EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION
AND CURRICULUM REFORM:
TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR
ROLES AS CHANGE AGENTS

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Title of dissertation: Educational transformation and curriculum reform: teachers’ perceptions of their roles as change agents.

In accordance with Rule G4.6.3, I hereby declare that the above-mentioned treatise is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment to another university or for another qualification.

Signature:

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Abstract

Since 1994, the educational landscape in South Africa has been subjected to on-going policy changes. The national Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) which has been promulgated recently, is the third version of a post-apartheid national school curriculum. Teachers, in particular, fulfil critical roles as change agents during a process of educational transformation, as they need to facilitate the change by implementing the new national school curriculum. This study aimed to ascertain teacher experiences of continuous curriculum change, by focusing in particular on the views of selected FET teachers. Focus group interviews were conducted with teachers employed at secondary schools in an urban township in the Eastern Cape. The data revealed that the teachers’ responses could be categorised into four broad themes, namely CAPS itself, the learners in relation to CAPS, the teacher in relation to CAPS and the Department of Education in relation to CAPS. Despite several frustrations and uncertainties, it was clear that the teachers wanted to assume agency as they expressed a commitment towards change and a willingness to implement CAPS to the best of their ability. This study however concludes that the FET teachers who participated struggled to assume full agency, due to restrictive and disabling conditions which are mostly beyond their control.
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Chapter 1
Orientation to the study

Introduction

When the new democratically elected ANC government assumed political power in 1994, education was regarded as a primary site of transformation, not only for its own sake but also as a critical area from where transformation of other spheres of society could be instigated. As a result, post-apartheid education in South Africa has undergone almost two decades of policy change. These changes evoked much debate, study and even condemnation.

Enslin and Pendelbury (2008) point out that new policy alone cannot bring about extensive educational change. Policies need to be implemented and several role players need to contribute to the implementation process by acting as agents of change. Teachers, in particular, fulfil a critical role during a process of educational transformation, as they need to facilitate the change by implementing new policies and more specifically, the new national school curriculum. Since 1994, three revisions of the original new national school curricula have been developed, promulgated and implemented. These were Curriculum 2005 (C2005) in 1997, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) in 2001, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) in 2006 and the latest Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in 2011. Within the context of these on-going curriculum changes, stringent demands are being put on teachers, leading to the question, “Are teachers allowed to participate in the process change, and if they do participate, what is the nature of their involvement”? (Carl, 2005: 223). Well-intentioned policy may indeed undermine teachers’ will to change if it ignores their perceptions, or the context and conditions of their work. Teachers in the Schools that Work study of Christie, Butler and Potterton (2007) for
example, perceived the abduction of corporal punishment, as promulgated by policy, as threatening their already dwindling authority.

The question thus arises: How do teachers, almost two decades after the demise of apartheid, perceive educational transformation in South Africa, and in particular, the roles they need to play as change agents? This study aims to ascertain their perceptions, by focusing in particular on the views of selected FET teachers at three secondary schools in an urban township in the Eastern Cape, as they are expected to implement the latest version of the new national curriculum, also known as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DoE, 2011).

Background to the study

At this point, it is imperative to provide a brief background of the historical context within which curricular changes took place since 1994. Curriculum, content and structure carry high symbolic value for all countries during transition from one political system to another. Hence, on 24 March 1997, the then Minister of Education appointed in the newly established South African government, Prof Sibusiso Bengu, formally introduced the first post-apartheid national school curriculum, known as Curriculum 2005 (C2005). With this announcement, he proclaimed, “… the dawning of new hope for the learners of our country” (cited in Fiske & Ladd, 2004: 154), signalling to the South African society profound and comprehensive change to South African education and a departure from our discredited past.

Education in South Africa was clearly entering a new era. To give substance to these changes, it was imperative that the new national school curriculum reflects the values enshrined in the country’s new Constitution. It was also necessary to transform the structure and governance of the education system by instituting a single national department of education, replacing the segregated education departments that existed during the apartheid years and which were constituted according to racial groups. The (new) National Department
of Education (DoE)\(^1\) comprised nine provincial education departments that were co-ordinated centrally.

The most significant reform however, was at a pedagogical and philosophical level, with the departure from philosophies of apartheid education, such as fundamental pedagogics, rooted in Christian National Education (CNE). Outcomes Based Education (OBE) became the underpinning philosophy for the new education system. OBE also indicated a significant departure from teacher-centred to learner-centred approaches. Whereas lessons had ‘objectives’ in the past, learning experiences were now designed to towards desired ‘learning outcomes’ to be reached by the learner. The new OBE philosophy represented a competency-based approach, and was also prevalent in educational approaches in Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, Canada, and limited circles in the United States. In 2000, the next Minister of Education, Prof Kader Asmal, in response to several research reports indicating sustained challenging implementation of C2005, appointed a national task team to review problematic aspects of C2005. On 30 July 2001, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), later amended into the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for Grades R-9, an improved version of C2005, was released for public comment (DoE, 2002a) and subsequently promulgated. Implementation started in 2004 and by 2008, all Grade 12 learners wrote the first NCS-based final school exam.

Yet, despite significant enhancements in terms of curriculum structure, implementation and so forth, it soon became clear that implementation of the NCS did not improve education in South African schools in a significant manner. In 2009, the fourth Minister of Basic Education since 1994, Ms Angie Motshekga in response to increased public disgruntlement and disapproval about the unsatisfactory state of schooling in South Africa, announced further comprehensive changes to be implemented from 2010 to 2014. The criticism she responded to included concerns about teacher overload, confusion and stress amongst educators, and

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\(^1\) The DoE has since been divided into two units, namely the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Department of Basic Education (DBE). All references to DoE in this study will relate to the latter, namely DBE.
in particular, the consistent underperformance of learners. Many changes announced by Ms Motshekga were aimed at relieving the administrative burden on teachers by for example discontinuing learner portfolios, and reducing the number of requisite projects. The most significant change announced by Ms Motshekga however was the ‘signing of OBE’s death certificate’ and the re-introduction of textbooks for learners. This implied a drastic turnaround from the initial OBE approach, with far-reaching implications for teachers who had to adopt an outcomes-based philosophy not so long ago. Ultimately, Ms Motshekga acknowledged the importance of a ‘teachable curriculum’ to be implemented by dedicated and inspired teachers. As such, she promised targeted and effective in-service training and support to teachers.

The above précis of educational change in South Africa during the eighteen years since the demise of apartheid education clearly indicates a fragile and struggling curriculum reform process with limited success. Jansen (2008) ascribes this dilemma to poor conceptualisation and implementation of unsuccessful transformation strategies that were primarily political responses to apartheid schooling, rather than strategies concerned with the modalities of change at the classroom level. Blignault (2005) concurs, arguing that teachers in particular, as foot soldiers of curriculum implementation and core change agents, have been caught up in the middle of these radical and often confusing changes.

The question that then logically arose in my mind, was the following: Almost two decades after the demise of apartheid, how do teachers perceive the on-going process of curriculum transformation in South Africa, and in particular the roles they need to play as change agents?

**Statement of the problem**

During times of change, and in particular when new innovations are introduced, several questions are normally generated in people’s minds, especially those who will be directly
affected by the changes. In the case of educational change, such as implementation of new school curricula, several stakeholders are directly affected, especially school leaders, teachers and learners. This study thus sought to investigate how recent curriculum changes affected FET teachers in selected high schools in an Eastern Cape urban township, in particular as they are the ‘foot soldiers’ expected to effect the educational changes by implementing, since 1994, a third version of the national school curriculum.

**Research question**

The core research question that this study thus tried to answer was: Almost two decades after the demise of apartheid, how do FET teachers in selected high schools in an urban township in the Eastern Cape perceive their roles as change agents as they implement the new national school curriculum (CAPS)?

**Research methodology**

This study was positioned within the interpretive paradigm as I aimed to interpret and understand the teachers’ perceptions of themselves as change agents during a prolonged process of curriculum reform. I adopted a qualitative research design as it proved to be more appropriate for this study (see Henning, 2004; Kincheloe, 2003; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). I conducted focus group interviews (see De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2011; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000) with the participants who were all FET teachers employed at secondary schools in an urban township in the Eastern Cape. The participants were encouraged to discuss issues in response to the following prompting question: How do you see yourself as change agent responsible for the implementation of CAPS in your school? A research assistant took field notes (see De Vos et al., 2011; Flick, 2009). I continued to conduct focus group interviews until the data became saturated, in other words, no new
ideas emerged (De Vos et al., 2011). The interviews were conducted in English. All the interviews were recorded on a tape recorder. These recordings were then transcribed verbatim (Flick, 2009). The transcribed interviews, as well the research assistant’s field notes constituted the data. Once generated, the data were analysed in order to produce the findings. In order to do so, I used an open coding method of analysis (De Vos et al., 2011; Flick 2009).

**Ethical considerations**

In order to ensure the well-being of the participants during the research process (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009) I adhered to ethical considerations. I obtained written permission from the Eastern Cape Department of Education as well as from the principals of the secondary schools in the particular urban township in the Eastern Cape. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study. Each participant gave his or her written consent. They were also reassured of the confidentiality of their responses. I also obtained ethical clearance from NMMU’s research ethics committee.

**Delimitation and limitations**

The study was restricted to three high schools in a particular urban township in the Eastern Cape. Only post level one teachers responsible for the implementation of CAPS in the FET phase (Grades 10 – 12) participated. This study constituted 50% of my master’s study. As such, it was limited in its scope. Although I focussed only on the perceptions of FET teachers at three urban township high schools in the Eastern Cape, I am of the opinion that these teachers do indeed represent a ‘typical unit’ (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006). I do acknowledge, however, that by focussing only on the views of FET teachers employed at three urban township schools, I have been relying more substantively on my own subjective
considerations, instead of objective criteria. Therefore, my statements about the selected teachers' perceptions were made on grounds of what was found to be true for these participants. Hence, these statements were inevitably probability statements (Bless et al., 2006).

