

Trudie Steyn

Teachers' perceptions of continuing professional development programmes in South Africa: a qualitative study

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Effective professional development programmes help teachers to acquire the most recent knowledge of subjects and to use appropriate techniques to enhance student learning. The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development attempts to address the need for suitably qualified teachers in South Africa. This qualitative inquiry aims to explain staff's perceptions of the provision of continuing professional development programmes in the light of the mentioned policy. The following two main categories have emerged from the data analysis: the provision and logistics of effective professional development programmes.

Onderwysers se persepsies van voortgesette professionele ontwikkelingsprogramme in Suid-Afrika: 'n kwalitatiewe studie

Doeltreffende professionele ontwikkelingsprogramme help onderwysers om die mees resente vakkennis te verwerf en om geskikte tegnieke te gebruik wat leer aansienlik kan bevorder. Die Nasionale Beleidsraamwerk vir Onderwysersopleiding en -ontwikkeling poog om te voorsien in die behoefte aan toepaslik-opgeleide onderwysers in Suid-Afrika. Hierdie kwalitatiewe ondersoek is daarop gemik om personeel se persepsies van die voorsiening van voortgesette professionele ontwikkelingsprogramme in die lig van bogenoemde beleid te verduidelik. Die ontleding van data het die volgende twee hoofkategorieë aan die lig gebring: die voorsiening en die logistiek van professionele ontwikkelingsprogramme.

*Prof G M Steyn, Dept of Further Teacher Education, University of South Africa,
P O Box 392, Unisa 0003; E-mail: steyngm1@unisa.ac.za*



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Research on school effectiveness and improvement emphasises the necessity for the continuous growth of professionals' knowledge and skills (cf Desimone *et al* 2006: 178, Knight & Wiseman 2005: 387, Wanzare & Ward 2000: 1). Since

... teachers have the most direct, sustained contact with students, as well as considerable control over what is taught and the climate of learning, it is reasonably assumed that improving teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions is one of the most critical steps to improving student achievement (King & Newman 2001: 86).

This implies that even experienced teachers are required to renew their knowledge and skills throughout their teaching careers (Van Eekelen *et al* 2006: 408). To ensure that all teachers are appropriately equipped for improving learner performance it is necessary to find suitable professional development (PD) approaches (Anon 2001/2002: 17, Hirsh 2005: 38, Shaw 2003: 39).

Recently PD programmes have become more continuing and content-focused (Brandt 2003: 13, Desimone *et al* 2006: 183, Mundry 2005: 9). Mundry (2005: 9-12), in particular, outlines three shifts in belief regarding PD: the importance of teachers' experience and knowledge of student learning is increasingly being acknowledged; PD focuses on learning content as well as teaching methods, and PD aims to improve all learners' learning of challenging content to enable them to meet the required standards. However, mere attendance of PD programmes does not necessarily guarantee teachers' professional development (Van Eekelen *et al* 2006: 408). Some researchers believe that many PD programmes are ineffective and do not meet the set goals (Boyle *et al* 2005: 4, Mewborn & Huberty 2004: 4). Burke (1997: 299) blames ineffective PD programmes on incorrect research assumptions and even the complete absence of research.

To meet the growing challenges and needs in South Africa it has become necessary to transform education and to equip teachers appropriately to address challenges and needs. According to the President's Education Initiative Research Project, the "most critical challenge for teacher education in South Africa (is) the limited conceptual knowledge of many teachers" (RSA 2007: 4). Teachers' limited access to PD is also identified in the *Report of the Ministerial Committee*

on *Rural Education* (2005) (RSA 2007: 5). Moreover, with a larger learner diversity and social inequalities, South Africa needs more skilled teachers to assist all learners in learning and operating on appropriate levels (RSA 2007: 4). The *National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development* aims to meet the need for appropriately qualified teachers in South Africa (RSA 2007: 5). It focuses on two complementary subsystems, namely Initial Professional Education of Teachers, and Continuing Professional Development for Teachers (RSA 2007: 2). This article focuses on Continuing Professional Development for Teachers (CPDT).

The ultimate aim of CPDT is to enable learners to “learn well and equip themselves for further learning and for satisfying lives as productive citizens, for the benefit of their families, their communities and our nation” (RSA 2007: 25). All teachers registered with the South African Council for Educators (SACE) must earn PD points by identifying approved professional development activities that meet their development needs (RSA 2007: 20). The Policy Framework identifies four types of CPDT activities: school-driven activities; employer-driven activities; qualification-driven activities, and activities offered by approved organisations (RSA 2007: 17). A distinction is also drawn between compulsory and self-selected PD programmes. The former is paid for by the education authority involved, while teachers may receive bursaries for self-selected PD programmes (RSA 2007:3).

