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THE MIGHTY PEN

Educational Marketing & Publishing ™

Magazine

EDUCATION

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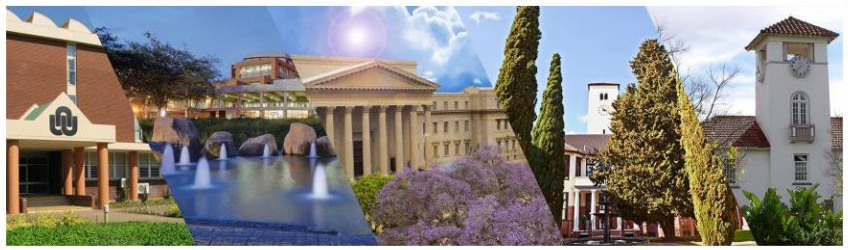
The Business of Education for School Decision Makers

Robotics competition

Digital skills set



More than a campus tour

Financial education

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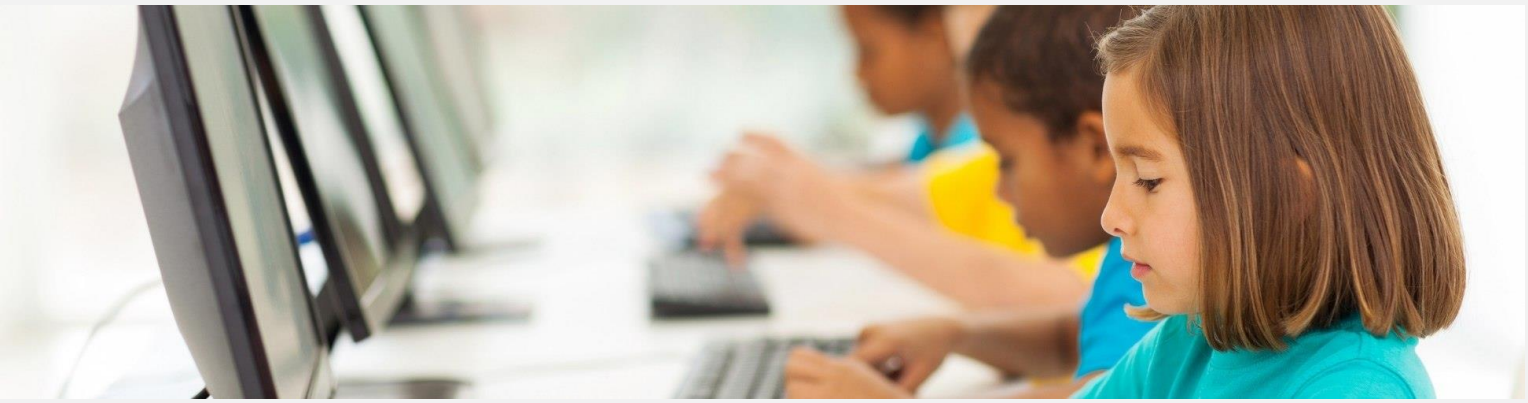

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The Business of Education for School Decision Makers

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Editor's Column

Digital education in SA meets global standards

In this issue we have an exclusive focus technology feature section which highlights how a South African company and school are pioneering achievements towards international goals and trends, specifically the OECD.

The *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) is a worldwide intergovernmental organisation of member countries with the aim of shaping better public policies.

One of their pillars is the *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030, which* aims to build a common understanding of essential underlying concepts that are crucial for students to thrive and share a better future. The learning and teaching frameworks are co-created by policy makers, researchers, school leaders, teachers and students from around the world.

The *OECD Learning Compass 2030* is an evolving learning framework that offers a broad vision of what students will need to thrive in 2030 and beyond, e.g. student agency, student well-being, and the types of competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values). It is globally informed, to be locally contextualised.

The *OECD Teaching Compass for 2030* builds on the conceptual mapping of learning reflected in the *OECD Learning Compass 2030.* It answers the question "What are the teacher profiles/competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) needed to help students learn and improve their well-being?"

As is the case for students, in order for teachers to develop future-oriented competencies, they need to demonstrate agency. They also need supportive systems that foster teacher well-being. The Teaching Compass is built around these three pillars – teacher agency, well-being, and competencies – and integrated into the OECD Learning Compass in recognition of the fact that teachers are themselves life-long learners.

Innovations such as collaborative professional learning networks, AI-powered tools, and increased autonomy in curriculum design provide new pathways for teachers to expand their influence and redefine their roles. This empowers teachers as co-designers of learning, adaptive experts, and drivers of change. This effectively brings the Learning Compass to life in their classrooms.

Blessings in education

Janos Bozsik* - *editor

Alma Mater Primary's robotics journey – where imagination meets innovation


***Grade 2** – Marty in the park: Using colour sensing & party coding to guide his movements & travel.*



***Grade 3** – Marty visits the city: Students used Robotical's Marty the Robot and Scratch Junior to code a city walk & visit to an art museum. Students could see how coding can bring robots to life, combining movement, creativity, and imagination by using sequencing and coding commands, storytelling through robotics & connecting technology with art and culture.*

Alma Mater International School - a South African Cambridge school aligned with thinking-based digital-skills frameworks such as Norway, the US, the UK, Singapore, Cambridge and CAPS, and strengthened by Knowledge Network and ILAMM - Integrated Learning and Learning Methodology - offers a rare, school-wide snapshot of what integrated robotics looks like for primary students and their teachers.

