

*Elize du Plessis*

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# Insights from returning teachers' exposure to curriculum change and professional development

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The continuous professional development of teachers is vital for the well-being of any education system. This article reflects on the adoption and implementation of the National Curriculum Statement with its outcomes-based education approach by teachers who returned to teaching after having been out of the education system for a number of years. Systems theory was used as a theoretical framework for this research. The research was done in 2010, with follow-up interviews during 2012 to include the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. These teachers responded to 12 items in an open-ended questionnaire on issues related to the changing curriculum and professional development as part of the education system. The article suggests that the professional development of teachers (in particular those who have been out of the system for some years) needs to be improved in order to ensure that the new curriculum is adopted and does not remain merely a policy document that is inefficiently implemented in its entirety.

## Insigte vanaf terugkerende onderwysers se blootstelling aan kurrikulumverandering en professionele ontwikkeling

Voortdurende professionele ontwikkeling van onderwysers is noodsaaklik vir die welstand van enige opvoedkundige stelsel. In hierdie artikel word gereflekteer oor die aanvaarding en implementering van die Nasionale Kurrikulumverklaring, met sy uitkomsgebaseerde onderwysbenadering, deur onderwysers wat, nadat hulle vir 'n aantal jare uit die onderwysstelsel was, teruggekeer het om weer skool te hou. Die sisteemteoretiese benadering is as teoretiese raamwerk vir hierdie navorsing gebruik. Die navorsing is in 2010 gedoen, met opvolgonderhoude in 2012, wat voorsiening gemaak het vir die Kurrikulum en Asseseringsbeleid-benadering. Hierdie onderwysers het gerespondeer op 12 items in 'n oop vraelys, rakende kwessies oor kurrikulumverandering en professionele ontwikkeling as deel van die onderwysstelsel. Daar word aanbeveel dat professionele ontwikkeling van onderwysers (veral vir diene wat vir 'n aantal jare uit die stelsel was) verbeter behoort te word, ten einde te verseker dat die nuwe kurrikulum aanvaar word en nie slegs 'n beleidsdokument bly, wat nie effektief in sy geheel geïmplementeer word nie.

*Dr E C du Plessis, Curriculum and Instructional Studies, University of South Africa,  
P O Box 392, Pretoria 0003; E-mail: [dplesec@unisa.ac.za](mailto:dplesec@unisa.ac.za).*



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The role of the teacher changed a great deal in the years 1996 to 2006, and again since 2010, when the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, announced yet more changes (DoBE 2010). In terms of the teacher-oriented and content-based teaching approach prior to 1998, the teacher was regarded as the person who communicated information. The teacher's most important task was to convey certain information – usually from a textbook – to passive learners and to establish whether such learners were able to reproduce it, unchanged, in tests and examinations. What the educator (teacher) said and what was written in the textbook were seldom challenged. Because of its proven ineffectiveness, this traditional role of the teacher has long since served its purpose (Niemann & Monyai 2006: 1). As an outcomes-based teaching approach has been followed in South Africa since 1998, and since learners are expected to take responsibility for their own learning and to be independent, teachers currently face new roles and challenges (DoE 2000). Although Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) is “downplayed” in the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), it will remain the method of teaching. The CAPS is an adjustment to what teachers teach (curriculum) and not how they teach (teaching methods) (Pinnock 2011). This article focuses mainly on teachers who have been out of the teaching system for many years and who have returned to find new challenges and policies. According to Christie (2003: 173),

... it has become commonplace for members of the government to admit [to] themselves that South Africa has excellent policies but knows nothing about implementation.

The question is: Do these teachers receive any professional development, and if so, is it sufficient? In the following sections, curriculum change and challenges as well as professional development will be discussed. The way in which the curriculum was developed and how it has changed over the past 10 years will be emphasised. Although C2005, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and OBE are not new terminology, they are relevant for the returning teacher. These documents are used in this instance to indicate the degree of change that has taken place and the confusion that currently exists for the returning teacher.