The CPDT system endeavours to:

- contribute towards improving teachers’ professional skills to enable them to execute their essential and demanding tasks effectively;
- improve teachers’ professional competence and performance continually;
- enable and empower teachers by improving their professional confidence, learning area or subject knowledge and skills, and classroom management skills;
- improve the professional status of teachers, and
- assist teachers in identifying suitable PD programmes that may contribute towards their professional growth (RSA 2007: 1).

Research reveals valuable contributions towards the understanding of teachers’ PD. However, much stills remains vague and incom-

plete. In light of the above, the following research question is posed: What are staff's perceptions of the requirements of effective professional development programmes?

Although the goals which the Department of Education (DoE) wishes to achieve by means of the Policy Framework are noble, the effectiveness of PD programmes will depend on whether such programmes succeed in meeting the expectations of staff in schools.

1. An overview of professional development for teachers

Recent research on PD has shed light on effective PD programmes that improve teachers' knowledge and skills, develop their teaching practice, and increase learners' performance (Desimone *et al* 2006: 182, Wanzare & Ward 2000: 2). In support of this, Hirsh's (2005: 43) study on effective PD identifies three significant qualities of PD learning: a profound knowledge of specific subject content is a key element of effective PD; teachers' individual beliefs play a significant role in the development process (the most effective PD programmes succeed when they change teachers at the level of belief), and a detailed plan for introducing new content and practices, and facilitation of follow-up action is required.

The traditional approaches to PD include workshops, seminars and conferences that adopt a technical and simplistic view of teaching in the belief that teachers' knowledge and skills can be improved by using experts from outside schools (Boyle *et al* 2005: 4, Lee 2005: 40). These programmes have not proved to be very effective since they do not succeed in improving teachers' subject knowledge or pedagogical skills sufficiently (Mewborn & Huberty 2004: 4). This explains why Mundry (2005: 14) and Desimone *et al* (2006: 209) suggest that ineffective PD programmes that do not lead to the improvement of teaching and learning should be abandoned.

More recently, longer-term PD programmes have been designed to support teachers by means of direct practical experience in order to improve student learning (Lee 2005: 39, Boyle *et al* 2005: 22, Browell 2000: 2). Where PD is designed for teachers of the same school, department

or grade, teachers have opportunities to discuss concepts and skills, observe colleagues, share practices and integrate what they have learnt (Boyle *et al* 2005: 22, Lee 2005: 40). This is supported by Mewborn & Huberty's study (2004), which identifies three main criteria for effective PD: PD programmes should be designed for teachers who teach particular grades; PD has to be sustained, contextualised and relevant to teachers' classroom practice, and PD programmes should be "site-based so that the staff developers understand their students, their curriculum, and their school structures" (Mewborn & Huberty 2004: 2). Principals who actively participated in the PD programmes have developed an appreciation for the teaching of the subject and for the value of classroom discourse (Mewborn & Huberty 2004: 4).

Teachers develop professionally when PD programmes recognise their needs (Lee 2005: 40). Fortunately CPDT also expects teachers "to take charge of their self-development by identifying the areas in which they need to grow professionally" (RSA 2007: 3). Needs-based PD is also supported by Desimone *et al* (2006: 206), who believe that principals could monitor and evaluate teachers to decide what kinds of PD programmes they need, and then encourage them to attend programmes that match their needs. However, to keep support for PD and a balance in teachers' development in equilibrium may be more difficult if decisions about PD are made from the top down. This may contravene the teachers' professionalism and autonomy (Desimone *et al* 2006: 206). If teachers have no or little choice in the selection of PD, the programmes may be less effective as a result of the top-down approach (Bernauer 2002: 91, Desimone *et al* 2006: 207, Somers & Sikorova 2002: 104, Lee 2005: 41). This view is supported by Lee's findings (2005: 46) that the success of the PD model is attributed to the fact that teachers have been "partners of the whole process – planning their own learning experience, implementing practices, providing feedback, and evaluating the programme".

Literature reveals a number of aspects that may play a crucial role in the effective implementation of PD. For the purpose of this article the following aspects have been identified in the literature: a focus on learning; effective leadership; feedback on teachers' development, and the provision of PD programmes.

