An Identification of the Kind of Training or Professional Development Typically Offered to the Teachers

Tebogo Mogashoa

University of South Africa, Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies
PO Box 392, 0003 Unisa, South Africa
Email: mogasti@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

The aim of the research was to identify the kind of training or professional development offered to the teachers in order to implement teaching and learning policies. This study was underpinned by critical theory. Qualitative research assisted the researcher to identify the kind of training or professional development offered to the teachers. Data were sorted accordingly, conceptualized, refined and organized into a coherent new structure. It has been established in this study that some teachers received training on the various teaching and learning policies. It is therefore necessary to find appropriate professional development approaches to ensure that all the teachers, even the most experienced ones, are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills for improving learner performance (Hirish 2005:40). Pre-service and in-service training should aim at empowering teachers with skills that will enable them to fulfil their roles as mediators of learning.

Keywords: Experiences or perceptions, strategies, techniques, professional development, programme.

1. Introduction and Context of the Study

Among other reforms proposed by the Government of National Unity (GNU) in South Africa was transformational outcomes-based education. This ushered Curriculum 2005 (C2005) with its emphasis on outcomes-based education. It was believed that C2005 was created to empower all South African learners with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which would provide productive and valuable agents of social change in creating a better future for all. The Department of Education took a transformative approach to outcomes-based education with emphasis on critical outcomes. C2005 was then introduced in 1997 and piloted in selected schools countrywide. A pilot study was conducted in Grade 1 classrooms in 270 schools around the entire country between August and November 1997. Then in 1998, the Department of Education introduced C2005 in all schools in South Africa.

According to Mda and Mothata (2000:22), the introduction of C2005 brought about a shift from teacher and content curriculum to an outcomes-based and learner-centred curriculum. Teachers had to change the way they used to plan and teach while on the other hand learners had to change the way they used to learn. However, in 2000, C2005 was reviewed. Thus, a Ministerial Committee was established, chaired by Linda Chisholm, which emerged with the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) (Review Committee on Curriculum 2005, 2000:21. Another Task Team was established by the Minister of Basic Education in July 2009 to investigate the nature of the challenges and problems experienced in the implementation of the RNCS and to develop a set of recommendations designed to improve the implementation of the RNCS. RNCS was also reviewed and it was then called the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). Another Task Team was established and came up with a document that recommended the replacement of the NCS and it is called the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). It is therefore logical and appropriate to revisit the kind of training or professional development offered to the teachers in order to implement these teaching and learning policies.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

This study was underpinned by critical theory. Booyse (2008:12) states that the key focus areas in the philosophy of critical theory are the 'change and emancipation' of societies from being indoctrinated towards being critical and questioning. As for Paulo Freire (cited in Lemmer 2000:57), the essence of education about society is that social reality is made by people and can be changed by people. It is imperative that teachers see that social and political reality is not

fixed, but that it can be changed and transformed. This is because most of the curricula facing most teachers in the developing countries are handed down for implementation without any room for critiquing. The main research question is as follows:

What kind of training or professional development was offered to the teachers in order to implement teaching and learning policies?

3. Research Design and Methods

This study was a qualitative mode of inquiry. Hofstee (2006:113) reflects that in the research design one does not have to explain the details of how to implement the techniques, but only discuss the technique/s that will be used. De Vos, Strydom and Fouche (2005:79) state that qualitative research methods elicit participants' accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions by producing descriptive data in the participants' own spoken words. Qualitative research is typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomenon, often with a purpose of describing and understanding the phenomenon from the participants' point of view (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:101). The participants were teachers in the intermediate phase who have been trained in C2005, RNCS, NCS and CAPS in the Gauteng North District of the Gauteng Department of Basic Education. Their noticeable experiences of the C2005, RNCS, NCS and CAPS and accessibility have contributed to them being selected or sampled. Respondents were interviewed separately on individual basis. This study was conducted in five different schools and this created a room for multiple/diverse ideas.