If the returning teacher does not get proper professional development, what are the consequences? Are they able to adapt their traditional teaching methods and adopt the new confusing terminology, new roles and loads of paperwork? In such circumstances, would the paperwork conform to the new requirements while the new teaching approaches are still not being implemented? Do such teachers really implement the new revised curriculum? The data collected for this article will attempt to find answers to these questions.

Qualitative research was carried out by investigating the type of professional development teachers receive, using an open-ended questionnaire that was sent to teachers who had been out of the teaching system between 1994 and 2010 and who had recently returned to teach again. Follow-up interviews were held with some of the participants in 2012.

## 1. Theoretical framework

This research is predicated on a general systems theory approach. One of the biggest breakthroughs in how people understand and guide change in organisations is systems theory and systems thinking. In addition, context is a key concept within the general systems theory. The term “systems theory” originated from Viennese biologist Bertalanffy’s general systems theory. The system theory approach is a world view based on the discipline of system inquiry. In the most general sense, system means a configuration of parts connected and joined by a web of relationships (Cain 1999: 15).

A system is a group of interrelated, interdependent and interacting activities that form a coherent whole. If any of the parts or activities in the system seem weakened or misaligned, the system makes the necessary adjustments to achieve its goals more effectively. One of the dominant goals of a system is that it is driven by a survival motive and a felt need for stability, which ties in with the survival motive. A system is designed to seek self-maintenance. In this process of self-maintenance a system generates creative forces within itself that enable it to alter circumstances. The system cannot remain healthy if it precludes the possibility of change (Cain 1999: 15).

The focus is on the interactive processes of which the individual is a part. The relationship between organisations and their environments is recognised as the foremost source of complexity and interdependence.

Systems can be open or closed or partly both. According to Finlay (2011: 2-3), a closed system is self-contained and is capable of having a clear boundary with regard to input and output. There is no interaction with the environment.

On the other hand, open systems reflect the view that all organisations are unique because of the unique environments in which they function. Open systems are therefore interrelated with the environment and should be structured to accommodate unique problems and opportunities. Open systems take resources from the environment, process them in some way, and produce outputs. Healthy open systems constantly exchange feedback with their environments, analyse that feedback, adjust internal systems as needed to achieve the system's goals, and then transmit the necessary information back to the environment. The focus is on relationships and patterns of interaction between subsystems and their environments within the organisation. Relationships and reciprocal influences between the organisation and the environment outside its formal "boundary" are also important.

The school system is an open system with permeable boundaries and it functions in active equilibrium with the environment according to both internal and external inputs and outputs. Schools function within a larger context in which they exchange matter, power and information through formal and informal feedback processes. According to Finlay (2011: 1-7), the school is an open system that depends on its environment as well as on the interactions among its component parts or subsystems. The classroom and the function of teachers within the classroom is one of the most defining subsystems in the school system. The returning teacher as a subsystem is a useful point of focus for attending to system malfunctions.

The external environment includes a wide variety of needs and influences that can affect the school system, but that cannot directly control it. Such influences can be political, economic, ecological, societal and technological in nature.

Systems have several defining characteristics (Finlay 2011: 2-3):

