

# TEACHERS, EDUCATIONAL CHANGE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: SOME THOUGHTS FROM A SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

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*In the past decade, widespread educational changes were proposed for education at all levels of the system in South Africa. Educational reform has therefore become an inescapable part of the reality of teachers' work. Initial implementation of the new curriculum for schools, guiding reform after the shift to democracy in 1994, was not easy for teachers and this was later revised and streamlined. These processes happened in a compressed time frame and in-service programmes were developed to assist teachers with the preparations for curriculum delivery. This paper explores ideas on in-service teacher education and professional development and draw on a case study of an in-service process developed for teachers to highlight participant's views and responses to the programmes presented. Finally it discusses options and possibilities that might be considered for processes of continuous professional development to be more related to the needs and contexts of teachers' practices.*

## INTRODUCTION

The reasons for and change in education in South Africa is well documented in literature and will be briefly explored in this paper. The change in government was indeed a momentous occasion in the history of the country. The events immediately following the demise of apartheid (the institutionalised separation of "races" in all spheres of life) prompted a series of changes in the political and economic systems of the country, and the changes in education that followed this, had far-reaching implications for educational practitioners. Educational change was caught up in a swirl of socio-political change that had profound implications for teachers' work. In education, the response was to develop new education policy restructuring frameworks with the intention of bringing about greater development, equity, participation and redress of past imbalances. A plethora of policies saw the light of day, some of which suggested profound implications for teachers' work in general and classroom practice in particular. While these initial legislative changes took place fairly quickly, the implementation of more systemic structural, curricular and administrative changes in the education sector posed a greater challenge. The change in government in 1994 enabled fundamental change in the education policy environment in South Africa, which is aimed primarily at transformation at the systemic, social and methodological levels. Educational policy changes are potentially far reaching, in that the proposals for educational transformation are situated within a broader strategy for national reconstruction and development. In essence, policy changes and developments have been influenced by socio-political conditions in the country, as well as by external political and societal factors, including global shifts in thinking about education and economics. However, implementation of the policies occurs at local level and this requires adoption by and the support of educational institutions and professionals. The responses of teachers are an important indicator of the degree of support and adoption of change initiatives and policies. Policies, in turn, have implications for the work of teachers but teachers are central to and play an important role in change processes in education. These changes needed to occur in a very compressed time frame. Educational changes under such conditions are like a "living laboratory" that is different from the situation in more developed countries, where change occurs in an "essentially stable societal context". Socio-political changes and changes in the school system in SA have recently created increasing pressures and developmental challenges for teachers. Hargreaves & Fullan (1992) argue that teachers are important, if not indispensable, agents of educational reform, a sentiment echoed by Elmore (1996), who states that if the core processes of teaching and learning are not addressed, very little will change in schools. Datnow & Castellano (2000, p. 777) indicate that teachers are considered by most policymakers and school change experts to be the centrepiece of educational change. It is not surprising, therefore, that the involvement of teachers in school reform is seen as critical. However, some teachers push or support reform efforts and others resist or actively subvert them. The receptivity of teachers to reform depends on their level of involvement in the change effort (Fullan 1991). Many teachers were however systematically deskilled and disempowered by the apartheid government and opportunities for professional development

needed to be provided in order to achieve policy aims and imperatives for equal and developmental education for all the people of South Africa. In other words professional development of teachers was crucial for successful transformation of education particularly schooling.