4. Data Collection

According to Voce (2005:6), the primary methods of data collection in qualitative research are observations, interviews and focus group discussions. The main data collection method was interviews. Supplementary methods of data collection such as videotapes, audiotapes and diary notes were used. Interviewing provided room for face to face interaction and clarification of concepts that might be confusing to the participants. Collection of data from fewer participants is a wiser choice for virtually any qualitative data. The interviews were tape-recorded.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

According to Michelle (2007:103), qualitative data analysis consists of identifying, coding and categorising patterns found in the data. Bradley (2007:619) declares that once the data have been reviewed and there is a general understanding of the scope and contexts of the key experiences under study, coding provides the analyst with a formal system to organise data, uncovering and documenting additional links within and between concepts and experiences described in the data. Data management, which is part of data analysis, aims at high quality and accessible data. That is why data collected were stored and retrieved for analysis. Addressing the issues that were raised in the research questions involved a systematic analysis of sources and opinions. Data were sorted accordingly, conceptualized, refined and organized into a coherent new structure. The audio-taped interviews were transcribed, then analyzed. Contradictory points of view and new insights were revised and refined. Data collected were compared against each other and consolidated into a meaningful discussion.

6. Research Findings and Discussions

6.1 "What training did you receive in respect of the new teaching and learning policies?"

Twenty teachers who were interviewed conceded that they received training and workshops for C2005, RNCS, NCS as well as CAPS. A few of the verbatim responses are indicated below:

> *Teacher S said, "We attended workshops for C2005, RNCS, NCS as well as CAPS".*
> *Teacher Q, "We attended some training workshops for policies on teaching and learning such as C2005, RNCS, NCS and CAPS".*
> *Teacher F, "The Department of Education organised workshops for C2005, RNCS, NCS as well as CAPS which we attended".*

In order to identify the various aspects of the training the teachers received, they were asked to elaborate more on

the workshops they attended.

6.2 *"Tell me more about the workshops you have attended".*

In responding to the question above, 16 teachers indicated that the workshop were confusing. A few teachers had different views as illustrated below:

> Teacher A, *"In most workshops the facilitators gave us activities and guided us on how to go through the activities and we were given opportunities to demonstrate how we were going to implement these policies in our classrooms ".*
> Teacher M, *"When we attended the workshops on Curriculum 2005, Revised National Curriculum Statement and the National Curriculum Statement, we were told different things which were confusing. The facilitators were not interpreting the various documents the same way. We were given a lot of papers to fill in. The presentations in the workshops were not appropriate to what we were practically doing in our classes. At least with Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements, it was better".*
> Teacher L, *"The facilitators for CAPS were well prepared than those who took us through C2005, RNCS and the NCS".*
> Teacher C, *"The workshop for C2005 was very confusing. The facilitators were not clear about what teachers should do. At least, the workshop for CAPS was better".*

In order to identify the kind of support the teachers received from the Department of Education, the following questions were asked:

6.3 *"What support do you get from the Gauteng Department of Education?"*

Twenty teachers indicated that the only support they received were workshops though follow-ups were inadequate.

6.4 *"Did you find the training activities relevant to what you were doing in class? If relevant or irrelevant, explain".*

Twenty (20) teachers indicated that the workshops were relevant but it was not easy to implement the new knowledge and skills in real classroom environment. This was emphasised by teacher N, when he said, *"Yes, but trainings are relevant, but it is totally different from what we do in class. In class there are those who are very slow, and some very intelligent. The training activities are relevant but more challenging to implement in class. When you present in the workshops there are only the educators but when you present in class is a different story. You are faced with a real situation".*

> Teacher D said, *"The activities were relevant but we struggle on how to implement them in real classroom situation".*
> This was further emphasised by teacher O who said, *"The activities are relevant but the problem is implementation".*

The above responses were followed by another question to determine teachers' opinions about the knowledge of trainers or co-ordinators of these teaching and learning policies.