1.1 Effective leadership

Effective leadership means that school managers are engaged in professional development and collect evidence that the PD of teachers has taken place (Dymoke & Harrison 2006: 80, Heaney 2004: 42, Mewborn & Huberty 2004: 6). Effective leadership involves a commitment to identifying the needs of teachers and appropriate training to meet these needs (Heaney 2004: 43, Lee 2005: 46). Principals also play a major role in changing the norms, values, beliefs and assumptions of teachers (Lam & Pang 2003: 84). However, their actions should also be consistent with the values they advocate, and they should be appropriate role models for teachers (Yu *et al* 2000: 371). An encouraging, supportive leadership style enables principals to provide individualised support and demonstrate respect for teachers and concern about their feelings and professional needs (Heaney 2004: 42, Lee 2005: 46, Sparks 2003: 43).

1.2 Focus on teachers' learning

PD programmes should meet the individual needs of teachers (Lee 2005: 46, Robinson & Carrington 2002: 240). Moreover, teachers prefer more practical programmes that meet their specific needs (Robinson & Carrington 2002: 239, Somers & Sikorova 2002: 108, Tyrell 2000: 15). Desimone *et al* (2006: 205) suggest "scaffolding" PD opportunities by offering programmes targeted at teachers with varying levels of content knowledge and skills.

1.3 The role of teachers

Teachers' commitment to learning refers to the psychological state in which they desire to learn and experiment (Van Eekelen *et al* 2006: 410). Their commitment to and positive attitude towards PD are crucial for the success of their professional growth (Blackmore 2000: 3, Ho-Ming & Ping-Yan 1999: 38, Pehkonen & Törner 1999: 262). Desimone *et al's* study (2006: 205) reveals that teachers with more expert content knowledge have more confidence and motivation to continue developing their knowledge and skills than teachers with less content knowledge.

1.4 Feedback on teachers' development

In the continuing approach to PD, research widely supports the importance of feedback to teachers on their development (Lam & Pang 2003: 87, Birman *et al* 2000: 29, King & Newman 2001: 87). Teachers need to know whether they are making progress and that their professional learning has a positive impact on learners' performance.

1.5 Provision of effective PD programmes

Progressive types of PD programmes have more content, and focus on pedagogical skills, active learning and coherence (Lee 2005: 39). The benefit of such PD programmes is that teachers can combine the programme content and their classroom practice over an extended period of time. The core features of PD programmes include the following:

- Content focus
Programmes must be contextualised for the school and must extend teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge and skills relating to a particular topic (Guskey 2002: 50, Birman *et al* 2000: 29).
- The duration of PD
The duration influences the depth of teacher change (Lee 2005: 39). Unfortunately, the main model for teachers is still one-shot programmes which often do not emphasise subject content or pedagogical skills (Desimone *et al* 2006: 183, Mewborn & Huberty 2004: 59).
- Time
Quick fixes may not produce the desired results because teachers need blocks of time without responsibilities for optimal learning to take place (Blackmore 2000: 4, Professional staff development: a key to school improvement 1999: 388). All staff members should have the opportunity to determine how much time they should spend on PD (Collinson 2001: 267).
- Evaluation
Programme evaluation forms a critical and integral part of PD, and should focus on the impact of a PD programme on teacher and learner outcomes (Knight & Wiseman 2005: 403, Vincent & Ross 2001: 37, Heaney 2004: 39).

- Presentation

Vincent & Ross (2001: 42), Moore (2000: 14), and Mewborn & Huberty (2004: 6) identify general guidelines that should be followed to ensure that PD programmes are effective: trainers should be experts and well prepared; learning outcomes should be clear to everybody; teachers' learning styles should be determined before the PD programme and then accommodated; different teaching aids should be used; participation should be encouraged, and continuous feedback should be provided.

2. Research design

A qualitative research design was deemed most appropriate for this study since it allowed the researcher to understand the views of staff on continuous PD of teachers. A phenomenological research design was implemented to understand participants' personal meaning on PD. Phenomenology, Husserl's response to the scientific method which he believed was inappropriate for the study of human thought and action, aims to study and describe the essence of the lived human experience (cf Johnson & Christenson 2000: 315, Mayan 2001: 8, Meadows 2003: 398, Rudestam & Newton 2001: 38). Phenomenologists "bracket" or put aside pre-conceived ideas before collecting data. As such interviews, diaries, journals and even poetry or art are used as data sources for insight into the human experience, although these may be complemented by participatory observation (Henning 2004: 35). The end product is a broad description of the meaning or essence of the phenomenon in question.