**Outline of the study**

This chapter provided the background and justification for the study, statement of the problem, research question, brief overview of the methods implemented, delimitations and limitations of the study. The next chapter will review literature on educational change, curriculum implementation and the role of the teacher as change agent. Chapter three will describe the research paradigm and data collection instruments and analysis procedures. Chapter four will present, analyse and discuss the collected data. In Chapter five conclusions will be drawn and recommendations made.
CHAPTER 2

Literature review

Introduction

Over many years, educational change has been a topical point of discussion, not only in South Africa, but also worldwide (Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan and Hopkins, 1998). South Africa, since 1994, has not been different from other countries in realising that the transformation of education is crucial for the overall transformation of society. Enslin and Pendelbury (2008) thus argue that if education in South Africa is not transformed, other spheres of society have little chance of transformation. Hence, in its pursuance of improving the quality of lives of post-apartheid South Africans, education took a centre stage.

Eighteen years since the demise of apartheid, there is yet reason to question the success of educational transformation in South Africa. At present, many previously disadvantaged schools are dysfunctional and in some regions, the system is close to total collapse. Many teachers are expected to teach under trying conditions, such as under-resourced schools, overcrowded classrooms, abusive learners, inadequate support from local and provincial departments, and so forth. Hence, many teachers no longer see themselves in terms of the ideals of the teaching profession. They are demoralised (Morrow, 2007). Bloch (2009) thus warns that the current unsatisfactory state of South African schooling is reinforcing the social and economic marginalisation of poor and vulnerable South Africans. Continued under-performance leaves the majority of learners unable to compete with fellow South Africans from privileged backgrounds. Disadvantaged learners, in particular, desperately need the space and order of functional schools in order to establish consistency and regularity in their lives. Ultimately, they need role models who see themselves as confident and competent teachers, and also as agents of change, contributing to educational transformation in South Africa.
This chapter will focus, first, on educational change as broader context within which curriculum reform and subsequent implementation should be understood. In response to Holloway’s assertion (2003) that policy makers often tend to overlook the importance of teacher involvement in the process of educational reform, the notion of the teacher as key agent of educational change will also be explored.

**Educational change**

According to Fullan (2001), ‘change’ implies a process of putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change. Fullan (1983, cited in Methula, 2002) warns that a comprehensive understanding of this concept and its subsequent implementation is complex. Hargreaves et al. (1998) and Methula (2002) thus attribute unsuccessful transformation to a naïve and simplistic understanding of the concept of change, which results in change being poorly conceptualised and implemented.

Any change process is complex and multifaceted. It does not occur at a particular moment following a specific decision or happening. Change is ‘a journey’ and not a blueprint. In other words, change cannot happen overnight. It is an intricate and often unknown process. Fullan (1993a) however warns that when the time for change has arrived, the process cannot be stalled, reversed or deferred. It is irrevocable. Fullan (2011, 1993a) furthermore emphasises the dynamic nature of change, often dictated by situations and adaptations. Individual and collective ideas should all be considered and respected. Problems that arose during the change process should thus be embraced as these are necessary elements in the change process. This requires a flexible mind-set of those managing the process.

Educational change happens at various levels. At national or regional level, implementation normally consists of the execution of policy by an authority so as to influence local organisations responsible for delivery, such as district offices, to operate in desired ways.
Taylor (2000: 4) refers to this as macro-implementation and identifies a ‘chain of passages’ in this process. The first ‘passage’ is that of administration, in other words, the transition of a policy decision into a specific programme. The next ‘passage’ is that of adoption, in other words, acceptance of the programme at the regional, district, local and community level. This is followed by the micro-implementation phase, namely, the delivery of the programme at school and classroom levels with the support of the local authority. The last ‘passage’ is that of evaluation, when the success of the programme is determined. Taylor’s analysis (2000) clearly demonstrates that the implementation of change policies, such as a new national school curriculum, should be a systematic and well-conceived process. All the above steps are essential elements for successful implementation of change policies, such as a new national school curriculum. There are no quick-fix strategies to effect educational change.

Fullan (2007, 1993) and Methula (2002) accordingly identify critical factors that determine the success or failure of educational change. These determinants form a “network of interacting variables”. If any two or three of these elements interfere with the process of implementation, the process will be less effective (Fullan, 2007: 86 – 98). The critical factors are:

- **The specific characteristics of the change or innovation:** These include the need for change, the complexity of the change and availability of materials.
- **The specific characteristics at school level:** These include the reactions of and relations between staff members.
- **The specific factors external to the school:** These include the role of government departments and other education agencies.
- **The specific characteristics at local education authority:** These include the history of innovative attempts, the capacity of school districts, the expectations and training of principals, teacher input and their technical assistance, community support, time lines, monitoring of the change, and overload of role players.
Curriculum change also implies development and use of new materials, changes in classroom structure, alteration of beliefs and philosophies, the use of new teaching strategies and new diagnosis and assessment procedures. Other contributing factors include availability of resources, educator perceptions of the process, objectives, learning content, time, assessment tools and standards. These contributing factors are as dynamic as the process itself. Carl (2009) thus argues that the real measure of successful change is determined largely by the planning, design, and dissemination of information done beforehand. He strongly promotes clear communication, on-going support, regular contact and co-operation between role players.

In 2000, the South African Department of Education identified prerequisites for successful implementation of the new national school curriculum in South African schools. These include:

- The availability of indispensible and critical resources, such as learner-teacher support material (LTSM), well-equipped school libraries, science and computer laboratories and so forth.
- Proper infrastructure, for example, the availability of proper classrooms. Conditions should be conducive to quality teaching and learning. This can only be achieved if classrooms are not over-crowded, teacher-learner ratios are maintained, desks and chairs are provided for each learner, and so forth.
- Local and institutional capacity to provide in-service training and support to teachers in order to enhance their confidence with regard to the adoption of new approaches, and subject content knowledge gaps that may exist.
- The will to actually implement the changes, in other words, to activate the real implementation.
- Pressure in the form of policy, meaning the need to implement policies and provide adequate support. If the implementation is for example at school level, the success
will depend on support provided by the local district, provincial and national education department.

- Adequate and timeous information on re-training of teachers, in other words, in-depth training that will equip and enable the in-service teachers to implement the new curriculum successfully and confidently.
- The establishment of feasible time frames, in other words, the establishment of implementation time frames that are realistic and attainable.
- Collective participation of all relevant role players (DoE, 2000a).

Rogan and Grayson (2003) as well as Verspoor (1998) however warn that whilst policy documents normally contain visionary and educationally sound ideas, implementation thereof often proves to be slower and more difficult than anticipated.

Yet, despite the DoE’s noble intentions to ensure successful implementation of curriculum transformation as alluded to above, research conducted by Dada, Dipholo, Hoadley, Khumbo, Muller and Volmink (2009) indicates significant impediments to successful implementation of new school curricula in the South African context. These include irregular staff rotation at many South African schools, too many subjects taught by one teacher, teachers’ general lack of subject specialisation, overcrowded schools, shortage of classrooms, teachers’ high administrative loads and overall shortage of subject specialists. Rogan and Grayson (2003) thus argue that much work on implementation issues still needs to be done in South Africa to realise the anticipated potential of new education policies.

**Change agents**

In order for any educational change process to be successful, it is critical that several role players assume mutual responsibility for the implementation of change. This implies that learners, teachers, parents, departmental officials, school leaders and so forth are all acknowledged as change agents, performing particular roles and assuming specific roles
Clarification of role players’ distinct roles and responsibilities is thus critical (Carl, 2009). These will now be discussed briefly.

- **The Department of Education (DoE)**

Fullan (2007) believes that it is primarily the responsibility of the government, in this case, the Department of Education, to create systems that will facilitate educational change. These include for example, accountability structures, incentives, pre-service and in-service training opportunities for educators, infrastructures, resources, as well as capacity building initiatives. It is also imperative that the DoE fosters a climate within which teachers will trust the process and be convinced of the benefits of the change for them. This means that problems must be addressed constantly. District offices for example need to take responsibility for the in-service needs of principals and teachers. During practice-oriented in-service training workshops, demonstrations of new practices, for example assessment should be given (Carl, 2009).

Teachers should also get continual support from subject education specialists (SESs), in other words, educators with expertise in a particular subject area or discipline. Subject education specialists are normally appointed by the Department of Education to guide and assist teachers in schools. Dada et al. (2009) believe that SESs should assist teachers in terms of moderating their plans, assessments and learners’ work. They should clarify content and introduce appropriate teaching methods aligned with particular school subjects or learning areas.

- **The school principal and school management team (SMT)**

The current international trend in educational reform and restructuring is the decentralisation of decision-making roles to the local and school level (see Kruger, 2003). This implies an increase of responsibilities for school managers and school management teams (SMTs), leading to significant changes of the traditional role of the school principal. Botha (2004) however observes that the workload of school principals is becoming more and more
unmanageable. Many principals also lack an understanding of their leadership task. Hence, the supporting role of the school management team becomes critical. Dada et al. (2009) however note additional lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities of school management teams, specifically with regard to the mediation and implementation of the curriculum change.

- **Parents and the school governing body (SGB)**

Teachers, school principals, school management teams, district officials, and subject education specialists cannot effect the changes on their own. In this regard, Fullan (2007) sees parents and other community members as crucial role players in effecting successful educational change. They are ‘untapped resources’ with assets and expertise, and essential links between the school and the community.