Through classroom observations, background information, photos, videos, and reflections from the principal, head of phase, students, parents and the school's two robotics teachers, this article shows how an integrated robotics project becomes a whole-school experience and the impact it has on learning.

When the school's Marketing Team proposed an internal robotics competition, the idea quickly expanded into a project that would involve every student from Grade R to Grade 6. To prepare for this, the robotics teachers turned to Knowledge Network and ILAMM for the training, structure and support needed to run a school-wide, thinking-based robotics initiative. What follows is their account of how the initial concept grew into a full in-school competition featuring 3D-printed awards, cross-department collaboration, parent presentations, work displays and student narrations.

Teachers Candice van der Merwe and Simoné Redelighuys:
"What began as a spark of inspiration from our Marketing Team soon ignited into something far greater - a window into the thrilling world of robotics unfolding in our Primary School classrooms. The idea quickly evolved into a vibrant competition designed to recognise and celebrate the ingenuity of our students. From that moment, the journey gathered unstoppable momentum.

"Guided by the expertise of the Founder of Knowledge Network and architect of ILAMM, and strengthened by countless hours of intensive training, both students and teachers threw themselves wholeheartedly into the challenge. It was demanding, yes - but also exhilarating, filled with laughter, energy, and a shared sense of purpose, even as mental stamina was tested to its limits.

"At its core, the project was always about the students. Under the mentorship of their robotics teachers - structured yet nurturing, supportive yet inspiring - students began to uncover their own potential. Confidence blossomed, curiosity deepened, and an exciting awareness of emerging technologies took root, promising to shape not only their future learning but their place in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

"Collaboration was key. The Arts Department, together with our dedicated Grade R teachers, brought 3D creations to life through the hands of young artists. These imaginative designs were then refined in robotics lessons, where technical skill and creativity fused seamlessly.

"What unfolded was nothing short of remarkable: a journey of discovery, resilience, and creativity. Students were empowered to experiment, explore, and shine."

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... from p. 2

***Grade 4* – Robots sensing in a classroom: Using micro:bit, robots can detect light levels, sense movement and direction, measure temperature & more. Students learn how sensors help robots interact with the world.**

"Even our teacher assistant, Ms Holly Backman, found herself captivated, attending every session as her own curiosity was sparked by the infectious enthusiasm in the room. This spirit of innovation was nurtured by unwavering support. Mrs Rina Visser, our Head of Phase, offered constant encouragement, while our Principal, Mrs Lynn Botes, championed every idea with openness and generosity - ensuring resources were always within reach. In such an environment, innovation was not only possible, but inevitable.

"Failure was never feared. Instead, each challenge became an opportunity to grow, to adapt, and to learn alongside our students. Teachers were not merely guiding the process; they were part of it - discovering, celebrating, and evolving together.

"This initiative now stands as a defining milestone in digital education - born of visionary leadership, driven by forward-thinking methodology, and brought to life by students who embody the true potential of education in a rapidly changing world."

Building on this momentum, the in-school robotics competition is now set to become an annual Alma Mater signature event. The depth of learning, thinking, discovery and engineering insight revealed that robotics is far more than technology, devices or budgets. It is a structured, thinking-based discipline - one that develops problem-solving, design reasoning, resilience, curiosity, and the confidence that grows through exceptional mentoring by teachers.

Students experienced moments of surprise, breakthrough, and genuine excitement as they realised they could code, sense, build, troubleshoot and create in ways they never imagined - feelings reflected later in their own words.

The teachers' narrative reveals how the competition unfolded from the inside - the training, the momentum, the breakthroughs and the transformation they witnessed in every class. To understand how this translated into whole-school impact, we turn to the Head of Phase, Mrs Rina Viser, who observed the event from a broader academic and developmental perspective.

Head of Phase, Mrs Rina Visser:

"The Alma Mater Robotics Showcase was a remarkable celebration of innovation, teamwork and excellence, made possible by the passion and dedication of two ICT and Robotics teachers who inspired students to transform ideas into reality and challenges into opportunities. More than just robotics, the event highlighted life skills such as perseverance, creativity, confidence and collaboration, with students embracing every challenge and learning to never give up, give their best, and ask for help when needed.

"The Alma Mater Collaboration Centre became a hub of imagination, featuring underwater worlds, bustling cityscapes, interactive displays and inventive projects like potato-powered peripherals and precision boom gates. Some students even went beyond expectations by creating a rap song to celebrate their journey, securing the title of Overall Winners.

"With every project, presentation and performance, students demonstrated resilience, creativity and school spirit, making their teachers, staff and parents immensely proud. This unforgettable first showcase set a high standard and promises to inspire future generations of innovators and problem-solvers."

While the Head of Phase highlights the collaboration, creativity and resilience shown across grades, the Principal, Lynn Botes offers a wider lens - connecting the showcase to Alma Mater's long-term vision for digital education, coding, robotics and future-ready learning.

Principal, Lynn Botes:

"Robotics and coding are no longer just concepts of the future - they are happening now at Alma Mater, where even our youngest students confidently engage with Marty the Robot, developing skills in sequencing, logical thinking, creativity, collaboration and

Cont. p. 4 ...

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Grade 5 – Potato Song Project: Students used Micro:bits and potatoes to code a simple song with five notes. Working in pairs, they applied creativity, coding knowledge & problem-solving skills while developing collaboration, critical thinking & teamwork skills.

problem-solving. Every child found a meaningful role, whether as a programmer, engineer, designer or presenter, and our Grade 4 to Grade 6 students impressed further with innovative projects such as recycled fuel stations and an automated boom gate they designed and programmed themselves. This inspiring initiative, guided by Teachers Candice and Simoné with support from Knowledge Network, exceeded expectations and showcased the ingenuity, confidence and teamwork of our students."

