBROSE KIBUUKA,**  
educational consultant

# INTRODUCTION

We live in a world that changes often and fast. Just think for a moment of how different your community and country were when you were a child ... For instance, could you possibly imagine, back then, that phones would become something carried in everybody's pocket? ... Or that powerful dictatorships around the world would end up breaking like glass?

If anything, the speed of change experienced by our children will be even faster. Much faster. Nothing less can be expected of the time when everybody can have access to unbelievable amounts of knowledge on the internet, and when people communicate quicker and cheaper than ever before.

However, honestly speaking, are our schools preparing the African youth for such realities? Are we bringing up children who will be active and creative citizens of the world?

More often than not, we are not.

And we have no valid excuse, sorry. In the eyes of history we may end up being seen as the generation that didn't prime our children for the life ahead. The generation that let Africa lag further behind when it had a chance to jump ahead ...

# CHALLENGES

We all know that we are not starting from a good foundation.

Above all, our **overcrowded classrooms** make learning a “survival of the fittest” environment, in terms of space and access to teaching materials. We teach classes, not individuals, and put slower learners in grave danger of losing touch.

Low pay and inadequate fringe benefits discourage the best students from becoming teachers. Those who choose to join the profession mostly do so out of necessity because other career avenues have been blocked for them. Their **motivation** can therefore be limited.

But it is lazy to blame everything on lack of resources. Millions of dollars have been invested in our education – they just seem to be spent on the wrong causes. How else can we explain, for example, that we have practically illiterate children at the end of their primary schooling? Or the paradox of dealing with jobless graduates while companies complain that there are no skilled workers?

The **curriculum** tends to be too academic and theoretical. A student who excels at school often may not be able to produce anything interesting in real life!

“There are no bad teachers. They were trained the chalk and talk methodology and they think that it can still work.”

**FLORENCE NAMUTEBI**,  
head teacher, St. Marcelino Preparatory School, Kampala

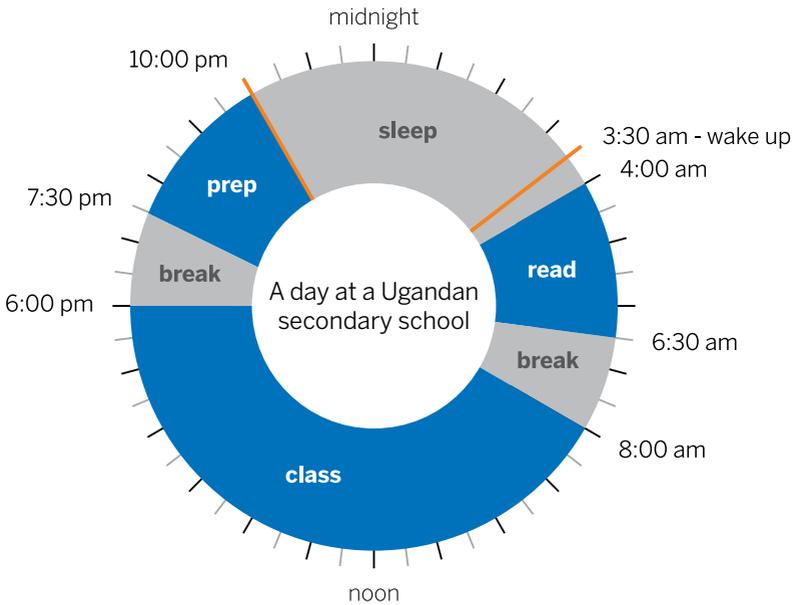
As we have discussed before, the amount of knowledge available has been growing. But there remains a mere 24 hours in each day... The curriculum is still attempting to squeeze everything essential into the school hours, therefore secondary students, for instance, hardly get enough time to sleep (8 to 9 hours would be the healthy minimum at their age) let alone develop their special talents. Instead of teaching students to learn how to learn, schools pretend they can teach everything. What a joke!