Parents are furthermore their children’s primary educators. They have intimate knowledge of their children. The closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact of the education will be on the child’s development and educational achievement. Learner commitment to school is primarily shaped by parents through the “curriculum of the home” (Fullan, 2007: 191). However, parental involvement is an alterable variable. Increasingly, more and more South African children are raised in single parent or child-headed households. Fullan (2007) thus encourages teachers and principals to liaise more closely with parents and communities. Ultimately, the SGB needs to assume a crucial role in facilitating change at the school, specifically with regard to the implementation of a new school curriculum (Fullan, 2007).

- **The learner**

Scanlon (2012) draws our attention to mostly ignored, yet critical agents of change during periods of educational transformation. They are the learners. Scanlon (2012) believes that learners should be seen as partners during the process and hence be consulted. This will encourage them to “buy into’ reform initiatives and cooperate more fully in achieving the
proposed outcomes” (Scanlon, 2012: 186). Unfortunately, learners are mostly excluded from the consultative process, hence they are unable to assume agency. Stoll and Fink (1996, cited in Scanlon, 2012) believe that teachers usually do not consider learners as co-partners in the change process. They are instead seen as “the targets and intended beneficiaries of change” and not key stakeholders in the change process itself (Scanlon, 2012: 188). This view contradicts current democratic and constructivist pedagogies. Learner involvement is critical to any educational change process, since the learners hold unique knowledge and views. In the end, it is the learners who “produce school outcomes targeted by reforming initiatives (Scanlon, 2012: 188). Rudduck and Flutter (2000, cited in Scanlon, 2012: 188) thus argue that “it is from the stories learners tell us about individual lessons that educators and instigators of reform can glean broader curriculum insights”. Learner feedback on the process and what enhances their learning will be most helpful to teachers.

- The teacher

Although the role players mentioned above are critical enablers of change at schools, the primary role of the teacher with regard to effecting educational change and improving education is uncontested (Hargreaves et al., 1998; Fullan, 1991). Fullan (1991: 17) according argues that the success or failure of educational change will depend “… on what teachers do and think – it’s as simple and as complex as that”. Active involvement of teachers in the transformation process is thus critical. It is essential that teachers perceive themselves as stakeholders in the process. Without such interest, they are unlikely to adopt required changes in behaviour, beliefs and actions to realise the change process. Carl (2009) and Robinson (2005) concur with Fullan (1991) and Hargreaves et al. (1998), seeing the teacher as the major agent of change in schools, especially in terms of curriculum renewal.

Fullan’s stance (2011, 1993) is rooted in the teacher’s moral purpose, arguing that teaching is at its core a moral profession. Teachers thus need to link their moral purpose with active
ways to engage in and enhance productive change. Such a teacher however requires a particular disposition and needs to be enabled and assisted to adopt the identity of a change agent (Fullan, 2011, 1993). This would imply that they need to be reminded of the moral purpose of their work and be encouraged to develop strategies towards accomplishing the moral good. Carl (2009) concurs, arguing that, given the fast-changing nature of society, teachers need to realise that they have an on-going role to play in terms of preparing learners for an ever-changing world. This calls for a focus on teachers who are often depicted as impervious, unaffected or resistant to change, to accept that they can make a particular contribution towards improvement of society. They thus need to express a willingness to utilise their knowledge and competencies to the maximum advantage of their learners. This would imply that they also reflect on the reasons for their engagement in the teaching profession. Fullan (2011, 1993) believes that personal purpose is imperative for organisational change, since personal vision comes from ‘within’. It gives meaning to work. Fullan (2011, 1993) furthermore promotes the notion of inquiry as a requisite for forming and reforming personal purpose. Inquiry implies the internalisation of norms, habits and techniques for continuous learning. Teachers need to see themselves as lifelong learners. Without such a disposition they will not be able to encourage learners to be learners-for-life.

Another important characteristic of an effective change agent is that of mastery. Fullan (2011, 1993) believes that in order to effect change, mastery is essential both in relation to specific innovations, as well as in the form of personal habit. People act their way into new vision and ideas. They do not just think their way into these. Finally, Fullan (2011, 1993) emphasises the importance of collaboration, arguing that the ability to collaborate with other people on both a small and large-scale is a critical requisite of post-modern society.

Leaman (2008) also proposes key characteristics of teachers who are good agents of change. She believes that such teachers are adaptable, have effective communication skills, are good listeners, and have the ability to establish and maintain positive and respectful relationships with learners. Teachers who can act as change agents, are however also self-
confident and assertive. Ultimately, teachers who act as agents of change have solid subject content knowledge. They will work collaboratively with colleagues when planning and presenting their work.

Schoeman (2009) concurs, emphasising transformative teachers’ applied competence as an overacting term for three inter-connected competencies. These are, first, the notion of practical competence, which is the demonstrated ability, in an authentic context, to consider a range of possibilities for action, to make a considered decision about which possibility to follow, and to perform the chosen action. The second competence refers to foundational competence or practical competence where the teacher demonstrates an understanding of the knowledge and thinking that underpins the action taken. The final competence relates to the notion of reflexivity, in other words a teacher’s ability to amend performances and decisions with understanding. A reflective teacher will be able to adapt to change and unforeseen circumstances. This teacher will then also be able to explain the reason behind his or her adaptations.

In addition, Carl (2009) asserts that, as change agents, teachers need to assume a range of roles and responsibilities, and execute several duties. They must for example be developers, exercisers and researchers. This implies that they need to have a clear understanding of the envisaged change and communicate their preferences, attitudes and renewal strategies unambiguously to all involved. They must liaise with other stakeholders and utilise available sources, such as instructional leaders and other specialists, to address their needs. They also need to evaluate the change process on an on-going basis and bring problems to the fore. This means that they need to be flexible and patient, allowing the change process to evolve over time (Karmos and Jacko, 1977, as well as Dull, 1981, cited in Carl, 2009: 212). It is thus clear that professional, competent teachers are the cornerstones of educational transformation. Their commitment, competence and quality ultimately determine the system’s success or failure (Morrow, 2007).
From the above, it is thus evident that the role of a teacher in the 21st century is not merely restricted to teaching subject content knowledge in the confines of their classrooms. In a rapidly changing society, teachers will be confronted with various manifestations of on-going educational change. This will include policy changes and as implementer of revised national school curricula, teachers have a critical role to play as agents of these changes. Carl (2009) thus argues that teachers should not only be trained to teach well but also be motivated and capacitated to bring about changes if necessary. This requires teachers to adopt the identity of lifelong learners (Palmer, 1997) who will be able to bring about changes (Carl, 2009).

**Enabling conditions**

Teachers however require conditions that will enable them to develop and explore their potential as change agents. In this regard, Carl (2009) highlights several characteristics of environments and conditions that will enable teachers to assume their roles as change agents. These include, for example, a democratic climate and culture in the school, explicit support from instructional leaders, inclusive leadership styles of educational leaders, opportunities and environments that invite involvement and stimulate empowerment, decentralisation of power, availability of resources, and sufficient time to devote to the change activities (Carl, 2009).

Due to their primary role as key agents of educational change, teachers thus need to be recognised, consulted and included in the change process. Botha (2004) argues that the significant changes and reforms that are demanded of schools in post-apartheid South Africa can only be attained through shared decision-making that encourages people to change and address educational problems. In this regard, Poppleton and Williams (2004) believe that when teachers participate actively, for example, by sharing responsibilities and taking initiative during the change process, they are more positive, committed and willing to engage in the change process more earnestly.
South African teachers’ realities

Many South African teachers work in challenging conditions. Slabbert (2001) thus believes that more attention needs to be paid to the impact of educational change on the work life experience of South African teachers. Teachers complain about numerous endemic problems, including a social culture that devalues education in many ways, unmotivated learners, a lack of public support and violence in schools (Slabbert, 2001). In the next section, some realities of the South African school context that impede the teacher’s agency will be discussed briefly.

- Functionality of the school

Morrow (2007) warns that the quality of South African education is often compromised due to unrealistic expectations of teachers, especially given the conditions many are expected to teach in. The work of a teacher in an efficiently organised and functioning school is very different from the work of a teacher in a dysfunctional or barely functioning school (Morrow, 2007; Ngobeni, 1999). As such, Morrow critiques the ambitious ‘seven roles’ of an educator as proposed by the Norms and Standards policy (DoE, 2000b), arguing that this characterisation becomes a source of acute professional guilt as teachers struggle to cope on a daily basis. Similarly, it ignores the vast differences between the institutional contexts in which teachers work.

- The teacher’s role in the curriculum renewal process

Carl (2009) also critiques the Norms and Standards policy, arguing that as change agents, teachers should not be regarded as mere recipients and implementers of curricula. The ‘seven roles’, as put forward by the Norms and Standards policy, according to Carl (2009), position the teacher as mere ‘handset’ of the curriculum, and not as a partner in the curriculum development process. Smit (2001) agrees, arguing that in the public domain teachers are often not acknowledged as professional persons. This perception is reinforced
by the perceived ‘recipient’-orientation. Stiegelbauer (cited in Smit 2001: 69) thus believes that,

the real crunch comes in the relationship between these new policies and programmes and the thousands of subjective realities embedded in peoples’ individual or organisational contexts and their personal mysteries.

Smit (2001) observes that during the implementation of C2005, educators had to rely on policy documents, workshops, the views of education of public officials, fellow colleagues’ insights, and non-government organisations (NGOs) to effect change. Training was often inappropriate and not adequate to bring forth substantial change in order to sustain quality education. This led to increased teacher confusion and frustration. Many teachers thus question the integrity of education policies. As a result, they disregard the policies and disassociate themselves from the change process. Smit (2001) subsequently argues that South African education has been subjected to extensive policy production at the expense of proper policy implementation.