A purposive, convenient sample of four schools with maximum variance was selected: a primary school (School A, a Quintile 4 school); a primary school (School B, a Quintile 5 school); a combined school (School C, a Quintile 1 school), and a high school (School D, a Quintile 5 school) (Johnson & Christenson 2000: 175, McMillan & Schumacher 2006: 319, Patton 2002: 108). Quintile 1 and 2 schools are regarded as the poorest of schools, whereas Quintile 4 and 5 schools are viewed as "rich" schools (Rademeyer 2007: 5) (cf Table 1). Participants were purposively selected from each of the selected four schools with the

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assistance of the respective principals to ensure that information-rich participants who attended a number of PD programmes were included in the study (Marshall 1998: 60). Focus group interviews were used to facilitate the collection of a large amount of data simultaneously and to increase the quality and richness of the data (Daymon & Holloway 2002: 186). The focus groups consisted of ordinary teachers, heads of departments (HODs) and deputy principals. Each focus group session lasted approximately one hour. For the sake of clarity, a follow-up focus group interview was held with School A. Personal interviews were conducted with three principals (Schools A, B and D). The principal in School C requested that the deputy principal and one HOD be present at her interview. Her request was granted. All interviews were held at the individual participating schools.

Table 1: Types of schools

Type of school	Location of the school	Socio-economic status of the school
School A: A parallel-medium primary school with 627 learners (previously a Model C school)	Urban, within a middle-class community	52% of learners from previously disadvantaged groups A Quintile 4 school where many learners are exempted from school fees
School B: An Afrikaans-medium primary school with approximately 1 400 learners (previously a Model C school)	Urban, within a more affluent community that includes affluent and middle-class families	A Quintile 5 school where only 8% of learners are exempted from school fees
School C: A combined school (Grade R to 12) with 1 635 learners	Located in a peri-urban informal settlement	The majority of parents are unemployed A Quintile 1 school where all learners are exempted from school fees
School D: An English-medium high school with 670 learners (previously a Model C school)	Rural school that includes middle-class to affluent families	A Quintile 5 school Only 8% of families are exempted from school fees

The participants were briefed about the focus of the enquiry and they expressed their willingness to participate in the study. All participants gave their consent to the making of field notes and the recording (on audio tape) of the interviews (Johnson 2002: 111, Warren 2002: 91). As a verifying measure all notes were expanded by the researcher immediately after each interview had been conducted.

The following main question was put to the participants: What is your view of the continuous professional development of teachers in accordance with the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa? A natural flow of conversation then followed. The role of the interviewer was to direct and encourage discussion by asking reflective and probing questions concerning professional development. As some of the participants preferred to answer the questions in Afrikaans, their responses were translated into English with due regard for the idiom of the language. Field notes were taken as a supportive source of data.

The researcher segmented and inductively coded the data (transcribed interviews and field notes) obtained from the various interviews. In other words, codes and categories were generated directly from the data (Johnson & Christenson 2000: 432, Patton 2002: 463). This was done when reading the transcripts and field notes for the first time in order to identify the data in pure form. Significant comments were grouped into categories, and units of meaning were put into these major categories (Johnson & Christenson 2000: 463). A number of subcategories within each major category were then identified.

Guba's model for trustworthiness was used to ensure the validity and reliability of the research (Poggenpoel 1998: 351, Daymon & Holloway 2002: 93). The four strategies to ensure trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Poggenpoel 1998: 351). Trustworthiness was ensured by recording (on audio tape) interviews and transcribing them *verbatim* to ensure an accurate reflection of the participants' views, and by cross-verifying data provided by participants at different post levels. The field notes made after each interview were also checked to verify interview data.

3. Results and discussion

The following major categories and subcategories of findings emerged from the data analysis depicted in Figure 1: provision of effective professional development programmes (need for proper research; leadership: the secret of staff development; teachers should be “ignited”); logistics of professional development programmes (focus of PD programmes; the appropriate venues for PD programmes; the presenters of PD: “A person who has walked, felt and experienced”; the appropriate time for PD training; feedback on PD programmes).

