

The Teacher as a Catalytic Agent in the Implementation of the Curriculum

Peter S Skosana¹, Reginald Botshabeng Monyai²

¹Gauteng Department of Education: Gauteng West District, Krugersdorp, South Africa

²Department of Educational Studies, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa

ABSTRACT: *The problem facing both the teacher and the learner today is that, contrary to what OBE tried to teach us, giving of instructions by teachers and memorization of facts by learners is still critical for effective learning to take place in the classroom. The problem is that many teachers struggle to interpret the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (also known as CAPS) in the process of developing their own lesson plans. With more resources compared to the time education was divided, today's teachers seem to fail to use the abundance of resources made available by the Department of Education. Teachers are not catalytic to use relevant resources like charts, newspapers or concrete objects to enhance teaching and learning in the classrooms. Teaching and learning in the classrooms is not made interesting and practical as prescribed by Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements. Learners are therefore, not prepared to be able to meaningfully memorize the facts for effective learning to take place.*

KEYWORDS: *Catalytic, agent, curriculum*

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper provides an orientation on the importance of a teacher in the process of transforming the lives of learners through education in the classrooms. Background information will be provided. That will be followed by the problem faced by learners, teachers and their parents in search for good education. The aim and objectives of the paper will be presented. The research method will briefly be outlined and then the definition of concepts will also be presented.

II. THE PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

This paper is based on a teacher being a catalyst in driving change in education. The quality of teaching and learning in the implementation of the NCS and CAPS is poor. It is argued that:

- The culture of teaching and learning is poor in township and farm schools;
- Learners who move to town schools and other communities are compromised because these schools only need them for purposes of increasing the teacher pupil ratio;
- There is no guarantee that learners achieve the assessment standards and the learning outcomes;
- Teachers do not have the required dedication and commitment to equip learners to their full potential because subject allocation is not per expertise and qualification.
- School management teams in most township schools do not ensure that a culture of learning and teaching takes place in their schools.
- Monitoring systems are not in place and it becomes difficult to implement the curriculum in catalytic way.
- HODs do not take responsibility to conduct class visits, monitor books, lesson plans and curriculum files.

III. THE AIM OF THE PAPER

The aim of the paper is to highlight the importance of a teacher as a catalyst in the process of driving curriculum change in the implementation of the national curriculum statement (NCS) and CAPS for all grades in the Gauteng province. The current debate is that without monitoring and supporting teachers in what they do in the classroom, it will be impossible to guarantee that learners are achieving the required learning outcomes and assessment standards. In most township schools district officials and heads of Department are not allowed to monitor and support teachers in the classrooms. There is therefore, a widening gap between what is happening in a township classroom and a town classroom in the same subject.

IV. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The objective of this paper is to determine the problems that lead to township teachers not being effective at schools, in order:

- To make a contribution towards the development of an education model that will promote and entrench the monitoring and support in the implementation of the NCS and CAPS;
- To ensure that township teachers become catalysts of the pastoral role of the teacher such as love, respect, humility, patience, etc.
- To stimulate debate and interest in order to ensure township teachers use teaching and learning activities in the classrooms to have greater impact on the lives of their learners.

Prior to 1994 education South Africa was racially divided into various education Departments that functioned independently of one another (National Department of Education 1997: 8). There was no common curriculum and education was unequal. Post 1994 the education system in South Africa had to be restructured and transformed. This was aimed at destroying the inequalities created by the former education departments (van Wyk & Mothata 1998 in Pretorius 1994: 1 – 12). This is a shift from a curriculum as a blueprint approach to a curriculum as a learning environment approach (Lubisi, Wedekind, Parker and Gultig 1997: 7 and Spady 1988; 46 (2): 4 – 8). Since the constitution of the Republic of South Africa emphasizes equality of all citizens before the law, the current single education system had to be established (Act No.108 of 1996 and Malan 1997 and Mothata 1998: 13 – 26).

Globally the provision of quality education and sustaining effective schools has become a challenge. While teachers' commitment to their work is constantly questioned by the public, teachers also complain about the crisis of resources and poor working environment (Davidoff and Lazarus 1997: 4). The problem is that without quality teaching and learning in all schools, equality of all citizens cannot be realized.

The old curriculum, which can also be called “input compelled schooling”, may have been designed when learners were still obedient and receptive of educators' instructions and may today work for only about twenty per cent of the learners in a learning environment (Fritz 1994: 79). Today's learners are no longer obedient and submissive in relation to taking instructions from teachers. In days of the OBE approach to teaching and learning in the South African schools, those who supported outcomes-based education argued that the teaching approach where teaching and learning took place through memorizing and mastering “obsolete or witless sections of the education code” frustrated both learners and educators (Fritz 1994: 79).