Conclusion

The literature discussed in this chapter clearly reveals the intricacies of educational change, and in particular the complex, yet critical role of the teacher in effecting change. Deep thinking is thus required about the transforming role of teachers as they need to assume identities as effective change agents (Carl, 2009). Should the teachers’ voices however be ignored, the outcomes of revised conceptualisations of educational change in South Africa may be thwarted, prolonging the dangerous situation that teachers, as potential curriculum agents, simply remain voices crying in the wilderness (Carl, 2009). This study thus set out to capture the voices of teachers who are at the coalface as they endeavour to implement CAPS in the FET phase in previously disadvantaged schools in an urban township in the Eastern Cape.
Chapter 3

Research design and methodology

Introduction

The central aim of this research study was to determine how teachers perceive themselves as change agents during times of curriculum reform in South Africa, specifically with reference to the implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). The previous chapter examined factors that affect curriculum changes in South Africa. I also discussed the notion of the teacher as a competent and effective change agent during times of curriculum transformation. This chapter describes the methodology implemented in the study. The paradigm, design, data collection strategy, sampling methods and data analysis strategies will now be described.

Research paradigm

The term ‘paradigm’ in the context of this study refers to a basic set of beliefs that guides action, not only in terms of disciplined inquiry, but also in a wider sense (Guba, 1990). The term ‘paradigm’ came into existence through the work of Kuhn in the 1970s. Kuhn saw the development of science as a process yielding results which do not fit into existing frameworks. These results, according to Kuhn, are often the products of creative and independent thinking which go beyond the boundaries of existing ideas. Guba (1990) accordingly distinguishes between four research paradigms, namely the positivistic, interpretive, critical and structuralist paradigms.

This study is positioned within the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm seeks to understand the world in terms of the experiences of people involved in it. It sees knowledge
as the product of individual thinking and consciousness, constructed by individuals in unique settings through interaction with their worlds. Researchers working in the interpretive paradigm regard knowledge as internally constructed (Fien & Hillcoat, 1996). Lather (1992) as well as Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1994) see the interpretive paradigm as an umbrella term for a host of different research methods which, although sharing many common assumptions, often originate from different fields of academic endeavour. These fields include, for example, phenomenology, which developed as a research method in psychology, as well as ethnography, which has its origins in anthropology. All these approaches share the same objective, namely for the researcher to understand and interpret social situations by becoming part of the situations. Researchers aim to get close to the participants, in order to listen and to share their perceptions and experience (Easterby-Smith et al., 1994).

In this study, I aimed to interpret and understand the teachers' perceptions of themselves as change agents during a process of curriculum reform. I focussed in particular on the implementation of CAPS in secondary schools in an urban township in the Eastern Cape.

**Research design**

For the purposes of this study, I adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative research, according Kincheloe (2002) can be distinguished from quantitative research in that it focuses on abstract characteristics of events, which are not necessarily quantifiable. Due to the complex and multifaceted nature of education, quantitative designs are of limited value, as these designs focus only on cause and effect, products, outcomes or correlations. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) thus argue that the intricacy of the education field demands the use of alternative research techniques and models. Subsequently, these authors recommend a qualitative design for educational research. Henning (2004) concurs, arguing that researchers who choose a qualitative design acknowledge that reality is constructed by
individuals who interact with their worlds. Qualitative researchers understand that meaning is embedded in individuals’ experience and is mediated by their perceptions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Henning, 2004). A qualitative approach is thus more amenable to accessing teacher thinking, understanding and sense-making of curriculum change in a rapidly changing society.

**Data gathering method: focus group interviews**

Acknowledging that the teachers’ reality, in other words, how they see themselves as change agents during a process of curriculum reform, is constructed by themselves as they interact with their worlds (Henning, 2004), I decided to conduct focus group interviews, as the primary source of data generation.

De Vos et al. (2011) describe a focus group interview as a carefully planned discussion, designed to obtain perceptions of a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) accordingly define focus group interviews as contrived settings. During these interviews, a specifically chosen sector of the population is brought together to discuss a given theme or topic. A moderator leads the discussion with a small group of participants to examine, in detail, how the group members think and feel about a topic (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The participants are able to discuss the issues in question with each other. Opportunities for disparate views exist. When the disagreements are explored, a much deeper understanding of the issue in question is generated. I have decided to conduct focus groups since a careful record of the debate between participants provides deeper insight into the topic than would have been gained from interviewing all the participants individually (Bless et al. 2006). Hence, data is generated via the interaction between the group members. This aspect distinguishes a focus group interview from other forms of interviews (De Vos et al., 2011).
De Vos et al. (2011) see focus group interviews as an ideal opportunity for the researcher to access participants’ feelings, views and thoughts on a particular issue, product or service. She holds that focus group interviews are useful when the researcher aims to ascertain a range of feelings that participants have about a particular aspects or issue. This kind of interview is also suitable when the researcher intends to uncover those factors that influence people’s opinions, behaviours and motivations, as was my intention with this study. The strength of a focus group interview is its ability to produce concentrated and focused amounts of data on the topic of interest.

Schreiber and Asner-Self (2011) advise researchers with limited time, access or resources to conduct focus group interviews. This kind of interview is also recommended when participants prefer to respond in a group rather than alone, or when interaction among the participants is desired. Focus group interviews are especially useful when attempting to understand diversity, since it can facilitate understanding of the variety of other people’s experiences. This kind of interview is also recommended when the researcher wants to test ideas, materials, plans or policies (De Vos et al., 2011).

Subsequently, the participants are purposively selected because they can provide the kind of information of interest to the researcher. They have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the interview. The focus group is thus likely to be homogeneous in composition, for example post level one teachers as was the case in this study. The group is also ‘focused’ in that it involves some kind of collective activity (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011). This promotes interaction and discussion. In this regard, Cohen et al. (2000) argue that it is precisely the interactive nature of focus group interviews that provide its richness. As a result of the participants’ interaction with each other rather than with the interviewer, the data emerge naturally. The researcher thus needs to create a conducive and secure environment which encourages the participants to share perceptions, points of view, experiences, wishes and concerns freely. In other words, the participants are not pressurised to vote or reach consensus. As such, the method is ‘friendly and respectful’. De
Vos *et al.* (2011) believe that focus group interviews suggest a willingness of the researcher to listen without being defensive, which is uniquely beneficial in emotionally charged environments.

CAPS is the third version of a new national curriculum since 1998, when C2005 was first introduced, that South African teachers are expected to implement. This prolonged and disrupted manner in which curriculum reform has been addressed during the last fourteen years, by necessity induces specific feelings, perceptions and viewpoints amongst South African teachers. Since the purpose of this study was to unearth teachers’ perceptions about their roles as change agents during this prolonged process of curriculum reform, the choice of focus group interviews as data gathering strategy was appropriate. It is my contention that the focus group interviews provided a ‘safe space’ where the teachers had the opportunity to share their honest views. Consequently, the focus group interviews provided me with a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied as these interviews stimulated the spontaneous exchanges of the teachers’ ideas, thoughts and attitudes in the security of the group.

**Selection of the participants**

Sampling is a process by which a number of individuals who represent the larger group, also referred to as the population, is being selected (Strydom and Delport, 2011). Bless *et al.* (2006) advise researchers using focus groups to be explicit about the selection criteria. In the case of this study, participants had to be post level one teachers employed at one of the secondary schools in the particular urban township in the Eastern Cape. Purposive sampling was thus used to select the participants. Strydom and Delport (2011) advise researchers who use this sampling method to first think critically about the parameters of the population and then choose the sample case accordingly. Researchers should strive to maximise the range of specific information that can be obtained from and about that context.
Once recruited, the teachers were divided into groups of six participants each. During the focus group interview, all six participants were interviewed simultaneously and asked to respond freely to the same open-ended prompting question. This question, “How do you perceive yourself as change agent in the context of curriculum reform in South Africa, specifically with reference to the implementation of CAPS” was asked to all the focus groups. The teachers were encouraged to interact with each other whilst engaging with the issue.

I continued to conduct focus group interviews until the data became saturated, in other words, no new ideas emerged (De Vos et al., 2011). In the end, a total of 18 teachers shared their perceptions in response to the prompting question.

**Ethical considerations**

McNiff and Whitehead (2009) hold that a key aspect of demonstrating initial engagement during research projects is to show awareness of ethical considerations. This involves care for the well-being of the other. This means that the researcher has to extend basic courtesies to all participants, such as inviting them to be involved, promising confidentiality as appropriate, and ensuring them of the researcher’s good faith at all times. Schmuck (2009) concurs with the above when he argues that a code of ethics can be useful as a moral pathfinder sensitising students, researchers and supervisors to ethical elements in research prior to, during and after a project.

In this study, I was guided by the views of the above scholars. I obtained written permission from the Eastern Cape Department of Education as well as from the principals of the secondary schools in the particular urban township. Each of the participants also gave their written consent. They were informed of the purpose of the study. They were also reassured of the confidentiality of their responses. At no point would their identities be revealed, since
pseudonyms will be used to refer to specific responses. I also applied for and obtained ethical clearance from NMMU’s research ethics committee\(^2\).

Data generation and analysis

All the interviews were recorded on a tape recorder. These recordings were then transcribed verbatim. During all the interviews, I was accompanied by a research assistant who took field notes (De Vos et al., 2011). The transcribed interviews, as well the assistant’s field notes constituted the data generated. Once generated, the data were analysed in order to produce the findings. In order to do so, I used a coding method of analysis.

De Vos et al. (2011) describe coding as representing the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualised and put back together in new ways. Coding pertains specifically to the naming and categorising of phenomena through close examination of data. It is the central process by which theories are built from data. There are three major types of coding, namely open coding, axial coding and selective coding (De Vos et al., 2011).

