

## Gridlocked in a Lesson Plan Triangle: The Perceptions of In-service Student Teachers

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**ABSTRACT** This paper presents the findings of the study conducted in schools in one of the regions in South Africa. The purpose of the study was to identify challenges encountered by teachers in implementing curriculum changes in their classrooms and the focus was on lesson planning. Using the qualitative approach within the interpretive paradigm, interview with teachers enrolled in upgrading programs in universities were the target population for the study. These include the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE), Advance Certificate in Education (ACE) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). These are in-service teacher education and training programs that assist teachers to upgrade their professional qualification. This study unveiled diverse conceptions and practice used in lesson planning by teachers due to the lack of consensus among higher education institutions, publishers and the Department of Education. The synthesis of the findings unraveled a lack of uniformity and incompetent teachers in lesson planning to be the main critical issues that need attention of teachers' trainers, education department's officials and publishers. This paper purports the clarification of the theoretical knowledge that underpins the design of the lesson plan.

### INTRODUCTION

The National Curriculum Statement (NCS), which evolved from Curriculum 2005, expected teachers to play a role in curriculum planning and development at school level. Teachers were provided with policy guidelines outlining the levels of achievement to be attained through teaching and learning. Researchers in the Curriculum field had alluded to numerous factors that hindered the effective implementation of Outcomes-Based Curriculum in schools. Chisholm (2002) argued that the implementation of Curriculum 2005 and NCS had been confounded by inter alia inadequate orientation, training and development of teachers. Critics of Outcomes-based Curriculum pointed out that a lack of adequately trained teachers was the main challenge facing its implementation in classrooms (Jansen and Christie 1999). In response to this outcry, the Department of Education assigned the universities to design qualifications suitable for in-service teacher education and training (DoE 1998). The norms and standards formulated by the National Department of Education prescribed the National Qualification Frameworks for the in-service teacher education and training qualifications. The paradigm for designing and developing the curriculum for the programs was competence-based. Teaching, learning as well as assessment was to be driven by three competences:

1. Foundational competences. These competences define the teachers' abilities inclined to disciplinary or subject specialization content knowledge,
2. Practical competences are the attributes of classroom teaching practice and,
3. Reflexive competences relates to the teachers' ability to integrate their performances and decision-making with understanding and with ability to adapt to change.

The department provided universities with the policy guidelines prescribing these three competences as frameworks for the curriculum development for NPDE, ACE and PGCE (DoE: 1998). According to the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996, the three competences emanated from the seven norms and standards, which described the seven roles formulated by the National Qualification Framework. These seven roles serve as a description of what it means to be a competent educator. The competent educator according to the NQF descriptions should have abilities to mediate learning, interpret and design learning programs and materials, lead and manage research, assess, support and provide pastoral care, and demonstrate an understanding and thinking, which underpin the subject or discipline as well as its pedagogical content knowledge. The curriculum designed for the in-service qualifications program had to be approved by the Higher Education Quality

Committee of the Council on Higher Education for accreditation and funding (DoE 1996).

This study intended to understand the impact of the curriculum transformation in the in-service teacher education and training, on their professional practice through the lens of lesson planning. The national department in collaboration with provincial departments of education targeted unqualified and underqualified teachers to be the beneficiaries of the NPDE, ACE and PGCE project. The project started in 2003 in universities where the programs for these qualifications were approved. The duration of the NPDE qualification is three years, whereas for PGCE and ACEit is one year. Student teachers who enrolled for the qualification having obtained two years training course were enrolled for 240 credits and this implied that they required only 240 credits for the NPDE qualification. Those who enrolled without any prior training but who taught for five years required 360 credits to meet the requirements of the qualification. ACE and PGCE qualifications targeted those teachers who needed 120 credits to qualify for REQV 14, the requirement for employment in schools under the democratic education dispensation. These programs had been in place for more than nine years.

### Literature Review

The experts in curriculum studies expressed that lesson planning is the vital and crucial level in curriculum design and development hence it provides the plan of action of what takes place in classrooms. The lesson plans serve as the record and evidence of teaching and learning (Killen 2006; Chatel 2002; Kilzik 2010).