### **TEACHERS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The issue of professional development is receiving increased attention internationally as educators at all levels are realizing the centrality of teachers to school reform and improvement. Professional development (PD) has been variously described in literature and is used fairly loosely and interchangeably with INSET. Craft (1996, p.6) indicates that both terms tend to cover a wide range of activities designed to contribute to the learning of teachers who have completed their initial teacher education. Veenman, Van Tulder & Voeten (1994, p. 303) describe INSET as “a coherent set of activities to deepen and broaden knowledge attitudes and skills that are directly connected with the profession of teaching to improve teachers’ professional competence and the effectiveness of their school.” According to Little & Houston (2003, p. 76), “professional development is a goal orientated and continuous process supported through mentoring, coaching and feedback and contextualised to address the perceived needs of students within individual classrooms and schools.” In South Africa INSET and professional development (PD) programmes currently offered to teachers are related to school reform and educational transformation. The process of educational reform has been closely linked to political reform and has been an ongoing process since the major democratic reforms in the country in 1994. In this period there have been major curriculum changes which have had far reaching implications for teachers work, particularly teaching practices and assessment processes. If teachers in schools are to meet the needs of all students and implement the curriculum imperatives developed in policies (Curriculum 2005 and the Revised National Curriculum Statement), instructional practices (teaching approaches) of teachers is one aspect facet of the education system that must be examined. In order to change instructional practices in meaningful ways (learn new instructional practices) teachers not only need to learn new instructional practices and content but also must alter their current practices through a revised process of professional development that includes continued support. Effective professional development according to Little & Houston (2003, p.76) is a complex and comprehensive process of change including multiple constituents within a system. Fullan (1993, p.257) suggests that to achieve a desired change, “professional development must be reconceptualised as continuous learning, highly integrated with the moral task of making a difference in the lives of diverse students under conditions of somewhat chaotic complexity”. Garet, Porter, Desimone & Yoon (2001, p. 925) indicate that teachers need to be involved closely in the professional development and INSET processes. They refer to active learning which they describe as providing opportunities for teachers to become “actively engaged in meaningful discussion, planning and practice, particularly how new curriculum materials and teaching methods will be used in the classroom”. This according to them would include opportunities to link ideas introduced during professional development experiences to the teaching contexts in which teachers work. Little & Houston (2003) indicate further that viewing the shift in approaches to teaching and learning as a change process necessitates matching quality professional development to provide new and deeper levels of knowledge and practice while focusing on policies and practices such as curriculum. The implication of the change process related to teachers’ role means that somehow teachers would have to be given the opportunities for further education and training, meaning some form of professional development process needs to be organised. This has been part of the change process in South Africa.

### **IN-SERVICE TRAINING (INSET) PROCESSES FOR TEACHERS**

What is currently being presented to teachers as in-service processes to assist with implementation of curriculum change imperatives? The information presented here was obtained by way of interviews with education department officials, members of provincial training teams and teachers particularly from the Western Cape Province. Since the major curriculum changes were introduced in South Africa the INSET programmes presented by the education departments (national and provincial) seem to have followed a specific pattern. This basically involves taking teachers out of classrooms to central venues for a few days

during which department officials or practitioners sanctioned by the department of education (nationally and provincially) present programmes for teachers. Materials used as resources were prepared by national education department teams or by teams sanctioned by the national department of education. This essentially involved advocacy campaigns and information dissemination in the earlier periods of curriculum change, particularly INSET processes associated with the implementation of Curriculum 2005. Curriculum staff attached to the provincial education departments were tasked with facilitating INSET programmes which were developed nationally. In some cases teachers were also involved as facilitators and the process followed what was called a cascade model which involved training of small numbers of people who in turn trained others and in this way the message cascaded to increasing numbers of people.

More recently for the Revised National Curriculum (RNC) training, a more structured process has been followed. A national team of 16 selected people were tasked with developing materials and a programme deemed suitable for the INSET process for all intermediate phase teachers in the country, in isolation at a national level. They in turn trained provincial representatives making up core provincial teams which were selected by the provincial education departments. These teams included curriculum support staff (at various levels), people from Non governmental organisations and also staff from other ministries in some provinces. Most of the teams were however drawn from the provincial education departments' own ranks. The thinking behind this approach was that by keeping the process controlled and tightly organised very little of the training message would be lost and would therefore be presented "intact" with very little loss of detail between trainers and trainees. During the implementation process, the trainers need to / are required to present what was presented to them as faithfully as possible. According to the official of the department, "the in-service trainers therefore sing off the same music sheet and give 'our teachers' a single message". The training of provincial trainers lasts for a period of four weeks at national level. After this further training of more provincial officials then takes place in the provinces by trained provincial staff under the guidance of national core training team members. Provinces develop resource materials for use in their provincial INSET processes basing on the materials provided by the national department.

