

Investigating Teachers' understandings of the principles and values of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS): A case Study of Two Township schools in Gauteng, Pretoria.

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Introduction and Background

- Since 1994 South African education and its structures have undergone major changes in particular the transformation and development of the National Curriculum.
- The basis for the transformation of the curriculum was provided in the Constitution of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996) the aims of which, as stated in the preamble, were to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on *democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights*, among other things.
- After a negotiated political settlement in South Africa, schools and teachers started to be seen as tools to be used to *promote national development*.

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Background (cont)

- a major paradigm shift aimed at transforming the South African Society and to give the young a sense of purpose, commonality and nationhood (ANC, 1994).
- teachers as interpreters and moderators of curriculum (Department of Education, 2002).
- realization of the principles of the Revised National Curriculum Statement, which include among others, social justice, a healthy environment, human rights, inclusivity, the development of a high level of skills and knowledge for all, integrated learning, etc.
- challenge for teachers: the understanding and the realization of the goals and the fundamental values of *democracy, ubuntu (human dignity), equality, social justice and equity, accountability, respect, the rule of law, non-racism and non-sexism, reconciliation and peace an open society* as identified by the Department of Education in the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (Revised National Curriculum Statement, 2002).

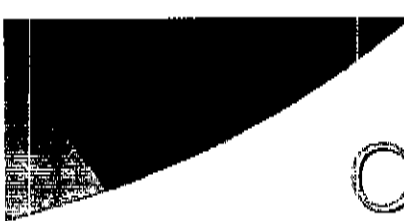
Objectives of the study

- To investigate teachers' understandings of the principles and fundamental values of the RNCS;
- To investigate the role that teachers are expected to play in as far as trying to redress the inequalities of the past and
- To examine and highlight the weaknesses and strengths of Curriculum development and implementation that have impacted on teaching and learning.
- **Key questions that the study sought to address:**
 - To what extent do teachers understand the curriculum principles and fundamental values of the RNCS?
 - What do teachers see as their roles in the new curriculum?
 - What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the value/worth of the new curriculum?

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Objectives of the study (cont)

- Underlying the above questions my intentions were to:
 - discover teachers' personal knowledge and understandings of the fundamental values and the principles of the RNCS;
 - discover teachers' personal understandings, views, experiences, assumptions and their beliefs that inform their meaning-making of what curriculum change is;
 - discover the role that teachers understand they have to play in relation to practice and the requisite knowledge that must inform their practice rather than the concepts they will use to explain particular educational phenomenon and
 - to ascertain teachers' perceptions with regard to the value of the new curriculum for South African learners.

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Theoretical Framework

- My interest was in describing teachers' views, thinking and experiences about curriculum values and principles in whatever form they would be represented
- Study was informed by selected writings of a number of authors and especially that of Michael Fullan-one of the world's leading authorities on change in education
- Humanistic theory provided a basis for understanding teachers' views and thinking, thus the study was ethnographic in nature
- A critical approach was used by starting with a problem and/or need as defined by teachers and proceeded in a collaborative manner to try solving the problem.

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Paradigm Shift - (From Apartheid Education to Outcome-Based Education)

▪ **Multiple Government Policies**

- **1994** - A policy Framework for education and training

(January, ANC, Draft: for Discussion)

Implementation Plan for Education and Training

(May, CEPD, Working Document)

- **1995** – White Paper 9/22/2009 on Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa: *(March, Department of Education)*

This was a First step to develop a New System. It emphasized the need for major changes in Education and training in South Africa in order to normalize and transform teaching and learning in South Africa and also promoted, among other things, a vision of ...democratic and internationally competitive country with literate, creative and critical citizens leading productive , self-fulfilled lives in a country free of violence, discrimination and prejudice (RNCS, 2002).

South African Qualifications Authority Act (No. 58 of 1995)

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Paradigm Shift - (From Apartheid Education to Outcome-Based Education - cont)

- **1996** - Lifelong Learning through a National Qualifications Framework
(February, Ministry of Education, Discussion Document)
This was a first major curriculum statement of a democratic South Africa that was informed by principles drawn from the White Paper on Education and Training.
National Education Policy Act (No. 27 of 1996)
South African Schools Act
Curriculum Framework for General and Further Education and Training:
(July, Department of Education, Discussion Document)
- **1997** – Draft Statement on the national curriculum for Grades 1 – 9: *(June, Ministry of Education)*
- **1998** – Education White Paper 4: A Programme for the Transformation of Further Education and Training: *(August, Department of Education)*
- Implementation Plan for Tirisano January 2000 – 2004: *(July, Department of Education)*



Context and Research Approach

- Participants in the study were secondary teachers from all learning areas.
- Teachers interviewed were 51% Male and 49% Female between 25 and 55 years of age and with 3 to 30 years of teaching experience in Township schools
- Unstructured interview as a research tool was preferred and used
- Document analysis of SA National Curriculum was also used to complement information gathered during interviews
- Classroom observations served to validate the information gathered from the interviews

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Findings

- 90% of teachers admitted that they had not started implementing the new curriculum by year 2007;
- This was also clear from classroom observations;
- Remaining 10% of teachers when asked what exactly they were doing in their classes, could not give any convincing responses that they were implementing the new curriculum though they claimed to be doing so;
- Most teachers were unenthusiastic about RNCS and hardly understood the vision of the RNCS;
- Lack of understanding curriculum reforms- a hindrance to positive change and implementation
- Teachers expressed frustration with confusing instructions, language associated with OBE is too complex, confusing and at times contradictory

"I am only beginning to understand Specific Outcomes, Performance Indicators and Assessment criteria after more than five years. It is a very inaccessible language" (Grade 8 Teacher, 2008)

- Policy documents left most of the teachers feeling that they were unable to understand what they were expected to do;



Findings (cont)

- Teachers felt that they had not been adequately consulted;
- Many teachers had not been properly trained to equip them well for OBE;
- Those that were trained, not enough training was given;
- Training started very late which made it difficult to meet the dead line for implementation date-January 1998;
- Teachers felt disempowered as they feared that they were not properly prepared for implementation and
- There was lack of teaching resources and space

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Conclusion-Lesson to be learnt

- With the implementation of the new curriculum, support systems for educators, educator training, resources and learner support materials were very minimal and received very little attention and as a result the implementation was not a success;
- Implementation was too hasty;
- I am of the firm belief that it would have been better if all interested parties including learners and teachers were given enough time to be prepared in advance before the new curriculum was introduced and implemented so as to enable everybody to cope with and adjust to the new changes;
- Time factor should have been taken into consideration and at least implement new curriculum in a phased way, with an opportunity for evaluation on the first phase of implementation before the second
- Also important was to ensure that teacher development was such that teachers were well prepared for the first phase of implementation.

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Conclusion

- Very important that those mostly intimately involved with implementation of any new reform are tuned in with its philosophy, are integral part of its development and are equipped with the necessary skills to ensure its successful realization in practice;
- There should have been a wide range of and well produced curriculum materials available to support work of teachers especially those teachers who have traditionally viewed curriculum as content-based
- The immediate emphasis must be on changing attitudes and then on changing practices and procedures.

THE END

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