Grundy (1994) alluded to the importance of lesson planning in teaching and learning when arguing that curriculum adaptations are modifications that relate specifically to instruction or curriculum content. Fullan (2006) supports this view in his argument that implementation of curriculum change for teachers entails, new material, new behavior and practices, and ultimately new beliefs and understanding of classroom practice. Chatel (2002) in the same vein asserted that the development of lesson plans through the use of planning templates is the central part of teacher preparation programs in United Kingdom, Canada and United States. John (2006) echoing the same perception of the importance

of lesson planning as part of teacher education and training programs, argued to say the principles and theories underlying lesson plan and design should be informed by the psychology of learning and instruction. 'Learning context and assessment standards, integration of learning outcomes and assessment within Learning Area, integration of learning outcomes and assessment standards outside the Learning Area, core knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, teacher activities and learner activities, teaching strategies and teaching methods, assessment methods, assessment tools and techniques, expanded opportunities and lastly teacher reflections' (DoE 2003).

Killen (2009: 70) elaborated on what lesson planning entails in Outcomes-Based teaching and learning, and says "the process of developing a detailed lesson plan helps a teacher clarify what he or she wants learners to learn and to consider multiple ways of helping learners achieve those goals". In this sense, lesson planning should reflect lot of thinking about the lesson, making decisions and committing those.

"Planning and preparation of an outcomes-based lesson have to be guided by the following questions:

- ♦ What is the general purpose and relevance of the lesson?
- ♦ How does this lesson relate to the rest of the subject or Learning Area?
- ♦ Why is this the most appropriate time to teach this lesson?
- ♦ How will this lesson build on learners' prior knowledge and understanding?
- ♦ What will learners do after this lesson?
- ♦ What is it preparing them for?
- ♦ Lastly, what are the likely consequences if learners do not master the understanding and skills that are the focus of this lesson" (Killen 2009:73).

Lending further support for the importance of lesson planning, Greiman and Bedtke (2008) argued that lesson planning provides teachers with some control over what is going to happen in the teaching and learning environment.

### Statement of the Problem

During teaching practice, lecturers visit in-service students in schools to monitor their progress. It has been discovered that these student teachers are not in par in terms of knowl-

edge of developing a lesson plan. There is no uniformity in the way a lesson plan is developed. Some students do not even know the phases of the lesson plan and the routine information that should go with it. Lecturers are baffled by this situation despite their endeavors to teach students how a lesson plan is developed, as well as the theoretical framework underpinning this activity. All the work done during lectures seems to be in vain. It is therefore against this background that this paper attempts to answer the following questions:

- ♦ What challenges do in-service student teachers encounter in the development of a lesson plan?
- ♦ What paradigms underpin the NPDE, ACE and PGCE students' interpretation of lesson planning and preparation?
- ♦ What are the effects of these paradigms of lesson planning and preparation in teaching and learning?

### Conceptual Framework

This study is underpinned by the concept of a 'lesson plan'. Chatel (2002) defined a lesson plan as a systematic design for the development, implementation and evaluation of instruction, and such a plan is in this sense a rehearsal for delivering effective instructions. Planning a lesson provides the teacher an opportunity to anticipate instructional and learning needs before stepping in front of the learners (Killen 2006). According to Chatel (2003), lesson planning is widely viewed as a subject of pedagogical content knowledge for teacher trainees and it relates to other aspects of educational theory and practice. According to Killen (2009), lesson planning is a task in which theoretical and strategic generalities are brought to bear on very concrete questions of particular curricular, contents and teaching practice and also of individual learner's needs.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach located within the interpretive paradigm. This has been necessitated by the fact that in-depth knowledge of challenges faced by students in developing the lesson had to be solicited. This paradigm is deemed relevant to this study because it is associated with human sciences where

people's behaviors, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes are investigated as Cohen et al. (2007) state. Strauss and Corbin (1998) and McMillan and Schumacher (1993) regard qualitative research as any kind of research that produces findings that are delinked from statistical quantifications.