- **Open coding** implies breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising the data. During open coding the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data. Without this first, basic analytical step, the rest of the analysis and communication that follows cannot take place.

- **Axial coding** refers to a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding has taken place. This happens by making connections between categories, utilising a coding paradigm involving conditions, context, action or interactional strategies and consequences.

\(^2\) The ethics clearance reference number is H12-EDU-CPD-011.
Selective coding refers to the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships and filling in categories that need further refinement and development (De Vos et al., 2011).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) however contend that the lines between each type of coding are artificial. These different types do not necessarily take place in sequence. During a single coding session, the coder may quickly and unknowingly move between one form of coding and another, especially between open and axial coding. The other major point to be made is that data collection and data analysis are tightly interwoven processes, and must occur alternately because the analysis directs the sampling of data.

For the purpose of this study I predominantly utilised the open coding method as explained above. In order to answer the central research question, namely how teachers see themselves as change agents during times of curriculum reform, I needed to collect the data from the teachers themselves, then dissemble and examine it closely. I compared the data to detect connections and dissimilarities. The coding process proceeded as follows (De Vos et al., 2002):

- First, the phenomena were labelled. Conceptualising the data thus became the first step in analysis. This was done by comparing various incidents so that similar phenomena could be given the same name.
- Second, categories were identified. The various phenomena were grouped according to these categories. This was done to reduce the number of units with which I had to work. This process of grouping concepts that seems to pertain to the same phenomena is called categorising.
- Thereafter, each category was named. I chose a name that seemed most logically related to the data it represented. De Vos et al. (2011) advise that the name should be graphic enough to remind one of its referent.
These categories were then developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. Properties are the characteristics or attributes of a category, and dimensions represent locations of a property along a continuum. The process of open coding stimulated the discovery not only of categories, but also of their properties and dimensions. De Vos et al. (2011) suggest that, when the researcher begins to develop a category, this must be done first in terms of its properties, which can then be dimensionalised.

I also relied on Tesch’s eight coding steps (1981, cited in De Vos, 1998) when coding the collected data. These coding steps are the following:

1. The researcher firstly gets a sense of the whole by reading through all the transcriptions carefully. Some ideas can be jotted down as they come to mind.

2. The researcher then selects one interview, for example, the most interesting, the shortest, the one at the top of the pile, and goes through it asking, “What is this about?” and thinking about the underlying meaning in the information. Thoughts that emerge are written in the margin.

3. When the researcher has completed this task for several respondents, a list is made of all the topics. Similar topics are clustered together and formed into columns that might be arranged into major topics, unique topics and leftovers.

4. The researcher takes the list and returns to the data. The topics are abbreviated as codes and the codes written next to the appropriate segments of the text. The researcher tries out this preliminary organising scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.

5. The researcher finds the most descriptive wording for the topics and turns them into categories. He or she endeavours to reduce the total list of categories by grouping together topics that relate to each other. Lines are drawn between the categories to show interrelationships.
6. The researcher makes a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetises the codes.

7. The data material belonging to each category is assembled in one place and a preliminary analysis performed.

8. The researcher recodes existing data if necessary.

There are however several different ways of approaching the process of open coding. One might begin by analysing the first interview and observation line by line. This involves close examination, phrase by phrase, and even sometimes of single words. Generating one’s categories early through line-by-line analysis is important because categories also become the basis of one’s theoretical sampling. The researcher might also code by sentence or paragraph. Here he might ask: What is the major idea brought out in this sentence or paragraph (of an interview, field note documents)? Give it a name. Then go back and underline more detailed analysis on that concept. This approach to coding can be used at any time, but is especially useful when one has several categories already defined and now wants to code around them. A third way is to take an entire document, observation or interview and ask: What seems to be going on here? What makes this document the same or different from the previous one that I coded? Having answered these questions, one might return to the data and specially analyse for those similarities or differences (De Vos, 1998).

**Trustworthiness**

Guba (1981, cited in De Vos 1998) holds that a model for assessing the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study must ensure vigour without sacrificing the relevance of the research. Guba’s model includes four criteria, namely, truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality:
• **Truth value** is perhaps the most important criterion for the assessment of qualitative research. Truth value asks whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings. A qualitative study can be considered credible when it presents such accurate and true descriptions or interpretations of human experience, so that people who also share that experience would immediately recognise the description.

• **Applicability** refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings or to other groups. It is the ability to generalise from the findings to larger populations. Guba (1981, cited in De Vos, 1998) refers to fittingness, or transferability, as the criterion against which the applicability of qualitative data is assessed.

• The third criterion of trustworthiness considers the **consistency** of the data, in other words, whether the findings would be consistent if the enquiry were replicated with the same subjects, or in a similar context.

• The fourth criterion of trustworthiness is **neutrality**. This refers to the freedom from bias during the research procedures and subsequent results of the study. Neutrality refers to the degree to which the findings are a function solely of the informants and conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivation and perspectives. Qualitative researchers try to increase the worth of the findings by decreasing the distance between the researcher and the informants, for example by prolonged contact with informants or lengthy periods of observation.

In this study, I relied on Guba’s model in order to ensure trustworthiness (1981, cited in De Vos, 1998).

**Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the manner in which the research process was implemented and conducted. It also justified the choice of paradigm, design and methodology. In choosing the methods of data collection I was guided by the central question, namely, *how do FET*
teachers in selected high schools in an urban township in the Eastern Cape perceive their roles as change agents as they implement the new national school curriculum (CAPS)?

In the next chapter (Chapter Four) I will present and discuss the findings of the investigation.
CHAPTER 4

Data presentation and discussion

Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of experiences of teachers responsible for the implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in the FET phase in high schools in an Eastern Cape urban township.

In total, 18 teachers shared their valued experiences. During the focus group interviews, the participants were encouraged to convey their honest opinions and interact with one another whilst engaging with two questions posed, namely, what are your experiences in implementing CAPS in the FET phase, and how do you see your role as change agent responsible for the implementation of CAPS? Initial responses to the questions led to further related discussions, which enabled the generation of rich data. I continued to conduct focus group interviews until the information became saturated. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. These transcriptions presented the raw data, which were then analysed independently by three coders, each applying Tech’s eight coding steps (1990, cited in De Vos, 1998). During a subsequent meeting, the coders jointly agreed on the final themes and sub-themes.

Four general themes emerged. These referred to CAPS itself, the learner in relation to CAPS, the teacher in relation to CAPS, and the Department of Education in relation to CAPS. Within these general themes, specific sub-themes could be identified which will now be discussed.
Theme 1: The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)

Within the general theme of CAPS, two sub-themes, each with its respective categories, could be identified. The two sub-themes relate to, first, the content and structure of CAPS, and second, the implementation of CAPS.

- **Sub-theme 1.1: The content and structure of CAPS**

When asked about their experiences of CAPS, several responses pointed towards the content and structure of CAPS. Many respondents tended to compare the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) with the previous National Curriculum Statement (NCS). Many teachers felt that, apart from some terminology changes, there is not much difference between these two policies. One respondent had this to say: "I personally, don't see the difference between CAPS and NCS. What I can see is just the new terminology. In NCS we were talking about the subject, and also we were talking about a topic. That is why I am saying they are just playing with terminology". Some teachers also compared the two curriculums in terms of the effect it had on their workload. They felt that CAPS provided them with a more linear and streamlined policy document. Other respondents felt CAPS was easier to implement compared to the NCS, as it consisted of only one policy and was more specific. As such they were now more effective as they had more time to teach. They were thus of the opinion that “CAPS brought remarkable improvement … if you compare it with NCS”.

Not all the respondents were negating the NCS in favour of CAPS. They felt that the NCS too encouraged learner-centeredness and that it was inappropriate to give all the credit to CAPS. One teacher remarked, “… to me NCS was also learner-centred, … if you were practising NCS principles and policies then the learning and teaching would have been more learner-centred”.
There seemed to be consensus amongst the respondents that CAPS is more structured than the NCS. This made their tasks easier. One teacher stated that “… CAPS is more structured. You know exactly what you should teach and also per term you are told exactly that this is what you should do per term”. There was general agreement that CAPS is “simple and straightforward”. Whereas the NCS consisted of three documents for each learning area, “… with CAPS it’s only one document. That is the main thing”.

The respondents also felt that CAPS was more accessible and structured in such a way that it directs teachers more clearly. They described the curriculum as “linear and more streamlined” and saw this as “an advantage for us”. They also felt that the subject progression and continuity across grades had improved as a result of CAPS. This, they experienced as “quite a remarkable improvement … if you compare it to the NCS”.

Although there was general agreement that CAPS was a “good curriculum”, many respondents still experienced the content as unclear and confusing, particularly due to the absence of clearly spelt out learning outcomes and assessment standards. One teacher remarked, “but with CAPS it’s just a topic. For instance in Maths, it will say ‘factorisation’ without explaining what that entails”. This generated a degree of insecurity and anxiety.

The respondents also felt that the content to be covered exceeded the amount of time allocated. As such, they experienced CAPS to be “good and its ideal for an ideal situation but we live in a real world. They would say do a specific topic in two hours whereas you would do that topic maybe in five days”.

When responding to the question about their experiences of CAPS, many teachers referred to the effect of CAPS on the learners. In this regard they referred to the clear principles of democracy embedded in the curriculum. Learners are encouraged to participate in the classroom. Some teachers were also of the opinion that CAPS had long-term benefits for the
learners, as it increased their employability prospects. One teacher remarked, *CAPS will assist us in this country, so that our learners can be employable anywhere*.