- Every system has a purpose within a larger system. One example of this is that the purpose of re-education in a school is to generate new product ideas and features for the school system. In other words, if these new ideas and features are not implemented well, there is no purpose in changing the curriculum.
- All of a system's parts must be present for the system to carry out its purpose optimally. For example, if any of the components such as the people, equipment, and processes involved in the school is removed, the system can no longer function. This includes in-service training of teachers – in particular, the returning teacher.
- A system's parts must be arranged in a specific way for the system to carry out its purpose. For example, if the school implements a revised curriculum before a team of experts has planned and organised the content, the school will probably find it difficult to carry out its purpose.
- Systems change in response to feedback. The word “feedback” plays a central role in systems thinking. Feedback is information that returns to its original transmitter such that it influences that transmitter's subsequent actions. For example, all new changes in a school system have to be evaluated. Feedback that prompts changes to enhance success and to achieve set goals is important.
- Systems maintain their stability by making adjustments based on feedback. For example, adjustments supported by feedback need to be respected (Cain 1999: 15).
- Open systems are influenced by cultural values. Cultural values determine the importance of various issues, and curriculum changes are influenced by the values, attitudes and norms of a community.
- Economic conditions. Curriculum changes demand in-service training, which can be costly (*Encyclopedia of Business* 2011).<sup>1</sup> In the school, returning teachers have to survive in a system that has undergone significant changes during their absence. Accordingly, they are being challenged by changed school systems when they return to the teaching profession.

1 <<http://referenceforbusiness.com/smal/Op-Qu/Organization-Theory.html>>

## 2. Conceptual framework

### 2.1 Curriculum change and challenges: a short history

Since 1994, South Africa has undergone a great deal of educational change, which was necessary because of the situation inherited by the first democratic government. Following the 1994 elections, one of the first tasks of the National Education and Training Forum was to begin a process to revise the national syllabi and to have certain subjects rationalised with the aim of laying the foundation for a single national core syllabus.

One of the most challenging aspects of this transformation was the adoption of an OBE approach that underpinned the introduction of the new curriculum, Curriculum 2005 (C2005). OBE is widely considered to have its roots in two educational approaches: the competency-based education movement and mastery of learning. Competency-based learning aims to prepare learners for success in fulfilling various life roles. William Spady, who first presented his framework in 1988, led the development of an OBE model that derives from competency-based learning. Mastery of learning promotes the notion that all learners can achieve the desired teaching outcomes if favourable learning conditions prevail, such as flexibility in the time provided and alternative ways of learning (Kramer 1999: 1-131). In March 1997, the then Minister of Education, Sibusiso Bengu, launched C2005 and announced a process whereby the new curriculum would be phased in from 1998 to 2005. Thus the OBE and the development of C2005 was adopted (Kramer 1999: 1-131).

In 2010, the curriculum was reconstructed once again and, according to the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, the following steps were taken (DoBE 2010: 2-7):

- a reduction in the number of projects for learners;
- a discontinuation of the need for portfolio files of learner assessment;
- a reduction in the number of teachers' files to a single one;
- the discontinuation of Common Tasks for Assessment (CTAs) for Grade 9 learners from January 2010;
- tests for Grades 3 and 6 to be set nationally, and

- the establishment of three committees to implement the new curriculum, namely:
  - the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements Ministerial Project Committee (the Subject Learning Area by Grade guidelines were known as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), to be implemented in a two-year time frame);
  - the Committee for the Reduction of Learning Areas in the Intermediate Phase in the General Education and Training (GET) band (the NCS with its eight learning areas for the Intermediate Phase would be repackaged into six learning programmes, known as subjects), and
  - the Learning and Teaching Support Materials Committee (this includes the distribution of learning and teaching support packs for Grade R teachers, as well as lesson plans in Literacy and Numeracy for Grades 1-6).

Could teachers who returned to teaching after many years of absence still fit into the system, bearing in mind all the new policy documents, terminology, new roles for educators, new lesson plans, learning areas and assessment standards? What type of continuous professional development workshops were arranged for them? Were they able to adopt the new curriculum or did they merely adapt to it? The research discussed in this article attempts to answer these questions.

## 2.2 Continuous professional development

The Gauteng Department of Education (DoE) has taken on the responsibility for presenting continuous professional development workshops to assist teachers in the GET band to upgrade their skills. However, the changes have been so far-reaching that it has been impossible to train all teachers adequately by means of the regular support services of the education department (Lessing & De Witt 2007: 53-4). Consequently, the DoE decided to contract teacher training institutions to assist with continuous professional development. This is an indication that the DoE does not have all the systems in place that are needed to provide this continuous training for all teachers. Teachers were not trained in the previous curriculum and in September 2010 yet another policy, namely CAPS, was introduced

(DoBE 2010). According to Coetzee (2012), Grade 3 teachers already missed out on CAPS training during 2011. CAPS was meant to be implemented in the foundation phase (Grades R-3) in 2012.