3.1 Provision of effective professional development programmes

3.1.1 Need for thorough research as basis of policy

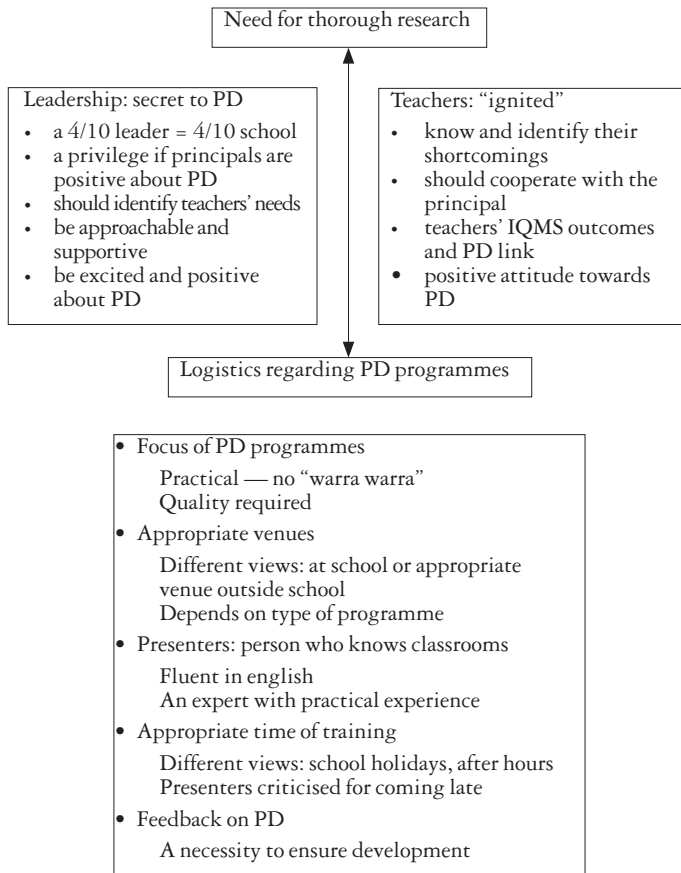
Participants agree that there is a lack of thorough basic research before policies are implemented. One teacher in School A states that the DoE probably does “a random selection study here and there, then put it on paper and we should execute it. It [a policy] should rather come from practice”. The only HOD in this school adds that information is merely “grabbed” without thorough research, and given to provinces to implement. She recommends that the Education Research Bureau be reinstated to assist schools in identifying and addressing teachers’ needs. The principal of School B believes that without an appropriate strategy the DoE “will waste money and will not get the desired results”.

As mentioned, many PD programmes are based on flawed research assumptions. They may even be developed without any prior research (Burke 1997: 299). In-depth research is a prerequisite of PD programmes. Research highlights the important role of school leadership and of teachers, and the requirements that should be met to ensure that PD programmes are effective.

3.1.2 Leadership: “The secret to staff development”

All participants agree that leadership plays a crucial role in the implementation of PD in schools as it brings the authorities responsible for PD provision “in touch with people”. The principal of School B has an interesting view of the principal’s role:

Figure 1: Staff's perceptions of the provision of continuing professional development programmes



If a leader is a four out of ten (4/10), you can do whatever you want, your whole organisation will only be a 4/10 [...] This is the secret for staff to develop. The enthusiasm is just so much greater if the leader is excited [...] If the principal is not excited, the school will not grow.

This is in line with the view of the principal of School C:

Leaders should be on a more superior level academically [...] When you have higher learning, you have confidence [...] you are motivated and it rubs off on the people.

Principals' positive view of teachers' development is also regarded as a privilege. A teacher at School B mentions that her husband, a teacher at another school, is

extremely frustrated to see how many courses we [she and her colleagues] can attend. His principal says that courses have no value [...] Not even circulars from the Department will convince him to send staff on training courses [...] Principals should therefore have a positive attitude towards training.

The participants feel that principals should assist in identifying teachers' needs. The principal of School D succinctly explains this:

A principal can never distance himself of development [...] It [development] should be done according to a professional development plan [...] If you are a principal you have to identify teachers' needs [...] but they [the teachers] should inform the principal of their needs.

A beginner teacher in School A mentions that principals should be aware of existing PD programmes that may support teachers. Teachers at School D go even further, because they expect their senior management team (SMT) to inform teachers whether workshops are worthwhile to ensure that teachers do not waste their time.