**Teaching methods** are stuck in the “chalk and talk” era. Instead of gently feeding students’ natural love for learning we worship the “all-knowing” teacher.

Our obsession with **exams** and their prescribed answers forces students to memorise pre-prepared materials. Thinking creatively and differently is dangerous for them, as it leads to exam failure. But the challenges of real life are not about the power of memory; they are about creatively applying what you have learned, in circumstances that are always unique and continuously changing.

**Parents’** interest seems to be limited to exam results. They count on schools to do all the work and are not involved enough.

Many challenges indeed... However, they can never stop us from trying our level best!



“Most teachers join the teaching profession not by choice but by circumstances.”

**OLIVIA MUHUMUZA,**  
headmistress, Railway Children Primary School, Kampala

“Parents don’t mind, they don’t want to explore the world around the kid. They are like: if I take you to school, that’s enough.”

**ANNE MBUULIRO,**  
special needs educationist

A close-up photograph of a hand raised in the air, palm facing forward. The hand is dark-skinned and appears to be that of a child. The background is a blurred classroom with other children sitting at desks, some wearing red and white uniforms. The lighting is soft, and the overall tone is educational and focused.

**“Every child matters.”**

FLORENCE NAMUTEBI,

head teacher, St. Marcelino Preparatory School, Kampala

# PROPOSAL 1: MANAGE BIG CLASSES EFFECTIVELY

What do you do when you are left alone in front of a class of 50 or even 100? Get the chalk out and start that time-tested teaching thing? Yes, you can do that, and claim your salary at the end of the month. But you won't be able to claim much greatness this way.

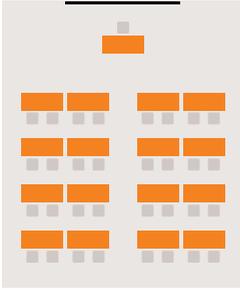
On the other hand, with some creativity, special methods and tools you can make miracles happen. Even big groups can become properly engaged!

The absolute number one piece of advice is to break up the group. Instead of lines of chairs facing you, reorganise the furniture and make little islands of subgroups. Then give them tasks according to their interest and ability – apply the differentiated way of learning.

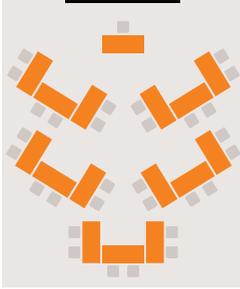
You must remember how boring it was when, as a student, you already understood something and needed to wait for the rest of the class to get it. Or how helpless you felt when you didn't learn as quickly as the majority but had no hope of stopping the teacher as he marched on and on.

What about simply accepting the fact that we don't all move at the same speed? Divide the students into three or four subgroups and serve each of these groups something that challenges them but is still within their reach.

Florence Namutebi, headteacher of St. Marcelino Preparatory



School in Kampala, uses differentiated learning to introduce children to different topics. 20 children will draw the animals they know with chalk on the ground, 30 faster learners will write about animals at their tables, the rest of the children will get special attention and discuss particular animals with the help of cards.



Let's now apply the same trick to secondary school maths: You will bring four problems of various levels and allow students to solve them within their subgroup. Your role will be to facilitate – move among different tables to check how they are doing. Prepare to spend more time with the slower learners, of course. If you want you can even make it a competition, see which team can handle a problem (appropriate to their skills!) fastest, and challenge the winners with something a little more difficult.

## PROPOSAL 2: DARE TO DO MORE

Yes, your students do need to pass their exams. There is no escape from that. But if you care about them, you must dare to do more! You don't need only to stick to what is in the textbooks, you can also give them other material to stimulate their minds.

Our first example is grammar, as described by Edgar Kangere, a youth empowerment activist.

When grammar is approached from the point of definitions and strange terms (adjective, noun, verb, conjunction... mind-bog-

gling stuff!), it will hardly capture the attention of anyone. If you, however, focus on how words come together, how a sentence is built, where the origin of their meaning lies – you may get your listeners on board!