Coetzee (2012) agrees that one of the areas where teachers experience the most problems is assessment. Conflicting information regarding the assessment policy does no favours for the education system. For example, in 2008, the Director-General of Education sent a circular to all schools to introduce revised progression and promotion requirements, which were to be implemented in 2010. However, the *Report of the Ministerial Task Team on the Review of the Implementation of the NCS* advised that there should be further changes to the progression requirements in order to strengthen assessment. In the light of this, the above circular has been withdrawn. All schools must therefore note the following:

- The changes that were introduced to schools in the Circular of 2008 will not be implemented.
- Until further notice, all schools will use the existing assessment policy in GET and the provisions for assessment in the *National Policy on the Protocol for Assessment: Reporting and Recording*. This arrangement will continue until the CAPS have been developed and implemented in schools (DoBE 2010: 9).

Since the distribution of *Curriculum News 2010* in December 2009/January 2010, officials in the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) have received many questions and comments regarding the changes that were introduced from the beginning of 2010. Two of these questions are highlighted for the purpose of this article (DoBE 2010: 10):

Question: My school has not received a copy of the Foundations for Learning and Teaching Pack that includes lesson plans for literacy, numeracy and life skills, learners' workbooks and resource books, as well as posters and story books for the Foundation Phase. How does my school get copies?

Answer: The Learning and Teaching Pack was for Grade R in the Foundation Phase. At the moment we do not have any additional packs.

Question: Are there any clear guidelines for teachers on how to plan and manage school projects?

Answer: The requirements for school projects will vary from subject to subject and teacher to teacher. It is best for teachers to



learn from and share information with one another in a school or cluster and teacher unions and/or associations on projects.

Conflicting information and inadequate material and guidelines on the part of the DoE are an indication that not all systems are in place, including continuous professional development. For the returning teacher, this might prove to be an even bigger problem.

It is widely accepted that the initial professional education of teachers is only the foundation of their professional education (Teacher Education 2010: 3).<sup>2</sup> The development of professional practices is a continuing process that lasts for the duration of a committed teacher's career. Continuous professional development is the process whereby teachers (like other professionals) reflect on their competences, keep them up to date and develop them further (Teacher Education 2010: 3).

According to Smith & Gillespie (2007: 216-8), professional development can be effective if it is designed to be of longer duration – longer term professional development allows teachers more time to learn about their own practice, especially if it includes follow-up training, focuses on subject matter knowledge, and includes a strong emphasis on analysis and reflection, rather than merely demonstrating techniques. It should also include a variety of teaching activities and should encourage teachers from the same workplace to participate together in teaching opportunities. It should also focus on quality and features of professional development, rather than on format or type of training.

Continuing professional teacher development is an essential component of a high-quality comprehensive teacher education system, as envisaged in the Minister of Education's *National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development* (DoE 2008: 4). A continuing professional teacher development system has six main purposes: to improve schooling and the quality of learner achievements; to coordinate professional development activities with a view to achieving sharper focus and effectiveness; to revitalise the teaching profession and foster commitment to the profession's seminal role in the development of our country; to contribute to the responsible autonomy and confidence of the teaching profession;

2 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teacher\\_education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teacher_education)>

to enable the profession to re-establish its professional standing and role in advancing the ideals of social justice, and to acknowledge the effective participation of teachers in professional development which is a priority for the education system and the teaching profession.

This system is managed and administered by the South African Council for Educators (SACE), supported by the DoE. It consists of professional development activities, endorsed by SACE, for which educators earn professional development points. Teachers are expected to earn a target of 150 points in each successive rolling three-year cycle (DoE 2008: 5).