Data was generated using structured interviews with three participants from each of the programs (NPDE, ACE and PGCE) selected through random sampling. Only final year students were deemed relevant for the study. The study included males and females teaching in semi-urban and deep rural schools in the region of northern KwaZulu Natal. In the process of analyzing data, there are three steps that were followed in the analysis of narratives. These steps are data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification according to Miles and Huberman (1994). Within the data reduction phase there are four steps that were followed as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (1993). Step one was about reading the data set as a whole to get the sense of it. Secondly, topics, which emerged from the data, were identified. Thirdly, the lists of topics that emerged from the data sets were checked to see that there is no duplication. After checking, they were then categorized into themes. Finally the provisional classification system on all the data sets was applied, after which coding next to the appropriate piece of data took place (McMillan and Schummacher 1993). After classifying data, the relationship or patterns between categories were checked in order to understand the complex links between various aspects of students' experiences in developing a lesson plan. Issues that emerged from the narratives were, the lack of uniformity in the designing of lesson plan templates, immersion of student teachers in a variety of paradigms of lesson planning, lack of theoretical knowledge and conceptual knowledge informing student teachers' classroom practices of lesson plan development and the above three issues that emerged from the study are reported to be caused by the different centers of power.

### FINDINGS

Findings unveiled that there was uncertainty about the ideal lesson planning in schools in KwaZulu Natal. Informants responded in diverse

ways but there was consensus in the way they presented their cases. When asked what kind of challenges they face in the development of a lesson plan, one informant responded:

*'There are various lesson plan templates, we as a school, had to choose from. The head of department has the final say on the matter pertaining to the lesson plan template used in our department. The head of department decided to prescribe the one given to him by the subject advisor.'*

The second informant alluded to the facts the first responded revealed by saying:

*'Our school use books supplied by a certain publishing company and they conduct workshops for teachers on how to use their books as well as designing a lesson plan template. Actually, the facilitators of the workshop recommended their company's lesson plan template.'*

These responses bear testimony to the fact that there is more than one source of information. Apart from what these students are taught at a university level, there is another source that imposes power on them. This is how the third informant responded to the same question:

*'In our school we use exemplars of lesson plan template supplied by the department. The subject advisors provide us with the lesson template that is suitable for the Learning Area. The heads of department do not want us to use the publishers' lesson plan templates.'*

With regards to the theoretical knowledge that informs the lesson plan and the design they use as a template to guide them in their planning, diverse answers were solicited. Three respondents stated that:

*'The lecturers gave us their own lesson plan templates which we only use when they visit us for classroom support and evaluation.'*

The challenge these in-service students teachers face is that their heads of department disapprove the lesson plan template prescribed by the institution of higher learning. This is what they have to say:

*'The problem with the one given by the lecturer from the institution of higher learning requires us to add critical outcomes, developmental outcomes and lesson outcomes on our daily lesson planning, whereas the one provided by the department and the publishers doesn't have these.'*

Given the information above, the researchers deduce that there are serious misconceptions that exist in schools regarding the devel-

opment of the lesson. Student teachers end up failing to reconcile the three paradigms into one solid paradigm. As a result they find themselves gridlocked in the lesson plan triangle taught or given to them by their lecturers in higher education, the department of education and the publishers.

## DISCUSSION

Findings reveal that the cause of poor performance in schools by both teachers and learners is caused by the misconceptions that exist regarding what should go into a lesson plan. These misconceptions are categorized into three. The lack of uniformity in the design of a lesson plan template, teachers are immersed in a variety of paradigms for lesson planning and lack of theoretical knowledge and conceptual knowledge informing student teachers about classroom practices of lesson plan development. Findings also highlight the course of misconceptions as being caused by the number of centers of power that inform the teachers' practices.

### There is Lack of Uniformity in the Designing of Lesson Plan Templates

Findings from data collected by means of interviews confirmed that the issue of lesson planning was "an affair" in schools in a region. The lack of accountability on the omissions and exclusion of certain aspects on the lesson plan templates was viewed in this study, as a dilemma in which student teachers are caught up. The rejection of a lesson plan template provided by the Institution of Higher Education by school managers could have implications on student teachers' confidence on their qualifications obtained from an Institution of Higher Education. The lack of uniformity in curriculum implementation was an indication that the Institution of Higher Education had its own stance regarding lesson planning and delivery of curriculum in the classroom that slightly differed to that of the department and the publishers.