Many respondents however lamented the fact that CAPS did not accommodate slow learners or learners with disabilities. The predominant feeling amongst the teachers was that CAPS assumed that all the learners are the same. One teacher commented “...I don't see CAPS as accommodating slow learners. To me, it’s rigid. Because it is saying within a period of time you [have to] cover this amount of work. So what about the learners who are slow? So it doesn't accommodate that”.

- **Sub-theme 1.2: Implementation of CAPS**

When discussing their experiences related to the implementation of CAPS, it became clear that the respondents experienced the implementation of CAPS as easier than the previous curriculum. Many respondents however alluded to the realities in schools and the impact this had on the success or failure of CAPS implementation.

Although the teachers were clearly aware of the advantages of learner research as stipulated by CAPS, many respondents alluded to a gap between policy and practice. One respondent expressed his concerns about the curriculum designers’ apparent ignorance about the realities in most township schools in poverty-stricken areas where learners’ access to resources was limited: *“I am just anticipating problems for CAPS in a short run, because the key issues are not addressed, for example, that of a school environment and making the school suitable to the systems”.*

Although they grasped the benefits of group work, many respondents were also sceptical about the feasibility of this strategy in classrooms, due to the unacceptably high learner-teacher ratio in most township schools. It became clear that big classes and too much work, in general, compromised the quality of work. This was exacerbated by the amounts of
administrative work. One teacher lamented as follows: “How often I wish I could go to class and just teach … and dump my [administrative] work on an assistant teacher”. This teacher thus expressed a need for an assistant teacher, “… to do the marking, [and] the recording”.

The teachers also expressed concerns about the unrealistic time allocated for the completion of specific tasks. In general, they seemed to feel that the time to teach was insufficient: “They would say you do a specific topic in two hours whereas you would do that topic may be in five days”. The interviews also revealed that teachers do not have time to support learners with barriers to learning. One respondent explained: “In the FET we don’t necessarily have time for barriers to learning. You can’t have time for learners for remedial [assistance]. We have time frames to submit other things”. In general, the respondents, who are all FET teachers, felt that learners who experienced barriers to learning should have received more support in the preceding school phases.

During the interviews it became clear that the teachers experienced CAPS as built on the premise that all learners were well-disciplined and cooperative. School environments however vary and teachers at township schools are particularly challenged. One teacher for instance felt that “context ‘things’ need to be addressed beforehand”.

**Theme 1: Conclusion**

The responses of these teachers confirm Rogan and Grayson (2003) as well as Verspoor’s (1998) postulation that whilst policy documents normally contain visionary and educationally sound ideas, implementation thereof often proves to be slower and more difficult than anticipated. The teachers argued that the policy (CAPS) itself was simple, the content was good and more streamlined but its implementation was a mammoth task. It requires careful and proper planning to achieve success. The notion one draws from the data is that it was assumed that just by mere changing from National Curriculum Statement (NCS) to CAPS
things will simply fall into place’. The data confirms the research conducted by Dada, *et al.* (2009) indicating significant hindrances impacting negatively on the implementation of a new curriculum. It also confirms the postulation of Rogan and Grayson (2003) that much work on implementation issues still needs to be done in South Africa to realise the anticipated potential of new education policies.

Carl (2009) argues that, in order for teachers then to assume their roles as change agents, they need to conditions that will be conducive and enabling. This means that they need to be recognised for their key role, and consulted and included in the design of new curricula. In the final instance, the teachers know the teaching and learning contexts best. If they are expected to implement externally designed curricula which are imposed onto them, they are likely to distance themselves from the process, relinquishing ownership and agency.

**Theme 2: The learner**

During all the interviews, the teachers considered and discussed the new curriculum in relation to the very people it aimed to benefit, namely the learners. It was clear that they regarded CAPS as beneficial to the learners, as it “encourages learners to be independent in terms of thinking and acquiring investigative skills, research skills, analysing skills, etcetera”.

Two prominent themes emerged with regard to the relation between implementation of CAPS and the learners. The first theme focussed on the effect of the learners’ attitudes and the second theme on the impact of the learners’ specific contexts on the implementation of CAPS.

- **Sub-theme 2.1: The learners’ attitudes**

The attitude of the learner is central to the success or failure of any teaching and learning process. Teaching by its nature is a two-way process and learner cooperation is critical. It was however evident that some of the hindrances the teachers experienced with regard to
successful implementation of CAPS were particular negative attitudes of learners towards their work. One teacher explained: “To me … I would say it is easy to teach CAPS but the problem is with the learners because our learners like to be spoon-fed”. Another respondent emphasised that learner enthusiasm is key to successful teaching and learning and subsequently implementation of CAPS. However, “learners still don’t have enthusiasm in their work. They just come here with no vision, no direction, they are just here at school”. The reluctance of many learners to engage in group work also impeded successful implementation of CAPS: “Some learners … they don’t want to work together … they always complain”. The fact that many learners were not doing their homework was “just some of the problems”. As a result, the “learners are stressing us”.

- **Sub-theme 2.2. Awareness of the learners’ contexts**

The respondents revealed an acute awareness of the impact of the learners’ contexts on the implementation of CAPS. They were aware that learners had diverse skills and cognitive abilities. They also acknowledged the need to accommodate the learners’ home backgrounds when implementing CAPS. In this particular study, I interviewed teachers from high schools in a poverty-stricken township in a previously disadvantaged area. According to these teachers, many of their learners became easily distracted because they “got issues from their backgrounds. So if your lesson is dull they tend to be swayed away from whatever you are teaching”. One respondent thus asked a rhetorical question: “Do we do justice to learners from poor family backgrounds?”

Parental support enhances any child’s growth, also at intellectual and academic level. Unfortunately, many of the learners’ parents were illiterate, hence support with and monitoring of homework became problematic. This reality subsequently challenged the learners’ academic growth potential. One teacher described this predicament as follows: “As a teacher you expect the parent at home to help with homework, but because of illiteracy in the family, no one is enlightened”. However, the teachers still exhibited an acute awareness
of the need to equip their learners irrespective of their poor socio-economic backgrounds and lack of parental support. They also realised that such commitment would increase the demands on them as teachers.

Another reality of the learners' context that hampered effective implementation of CAPS related to the learners' poor command of English. One respondent observed that “language is always a problem for them. They can't express themselves in English. That is a challenge, a great challenge for us in FET”. This reality not only impeded successful teaching and learning in the classroom, but also put the learners at a disadvantage in terms of assessment. The respondents furthermore felt that the learners were struggling with CAPS in the FET phase because of poor implementation of outcomes-based education in preceding school phases, particularly in terms of subject content knowledge. One teacher stated bluntly that, “OBE did not prepare learners for CAPS”.

Theme 2: Conclusion

The responses of these teachers indicate the critical role the learners play in the success or failure of curriculum implementation. The teacher’s enthusiasm and agency to effect change is hampered by learner disregard and lack of cooperation. This is further aggravated in poverty-stricken township schools where learners have illiterate parents or come from child-headed households. These factors give rise to feelings of despondency and despair. The results thus confirm Slabbert’s assertion (2001) that South African teachers experience numerous endemic problems related to unmotivated learners, a lack of support from home and violence in schools. All these factors hinder their ability to assume their roles as effective change agents.
Theme 3: The teacher

It goes without saying that, in their responses to the two questions, the teachers also reflected on themselves in relation to the implementation of CAPS. They shared positive and negative experiences and disclosed particular stances regarding their roles and responsibilities and towards educational change in particular.

- Sub-theme 3.1. The teacher’s disposition

It was clear that the teachers had specific personal viewpoints with regard to the implementation of CAPS. In their responses, the teachers reflected on their (un)changed roles and responsibilities as facilitators, leaders, change agents and lifelong learners. They also considered and shared approaches and attitudes towards their work.

It was evident that, similar to C2005 and the NCS, the respondents still regarded the teacher primarily as a facilitator of learning. As such, “the role of the teacher is not different from the previous curriculum (OBE) and that is to facilitate constructive learning and teaching”. However, they often found this role problematic as it forced them “to hold back”. It was thus clear that they still positioned themselves at the core of the teaching and learning processes. One teacher explained, “I see myself as a bridge for these learners to pass through”. Another teacher saw himself as the “middleman between policy and the learners”, whilst another teacher referred to herself as a “compass”. The teachers were also clearly aware of subsequent responsibilities related to their core role, especially in terms of having solid content knowledge. One teacher explained “You need to be strategic. You need to know your business in your learning area, in your subject. So you need to know your content”.

In addition to their perceived roles as alluded to above, the teachers also saw themselves as leaders in terms of curriculum implementation. One respondent argued: “I must remember that one of the important roles… I must be a good leader because you are going to stand in front, even if you are going to be a facilitator. But at the end of the day you are going to
lead”. In this regard, they also lamented the lack of leadership exercised by the provincial Department of Education, forcing them to assume a leadership role beyond the classroom. According to one respondent, “the department has put wrong people in wrong places somewhere somehow”. As a result, “I’m the teacher but I have to facilitate these workshops”. Subsequently, they realised that they had to assume agency during the curriculum change process and abandon dependence on the Department of Education in this regard. They saw it their duty to be pro-active: “You can’t wait for the department”. As agents, they were committed to sacrifice time, energy and even money. “I am not paid to do that [present the workshops]. I do that voluntarily”.

As agents, they also had to take responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms. The respondents clearly regarded it their responsibility to be assertive, have solid content knowledge, apply effective teaching and learning strategies, are well prepared and clear about intended outcomes of each lesson. One teacher explained “I think it lies before you go to class, with thorough preparation … so it requires proper preparation from teachers. Then it becomes easier to implement”. Another teacher concurred bluntly: “I have to know my stuff”. This however required commitment from the teachers “to make sure that we do things the right way”.