Our second example is practice versus theory. Theory is so much easier to teach – but practice is more attractive and memorable. It takes more preparation, for sure, yet the benefit is immense. If you teach chemistry, you can choose a simple product that could help your students start a business, and make it with them. Dr Emmanuel Katongole at Uganda Martyrs University, for example, teaches Development in Practice through recycling paper, making soap, growing mushrooms and more.

## PROPOSAL 3: PROMOTE LEARNING BY DOING

“I read and I forget. I hear and I remember. I do and I understand,” said the Chinese. And look at them now – they will soon overtake America as the world’s leading power ...

Actually, the first part of the saying depends on the individual. Some of us remember things better when we see, others when we listen.

Yet there can be no discussion about the doing part! Before colonialists confused us with imported ways of teaching,

“As early as primary school, I was learning how to use context and that was not what was in the handbooks for the teachers.

EDGAR KANGERE,  
youth empowerment activist

“We were amazed to see the interest that children had to read books written by other kids!”

**OLIVIA MUHUMUZA,**  
headmistress, Railway  
Children Primary School,  
Kampala

did we organise classes to prepare children for life? Was there a “Peel the Banana” textbook? No. The youth observed their elders, heard their explanations and then they tried doing it all by themselves.

We can apply that old wisdom to almost any modern subject. In fact, research shows that writing on the blackboard is a shockingly ineffective way to teach! You can talk for an hour and only a few minutes will remain in your audience’s brain.

The smart way is to approach young people based on what they have in abundance: inquisitiveness, curiosity, inventiveness, and an adventurous spirit. All you need to do is to take advantage of these characteristics! Allow them to explore, to learn by themselves, to try and fail. Send them out, into the field. It will be more chaotic and may not look as neat as 40 uniformed children copying from your notes, but it will bring long-term results!

Above all, it will allow the youth to explore their talents. And that’s what Africa needs – people who are passionate about different things in life, who work in the fields that deeply interest them.

Creative Guides’ example from Railway Primary School in Kampala, presented by the headmistress Olivia Muhumuza: Encourage children to write their own books. It can be stories, poems, or something else; it really doesn’t matter as long as it inspires the young writer. You don’t necessarily need to bind the final product: a coloured notebook will be just fine. Then put in the school library. It will demystify books and make children believe that they are authors too – that they can basically do anything.

**“A creative teacher is the one who inspires the students to be themselves.”**

ERI TUMWESTIGYE,  
retired teacher



## PROPOSAL 4: PROVIDE GUIDANCE

Are you strong enough to proudly and humbly sacrifice the status of Mr/Mrs Know-it-all? We all privately know it is fake; nobody can claim to be the sole custodian of knowledge and everybody makes mistakes.

Yes, if you step down a little bit, learners will treat you differently. You will be challenged. You will need to earn their respect and admiration.

However, isn't that a small price to pay? It will help us obtain a generation that is not going to take anything for granted, a generation that is going to question everything – the critical, demanding citizens that Africa needs.

Have you noticed that we have never called you a “teacher” so far? Not even once! It's because we believe that you should rather be a guide, a facilitator, a motivator, an inspirer. As such, you accept the duty to shape a young person, make him or her think independently. You do not bring solutions – you bring problems that entice young minds to act. You inspire them to dream of things that never were and ask themselves the question “Why not?”

Please help us stop “academic accidents” that keep happening on our career roads. So much African human resource is wasted due to lack of guidance ... Instead of inspired doers and makers we get zombie employees who are never really there with their hearts and minds.

“It is the teacher who really frames you, and you become the product of the teacher. Rarely do you start thinking on your own unless the teacher guides you!”