### Immersion of Student Teachers in a Variety of Paradigms for Lesson Planning

Student teachers were confused as which paradigm of lesson planning to adopt for their classroom practice. This was expressed by the respondents who said, "We use the lesson tem-

plate provided by the Institution of Higher Education during lesson evaluation visits by lecturers. Heads of department and subject advisors do not approve it for our normal daily lesson planning." It became clear that some respondents preferred the lesson templates supplied by the publishers and the reason given was "It is a more user-friendly lesson plan because publishers give us exemplars to use when planning daily lessons and above that, the facilitators from publishers conduct workshops on how to use their books when teaching." The conclusion drawn from the respondents' views in this regard was that despite all the training the student teachers acquire from the Institution of Higher Education, they are not competent to design their own lesson plan templates. The dependence, which is entirely on publishers' material, was an indication of incompetence and uncertainty about an ideal paradigm for lesson planning and design lesson template

#### **Lack of Theoretical Knowledge and Conceptual Knowledge Informing Student Teachers' Classroom Practices of Lesson Plan Development**

The incompetence in lesson planning established from the findings unveiled that student teachers lacked understanding of what ought to be recorded on the lesson planning. If student teachers understood that critical outcomes and developmental outcomes are reflected in the Learning Area outcomes, they were going to omit the subheadings on their lesson plans templates. In other words, they would have not considered rewriting these cross-field outcomes on the lesson templates. The student teachers who participated in the sample were unable to explain how they formulated lesson outcomes.

The study purported to establish paradigms influencing lesson planning and designing of the lesson plan templates used by NPDE, ACE and PGCE student teachers in their schools. The findings of the study unveiled the paradigms of lesson planning that drove teacher implementation curriculum transformation in classrooms. Even though the collected data for the study focused on lesson planning, the paradigm according to John (2006) entails beliefs, philosophical underpinnings, and teaching and learning theories. In this context, this means that through the lens of lesson planning there are attributes of classroom practice that could be deduced from the findings and those were, competencies of

student teachers in planning and preparation for lessons, adequate pedagogical content knowledge and its philosophical foundations and knowledge of quality teaching for effective learning in classrooms. According to Goodson (1994) who asserted that curriculum renewal or transformation comes with its own prescriptions in terms of its intents, the *what* and the *how*. The issue of lesson planning involved concepts and contextualization of pedagogical content knowledge in the classroom practice. This means that student teachers should demonstrate competent knowledge and planning of lesson based on theories and philosophical underpinnings of outcomes-based curriculum.

This study discovered that teachers loomed in confusion regarding an ideal template for lesson planning to use when planning their lesson. This study identified three paradigms at the student teachers' disposal to choose from and they were the three centers of power. What emerged from the findings is that there are three centers of information that inform their practice. The misconceptions are caused by the centers of power that are not in agreement regarding the way lesson plans should be executed. These centers of power are, Department of Education's paradigm Higher Education Institutions and Publishers.

#### **Department of Education**

The department of education employs teachers. They have to abide by the rules and regulations given to them. Failure to do so will render them incompetent for their positions. The department is responsible for the development of teachers and the rendering of advisory services, amongst other things is teaching teachers how to develop a lesson plan. Their lesson plan bore the following subheadings, *the grade, learning context, learning outcomes and assessment standards, core knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, linking with previous knowledge and linking with next lesson, educators and learners' activities, expanded opportunities, teacher reflections, resources and assessment activities, assessment methods and teaching strategies and methods.*

#### **Higher Education Institution's Paradigm**

The duty of higher education institution is to train teachers and graduate students who are deemed to have fulfilled the requirements for a

particular qualification. Therefore students have to conform to the rules and regulations. The comparative analysis carried out for the purpose of synthesis of the findings to answer the research question averted similarities and differentiations in the manner in which the publishers, district subject advisors, and the Institution of Higher Education conceptualize and interpret lesson planning. The template identified with the Institution of Higher Education bore sub-headings that were found in the publishers and districts lesson plan templates. The variation in the district lesson plan to that of the Institution of Higher Education and publishers' is the inclusion of critical outcomes and developmental outcomes but the rest was the same. The peculiar element on the Institution of Higher Education lesson plan template was the subheading requiring *lesson outcomes*. The conception of lesson outcomes in the lesson plan template was explained in Killen (2009) to be the statement that provides a clear focus on what a teacher wants learners to learn and be able to do after the lesson. Spady 2001 cited in Killen (2009:60) argues to challenge the notion of equating lesson outcomes with lesson objectives. In his view what learners are able to demonstrate at the end of each individual lesson is not culminating a demonstration of learning but it should be considered as intermediate steps towards significant learning. Spady further alluded to the issue of lesson outcomes when contending that what the learners are able to demonstrate in the short term is considered to be significant and they should be referred to as significant learning in context or enabling outcomes.