"As we look ahead to 2027, Alma Mater is excited to continue equipping students with the skills they need to thrive, proving that robotics and coding are not just the future - they are the present, and our students are leading the way."

Leadership perspective sets the direction, but the clearest evidence of impact comes from the students themselves. Their reflections capture the surprise, excitement, challenge, confidence and discovery that unfolded as they coded, built, engineered and presented their projects.

Leago and Pablo in Grade 4: "We love robotics, we never thought that we can code how to sense light with a micro:bit, we had a blast and hope to do more of this stuff."

Ntsako and Kago in Grade 5 share their experience of this remarkable journey. "Robotics was full of surprises; we were very confused at first because can a potato make sound? And then boom, we end up coding a song. This is something that we have not done before, and we think it was one of the coolest projects, we hope to have something like this in Term 3 again!"

Mia Gossman, a Grade 6 student: "At first, I hated robotics because I felt I had no idea what I was doing and then the next minute I am helping others connecting their electronics and fault finding, what a fun journey - I never thought this was going be one of the best subjects ever. I would love to have some more practice with more of these types of projects and with that said I want to compete in robotics competitions."

The students' reflections reveal how deeply the experience affected them - from surprise and confusion to confidence, curiosity and a desire to do more.

Their voices show the internal shift that took place as they coded, built, experimented and solved problems.

The robotics teachers also witnessed this transformation firsthand, not only in the classroom but in the conversations and excitement that continued long after lessons ended.

The teachers' perspective highlights how the impact of the project extended beyond the classroom, reaching families who saw their children's enthusiasm, confidence and creativity grow day by day.

To understand this from the parents' side, we turn to their feedback - a view of how the showcase influenced home conversations, learning attitudes and the way children spoke about robotics, thinking and discovery.

Parents' feedback:
"As a parent, I found this robotics project a great learning experience. It allowed my daughter to step out of her comfort zone and experience a practical way of thinking and problem solving."

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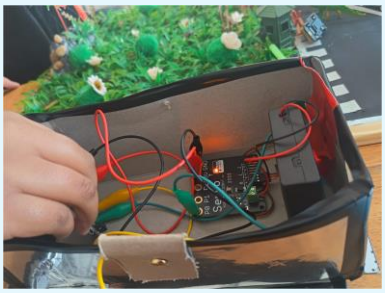

Grade 6 – Boom Gate Project: The full robotics design process was required to build a boom gate, create a story and setting, and complete the project within a limited timeframe. Students combined their coding knowledge with engineering skills, using electronics to explore concepts such as sensing, logical design, decision-making, and automated actions performed by a robotic device. Creative artwork helped bring real-world elements to life, making the projects both meaningful and engaging.

“Hi Teacher Candice, I just wanted to say how wonderful it was to see how much time and effort Rayferd and Lesedi put into their robotics project. They took it so seriously, and it was such a joy to watch.

“I especially loved that it wasn't just a boom gate - it became a complete project with a story and even a song. It made the experience so much richer and taught them so much more than just robotics.

“One of the biggest lessons was patience. I couldn't believe how they sat for hours, working together and figuring out how to make their boom gate function properly. It was incredible to see their determination and perseverance.”

“Thank you for creating such a meaningful learning experience for them. We really appreciate all the time, creativity, and dedication you put into making learning so engaging. Thank you, Teacher Candice!”

Teachers Candice and Simoné conclude:

“It soon became clear that the impact of this journey extended far beyond the classroom. Messages began to filter through from parents in the Junior and Senior Phase, sharing how their children were constantly talking about Marty, Rascal and Ally - the robots had captured their imaginations entirely.

“It was truly remarkable to see children build a boom gate that opened and closed, a project that not only showcased their technical skills but also revealed how stepping beyond their comfort zones allowed them to thrive.

“Parents could witness firsthand how their children embraced discomfort as part of the learning process, growing in confidence, resilience and creativity without even realising it.

“This achievement was a powerful reminder of how innovation and challenge can unlock hidden potential. For us, this was perhaps the greatest reward.”

“It meant that we had not only engaged our own students but had inspired curiosity and excitement in others too. As educators and mentors, we are deeply grateful for the opportunity to spark that sense of wonder - to show what is possible when learning is brought to life in meaningful and memorable ways.

“A heartfelt thank you to Knowledge Network for the incredible support and for providing us with a curriculum that challenges and inspires us on levels we never imagined possible.”

With teachers, leadership, students and parents all reflecting on the experience, the story of Alma Mater’s first Robotics Showcase reaches its full arc.

The closing message acknowledges the collaboration, support and shared belief that made this milestone possible - and offers a final note of appreciation to those who help make high-quality digital-skills learning accessible.

"Thank you, Microsoft, Micro:bit Education Foundation, MonkMakes USA, Robotical UK, Eduboard, PiShop and Maze. Your innovative, accessible, and reliable tools empower these exceptional teachers to spark curiosity, unleash potential, and mentor their students to extraordinary achievements."
— Jil Hrdliczka, Founder, Knowledge Network.

Let's make learning easier and fun!

Partner with Knowledge Network® to give your students the best chance to successfully master technology.

This is Marty. Marty can talk, walk, dance, translate, sense and learn.