**JOSEPH MUKASA MAIRA,**  
chief administrative officer, Kabale District

As young people study, at any level, make them continuously tackle the following questions:

**Who am I?**

**What subjects fascinate me?**

**What can be done with these subjects in real life?**

**How do I want to use what I learn to serve humanity?**

**How can I build a successful career out of this?**

Michael Niyitegeka from the Faculty of Computing & IT of Makerere University has a wonderful example for us – the “Which is your junction?” exercise. Get students to observe where advertising billboards are positioned. Ask them where they found them and why. Don’t provide them with an answer, lead them to the realisation that billboards are located at junctions and other places where traffic slows down and the advertised goods or brands can become visible to drivers. That is called strategic positioning – the real question for the group is how each of them is positioned. There will be thousands of CVs coming to employers; what will make theirs stand out? Which will be the junction where they themselves will be visible?

## PROPOSAL 5: COMPLEMENT PARENTS

In many ways your knowledge of education and children's development must be superior to their parents'. You have been educated to do your job while there is, so very unfortunately, no licence needed to produce a baby.

Ideally you would work hand in hand with them, but what if their lack of interest is undoing your efforts?

Headmistress Olivia Muhumuza from Railway Children Primary School in Kampala has a great proposal: school families. Parents were too busy to talk to children and be appropriate mentors, so the school staff got involved. They divided pupils into small groups and each of them received a teacher figure to act as the mother or father of that "family". Once a week each family sits together and discusses any issue that concerns them.

"Teachers are trained to know how children perform, how they reason, how we can communicate to them at different ages. Many of us parents don't know that."

RITA NANTONGO JJUMBA,  
parent

## PROPOSAL 6: BE SELF-AWARE

“You need to be capable of self-criticism but also to have a healthy dose of self-esteem. What good have you done for your class, what makes you proud? What are the areas where you still want to improve?”

When retired teacher Evarist Ntamwesigire looks back at his experience, he regrets being authoritarian in class. He believes that he would have achieved more if he had acted as a friend to his primary school pupils and secondary school students. Children don't come to military barracks, believes Evarist, they come to be and to learn.

Michael Niyitegeka from the Faculty of Computing & IT, Makerere University, is even more provocative. He wonders if you try to inspire dreams or do you only inspire qualifications? Do you speak to people's passions or are you preparing them for exams?

“Do you speak to people's passions?”

**MICHAEL NIYITEGEKA,**  
Faculty of Computing & IT,  
Makerere University

## PROPOSAL 7: CELEBRATE YOUR REWARDS

No career can beat the teaching profession if you know who you are and what influences you. You are giving shape to the lives of thousands of young people, and that can be incredibly rewarding.

If it is money you are chasing, perhaps you need to remember that sustainable money is simply a byproduct of exceptional work and a commitment to your calling. But even if you never get to acquire much of it, the youth will appreciate every little bit of direction you have given them. Never forget what you are doing for the youth, for your country, Africa – and for yourself.

“One of the biggest satisfactions of a teacher - colleagues, don't miss out! - is being able to notice that you are an agent of transformation in the life of the learner. Recall what learner X was like when put in your hands and what he or she is like by the time the learner leaves your charge. That used to put a smile on my face.”

**EVARIST NTAMWESIGIRE,**  
retired teacher

# CONCLUSION

With this booklet we have taken you through a number of proposals that could help you be better at your job and enjoy your work more. But there is more. The booklet is a part of a bigger pack:

- the Creative Guides Video (30 minutes) is a filmed version of what you have read here
- the Creative Guides Workbook is a free paper material that takes all this content to a new level
- the Creative Guides hands-on training sessions and radio shows can bring our ideas to life in any African community
- the Creative Guides Website ([www.edirisa.org/creativeguides](http://www.edirisa.org/creativeguides)) is your feedback site and your reference point for the future

What this tells you is that we don't want to stop here. We hope that Creative Guides will be a starting point for serious discussions and that it will grow into a transformative movement of African educationists. We are sure that we can bring real changes to the classroom and beyond.

Because we all want Africa to prosper, don't we?

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**CREATIVE GUIDES**

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*photo:* Edirisa archives



Community Outreach Department



Real life is  
not about  
memory  
power.  
Real life  
is about  
creativity  
power.



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