There can be no meaningful learning without some level of memorizing by the learners and instructions by teachers. Learning continues to take place through teachers driving the curriculum. The problem is that in most of our schools teachers seem to be ill-equipped and lack the ability and the passion to drive the curriculum through effective teaching, assessment processes and testing of their learners.

Teaching and learning practices in most classrooms need to change in a manner that will ensure teachers are able to instill confidence in the poor township and rural school learners and their parents. However, the researcher does not blame the teachers because there has also been little time given for the training of teachers both at national and provincial level. Training was compromised by given or allowing teacher the liberty to choose which subjects they wanted to attend at training. This liberty to choose subjects at training compromised training and led to teachers being ill equipped. Therefore, teachers lack the ability and passion to drive the implementation of the CAPS.

Poor teacher training and the implementation of the CAPS does not mean affect the quality of teaching and learning in township schools only but also the town schools. While there may be less compliance with the CAPS in the town schools, at least there is generally effective teaching taking place. In most classrooms, whether town or township school, the way teachers test and assess is not effective to prepare the learners in a way that they will not need additional support before the final assessments or examinations. Evans (1993: 19) asserts that real change in education depends on whether teachers will make the changes asked of, teacher by teacher in each classroom and school by school throughout the education system. In this case, there is no evidence that all teachers implement the CAPS successfully. When change is advocated it is not only the organogram that must change every five years. Changing the structure of the Department of Education and its organogram has to always have implications for teachers as well. Changes without implications for the teacher is no guarantee that at the end of curriculum and system changes, learner outcomes will improve.

Since OBE had a lot of loop holes, in CAPS educators are given a directive in terms of what to teach, what to assess and when to assess. There are also specifications in the types and length of texts teachers must teach to learners. (Department of Education 2012: 36 – 87 and Department of Education 2012: 94 – 97).

There is therefore no reason why in some township schools teachers should not teach because the CAPS also provide teachers with various tools to use when assessing learners. The National Policy on Assessment and the NPRR also give specifications on promotion and progression of learners (Department of Education 2012: 36 – 87). In the process of transforming education in South Africa, at least the introduction of the CAPS has brought in a balance on how teachers must teach and learners must learn. This is contrary to the so called education transformation in 1997 when national and provincial teams were trained so that the approach to teaching and learning could change from “input-compulsion” to outcomes-based (Jansen 1998: 28 (3): 321 – 331 and Kanpol 1995: 9 (4): 359 – 374). The introduction of OBE was, therefore, informed by the social constructivism theory, based on such writers as Vygostky who argued that a curriculum should be designed with emphasis on interaction between learner and learning. Teachers were therefore expected to create an environment where the culture of teaching and learning would allow the learners to learn by learning, reading, interaction and doing assessment activities on their own, with the teacher only acting as facilitator in the classroom. This approach to teaching and learning in the South African schools failed. It was neither understood by both learners and their teachers nor appreciated by the South African society. However, the key principles of the vision of the Gauteng Department of Education such as knowledge, skills and values remain outcomes-based education principles meant to equip learners.

While the writer agrees with constructivism, rooted as it is in the cognitive school of psychology and theories of Piaget, rejecting the notion that the learner is a blank slate and has to simply receive knowledge from the teacher in the classroom, the writer argues that learners who fail to complete the syllabus grade after grade, reach the end of the schooling system as “blank slates” because of teachers who fail to fulfill their roles in the classrooms. In support of the National Education Policy Act (NEPA) No. 27 of 1996 of the Department of Education, constructivist theorists see the role of the teacher as not only looking at the academic performance of learners but also their thinking, intellectual adaptation, interaction, problem solving skills, being responsible, behaviour and interaction with surrounding culture and social agents such as parents and peers. The researcher argues that very few teachers are skilled use the CAPS effectively in order to equip learners with the required skills.

The purpose of training teachers and officials both in the days of OBE and recently in the CAPS was for the teams to train district officials and the rest of the teachers in a phase in approach. The introduction and training of teachers in the CAPS seems to be one of the significant changes in education after the democratic elections of 1994 in South Africa. Changing the curriculum means setting a new vision and approach for education so that there could be a shift from focusing on the educator to the learner. The introduction of the CAPS also helped to address one of the most difficult aspects of OBE to implement is integration across the subjects and Brophy and Alleman (1991:66) had warned that excessive use of integration could cause confusion and undermine the attainment of outcomes. Monitoring and support provided by district officials to schools remains critical.