### **Implementation of INSET Processes**

What form does the in-service process take in practice? Teachers are required to attend a week-long session during a school holiday, normally mid-year holiday at a central venue designated by the local district office. At these venues personnel who form part of the provincial training team or who have been trained by the provincial or national core training teams preside over activities and facilitate the process. In the Western Cape Province a training manual (Western Cape Education Department 2004) has been developed for this process in accordance with national training imperatives. This manual has been structured as a developmental process for the five day period that teachers attend and participants are expected to attend for the entire week. At the workshops teachers are provided with the manual (main resource) and also with activities they are required to do during the training week and in the weeks after the week of in-service training. The manual includes activities related to learning area statements, curriculum principles, assessment standards, outcomes and learning programme development. At the end of the week teachers are given tasks they have to work on back at school, often in collaboration with surrounding schools. This often involves the development of learning programmes and some forms of planning which need to be available for scrutiny when officials visit the schools.

### **Responses to INSET Processes**

What are the views of some teachers subsequent to having attended the programmes? Comments regularly heard from teachers were "too much done in too short a time", "no prior consultation with us about what we need", "a very rigid process which does not allow discussion", "programme inflexible and time linked". Another comment heard often was, "many presenters do not have good inter-personal skills and make us feel and look stupid". One teacher said "they treat us like children who know nothing". It

was also mentioned by participants that the daily reflections were controlled, and that it appears as though facilitators expected specific feedback, mainly positive comments. Teachers indicated that critique was not well received and often viewed as a form of dissent. Responses were similar to earlier researches, where teachers also indicated that presenters seem to lack insights into the real reasons for change and also seem to have a limited understanding of the changes required. In these research projects teachers also commented on the poor inter-personal skills of the presenters and their views of teachers as people who were resistant to change and needed “training and upgrading”. Many participants indicated that the presenters did not appear confident about the change process. One teacher indicated, “they seemed to be following a recipe from the training manual and did not seem to understand the process of change and the details of curriculum change”. This was based on comments made by presenters which included “everything is in the books and you need to just learn the basics and implement”. It was also mentioned that the presenters seemed to have some familiarity with training manual, official documents and the curriculum policy pack containing learning area books. They were not however able to digress beyond these books and documents or answer queries which were beyond the scope of these materials, particularly the orientation guide developed for the province.

### **Personal Experience**

As a tertiary education practitioner, the author was part of a group that was given the same training programme as that offered to teachers during the week teachers attend and. This process was to provide teacher educators, publishers and non-governmental organisations involved with INSET insights into what teachers need to know in order to implement the RNCS. Part of the rationale was also to provide teacher educators with insights into the training required by teachers so that they might adjust the pre-service programmes accordingly. The programme was based on and driven by a training manual (WCED 2004). All the presenters used this book throughout the week and based all the activities on it. No other material was provided. The author experienced the process as one sided lecture type programme with some opportunities for group work, discussion and feedback but overall a very regulated and controlled process. The programme had a strong training and skills development focus with the training seemingly focused towards developing of learning programmes as the main goal to be reached by the end of the week. Questions from participants were met with answers that pointed them to particular pages in the training manual. The author’s overall impression was that the programme was closely linked to a training manual, strongly skills based and developed as a short, intense training process that was aimed at providing a basic introduction to the rationale behind the national curriculum statement, background to learning areas and geared towards providing a strategy for learning programme development. The programme was highly structured and followed the training manual to the letter. There was very little time for discussion and presenters often mentioned that time was a constraining factor. It was clearly indicated by the presenters that discussion about the curriculum and possible flaws and shortcomings would not be allowed as this was not part of the training process. The officials called themselves messengers and indicated that they had neither developed the curriculum nor the training programme but were merely implementing what was developed by the province. The author’s experience seemed to confirm what teachers had indicated in the interviews and discussion, mainly that the process was tightly controlled and inflexible, presenters were not keen to enter into discussions and that the process was intense, one-sided and focused on the development of particular skills, learning programme development in particular.