We use Marty to test code already learned through Knowledge Network for unplugged, ScratchJr, Scratch and Python, and we progress from there. We do machine learning, add microcontrollers and use AI like text-to-speech. Progression per grade is built in.

This is a microcontroller. A micro:bit – a great starter tool to teach how circuits work, how to connect different robotic elements, how electricity flows through materials, coding and robotics for indoor and outdoor use. We use it for AI, machine learning, to use with robots like Marty, and for creating DIY robotics like windmills, fans, turtles and other. Extensions like sound, recording, servos and microturtle grids are excellent teaching tools for little learners too.

Coding. We integrate all the different learning areas into coding. Students code stories, games, shape drawing, animation, calculations and data storage like game scores. They **design** characters for animation, use art and graphics to **create** backgrounds, game interfaces and develop websites.

They do research for photos and images, make music for stories and games, edit sound and record voice. They make videos, **invent** new games and code apps. They learn how to manage their files. Little learners improve their vocab, communication and thinking skills through storytelling **coding**.

This looks like AI. A companion for students and teachers learning **Skills for Schoolwork**. AI is a valuable study companion and **research** assistant. AI can help with full APA-style **referencing** and proper citing.

AI can support writing, provide math help and study guides, and assist students with revision by helping with translations, grammar checks and language conversational practice.

Let's teach students how to use it correctly and safely. Teachers also use it during class to make learning easier.

Skills for schoolwork: we all need excellent skills in all areas of computer use, from writing, drawing, layout, research and referencing to charting, number crunching, animation, sound, video, presenting data for projects using business-standard and newly released tools.

Integrating technology in teaching and learning is the key to mastering all these new skills for schoolwork, coding and robotics. It also develops **computational** thinking, **creativity, problem-solving, teamwork** and collaboration - key abilities students also need to prosper in the digital age.

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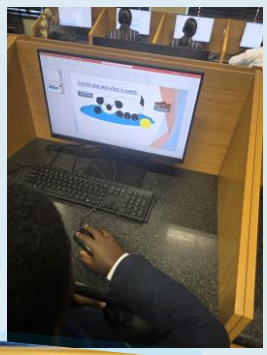
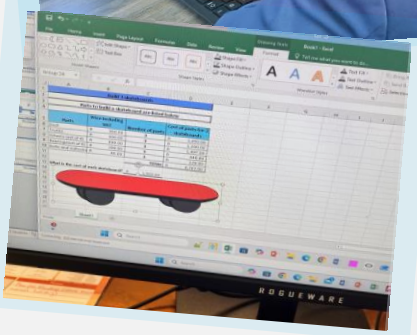
Skills needed along with – Coding & Robotics

A photo journey of primary students in action

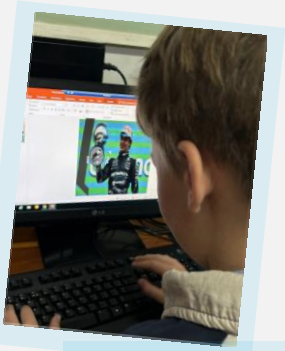
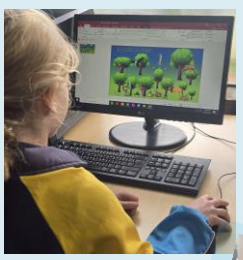
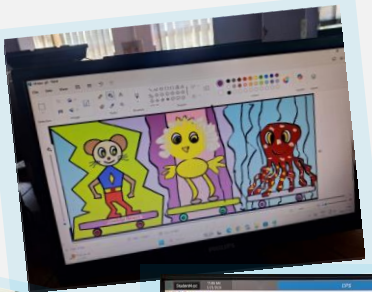

CAPS Coding and Robotics

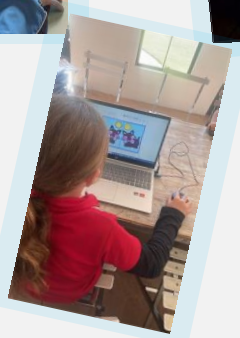
"Coding and Robotics combine the principles of programming with the design, construction and operation of robots. Programming concepts, practices and perspectives control robots to perform specific tasks. It includes digital concepts that refer to various ideas, principles and processes that are associated with digital technologies." - *CAPS Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement.*

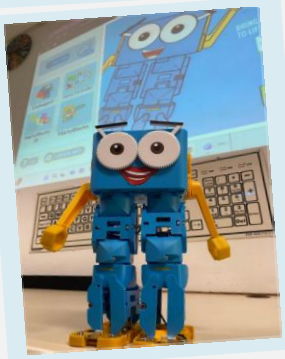
CAPS Coding and Robotics is one part of a bigger learning picture. To prepare students for 2030, schools must develop digital skills, thinking skills, language mastery and people skills together - the full skillset needed for schoolwork, varsity and the workplace.

Skills for Schoolwork, Varsity and Workplace

Digital Concepts includes digital citizenship, awareness and skills. These descriptively named Skills for Schoolwork, Workplace and Varsity Skills prepare students for a world shaped by digital tools, AI, coding, robotics, thinking and modern learning expectations. They develop workplace and varsity skills - empower students to do more, achieve more, score more across all learning areas - make learning easier - prepare students for real job, real tech, real life. Our students need the skills to be creators, not consumers.