Principals should be appropriate role models for staff, and their actions should reflect the values of their leaders (Yu *et al* 2000: 371). Principals should create an orderly and nurturing environment that supports teachers and stimulates their efforts (Bernauer 2002: 90). Quality leadership fundamentally aims to make events meaningful and cultivate professional development and higher levels of commitment to organisational goals on the part of staff (Yu *et al* 2000: 370). Principals are also responsible for identifying staff's needs and for collecting evidence that teachers have developed professionally (Dymoke & Harrison 2006: 80, Heaney 2004: 42). However, programmes can only be effective if both management and teachers support them (Richardson 2003: 401).

3.1.3 Teachers should be ‘ignited’

Participants agree that teachers play an important role in their own development and in their identification of developmental needs. The principal of School D states:

If the teacher can't identify his or her own needs, what are they doing in education? The teacher must speak up [...] I need this or I need that. Help. It can be in anything: learner relationships, discipline, or mastering the content or technology [...] and we should work together.

Two schools also link PD and the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS). The deputy principal of School C explains:

The individuals assess themselves ... and from the peer evaluation we build the school development plan [...] We then identify which shortcomings we as a school can work on and which ones we can refer to the Department to run workshops on.

One HOD of School B has another view on PD and CPDT:

Teachers often identify their growth plans, but in three years' time they often have done nothing [...] The Department realises that the IQMS has worked up to a point, but that staff have not implemented their growth plans. The Department now wants to force teachers to develop.

A few participants supported the importance of teachers' positive attitude towards PD. School B's principal states:

It is all about attitude [...] If the teachers can have a positive attitude and can become excited with what they are doing, then things can change and have the correct impact.

This principal views a positive attitude as the main principle: “to ignite something, to set a fire within people”. The effect of a teacher's negative attitude is explained by a teacher of School A: “If I am not motivated, I'll do nothing [...] If there is no recognition, I will also not do it”.

The whole-hearted commitment of teachers to identify and address their developmental needs is crucial for the effectiveness of PD programmes (Blackmore 2003: 3 Desimone *et al* 2006: 179). A top-down approach that does not recognise teachers' professionalism may hinder the effectiveness of PD (Lee 2005: 41). This implies that teachers need to be “partners of the whole process” (Lee 2005: 46).

3.2 Logistics of professional development programmes

3.2.1 Focus of PD programmes

It is clear from all the interviews that the approach of PD programmes should be “subject-oriented”, “practical”, “hands-on”, “not theoretical”, “not an orientation” and not “short courses”. Participants from School C support the training model used by Matthew Goniwe of the School of Leadership and Governance. According to the deputy principal,

it is more like a hands-on training. This is what we do on a daily basis in the school [...] We do the training in smaller groups and they [trainers] do follow-ups and assessments and evaluations at the schools.

Both the principal and the deputy principal of School C propose in-service training rather than short courses: “Give people accredited activities, not only certificates of attendance [...] That qualification should also have some kind of a monetary remuneration”.

All participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the majority of official PD programmes whose scope and content, in particular, are a cause for concern. Since programmes are not clearly applicable to specific learning areas, teachers have to adapt the content to suit their own needs. Many participants also criticised the theoretical nature of official programmes: “These programmes are very fundamental and too theoretical with little practical value” (HOD from School C). An HOD from School A also blames district managers for poor programmes since they often do not understand what is going on at “ground level”.

Official programmes are a waste of time, and money is shared by all participants. Compulsory official programmes are often merely a repetition of what teachers already do and know. Participants are particularly critical of the repetition of information for different grades. The deputy principal of School B calls departmental programmes a “‘warra warra’ [...] with teachers marking books while attending such programmes”. A teacher at School D considers such programmes to be “just different sound tracks with the same content”. Participants from Schools A and B blame the overlapping of programmes on the poor collaboration and cooperation between the

district managers at district level. However, the HOD of School D defends the repetition of programmes, because teachers' poor attendance of programmes compels the DoE to repeat workshops.

The principal of School B expresses the hope that officials responsible for PD programmes will change the standard and style of their programmes. In his more than 25 years in the teaching profession he has only attended one worthwhile official programme on invitation for people who have contributed to the upliftment of disadvantaged schools. This was a very expensive session; the presenter's fees amounting to R10 000 an hour. He states: "It would be far better if the DoE presents only one such a session than to offer 200 sessions that do not make you excited about the future". After attending this successful course, he felt motivated, positive and happy to be in the teaching profession. According to him, other PD sessions make him feel "morbid to be in education". Three participants express different views. A deputy principal of School B mentions that she recently attended an excellent course on bullying presented by a facilitator in Laudium. Two HODs at School D also mention successful official programmes they attended.