6.5 *"What is your opinion about the competency level of the trainers and co-ordinators of the training?"*

Twenty (20) teachers indicated that the competence of facilitators who trained them for C2005, RNCS, and NCS was inadequate; the situation for CAPS was better.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The research findings of this study indicated that teachers received training on the various teaching and learning policies. However some policies were not deemed appropriate to what teachers were actually doing in their classrooms. The time frames in which teachers were trained were not adequate. The study found that the only intervention strategy to assist teachers in implementing teaching and learning policies was in the form of workshops. This study further indicated that the facilitators of the workshops were not sufficiently competent.

There is need for high quality professional development is imperative for improving quality education in South African schools. Policy makers increasingly recognise that schools can be no better than teachers and administrators

together (Guskey 2002:383). It is therefore necessary to find appropriate professional development approaches to ensure that all the teachers, even the most experienced ones, are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills for improving learner performance (Hirish 2005:40). Just like the practitioners in other professions, teachers need to broaden their knowledge and improve their skills over the course of their careers (Report on Teacher Professional Development 2006:79). Research seems to indicate that most professional development programmes for teachers are unsatisfactory and do not meet their intended goals (Boyle, Lamprianou, and Boyle 2005: 17). Policy makers have to explore professional development from the side of the participating teachers in order to clearly understand what would be best for changing their classroom practice.

According to Robinson (2003:27), recent views of professional development frequently emphasise the importance of involving teachers in defining their needs and developing opportunities for their own professional development. To make informed policy and programme decisions regarding professional development, district and school leaders need to know whether professional development programmes are currently reaching the teachers who need them most (Desimone, Smith & Ueno 2006:181). Teachers are the key actors in continuing professional development and should be involved in the decisions made by the authorities. Teachers should thus be given the opportunity to give their own opinions on professional development programmes.

This study has uncovered major sets of findings and these findings provide suggestions for what the teachers identified as the best characteristics of effective professional development programmes. In order for professional development programmes to be successful, they have to be meaningful to the participating teachers. The challenge to policy makers and management is to understand what the teachers want and what they find meaningful, and then design continuing professional development programmes that respond to the teachers' needs. Only if the continuing professional development programmes have personal meaning for the teachers, will they have the potential to be transformative and life changing.

It is therefore recommended that for effective implementation of teaching and learning policies, the Department of Education should provide adequate knowledgeable curriculum staff to do extensive training for both the teachers and members of the SMTs. Training of teachers in new skills, insights and qualities should be prioritised. Teachers' training or professional development should be longer, albeit shorter than initial training. Teachers should collaborate and establish learning area/subject clusters to resolve mutual curricular challenges.

Pre-service and in-service training should aim at empowering teachers with skills that will enable them to fulfil their roles as mediators of learning. This may have to involve the revision of curricular in teacher training institutions to meet the demands of the present world. As part of teacher development, the Department of Basic Education should sponsor teachers to take upgrading courses. Educators are lifelong learners, that is, ongoing education is a requirement for teachers in all schools. This can be in the form of workshops, seminars and training courses. Teachers can participate in activities such as courses/workshops (on subject matter or methods and other education related topics), education conferences or seminars (at which teachers and researchers present their research results and discuss education problems), qualification programmes (e.g. diploma or degree programmes), observation visits to other schools, participation in a network of educators formed specifically for the development of teachers, individual or collaborative research or a topic of professional interest as well as mentoring and peer observation and coaching as part of formal school arrangement. This will help teachers to stay up to date with new trends and learn new strategies, techniques and methods for classroom challenges.

Professional development must both align with and support system-based changes that promote learning. Quality professional development should focus on supporting the improvement of teaching by enhancing knowledge and skills. Professional development programmes should also help to transform teachers' thinking in terms of new developments. Professional developers should be guided by the research and practice knowledge about how effective change happens in education settings. The Department of Basic Education should develop a differentiated professional development programmes to respond to teachers' range of concerns.

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