Monitoring and support by district officials as well as quality assurance officials can ensure that learners are equipped with the required skills, knowledge and values and qualifications. In the further education and training (FET) schools the National Department of Education (doe) introduced a national curriculum statement (NCS) in 2005. The NCS replaced the senior certificate with a national senior certificate. The implementation of the NCS started with grade 10 in 2006 (National Department of Education, 2005:1). The premise behind this change is to provide opportunities for lifelong learning and career paths for learners. Although in the CAPS learners should be equipped irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability, with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfillment, and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country, this is not always the case in the poor township schools.

While the abovementioned national curriculum statement and the CAPS were introduced to lay a solid foundation for lifelong learning and different career paths (Department of Education 2005: 1), in South Africa it is very common to hear about teachers who are demotivated and demoralized.

The problem facing the Department of Education with the introduction of the new CAPS is that currently in most township schools teachers are teaching and learners are learning but there is no effective teaching and learning in the classrooms. This leads the education Department having to introduce numerous intervention programmes to authenticate or support teaching provided by teachers. It seems impossible for teachers to equip learners to be ready for their assessments and examinations.

As a result of decades of unequal distribution of both human and material, the majority of schools are either still under-resourced or dilapidated. According to Davidoff and Lazarus (1997: 4) many schools are still overcrowded and without the required equipment and sporting facilities. Curriculum practices and offerings are not equitable and aligned with provincial and national strategy for curriculum and human development (Gauteng Institute for Educational Development 2005: 1).

The introduction of the national curriculum statement and the CAPS raises numerous problems. In most township schools teaching and learning is not happening as effective as envisaged by the policies of the Department of Education. There is a gap between the policies of the Department of Education such as CAPS policy documents, NPA and NPRR and what teachers are practicing in the classrooms. The national curriculum must develop learners to their full potential. There is no guarantee that schools are succeeding in developing learners to their full potential, hence township learners run away from some of their own black teachers in the townships to mainly white teachers in town schools. Even township teachers are not confident to trust their own colleagues with their own children in the township schools. The majority of township teachers try by all means to also take their own children to town schools where there are no regular time-offs, memorial services during teaching time, disengagements, late-coming, and teachers do not profligate with the time meant to teach learners. Some township teachers would rather be injurious with children of ordinary parents but ensure that their own children are dropped off on time in the town schools.

It is also debatable whether the democratic society teachers need training for every change to the teaching approach or the curriculum in order to make a meaningful contribution in the classroom? If the teaching profession is still a calling, then teachers who are committed and passionate about equipping the learners with required skills, values, knowledge and qualifications should be able to learn and apply teaching methods and approaches without having to go for training workshops each time there's adaptation to the curriculum. Unending training workshops for teachers could lead to excuses, time wasting and outcomes that could lead to the failure of the new education system. The education system still has a long way to go towards being fully independent from the support of intervention programmes. Are teachers of the new democratic system in South Africa on their own, capable of producing learners that will attain the skills, values, knowledge, qualifications required the country and the world of work? (Green 2001:129 – 140).

For CAPS and its curriculum structures to be successfully implemented, all relevant stakeholders in education must be committed to making our schools successful. Marris (1975: 121, in Fullan and Stiegelbauer 1991: 31) contends that innovation and change in the education system cannot be assimilated by teachers if they do not share the meaning of such innovation and change. The challenges facing curriculum transformation have compelled the national minister of Education to change and reorganize the organogram so that education district and education officials can have more authority to deal with monitoring and support problems in fewer schools. However, there can be no guarantee that the reorganization of districts will yield the desired quality teaching and learner outcomes in the classrooms.

Currently principals are not able to deal with those teachers who are lazy, corrupt, bunk classes, hold illegal meetings during teaching time and do not teach effectively. For a number of years the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) has initiated intervention programmes to improve results in all grades. The assumption was that the professional and academic development of teachers was too slow. Teachers could not meet the required levels of teaching, learning and assessment. With additional subjects now having been added to the curriculum, the problem is likely to be exacerbated, as teachers attempt to catch up (Gauteng Institute for Educational Development {GIED}, 2005:1). The biggest challenge to the implementation of the curriculum by teachers in South Africa is Jansen and Christie's (1999: 173) contention that "there is not a shred of evidence to suggest that altering the curriculum leads to changes in national economics". This was seen with the introduction of OBE critical outcomes that could not guarantee that poverty and unemployment could either be halved by 2014, as was envisaged by the South African government.