The deputy principal of School C compares the official programmes with those offered by Matthew Goniwe, a private provider:

Matthew Goniwe is totally different [...] It is more like a hands-on training [...] We do the training in smaller groups and they do follow-ups and assessments and evaluations at the schools. The Education Department should do the same. It should not be a top-down thing where they come and lecture. They don't even follow up, they don't even monitor whether we implement that which we have been taught.

There are many reasons why previous PD programmes seldom proved to be effective. Researchers support continuous development programmes that focus on pedagogically sound content knowledge and teaching skills (Brandt 2003: 13, Desimone *et al* 2006: 183, Mundry 2005: 9). Programmes also need to be contextualised for schools to meet their developmental needs (Birman *et al* 2000: 29, Guskey 2002: 50, Somers & Sikorova 2002: 111). Merely attending PD programmes to accumulate points will not necessarily guarantee professional learning by teachers (Van Eekelen *et al* 2006: 408).

3.2.2 Appropriate venues for PD programmes

There are different views on where PD should take place; even colleagues from the same school disagree about suitable venues. All participants in School A feel that programmes should be offered “within the school, because we know what our shortcomings are”. The staff of School D have a different view. One teacher explains: “It should not be at schools. The DoE relies too much on schools to make the necessary arrangements”. However, participants acknowledge that certain programmes, such as computer programmes, should be presented in fully equipped centres.

Participants criticised the venues where workshops are often presented. One deputy principal of School B states:

They [the Department] should not have such huge training sessions. We sit 300 in a huge hall [...] and there are six different languages. People cannot concentrate in such huge groups.

Participants from School C also prefer smaller groups. The principal of School B adds: “They [the presenters] should not go overboard. Often courses are presented at exotic places [...] It may be too jolly [...] The environment should be conducive to learning”.

Many participants regard individual schools as appropriate places for learning. This is in line with the Skills Development Act, 1998, which encourages employers “to use the workplace as an active learning environment” and “to provide employees with the opportunities to acquire new skills” (RSA 1998: 2). However, schools’ circumstances and their available resources differ and may not be suitable for effective training. Each specific training programme needs to select the most suitable venue as the “one size fits all” approach may be inappropriate and ineffective (Brandt 2003: 13, Desimone *et al* 2006: 183).

3.2.3 A PD presenter: “A person who has walked, has felt and has experienced”

Participants complain about poor programme presenters. A teacher from School B also criticise presenters who are not fluent in English and merely read the content of the programme: “I don’t want a sound track of the material” (teacher, School D). Participants also complain

about presenters' practical experience: "Those people were never in practice. They have no idea what is going on in classes" (deputy principal, School B). The principal of School C feels that presenters should have proven that they are specialists in an area. "Like Professor Moloji, she has been in the squatter camp [...] That kind of person has walked, has felt and has experienced". Participants also believe that official presenters do not understand the challenges faced by less privileged schools: "Good teachers in affluent schools with a lot of resources explain to other teachers what they do in their schools. They don't really know what is going on in other schools" (an HOD, School A). In this regard the HOD of School B states:

They [the presenters] are not specialists and cannot answer your questions [...] It [the presentation] was given to him at the last minute [...] You do not dare to ask a question or he would say 'I'll find out' or 'I don't have the answer [...]' They also become aggressive when you do ask questions.

Although the majority of participants criticise presenters who are "not experts, competent or specialists" in the different fields, they have varying views on appropriate presenters of programmes. The principal of School A prefers staff from tertiary institutions

who are knowledgeable, who are experts and who have done research to assist the school in cooperation with top management in the school. Universities should keep their ear on the ground [...] to hear what information should be conveyed and how it should be done.

The principal of School D supports this view to a certain extent: "A person from a nonperforming school can't tell you what to do at your school if there is no proven record of his or her achievements over many years". A deputy principal at School B even wants to see the CV of presenters and expects a presenter to be a "top achiever"; this is in line with the view of the principal of School B:

They [the Department] should invest in quality people with a proven record of success [...] It doesn't help to choose any Tom, Dick or Harry to study a topic that he doesn't have a passion for or in which he didn't have success before.

The HOD of School C supports this view: “That person just talks about his story, we don’t really learn something [...] I don’t want Johannes teaching Johannes”.