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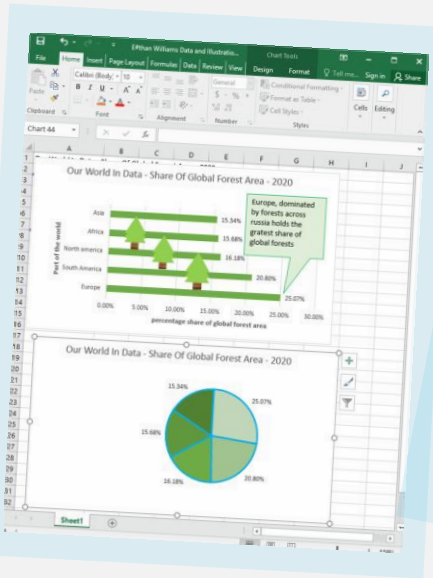
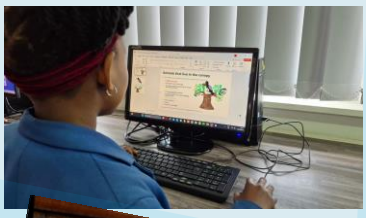
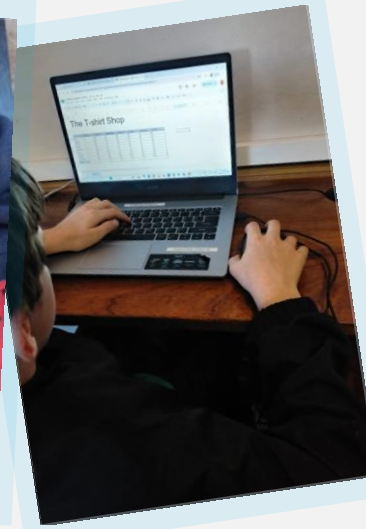






Thinking Skills

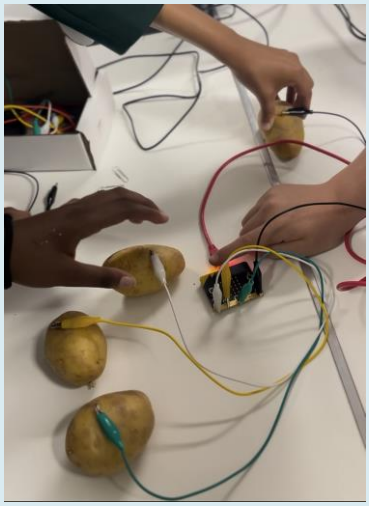
Starting with Quads Grade 0000 and continuing until students leave school, the above skills powered by thinking skills need to be developed together; both are the foundation of coding and robotics as well. Research and language skills in a world of AI and information overload require constant and thorough verification. Students need to learn thinking to cope.

Modern curriculums - Norway, Singapore, the USA, the UK, International Cambridge, South Africa's CAPS and the Global OECD 2030 Compass - emphasize thinking from as early as possible.

ILAMM - Integrated Learning and Mentoring Methodology®, developed in 1994, strengthens learning. ILAMM's eight main thinking types are Language, Lateral, Metacognitive, Computational, Logical, Creative, Design and Critical, and integrated projects develop communication, collaboration, teamwork, life and soft skills, also emphasised by global curriculums and education frameworks.

Do ... While ...

Schools can develop these thinking, schoolwork, workplace and varsity skills using whatever technology they have while they budget and acquire different types of sustainable robotics equipment.
This can also be practiced at home.