The SACE task team has already identified risks and problems regarding the implementation of the new continuing professional teacher development system (DoE 2008: 7-8). Some of the problems include:

- Funding to the system may not be sustained.
- The new professional development policy may not be communicated clearly or effectively to teachers in schools. An aggravating factor is that, in general, teachers' morale is low (Coetzee 2012).
- Backlogs in school infrastructure, resources and administrative support, as well as teachers' workloads may inhibit professional teacher development.
- Providers such as the DoE may not have the capacity to support teachers' developmental needs.
- The provincial DoEs may not have the capacity to support the system.

Against the background of the theoretical framework and the literature review, the following methodology was deemed suitable for investigating how returning teachers cope with the new curriculum and the type of professional development they receive.

### 3. Research strategy

This research was interpretive. The researcher employed a qualitative research approach using a phenomenological research design to obtain an understanding of the views of returning teachers regarding the new curriculum and professional development. According to McMillan

& Schumacher (2001: 393), a qualitative research approach extends the understanding of a phenomenon and contributes to educational practice, policymaking and social consciousness. Purposive sampling was used when teachers were identified during visits to schools in order to select teachers who had been out of the teaching system for several years. Selection of rural and urban schools as teaching sites ensured that both well-resourced and poorly resourced schools were included in the sample. It thus ensured that the selection of participants and school sites resulted in maximum variation. Ten teachers who had been out of the system for between four and sixteen years (1994-2010) were chosen for the research study. The ethical measures to which the researcher adhered included informed consent from the school principals and participants. Trustworthiness was established to guard against bias in the findings, for instance by comparing the responses received in order to demonstrate similarities. Confidentiality was also ensured. Leedy & Ormrod (2001: 197) mention that, when a questionnaire is used, participants can respond to questions with the assurance that their responses will be anonymous. They become more truthful than they would be in a personal interview. Data were gathered using 12 items in a qualitative open-ended questionnaire, with the intention of eliciting the teachers' views on returning to teaching after so many years, as well as on professional development. The questionnaire was structured as follows: the first section contained questions that determined views on the principles of OBE (for example, inclusivity and multicultural education), implementation of C2005, the NCS, and areas of concern, classroom practice and academic standards. The second section was intended to elicit general comments and recommendations from these teachers. In the next section, teachers had to respond to questions regarding professional development. Questions were asked about periods (duration and frequency), as well as usefulness and type of training. Teachers were again asked to make general comments and recommendations. Notes were made after the questionnaires had been completed and the data were analysed by manual coding for internal consistency (Haig 1995). Comparisons were drawn in order to arrive at similarities and contrasts.

## 4. Presentation and analysis of data

Teachers who completed the questionnaire were from different schools and different provinces. One teacher was from Atteridgeville (a township school); one from a farm school near Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal (a rural school); two from Mbombela in Mpumalanga (one private school and one dual-medium school), and the remainder of the teachers were from Gauteng (three dual-medium and three Afrikaans-medium schools).

### 4.1 Curriculum change

In response to the question "Do you think South Africa has successfully implemented C2005 with its OBE approach?", two teachers from rural schools indicated that they did not know how to implement OBE, owing to a lack of guidance from the DoE. One teacher stated that "excellent policies exist, but no implementation guidelines are available". Another wrote that "OBE has too much paper work and that implementation was poorly planned and over-hast[ily] introduced". This corresponds with one of the principles of systems theory, namely that, when new aspects are implemented, they should be planned and organised well in order to function in a proper system.