Research supports the necessity of expert and specialist programme presenters (Vincent & Ross 2001: 42, Moore 2000: 14, Mewborn & Huberty 2004: 6). Presenters with theoretical knowledge and skills as well as communication skills also need to have expertise based on practical experience. Teachers are professionals and deserve to be trained by experts; otherwise their training will not impact on their own practice.

3.2.4 The appropriate time for PD training

Although it is agreed that PD programmes should not be presented during school hours, participants’ views concerning suitable times for PD training differ. Participants from Schools A, B and D concur that programmes during school holidays and during school hours are not always feasible, although the staff from Schools B and D are willing to attend high-quality programmes during school holidays. Schools A and D prefer sessions after school, because schools cannot afford relief staff when teachers attend such programmes. Participants from School C do not think afternoon sessions are viable. The deputy principal explains: “Most of the workshops are conducted in the afternoon when most of us are tired”. It appears that the timing of PD training “is a big bone of contention”, according to a HOD of School D.

As far as training during school holidays is concerned, the principal of School C believes that teachers should be trained at in-service centres for the first five days during school holidays and “have contact sessions once a month, one Saturday a month, from nine to four”. Her views have been shaped by the Matthew Goniwe model. The staff of School D is also of the opinion that staff should be available for training during holidays, but that they should be given ample warning. This will ensure continuous development, which is another aspect mentioned by a few participants. In the words of the principal of School D: “Training must be done on a continual basis. It is of the utmost importance”.

A deputy principal of School B is irked by presenters who arrive late for their sessions: “The session should begin at one o’clock and they only arrive at three o’clock. Some don’t even come”. Participants complain that some presenters have been known to tell participants that they have completed the session but that “it is now only quarter past three and you need to stay till four. We should talk to one another. Really we are not children”.

Research indicates that teachers require time blocks without responsibilities for optimal learning to take place (Professional staff development: a key to school improvement 1999: 388). Since the needs of individuals and schools differ, it is important that teachers be given the opportunity to determine the appropriate time for PD in their school year (Collinson 2001: 267). Time cannot be treated as a linear, uniform concept since it may lead to a misdirected PD effort and meaningless teacher participation.

3.2.5 Feedback on PD programmes

All schools agree that there should be support and feedback once PD programmes have been attended, but there are different opinions regarding the way in which feedback should be given. With the exception of School C’s positive views of the Matthews Goniwe project, it is obvious that schools are not effectively supported or followed up after PD programmes have been presented. The reason for ineffective support is explained by an HOD in School A, who states that district leaders often do not attend such programmes, implying that they cannot offer the support teachers require. Other reasons mentioned include presenters’ inexperience, poor training and lack of practical knowledge.

Participants from School C feel that monitoring and evaluation should be done continuously at schools after staff members have attended workshops. A teacher in School A feels that she has been “left in the dark to experiment” on her own after attending PD programmes. The principal of School D supports this view: “I would love them to make contact with the school [...] What can you say to us to make it even better?” A teacher in School D holds a different view; he prefers to make contact with presenters or officials when he experiences problems.

Literature widely supports the importance of feedback to teachers on their development (Lam & Pang 2003: 87, Birman *et al* 2000: 29). Teachers need to know whether they are making progress and that their professional learning has a positive impact on learners' performance. If PD programmes do not allow for feedback, such programmes will most likely be futile (King & Newman 2001: 87, Richardson 2003: 401).

4. Conclusion

This study explored the views held by school managers and staff on teachers' professional development. Although the participants were supportive of PD, their perceptions showed the numerous challenges associated with implementing effective PD in practice. One of the great challenges of CPDT is to motivate teachers to become committed to their own development and learning. The punitive measure that "teachers who do not achieve a minimum number of PD points over two successive cycles of three years will be accountable to SACE for such failure" (RSA 2007: 20) may not have much effect on poorly performing teachers. Another challenge is to encourage a collaborative culture in schools under supportive leadership in order to improve the competence of teachers in South Africa. Unfortunately, many PD programmes focus on the development of individual teachers and ignore the importance of teacher collaboration and a more collegial culture in schools. This may have a negative impact on school improvement.

The findings of the study should be regarded as tentative. It is obvious that more extensive research over a longer period of time and in a wider range of settings in South Africa is required to test the findings of this study. Nevertheless, this study shows that new PD strategies may be required to equip teachers for a constantly changing context.

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