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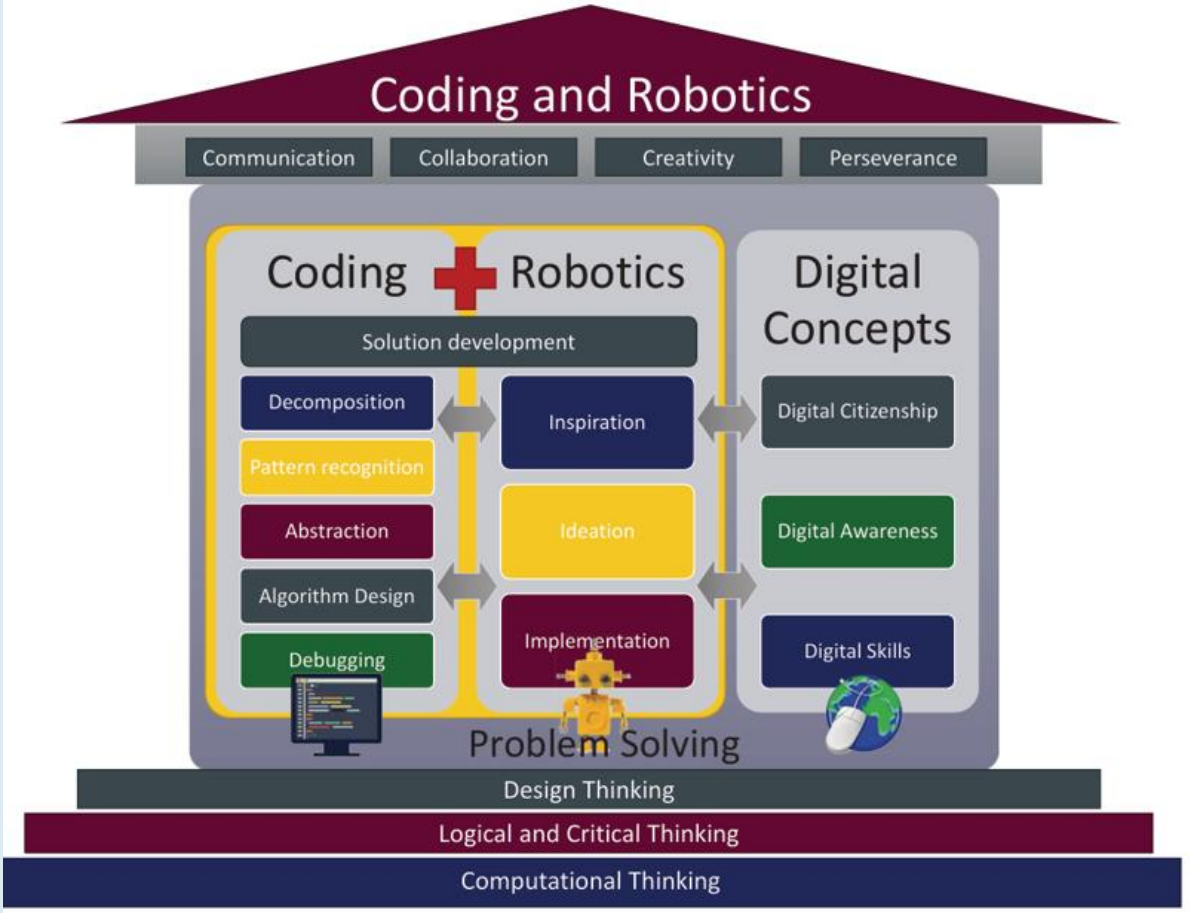
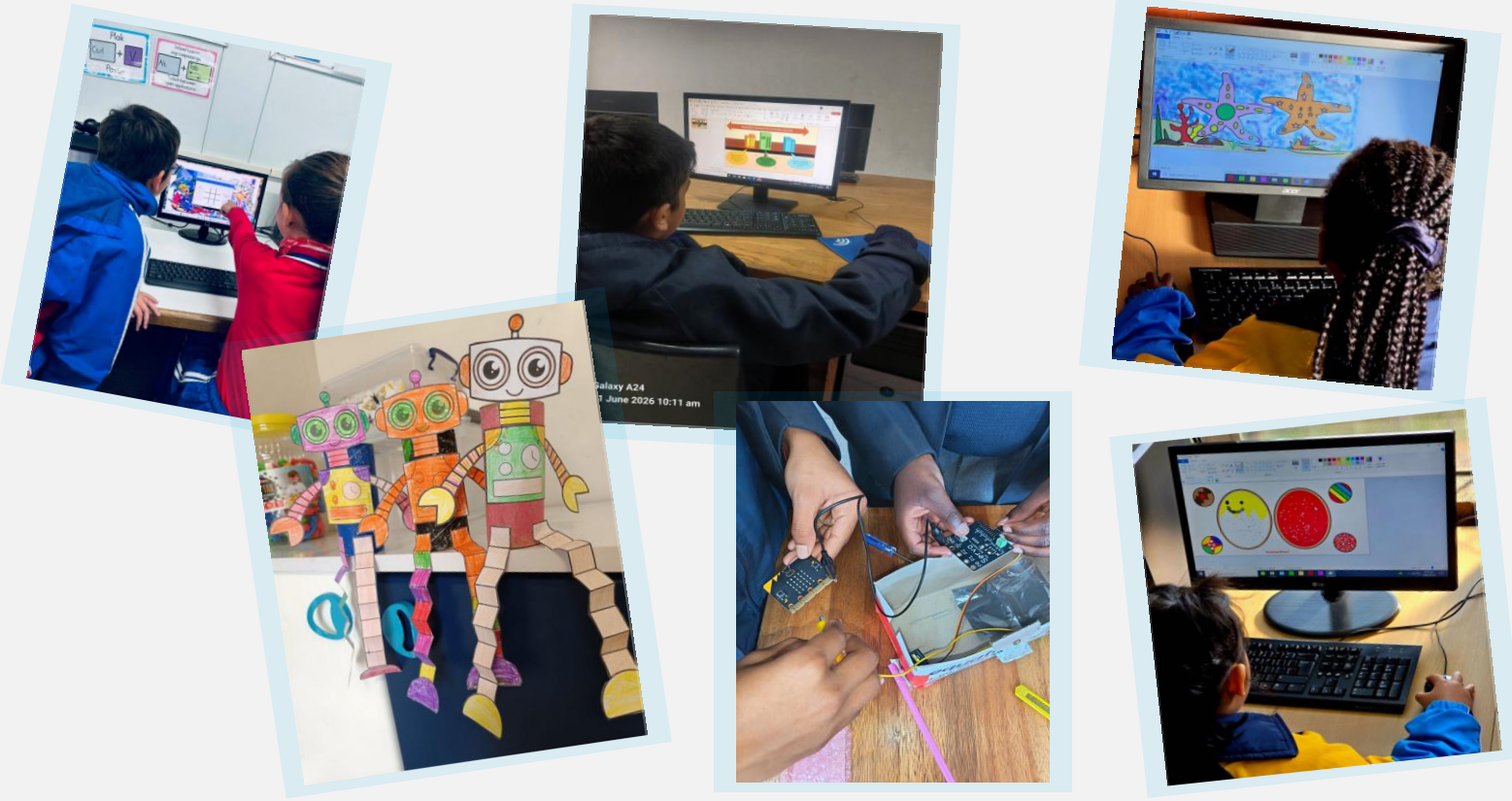
The CAPS Coding and Robotics curriculum is based on the following pillars as depicted in this figure.



Overview of Coding and Robotics as a Subject from CAPS Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Grade R - 3, Grade 4 - 6, Grade 7 - 9. ***Pages 9 & 10***



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Mentorship – women uplifting women

Ask a successful woman about the people who shaped her career and, somewhere in the story, there is often someone who opened a door, offered advice, provided an opportunity or simply saw potential before she did.