### **DISCUSSION**

The reported experiences of teachers and my own experience of the INSET provided by the education department are similar and seems to indicate a preference for a skills training type of programme (Ross, Rolheiser & Hogaboam-Gray 1998, p. 463). They describe this as an approach where trainers help teachers upgrade their skills through study of theory, sequenced practice and other direct instructional

techniques. Little (1992) writes that enquiry into teachers' professional development reflects two quite different points of departure. A first, which is the path most frequently trod, involves teachers' progress in mastering the complexities of classroom practice. These are dominated by a concern for the implementation of specific pedagogical or curricular innovations. These programmes tend to be presented in unidirectional ways with participants being more passive than active. This seems to be the main thrust of the current INSET programmes teachers are being put through in South Africa according to teachers in the Western Cape and my own experiences. Teachers reported that they were not consulted about their needs and that they were largely taken through a structured process by dominant presenters. The strong emphasis on learning programme development and planning also indicates strong leanings towards skills training (Ross, Rolheiser & Hogaboam-Gray 1998). This is closely linked to the defect or deficit model described by Bagwandeem & Louw (1993, p. 69) who indicate that this model for INSET is characterised by the view of other educators that teachers need development because they lack the necessary skills to teach successfully. It assumes that something is wrong with the way teachers operate and that this needs to be corrected, the defects need to be repaired. According to Dadds (2001), the approach is prescriptive and reduces teachers' choice. She refers to this approach as the delivery model or empty vessel model as teachers are seen as empty vessels who make no contribution to the professional development process but are mere passive receivers. Courses are often developed in isolation and centrally providing "one size fits all" interventions that do not take varying contexts and needs into account. Another point mentioned by teachers as problematic. A second path according to Little (1992) draws attention to the organisational and occupational conditions that affect teachers' incentives and opportunities to learn. This body of research places professional development in the social organisation of teachers' work seeking the connection between the social organisation of teaching and the professional development of teachers. Such processes attend to the larger patterns of policies, practices and circumstances that affect teachers' professional obligations and opportunities as well as the broader issues that frame teaching and learning. Inquiries have also broadened to include curiosities about how teachers learn to teach how they mature intellectually and professionally and how they sustain engagement in their work over time. This general approach links to the growth model for INSET (Bagwandeem & Louw 1993) which aims to familiarise teachers with developments in the field of education. Jackson (1971, p.26) writes that the growth model is based on the assumption that: "...teaching is a complex and multifaceted activity about which there is more to know than can ever be known by any one person. From this point of view the motive for learning more about teaching is not to repair a personal inadequacy as a teacher but to seek greater fulfilment as a practitioner..." In this approach to PD INSET processes are seen as opportunities for continuous professional development rather than sessions during which skills are updated or new skills are learned. There is wider opportunities provided for growth and teachers are viewed as professionals who hold professional opinions about their work and issues related to their work. From the foregoing it is clear that the current programmes provided for teachers by the education department are skills focused and also in keeping with the assumptions underpinning a deficit model. Furthermore, the programmes seem to resonate with the viewpoint of Clark (1992, p. 75) "In some quarters, (professional development) implies a process done to teachers; that teachers need to be forced into developing; that teachers have deficits in knowledge and skill that can be fixed by training and that teachers are pretty much alike. He comments further that: "this is hardly an ideal set of conditions for adult learning, support and development." The experience broadly indicates that teachers are not deficient, passive or homogenous. Research on teacher thinking supports the position that teachers are more active than passive, more ready to learn than resistant, more wise and knowledgeable than deficient and more diverse and unique than they are homogenous. This flattering and optimistic picture is not true of all teachers in all situations though, but represents a viewpoint that seems to be missing from the current INSET and PD processes in South Africa.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In-service education of teachers in a period of large-scale education transformation is major logistical undertaking that no one doubts. But the question is whether the current approach being implemented for