The following question was asked: "Do you think your school has adopted and implemented the NCS with its OBE approach as prescribed by the Department of Education?" Two teachers from urban schools indicated that "some teachers adapted OBE, but not adopted it!" It appears that some teachers did not want to change old habits and ways of doing things. They also indicated that "it is too much paper work; classes are too big to implement such an approach". Four teachers from different schools indicated that they had attended the NCS courses and had implemented the new curriculum, but they had made their own changes according to their own views. One teacher indicated "that there is a lack of guidance from the Department in terms of transformation measures relevant to farm schools". According to systems theory, systems change in response to feedback. Inadequate feedback was given on the practical implementation of the NCS. Policy documents should have been evaluated in order to prevent teachers from having to make their own

changes according to their own views. Participants were asked in which area of the NCS they experienced the most problems, for example the roles of the educator, lesson planning and phase planning. Various problem areas in the NCS were identified, such as maintaining a balance between management-related work and teaching, and the many roles that teachers have to fulfil in the classroom. Other areas in which problems were identified include lesson planning for specific learning areas, phase planning and types of assessment, such as continuous assessment. One teacher indicated “that it is very difficult to do phase planning (Grades 7, 8 and 9), because every primary school’s lesson plans differ”. It is difficult to do meso-planning with primary and secondary schools together. Another problem is that “lesson themes are not the same for different schools. If one moves from one school to another, you’ll have to start all over with lesson planning, even for the same grade”. Teachers complained that, in general, too much was expected of them. This indicates the importance of the interrelatedness of the environment and the claim that open systems should be structured to accommodate unique problems, as pointed out by the theoretical framework on which this project was based. One of the principles of OBE is expanded opportunities for all learners in education. Two teachers indicated that “there is no time to explain concepts to slow learners, they stay behind”. They also indicated that there were no facilities for these children. The private school in Mbombela had between 5 and fourteen learners in a classroom. According to the teacher, “they can accommodate all learners and give them equal opportunities according to their limitations”. The other school in Mbombela made provision for children with physical disabilities, as well as for learners with special educational needs. The school had wheelchair facilities and a computer laboratory that could accommodate 5 learners at a time. These children could do their typing and receive help with homework in the computer laboratory. One teacher stated that “they have a counsellor at school that supports these learners, but this service is expensive, as well as additional learning material needed, for example material with more pictures and other assessment strategies”.

The above relates to systems theory. Support services are a component of the education system and are needed to improve the quality and effectiveness of educational events (Van der Westhuizen

*et al* 2002: 11). Moreover, it is a partly open system. Support systems are placed in the system, although the output cannot be valued as these support systems are too expensive for those who need them. According to systems theory, systems change in response to feedback. The support services need to be evaluated, and feedback needs to be available in order to determine the value of the support services. The other teachers indicated that they had children with Down's syndrome in their schools, but the school was not able to offer them any additional assistance. One teacher from an urban school indicated that "in her previous school four Down's syndrome learners had been adopted successfully into the mainstream with remedial help".

All the teachers agreed that the academic standard had deteriorated since they last taught, for the following reasons: "It is difficult to test without formal tests"; "There is confusion about continuous assessment"; "Teachers have to develop their own learning material without guidelines or quality control"; "Handbooks [textbooks] are of poor quality and reading and writing skills are neglected"; "Learners are weaker readers and mathematical skills and language structures are lost due to the communicative approach", and "Learners are not all very eager to do tasks, especially in life orientation, which is a new field for them - learners are not enthusiastic". In response to the question "What support structures are in place to help and train teachers who were out of the system for some years?", teachers complained that there were not enough support structures, apart from the school principal, heads of department and cluster meetings. One teacher indicated that "the problem with the existing support structures of schools [is] that they are in most cases also from the traditional old system". This means that her principal or head of department still focused on content-based education and not on OBE. This shows that activities do not function interrelatedly and interdependently in a coherent whole and that they are often weak and misaligned. All the teachers agreed that OBE was not being implemented successfully, because of a lack of guidelines (for farm schools). If implementation plans were in place, they were simply not being followed. One teacher indicated that "OBE has successfully been implemented in privileged schools, but resources are not available for poorer schools, like learning material, computers, laboratories and internet use". According to systems theory, every system is unique. If any of the

parts or activities in the system seems weakened or misaligned, the system makes the necessary adjustments to achieve its goals more effectively. The external environment includes a wide variety of needs that can affect the school system, but that cannot directly control it. All subsystems must be intertwined in order to meet the needs and overcome the challenges in a system. In addition, teachers were of the opinion that there was a great deal of paperwork and information. They completed the paperwork according to the new format, but still taught as they used to teach before the implementation of OBE: "Some aspects of OBE do take place, but teachers choose what they want to use from OBE". Only one teacher indicated that "they have implemented the OBE approach successfully and it is working well".