Globally the type and quality of Education systems affect people's chances and access to opportunities in life. To this end, as curriculum is strengthened in the country, the majority of teachers in the South African context are still battling with the conceptualization and the logic of the introduction of the CAPS, as they had not understood the abandoned outcomes-based education system. A clear understanding of our own paradigms in the process of implementing the NCS and CAPS is of utmost importance. CAPS was introduced in 2012 for foundation phase and grade 10 in FET. In 2013 it was introduced in grade 4-6 and grade 11 FET in 2014 implementation will be on grade 7-9 and 12.

The CAPS gives expression to the knowledge, skills and values in South African schools. It aims to ensure that even township children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives. In this regard, the curriculum promotes knowledge in local contexts, while being sensitive in global imperatives. The researcher argues that teachers are not well equipped to implement the CAPS and the NCS curriculum. For this reason, teachers are not very confident and sure of what they are doing with the CAPS and the NCS. The training sessions were short, very brief and in some cases optional. They also experience contextual factors like overcrowded classrooms and infrastructure challenges. There are also problems of township parents, in particular, who do not participate in the education of their children. Learners who are from poverty stricken areas are likely to remain poor without parental support. Child headed families also worsen the situation.

So far, the teacher as a catalyst in driving the implementation of the CAPS and the curriculum in general in the lower grades still shows that “schools are struggling with teaching and learning matters”. As a result of teachers not being effective and efficient in the performance of their roles, learners are not properly prepared as they move from one grade to another (Dlugosh, I, Walter, J Anderson, T & Simmons, S. 1995: 178 – 283). Many teachers complained about the rapid introduction of NCS policies over a relatively short space of time and therefore felt confused and overwhelmed. With the introduction of CAPS the situation may be worse (Davidoff and Lazarus 1999: 4). Teachers will not be creative, everything is given. The teaching plan, program of assessment, there is no prescribed lesson plan; educators will use teaching plans as lesson plans instead of drafting their own lesson plans.

V. THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

As stated at above, many teachers are struggling with teaching and learning matters in the NCS and CAPS. For teachers to be effective, the Department of Education, principals and school governing bodies must cooperate in order to create an enabling environment for educators and learners and hold teachers accountable for the performance of the learners. If parents play their part in assisting with the creation of an enabling environment, that will encourage teachers to be catalytic agents in driving the provision of the required quality education both inside and outside the classrooms (Davidoff and Lazarus 2002: xv). Teachers must be catalytic agents in driving the implementation of the curriculum. Teachers must make the schools to be effective because the hope of the communities is rooted in the schools. Parents expect the newly introduced CAPS to strengthen the national curriculum statement to effectively develop the learners to their full potential in all aspects of life (Spady 1977: 6 (2): 9 – 15). The problem facing the teacher as a catalytic agent to drive the implementation of the curriculum is that, since the collapse of former apartheid education Departments into a single education system, the curriculum has been changed too many times.

Many teachers still need to be supported in the implementation of the NCS and CAPS so that they can be effective catalytic agents in using the curriculum to equip learners with the required skills, knowledge, values and qualifications. What this will necessitate is that many teachers from all grades will have to be skilled in the new CAPS methodology. Teachers must attend workshops; the SMTs must ensure that teaching and learning takes place through proper monitoring systems and IQMS processes. District officials must also do school visits and monitor educators.

Apartheid South Africa left a legacy that made communities to believe that town schools and their teachers are better equipped to impart knowledge to the learners. This point has not changed and is succinctly explained by the guideline document for volume 1-5, (September 2004: iii), that in some schools teachers have in the past taught learners “obsolete teaching practices and learning theories”. Although this is not the teachers’ fault, the problem of teaching wrong things still continues in some township schools and the researcher feels the teaching profession is faced with a problem because if teachers, as people who are expected to make the education system successful, are not monitored and supported, skilled enough, hold memorial services during teaching time, tweet in class, bunk classes, etc. There can be no effective teaching and learning in the classrooms. The lives of the majority of poor township learners will not improve like those of their counterparts in town schools (Willis, S. & Kissane, B. 1997).