For six women taking part in, *She Is Forestry South Africa's (SIFSA) Mentor Me* initiative, mentorship is not simply about receiving that support. It is also about what happens next: becoming the person who opens the door for someone else. Progress rarely happens alone.

Yoliswa Dlamini, now a Management Forester at Sappi Midlands, studied Forestry at Nelson Mandela University's Saasveld Campus. Today she is responsible for eight teams comprising around 145 people. Looking back, she recognises how much her career was shaped by people willing to invest in her. It is why she is now committed to helping young professionals and women coming into forestry build confidence, overcome obstacles and find their own paths.

"For me, mentorship is a two-way journey. Just as I have learned from my mentors, I know I will also learn from those I mentor, while sharing what I have gained along the way," says Dlamini.

Nonkululeko Ntinga, Nurseries Manager at Mondi South Africa, was the first Black African woman to receive the Sir William Schlich Medal twice for academic excellence after her studies towards a National Diploma in Forestry from Nelson Mandela University and a BSc Forestry Honours degree from Stellenbosch University. She too has experienced mentorship from both sides and now manages multidisciplinary teams.

Mfundo Ngcobo, who leads NCT's communications, public relations and corporate social responsibility, admits that she initially questioned whether her own career was remarkable enough to inspire anyone when she joined the Mentor Me programme in 2026. "I never thought of myself as particularly inspiring, but rather as someone working hard and making the most of every opportunity."

Her career has since taught her that perseverance and a willingness to continue learning matter more than perfection. She adds that growth is never a solo journey and everyone has something to teach and something still to learn.

For Trudy Sebelebele, Forest Certification Manager at Sappi, mentorship is fundamental to leadership and that leadership carries a responsibility to create visibility, inspire possibility and help others see pathways they may not have considered for themselves.

Noxolo Kheswa, a GIS Analyst at Mondi South Africa, has built a career that brings together geography, technology and environmental stewardship.

Having benefited from mentorship since her high school days, Kheswa is committed to creating the same opportunities for other young women.

"My success would be incomplete and futile if the door shuts behind me," she says. "Mentoring keep those doors open by creating inclusive spaces for the next generation of young women."

Dr Noxolo Ndlovu, a Forest Research Scientist at NCT Forestry, oversees research into tree improvement, protection and silviculture.

"Mentorship is a wonderful human experience and an integral part of growth," says Ndlovu.

SIFSA's five-year Mentor Me initiative brings women at different stages of their careers into relationships with experienced female mentors, while encouraging them to become role models for those following behind them.

For these women, that creates something of a virtuous circle.

And perhaps that is one of the most useful questions to ask this Women's Month: who helped you get where you are, and whose career could you help change next?

Smart money habits – start young

By Cebile Zibi, Head of Trade Marketing at Momentum Advice

In the world of sport, a flashy offense might grab the headlines and the cheers, but any seasoned coach will tell you the same thing: defence wins championships.

The same logic applies to our financial lives. While "offense" is our ability to earn an income, "defence" is the discipline, delayed gratification, and literacy required to keep it and grow it. In an increasingly complex economic landscape, teaching our children these defensive habits is no longer just a nice-to-have life skill but a non-negotiable foundation for their future success.

Shifting the focus from merely *providing* for our children to *equipping* them is the greatest legacy we can leave. Here is how you can start coaching your children today to ensure their financial security in the future.

The power of delayed gratification

The core of financial defence is the ability to say, "not yet." In a world of instant downloads, messaging and one-click shopping, the ability to save is a superpower.

Instead of buying a toy on impulse, help your child set a savings goal. This helps them learn that the satisfaction of a hard-earned purchase far outweighs the fleeting thrill of an impulse buy.

Understanding the home ground advantage of interest

Interest can be a foul when it's on debt, or a star player when it's on savings. Use a clear jar for savings so your children can see the pile grow. For older children, introduce the concept of compound growth - the idea that their money is working for them while they sleep. This helps children to stop seeing money as a static object and start seeing it as a tool that can grow.

The needs vs. wants playbook

Every championship team has a playbook. For a child, this means learning to categorise expenses. When grocery shopping, involve them in the choices. Explain why you are choosing a house brand over a luxury label to save for a family weekend away. This allows children to develop a discerning eye for value, protecting them from predatory marketing and lifestyle creep later in life.

Money coaching tips for children at different ages

- Age 5 to 8: This is a good time to introduce physical money to your children. Use three glass jars, labelled 'save', 'spend' and 'give'. This helps to make the abstract concept of budgeting visible to young children.

- Age 9 to 12: This is the age children can learn the value of earning and choice. Offer a 'commission' for extra chores beyond their daily responsibilities to help teach them that effort equals income.

- Age 13 to 18: It's time to introduce them to real-world banking and digital money. Help them open a bank account, explain how a bank account works, the invisible nature of digital spending and how to track it.

The role of the head coach - your financial adviser

While parents provide the daily drills, a financial adviser acts as the head coach, looking at the long-term season.

A professional can help you structure the formal defence such as education policies, tax-efficient savings, or trust funds, ensuring the capital is there when your child is ready to step onto the big field.

Giving your child a head start

We don't want the next generation to enter adulthood constantly tackling debt and financial stress.

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Building artisans – from the ground up

ACTOM, one of South Africa's leading engineering and manufacturing groups, has long recognised that a strong technical skills pipeline is vital not only for its own operations but for the future of the country's engineering sector.