Participants made the following general comments: "OBE needs extra activities and projects from learners that are expensive to do; it puts an extra financial burden on parents"; "Parents do many projects for their children and, in group work, all learners don't put in the same effort"; "OBE can be effective in 'privileged' schools, but not in rural areas, because it is expensive for teachers to develop their own material and for learners to do projects"; "Services that farm schools receive don't help in achieving transformation"; "The new curriculum is relevant and has positive learning areas, like entrepreneurial - and life skills, but language and numerical skills are falling behind"; "Classes are too big to implement an OBE approach"; "Administrative duties are extremely time-consuming and do not add value to the teaching situation in classrooms", and "Teachers choose what they want to use from OBE and do only that".

In general, participants were of the opinion that the following issues inhibited classroom practice:

- high learner-teacher ratio;
- low teacher morale;
- ill-discipline of learners;
- the inability to deal with learners who demonstrate barriers to learning;
- inadequately qualified teachers;
- a lack of in-service training;

- teachers and principals who are unfamiliar with the interpretation of the NCS policy with its OBE approach, and
- more time needed for professional development – should be part of the daily work life of educators.

## 4.2 Professional development

Participants were asked to describe the type of OBE in-service training they had attended since returning to the teaching profession (for example, how often, by whom, about what). Seven of the teachers in Mpumalanga and Gauteng had received formal OBE training through the DoE (between 2000 and 2002). Training had been given for different phases, once a year, for five days during the June/July school holidays. One school in Atteridgeville only received guidelines from the department, but no formal training. The teacher indicated that “these guidelines changed again before teachers could adapt to them”. One school in KwaZulu-Natal (a farm school near Pietermaritzburg) did not receive any formal training. According to this specific teacher, “they have major logistical problems and most rural schools ignored the launch of C2005 in their province”. One teacher indicated that “training was given by the Department of Education in 2000, 2001 and 2002 for the different phases in primary schools, but nothing after that” and, since she started to teach in 2003 again, she had not received any training in the interpretation and implementation of OBE. As pointed out by systems theory, every system has a purpose within a larger system. In-service training is part of a system, and should not be neglected. A general picture of continuous professional development shows that training does not take many forms. Currently, it includes primarily one-day workshops over a period of five or six Saturdays. Some participants commented that because workshops were presented over weekends, they spent too much time and effort compared with what they gained. Their expectations that they would be able to deal with OBE and support learners with learning difficulties in an inclusive classroom had not been met. Even with follow-up interviews in 2012, teachers complained about the CAPS training they had received. In their opinion, principals had not yet received training themselves, despite the fact that they must lead their teachers in schools. Some grades had



already missed out on training, for example Grade 3 teachers (Coetzee 2012). Teachers also complained that the new CAPS training was too short. The responses revealed a negative attitude towards most of the presentations, because the participants were of the opinion that they had not gained sufficient knowledge and skills for application in their classrooms or for addressing the problems they were experiencing. The findings indicate that teachers valued workshops positively and that they were important in terms of personal development, confidence and teaching support. They indicated a willingness to change their old teaching habits and methods, and agreed that change should contribute to the school's development. According to systems theory, systems maintain their stability by making adjustments based on feedback, and the feedback must be used in order to improve the environment. The findings prove that returning teachers respect the changes in the education system. However, they do need more support with regard to implementation of the new curriculum.