It also emerged during the interviews that teachers needed to adopt the roles of lifelong learners. One teacher was of the opinion that, “I need to teach myself to learn more and not only depend on what I have learnt from university, but I must be able to research more on the content and in my subject”. They felt that teachers should constantly search for new knowledge to empower themselves: “You need to read and read. [There is] no short way out or easy way out”. In this regard, some respondents alluded to bored and weary teachers who are indifferent, not interested in their work and as such ineffective teachers. One respondent was of the view that, “I think some of the teachers have reached a point of saturation in the field. So how can you expect teachers to implement curriculum successfully
if their brains can’t take it any longer. They are more like zombies now, coming to school. They teach, they go”.

In this regard, some respondents also referred to ill-disciplined teachers who behave unprofessionally by arriving late and being unprepared. One teacher was clear that, if “you are not punctual, implementation is impossible”. Another teacher lamented “the years when we started this profession. We were calling it a ‘profession of a call’. History will judge us one day as the agents who failed these learners in their future”. The teachers thus regarded a professional, passionate and enthusiastic teacher disposition as critical for the successful implementation of a new curriculum. This requires self-reflection and introspection: “Sometimes you need to do introspection and check your weaknesses and your strengths”.

Responding to the question about their role during the implementation process, several respondents referred to the need for collegial support. They saw it as their responsibility to network with other teachers, build strong relationships with colleagues and share best practices, also with colleagues from other schools. One respondent explained, “… so we network with other teachers and see what we get from other schools”.

The teachers were acutely aware that many of them received their training when different philosophies of education underpinned teacher education. One teacher said, “Remember that we were taught in another type of a system so we come into the field and we have another type of a system and we are in a field where things changed”. Another respondent explained that, “you were not exposed to the kind of education or system at the time that you were a learner. So much of your understanding of learning is what you received mostly and it could take time probably for you to understand and be able then to apply it [the new approach]”. Some teachers even preferred the ‘old system’, describing outcomes-based education as “not original” and “as I may put it, a ‘fong kong’ (sic) type of education”.

However, despite the fact that the respondents were acutely aware that many of them were taught and trained differently, they acknowledged the need to transform and adjust to the
demands of educational and curriculum change. One teacher remarked: “We are in a transformation process; we definitely have to battle with that aspect”. Another respondent concluded that “what I need to do is to make sure that I know my content, [because] to the learners that is the real thing”.

They thus lamented that fact that many “teachers do not take transformation seriously. They are just in a comfort zone, so when you say it’s transformation he goes mad”. They felt that teachers needed to demonstrate a willingness to assist with the implementation of CAPS. One respondent explained that “CAPS is here to stay, ours is to accept it. [We need to] begin to master this new curriculum”. Therefore, despite their negative experiences with regard to the “haphazard nature” of the implementation process, they accepted that “we cannot throw the baby and the bucket outside”.

**Sub-theme 3.2 Personal experiences**

The two questions asked during the focus group interviews, namely, what are your experiences in implementing CAPS in the FET phase, and how do you see your role as a change agent responsible for the implementation of CAPS, encouraged the respondents to reflect on and share negative and positive personal experiences.

It was clear that the teachers faced several challenges as they were implementing CAPS. These obstacles generated negative experiences. One such a challenge related to large class sizes, in other words “big numbers” in one class. As a result, the teachers experienced discipline problems and difficulties with group work. Monitoring of individual learner progress also became problematic. In addition, uninterested and apathetic learners who were reluctant to participate and do homework generated frustration: “Sometimes you give learners a task so that they can do it at home but unfortunately they don’t submit it. It frustrates”.
It was also clear that, despite expectations that CAPS would reduce the teachers’ administrative load, they were still burdened by administrative demands. This hampered their teaching: “The bulk of our time we spend on administration work [...] is a hindrance”. The teachers were also frustrated about the fact that they had no input in the design of CAPS. They felt that they were thus expected to implement a policy that was imposed onto them. This unrealistic expectation “puts us in a very awkward situation”. They revealed negative experiences related to the Department of Education, especially in terms of lack of consultation and inadequate support: “It’s very unfair when our department does not come our way, to solve the problems”. Subsequently, they felt despondent and deserted.

The respondents however also shared positive experiences related to the implementation of CAPS. They were excited about new learning opportunities brought about by the new curriculum. “I think, but we are enjoying it because we are learning. We learn as we go”. The fact that they had textbooks that were aligned with CAPS and “straightforward and easy to use” generated optimism. One respondent remarked that “Everything is there … you can give your learners the work and they will do it”.

Theme 3: Conclusion

Carl (2009) asserts that, as change agents, teachers need to assume a range of roles and responsibilities. They want to improve their subject content knowledge (Leaman, 2008). According to Carl (2009) teachers who are agents of change express a willingness to utilise their knowledge and competencies to the maximum advantage of their learners. Teachers who act as change agents furthermore evaluate the change process and raise impediments and problems that they encounter during the change process.

The responses from the teachers confirm that, despite several problems and frustrations that impede their ability to act as effective agents of change, the teachers expressed resilience and commitment. The data thus confirm Morrow’s claim (2007) that professional, competent
teachers are the cornerstones of educational transformation. Their commitment, competence and quality ultimately determine the system’s success or failure. The notion of teachers being leaders and lead curriculum change has been confirmed by this data.

Theme 4: The Department of Education (DoE)

During all the interviews, the Department of Education (DoE), as designer and owner of the national school curriculum, featured strongly. Consistently, the respondents expressed discontent and frustration about the role the DoE plays in relation to the implementation of CAPS. Two sub-themes could be identified. These referred to guidance and support, and management and administration. These sub-themes will now be discussed.

- Sub-theme 4.1: Guidance and support

The respondents expressed disappointment, despondency and frustration about inadequate motivation, support and guidance from the DoE: “On the department side … they are not motivational enough”. The teachers felt deserted as the DoE officials did not contact them or visited the schools to ascertain their needs and provide ongoing support. As such, they felt that there was little sympathy and understanding for the unique problems they encountered as teachers in poverty-stricken township schools.

In-service training workshops presented by the DoE were experienced as “inadequate and a complete waste of time”. In this regard, the teachers also expressed scepticism about the assumed inability of some DoE officials to provide guidance and support. This led to a perception that the DoE is “too irresponsible and merely passing the buck”. One teacher who assisted with workshop presentations remarked: “I am doing somebody else’s job”.

It became clear that insufficient guidance and support from the DoE led to some teachers feeling disempowered and lacking sufficient self-confidence to assume their roles as change agents when implementing CAPS.
Sub-theme 4.2: Management and administration

It appeared that the respondents were unsatisfied with the “haphazard” way the implementation of CAPS had been managed and administered. One teacher expressed his concern as follows: “Everything is rushed, rushed, rushed. Somehow it is going to catch up with us”. They also felt that the department was unilateral when implementing these changes and did not consult sufficiently with them as stakeholders. One respondent remarked that, “… somehow I am asking myself the question whether proper consultation has been done with teachers”. One teacher explained for example that, “the designers never thought of lack of discipline [in the classroom] when drafting the curriculum and it frustrates the teacher who is between the system and the learner”. They believed that the DoE assumed that “CAPS will succeed as long as there is a teacher and the learner at school”. Many respondent subsequently referred to “a gap between policy and practice”, and the “ideal and the real”. As a result, one teacher anticipates “problems for CAPS in a short run; because key issues are not addressed for example that of environment and that of making sure that the situation at schools is suitable to the system”.

The teachers also felt overwhelmed by “too many policies”. The constant curriculum policy change created uncertainty and despondency. One teacher remarked, “… the last time I checked we did OBE, RNCS, and NCS. Now we are doing CAPS. I am sure next year we will be doing ‘panamas’ (sic)”.

In general, the teachers felt that it was primarily the duty of the DoE to, via proper management and administration, create working conditions that should motivate teachers to go the extra mile. In this regard, they once again mentioned the impediments brought about by large learner-teacher ratios in classes. “I feel the negatives are we have over-populated schools”, said one teacher. Another pertinent frustration caused by poor management and administration related to lack of resources required for implementation of CAPS, and in
particular the poor delivery of much-needed textbooks. “Why deliver books, textbooks this time of the year [June]?, one teacher asked.

Other aspects related to the DoE’s management and administration of the implementation of CAPS were “poor remuneration” and lack of incentives for teachers to implement new innovations. The issue of “temporary educators” who could not be appointed in permanent posts was also cited as impacting negatively on curriculum implementation. In this regard, the impact of the relationship between the DoE and teacher unions was also mentioned and highlighted as impeding the teachers’ ability to implement CAPS. One teacher mentioned that he experienced a “catch twenty two type of situation”. When referring to recent teacher strikes about the non-employment of temporary teachers, he explained that, “You are a member of the union and you also find the government is not doing its part, for example the issue of temporary teachers… Then if the union calls a strike you are forced to participate. So, obviously as a change agent you are in the middle of that”.

Theme 4: Conclusion

Fullan (2007) emphasises the important role of the government (in this case the Department of Education) during a process of curriculum reform and implementation. He cites the need for efficient accountability structures, incentives, support, resources as well as capacity-building initiatives as critical for successful implementation. Similarly, Carl (2009) and Smit (2001) highlight the need for effective practice-oriented in-service training, workshops, and demonstrations of new practices, for example assessment. The teachers’ despondent responses suggest that the lack of sufficient guidance and support, coupled with poor management and administration significantly impeded their ability to assume their roles as change agents during the implementation of CAPS.
However, it was also clear that, despite these impediments, the teachers had faith in CAPS as national school curriculum for FET learners. They also conveyed a sincere commitment to the education of their learners, and were prepared to implement CAPS and facilitate teaching and learning in their classrooms to the best of their abilities.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, generated data pertaining to the central research question, namely, *how do FET teachers in selected high schools in an urban township in the Eastern Cape perceive educational transformation in South Africa, and in particular their roles as change agents as they implement the new national school curriculum (CAPS) were presented and discussed.*

The teacher’ responses could be categorised into four broad themes, namely CAPS itself, the learners in relation to CAPS, the teacher in relation to CAPS and the Department of Education in relation to CAPS. It can be concluded that, despite several frustrations and uncertainties, the teachers did assume agency as they expressed a commitment towards change and a willingness to implement CAPS to the best of their ability.