This insight led the company to take a more hands-on approach to skills development by identifying learners early and guiding them towards becoming qualified artisans or engineers.

ACTOM's involvement in education began with a maths and science tutoring programme for matric learners. "Although well intentioned, we discovered that by Grades 11 and 12, many learners had already dropped pure mathematics or physical science, limiting their access to technical careers and tertiary studies," explains Sylvester Makamu, ACTOM's Executive Director.

This realisation sparked a shift in strategy. "We decided to intervene earlier, at Grade 9, because this is when learners are still choosing subjects, forming confidence, and deciding whether maths and science feel achievable. By engaging them at this stage, we can prevent disengagement before it begins and keep future career pathways open."

A structured journey from school to career

The programme begins with close collaboration with schools. Each participating school identifies the top 20 learners who are then invited to join the ACTOM Maths and Science Tutoring Programme. Participants receive additional lessons, study guides, calculators, and even ACTOM-branded kits as tangible signs that they are part of a special initiative.

Beyond material support, learners regularly engage with artisans, technicians, and engineers who provide mentorship and career guidance. "We maintain continuous engagement, checking that learners are staying on track and inspiring them by showing real-life examples of career success," Makamu notes.

After completing school, learners can pursue an artisan apprenticeship at ACTOM's training centre or university studies for those aiming to become engineers.

Real impact, real stories

"When we first engaged with Tony Mfubesi as a student, he had little hope. Peer pressure and life circumstances distracted him from his goals, but through personal engagement and mentorship, he completed his matric, trained as an artisan, and is now employed full-time with ACTOM," recalls Makamu.

(L- R): Jaco Opperman, Principal at Katlehong Engineering School, Mervyn Naidoo, Group CEO at ACTOM, Tony Mfubesi, Sylvester Makamu, ACTOM's Executive Director

Addressing broader challenges

The programme does not come without challenges. Many learners come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including children-headed households. ACTOM addresses these barriers through personal engagement, career guidance, and practical interventions such as providing study materials and access to social support professionals.

A model for social impact and skills development

For ACTOM, the programme is about more than workforce development. "A skilled company is an empowered company," Makamu says. "We train people to serve as employees but also for entrepreneurship. If we cannot employ them, they can still create opportunities for themselves. This changes the dynamics of job creation and contributes to a sustainable skills base for South Africa."

The ACTOM Maths and Science Tutoring Programme demonstrates the power of early, sustained, and human-led intervention. By investing in learners from Grade 9 onwards, ACTOM is not only filling its own talent pipeline but contributing to the development of artisans and engineers who will strengthen the country's industrial future.

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Not just a campus tour – university open days

During the next few months, students across South Africa who want to pursue further study after Matric, are entering a critical decision-making window as they investigate their options at university open days.

It is important to understand that open days are not just exploratory - they take place at the same time students are expected to begin making firm application choices, often with limited information and under time pressure, an education expert says.

“At the same time, South Africa’s higher education system remains highly competitive. Public universities receive far more applications than available spaces each year, particularly in high-demand programmes. This reality makes it essential for students to understand not only entry requirements, but also selection processes, extended programme options, and alternative pathways,” says Dingaan Moropane, Deputy Dean: Teaching and Learning at IIE Rosebank College.

While open days provide access to institutions, faculties, and staff, simply attending is not enough. What matters is how students engage with the experience and what information they extract from it.

Open days can be noisy, crowded, and highly structured around marketing messages. Institutions naturally present their strengths, flagship programmes, and top-performing graduates.

As a result, students are often exposed to a curated version of the institution, rather than a complete picture of what it takes to succeed there.

“To make informed decisions, students need to go beyond presentations, interrogate what they are seeing, and actively seek out the less visible but more meaningful insights,” says Moropane.

What most students miss

Many attendees focus mostly on big-name degrees or popular faculties, often leaving with surface-level impressions. However, the most useful insights are rarely found in formal presentations, they come from asking the right questions and observing what isn’t being said.

Look beyond historically popular choices

Students should approach open days with the mindset of investigating the full range of study options available, rather than narrowing their focus too early.

This includes actively exploring private higher education institutions, which often offer industry-aligned curricula shaped by current employer needs.

Many of these programmes place a strong emphasis on practical skills and work-readiness, helping students transition more effectively into the job market. They may also introduce newer or less traditional fields of study that are not widely available at public universities, expanding the range of possible career pathways.

Think long-term, not just first year

An open day is not just about choosing where to study; it’s about understanding where that choice could lead.

Students should think beyond admission and ask: Will this environment help me succeed? Does this qualification align with real job opportunities? Are there multiple career or study pathways if I change direction?

“Open days can feel overwhelming because the stakes are so high, but with a more strategic approach, they become powerful decision-making tools,” Moropane says.

What matters is not seeing everything, but recognising what genuinely fits, and what doesn’t. The most effective students leave not necessarily with certainty, but with a clearer sense of direction and the confidence to make decisions based on evidence rather than assumption.

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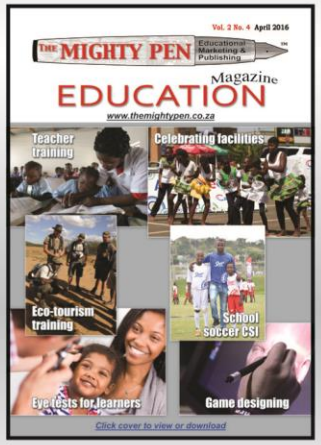

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