Teachers also indicated that they need continuous upgrading in all the teaching activities in which they engage as teachers. Individual teachers should be provided with common skills, and assisted in adapting to the changes, as they participate in planning at instructional level. Otherwise a new curriculum will have little worthwhile impact until teachers have had time to understand and assimilate it.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

On the topic of adopting or adapting to OBE, some participants were of the opinion that they lacked the necessary knowledge and skills to meet all the existing challenges. Returning teachers also mentioned that many changes had taken place since they had taught previously. However, they had no choice but to keep abreast of methods and trends in education. This article highlighted curriculum change and the premise that continuous professional development is necessary to empower the returning teacher. The questionnaire findings draw attention to the fact that professional development is a lifelong and continuous process in which teachers are expected to upgrade their knowledge, master new skills and change their practices, since advancement in their teaching career is essentially for the benefit of their learners and education reform. In addition, teachers and

their development must be viewed as an investment; hence, schools should not only apply appropriate professional development policies but also ensure the means of their execution by means of efficient management and leadership.

The message for policymakers is that teachers and, in this instance, the returning teachers, need considerably more access to professional development if they are to contribute to significant improvements in learner achievement. The research findings are unequivocal that professional development is more effective in changing teachers' practice when it is of longer duration, allows for the collective participation of teachers, and includes opportunities for follow-up activities that make a strong connection between what is learned and how to apply it in the teacher's context. This means that a wide range of offerings must be available, and such programmes should be accessible to teachers throughout their career.

One clear point which was highlighted by the participants is that the system must provide more opportunities for professional development for returning teachers, and that this should be one of the priorities to be addressed by the education system. Development should play a role in preparing teachers not merely to adopt new curricula, but also to adapt them.

The provincial DoEs should make single-session workshops the exception rather than the norm, and should increase the incidence of mentoring, study circles and inquiry projects. This may mean that teachers go to fewer sessions each year, but the sessions they do attend are of longer-term duration, and are more embedded in their actual teaching.

The presentation and analysis of the data indicate that returning teachers in historically disadvantaged schools are particularly in need of more training, guidelines, support, facilities and infrastructure in order to successfully implement the NCS with its OBE approach. Teachers in township schools and in schools in the rural areas, in particular, indicated that they had not received training, nor any guidelines for the development of new study material.

The research provides evidence of the need for professional development and guidelines for teachers, especially for those teachers who have been out of the system for some years. It highlights the

importance of making interpretation and implementation guidelines available for the NCS with its OBE approach. It emphasises the need for new, applicable study material and textbooks, and for more training in lesson planning for specific learning areas, assessment and whole-school planning. The research also stresses the consideration of smaller classes, the questioning of the academic standards and the evaluation of the amount of paperwork that teachers need to do. It further draws attention to the fact that a new policy should be precautionary and to the need for proper timing for professional development.

It is recommended that:

- school-based and cluster-based in-service programmes be more cost-effective;
- additional providers of training for teachers in particular settings, for example rural areas, be acquired;
- ongoing training and on-site follow-up supervision and feedback take place; computer-assisted instruction as a valuable learning technique for teachers in isolated settings, as well as distance education technologies as a method be considered; school districts formulate plans guaranteeing that individual teacher needs are met; and
- a countrywide and/or regional taskforce be formed to focus on identifying the time, resources and opportunities for this type of development, as well as on gaining the support of the public and policymakers for professional development.

More research should be done to develop a model for professional development, and all stakeholders should be involved in the process. Sufficient room should be allowed for support, interpretation, monitoring and assessment of any new curriculum.

It is concluded that teachers who taught previously can adapt to new challenges and changes as set out in the NCS (now CAPS), but not without the necessary professional development, guidelines and support structures. The voices of these returning teachers should be heard to improve their teaching. Without proper training, any new curriculum will remain a policy that is merely adapted and not adopted, and that will therefore never be fully implemented.

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