INSET is the only and the best option? The accounts of teachers and my own personal experience of the current INSET process suggests many of the ideas presented by the authors as “good” INSET / PD programmes (Fullan 1991, 1993; Clark 1992; Veenman, Van Tulder & Voeten 1994 ) have not always been taken into account in the INSET process provided and facilitated by the education department. While much information is imparted during the programmes not much follow up support is / has been forthcoming. In addition very little is done by way of support for transfer of ideas presented during centralised INSET programmes to classroom practice. What this entails is that teachers are subjected to a training type process during which “new skills” that need to be implemented are emphasised. Ross et al. (1998, p. 463) indicate that the inadequacies of a skills training approach include that it is generally too short, designed by non teachers without regard for recipients needs and provide little conceptual grounding. They add that these sessions often address disembodied skills divorced from curricular context, give insufficient follow up support and ignore conditions under which teachers work. Sachs & Logan (1990, p. 479) indicate that if the training model as described above is continually favoured or becomes the only route to professional development then, instead of developing reflective practitioners who are able to understand, challenge and transform their practice, “in-service education in its current form encourages the development of teachers who see their world in terms of instrumental ends achievable through the recipes of ‘tried and true’ practices legitimated by unexamined experience or uncritically accepted research findings.” Hargreaves (1994, p. 5) writes that the involvement of teachers in educational change is vital to its success especially if the change is complex and is to affect many settings over long periods of time. It is extremely difficult to change everyday practice of teachers as much of teachers work can be described as routinised work rooted in cultural habits. It certainly appears as though much of this may be true for the South African context in general and some local contexts in particular. Literature on the topic of INSET discussed earlier indicates that teachers experience major problems with implementation of novel ideas and policies where there is a preference for narrow skills based processes of INSET. It is also well documented that PD / INSET programmes that occur over longer periods and which are followed by site based support might lead to more successful implementation of curriculum initiatives and changes by teachers, an aspect glaringly absent from current programmes. According to Hedges (1999, p. 114), much of the work done by teachers is based on complex rituals and is almost habitual. Changes that impact on the work done by teachers is therefore filtered through strong forces of habit and ritual that date to pre-service teacher education and that are rooted in the complexities of school settings and the broader society. The work done by teachers has a sense of purpose: there are things that teachers value and want to achieve through their teaching. There are also things they do not value and things they fear will not work. Teachers’ purposes motivate what teachers do. Sadly, reformers and change agents often overlook the purposes of teachers. They do not give teachers’ purposes a voice. They treat those purposes as if they are unimportant and do not exist. Ignoring or riding roughshod over teachers’ purposes, however, can produce resistance and resentment (Hargreaves & Fullan 1992, p.31). Many of the factors mentioned above are relevant to the South African context, in which socio-political factors have played an important role in the change process. In addition, the realities of schooling already impose pressures on teachers and these were seemingly ignored during policy developments. Thus, the assumptions underlying teachers’ participation in reform, the development of policies and the planning of INSET processes ought to be examined not only in the light of professional / personal factors, but also in the light of the ideological, political and social factors influencing educators and in the light of specific contexts in which teachers work. This is particularly important in the South African context, with its history of disparity and discrimination. Wood & Bennett (2000, p.1) note that, in an era of radical reform, there are potential tensions between changes that are imposed externally through government policy and changes in professional knowledge and practice that are generated by teachers. May be the answer to the question “why have our teachers still not changed”, is because the INSET processes have not and probably need to be changed.

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