VI. WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO AS CATALYTIC AGENTS OF CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

According to the Gauteng News (January 2005:4 and Spady 1977: 6 (2): 9 – 15), there's a need for teachers to assist and be involved in 'building quality education for all in order to produce learners readily prepared to meet the skills requirements of the country'. The challenge is that without practically proper in-service training, teachers cannot be effective catalysts performing teacher roles in the national curriculum statement and CAPS. Inequalities of the past are likely to continue to be reproduced by some township, rural and town schools. According to Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991: 231) it is not only a catalytic teacher agent that is crucial in the transformation and implementation of the curriculum but also parental involvement up to the level of the classroom.

While the education system in South Africa has continued to be transformed since 1994, the general goals that were formulated for education in this country will not be achieved if teachers are not catalytic agents in ensuring that they become skilled in the performance of their roles in teaching subjects in the national curriculum statement and CAPS (Pithouse, K. 2000: 19 (1): 154 – 158). To this end, Smit (2001: 68) argues that policy makers make policies and expect teachers to be catalytic agents that can change themselves and what they do. The researcher argues that for real change to take place in the classrooms teachers, especially in the townships, must be catalytic in doing their work and parents must prioritize participating fully in the processes of the education of their children.

The problem is that the unwillingness to be monitored and supported in the classroom can lead to the failure of monitoring and support for the implementation of the national curriculum statement and CAPS. This implies that the principles and goals of the education system are not understood and education in South Africa cannot be truly transformed. Without working in cooperation with district officials, teachers will be frustrated and find that they are not able to meet the requirements and principles of the new education system. Jansen (1999: 1) supports the need for teachers to be catalytic agents by contending that in South Africa there is a lack of conceptual connection between the implementation of the curriculum and the early integration and competency debates. This could lead to confusion and uncertainty among teachers as they attempt to implement the NCS or CAPS (OBA) (Jansen, J.D. 1998: 28 (3): 321 – 331 and Woolley, M. And Pigdon, K. 1997: 30 – 31).

VII. PREPARING AND EQUIPPING LEARNERS

Schools need to be monitored and supported to ensure that they prepare and equip learners with skills required by the country. As stated earlier in this paper, 'many teachers in some township schools are not as effective and efficient in the performance of their roles'. Many township learners are therefore not properly prepared as they move from one grade to another in the township schools. It therefore seems, particularly in some poor township schools; teachers have in the past taught learners "wrong things".

Although teaching obsolete things and learning theories is not the teachers' fault, the researcher argues that teachers are not living up to the challenge of displaying commitment in their performance of educator roles. There is therefore a knowledge gap in the education of the township learners who come through the education system from primary schools to secondary schools. (Janse van Rensburg, J. 1998: 27 – 42 and Malcolm, C. 1999: 77 – 113 in Jansen, J. & Christie, P).

VIII. THE SCHOOL AS A VEHICLE TO MEET KEY PRIORITIES

From the above it is clear that if effective teaching and learning takes place in all township schools, parents and township teachers will not have to spend too much money sending their children to town schools. Learners may further acquire skills which could enable them to be responsible and adopt new patterns of behaviour and lifestyle in the very township schools. The challenge is that without dedicated monitoring and support for township teachers,

- The key priorities of the Gauteng Department of Education and the National Department of Education will not be met; and
 - The aspirations of poor communities to be self-sufficient and have citizens who will be ready for the world of work cannot be realized.
- Based on the above, therefore, the critical questions to be asked in this paper are:
- Do teachers accept monitoring and support by district officials in the process of implementing the national curriculum statement and CAPS?

- Are district officials confident to monitor and support teachers in the implementation of the national curriculum statement and CAPS?
- Are parents actively involved in the education of their children in the township schools?

IX. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teachers need to master many new teaching competencies and strategies in order to be catalytic agents in the implementation of the CAPS and any curriculum effectively (Killen 2000: 85 Griffin & Smith (Eds). 1997). The researcher wonders if some teachers in the new democracy in South Africa can live up to Lebeloane's (1998: 19) contention that 'no specific paradigm and teaching method can be regarded exclusively ideal for teaching because a variety of teaching methods can be used simultaneously to teach, depending on the topic and context within which a topic is taught'. In most township schools, teachers seem to be teaching, learners are learning but assessment standards, learning outcomes and critical outcomes are not being attained because teachers are not catalysts in driving the curriculum in their classrooms. There is also no effective monitoring and support by district officials to ensure that teachers are teaching according to policy guidelines and circulars as stipulated by the policies of the Department of Education. The implication is that learners are not prepared to be ready for their assessments and examinations and therefore not being developed to their full potential like their counterparts in town schools.

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