In the final chapter of this treatise, I will discuss my conclusions and propose recommendations.
Chapter 5

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

This chapter brings this research study to closure. I will discuss conclusions I came to in my pursuit to answer the main research question, namely, How do FET teachers in selected high schools in an urban township in the Eastern Cape perceive educational transformation in South Africa, and in particular their roles as change agents as they implement the new national school curriculum (CAPS)? In response to these conclusions, I will then propose recommendations in order to improve the quality of CAPS implementation in the FET phase.

Conclusions

Teachers’ perceptions about the implementation of CAPS inadvertently will determine the degree to which they would assume agency when implementing the new school curriculum. The data clearly revealed that the teachers who took part in this study had various perceptions about the implementation of new national school curricula in South Africa over a period of time. This includes CAPS. In my pursuit to determine the specific perceptions of teachers about curriculum change and their roles as change agents, I came to the following conclusions:

South Africa has undergone many curricula changes within a short period of time since 1994. The constant changes impacted on the teachers’ self-confidence and resilience. They felt that they had barely master one curriculum, before it was replaced by another one. This is also created a sense of anxiety and unease. Uncertain and unconfident teachers will inevitably not be able to realise the full potential of CAPS and delivery quality teaching in the classroom. The constant changes also led to a feeling of despondency and scepticism.
As such, the teachers were **cautious** and **reluctant** to invest too much energy into settling into CAPS. This **hesitancy** and **averseness** undoubtedly impeded their sense of agency.

It also became clear that the teachers were **disillusioned**, **disappointed** and **disempowered**. They anticipated a reduced administrative load after Minister Motshekga’s famous “death of OBE” announcement in 2009. The teachers still felt **overburdened** and **demoralised** by the load of administrative work which impeded their desire to focus on teaching and learning in the classroom. This did not materialise to the anticipated degree. This sense of **abandonment** was further aggravated by the perception of inadequate support from the DoE, especially in terms of insufficient in-service training. Since township schools are mostly Section 20 schools, it means that their budgets are controlled by the DoE. As such they are dependent on government for resources. The poor provision and delivery of support materials, such as textbooks, subsequently added to the feelings of **desertion** and **neglect**. This in turn led to feelings of **despondency**, as they felt **unequipped** to do justice to quality teaching and learning. The data thus revealed that the teachers felt **disempowered**. Teachers who feel **deserted** by their employer and are also **disenchanted** are unlikely to assume their roles as enthusiastic agents of change.

The demand for increased accountability procedures as required by the DoE were furthermore perceived as a lack of trust and confidence in their own professional judgement. As such, they felt that they were **compromising their own sense of individuality and autonomy**, also in terms of implementing their own style of teaching and assessment. The teachers furthermore expressed a sense of **helplessness**, as they inherited learners from feeder schools that were ill-prepared for the demands of CAPS, yet they as FET teachers were expected to ensure these learners’ academic success. This sense of **vulnerability** was aggravated by inner conflict brought about by expectations and demands from the unions. Whilst these organisations on the one hand agitate for quality education by protesting against poor DoE administration, it also disrupts schooling with teacher strikes and so forth.
This put the teachers in a predicament, adding to their sense of powerlessness. Their lack of agency made them feel vulnerable and confused.

As mentioned earlier, the participants in this study were all teaching at urban township schools in poverty-stricken areas. The fact that the impoverished home conditions of many students, for example lack of resources and illiterate parents hampered learner performance effective implementation of CAPS added to the teachers’ sense of frustration and helplessness. This was aggravated by poor learner discipline and large class sizes which hindered quality teaching, learning and assessment.

It was also clear that the teachers felt overwhelmed by what they perceived to be haphazard implementation of CAPS. The lack of incentives from the government also did not motivate the teachers to go the extra mile and assume agency. This unfortunately affected commitment and their willingness to implement CAPS to the best of their abilities. The teachers also longed for more collegiality between teachers, as this would motivate them to collectively take up agency.

From the above it is clear that the teachers’ perceptions about the nature of curriculum change in South Africa, and in particular the implementation of CAPS, were predominantly negative. Their primary reservation related to the way the national government, in other words, the Department of Education, is leading and managing educational change in South Africa.

Agency, specifically during times of change, to a large extent depends on one’s perceptions about the rationale and nature of the required changes. Unfortunately the teachers’ prolonged negative experiences affected their morale, hence also hampered their willingness to be change agents.
This study however also revealed that, although the teachers in general expressed despondency, frustration and even despair with regard to the implementation of CAPS, they had faith in the curriculum itself. They felt the curriculum was more streamlined and structured and subsequently easier to implement. They also believed that CAPS served the learners. This motivated them to take up their roles as change agents to the best of their ability, compensating for neglected support by departmental officials when needed. The teachers interviewed were committed to the teaching profession, and expressed a sincere desire to improve their subject content knowledge by continuing to learn. In the final instance they strive to facilitate teaching and learning in their classrooms to the best of their ability, despite impeding conditions. As such, they exemplified committed agents of change.

**Recommendations**

To enable South African teachers to implement CAPS successfully in the FET phase, especially in township and rural schools, it is recommended that the national government, in other words, the Department of Education, take note of what this study revealed. The above conclusions clearly show that the vast majority of problems have been experienced as a result of the way educational transformation has been lead and managed by the DoE since 1994. Should the DoE manage to improve the conditions under which teachers are expected to teach, and provide the necessary on-going support, there is reason to believe that teachers will indeed be able to implement CAPS successfully to the advantage of all aspiring FET learners. To improve the current situation, the following strategies are recommended:

- The prevailing phenomenon of under-resourced schools needs to be addressed with more urgency. In most cases, these schools had been previously disadvantaged as a result of the apartheid schooling system. Since these schools are mostly located in poverty-stricken areas, local resources and parental support are limited. This means that the provincial department of education needs to assume responsibility more explicitly
and improve its administrative systems to ensure adequate resourcing of the schools, especially in terms of teaching and learning support materials, such as textbooks.

- Local and regional cooperation and collaboration between teachers should be encouraged and formalised. This can happen through the establishment of school networks or clusters. During regular cluster meetings teachers can discuss and share issues related to curriculum implementation.

- The provincial Department of Education needs to engage more actively with local HEIs with regard to in-service training of teachers. It is clear that departmental workshops are inadequate and do not equip teachers sufficiently for the work they need to do. The in-service training by HEIs can also be in the form of focussed Short Learning Programmes (SLPs), addressing a particular subject content area where teachers require development. In this regard it is hoped that the proposed CPD point system will be implemented soon, as this may provide the necessary incentive for teachers to enrol for SLPs.

- It is clear that teachers struggle to implement the curriculum as a result of classroom and learner discipline problems. Here, too, HEIs can assist with the presentation of Short Learning Programmes that focus on classroom management, teaching and learning strategies for large classes and positive learner behaviour support.

- This study revealed that FET teachers struggle to implement CAPS successfully due to the fact that the learners are ill-equipped during the preceding GET phase. This means that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment from Grades R to Grade 9 needs to improve, especially with regard to learners’ proficiency in English as language of learning and teaching. The Department of Education needs to monitor the quality of education more closely and provide on-going support, especially to teachers in the Intermediate and Senior phases, where learners do an array of subjects. Due to lack of specialised teachers in these phases, subject content knowledge is often compromised because teachers often teach subjects outside of their own expertise.
• Ideally, teachers need classroom assistants who can assist with administrative work and classroom management, so that the teachers can focus on the academic aspects of their work. It is recommended that the Department of Education considers the appointment of classroom assistants to FET teachers, especially those with large classes.

• In addition, it is also recommended that the Department of Education appoints to each school an educational support team that could attend to the learners’ social, health and psychological problems. Learners in rural and township schools are prone to various social, psychological and health challenges. These affect their academic engagement and performance. Should teachers be able to direct distressed learners to these support teams, they would be able to focus their attention to academic aspects of their work.

• The concept of a Community School should also be considered, especially in areas with socioeconomic challenges. Community Schools establish mutually beneficial partnerships with parents, the broader community, and other education stakeholders to support the academic and social development of learners. They draw on the assets of the local community and via partnerships with the local community strive towards reciprocity so that both school and community can benefit from the relationship.

It is my contention that, should these recommendations be implemented, FET teachers in previously disadvantaged schools will be able to implement the national school curriculum more effectively.

Final conclusion

In this study, I have set out to explore how recent curriculum changes, such as the implementation of CAPS, affect FET teachers in selected high schools in an Eastern Cape urban township. I came to the conclusion that, although the teachers have faith in the new curriculum, and expressed sincere commitment and devotion to their work, their experiences were predominantly negative, primarily due to the many constraints they experienced. In
essence, they struggled to 'do their job', which is to teach properly (Morrow, 2007: 91). The esteemed South African educationist, the late Wally Morrow, quoted Shulman who claimed that

Teaching is impossible. If we simply add together all that is expected of a typical teacher and take note of the circumstances in which those activities are to be carried out, the sum makes greater demands than any individual can possibly fulfil (Shulman, cited in Morrow, 2007: 91).

This study thus concludes that FET teachers employed at three urban township schools in the Eastern Cape struggle to assume full agency during times of educational change, due to restrictive and disabling conditions which are mostly beyond their control.
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