In the context of South African curriculum, development and review of the issue of outcomes had been debated. The advocacy policy documents developed by the national department of education for cascading Outcomes-Based Education and Curriculum 2005 introduced there were two types of outcomes. These were, *Critical outcomes* or cross field outcomes which were generic, cross-curricular and cross-cultural outcomes, and the second set of outcomes generated from critical outcomes were known as *Specific outcomes* and were linked to Learning Areas respectively. This study contemplates that the notion of lesson outcomes in the Institution of Higher Education's lesson plan template implicated the interpretation of specific outcomes. This contemplation is based on the fact that before the curriculum review in 2000, the documents for curriculum implementation for teacher

training workshops referred to contextually demonstrated knowledge, skills, values as specific outcomes and these outcomes were linked to Learning Areas.

The lesson triangle that needs to be reconciled is created by three sources of power (publishers, DoE and Higher Education Institutions). It is therefore vital to have these three centers of power reconciled for the benefit of the students who end up confused and not knowing which one to follow. These three centers should sit and have discussions until a consensus is reached. With them not having a common ground, it is still going to a problem for teachers to know what is expected of them.

### **Publishers' Paradigm**

The findings indicated that there are variations in teachers' interpretation and knowledge about lesson planning. The implications of this uncertainty among student teachers about planning of lessons can be attributed to what researchers alluded to when contending that teachers are not competent to implement curriculum changes in classrooms (Jansen 1997; Jansen and Christie 1999; Chisholm 2000). The adoption of publishers' lesson plan templates could have far researching consequences for the implementation of curriculum changes in schools that could develop a tendency in teachers, of depending on publishers for every material required for teaching and learning. If this becomes a trend, publishers could hijack the process of curriculum transformation to fulfill their own convictions and thoughts about curriculum and educational goals. The following concepts were dominant in the publishers' lesson plans; *critical outcomes, developmental outcomes, skills, knowledge, and values, integration expanded opportunities, reflections and assessment standards*.

Given the information above, it is clear that student teachers fail to reconcile the three paradigms in their lesson planning. Some intervention strategies have to be made to spare teachers from the stress of having to choose which version to adopt.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has presented and discussed the findings of data collected by means of documentation analysis and interviews. Generally, it is obvious that student teachers produced

through in-service continuous professional programs require competences in designing lesson plan templates. Competence in understanding a paradigm for pedagogical content knowledge required adapting to curriculum changes and continuities in classroom as paramount importance. The study proved that there are conceptual issues of understanding requirements of lesson planning and requisites applied competences to develop or create lesson plan templates, following the guidelines of the Department of Education. This is where further research on curriculum adaptation requires to be focused on. It cannot be denied that students are gridlocked between these three centers of power not knowing which one to follow to the latter. There is therefore an acute need for these powers to come together and discuss what should go into a lesson plan so as to avoid a situation wherein student teachers are over-stretched and not know which power to abide by.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended the following as a springboard for the implementation of curriculum change and teacher development in the regions of South Africa,

- ♦ The study proposed a synergy between the department of education officials and lecturers in the Institutions of Higher Education on issues pertaining to curriculum design and development in schools. The Curriculum Unit in the provincial Department of Education can involve academics, teacher educators and other stakeholders such as publishers and teacher organization in symposiums and colloquiums to discuss and deliberate on issues of lesson planning. Lesson planning is a crucial level of curriculum adaptation and if teachers lack competent skills and knowledge in designing lesson plans the curriculum transformation is under threat of doom failure.
- ♦ The study recommended the recognition of student teachers' prior knowledge. In the area of lesson planning student teachers' prior knowledge could be a springboard for the development of pedagogical content knowledge, which is congruent with their experiences of the classroom practice to meet their needs.

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