

Reflections on the NCS to NCS (CAPS): Foundation Phase teachers' experiences

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ABSTRACT

*The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is a modification of **what** to teach (curriculum) and not **how** to teach (teaching methods) in South African schools. In July 2009, the Minister of Basic Education appointed a panel of experts (an independently constituted quality assurance body) to investigate the nature of the challenges and problems experienced in the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). During 2011 the NCS was reviewed extensively; amendments were made to the NCS, which is now referred to as the NCS (CAPS). The aim of this study was to evaluate whether or not the amended NCS (CAPS) is an improvement on the original NCS. The Reflective Model of Gibbs and the Appreciative Inquiry Theory were used as theoretical frameworks. A qualitative research approach was used and 16 Foundation Phase teachers were interviewed to determine their views on the differences between the NCS and the NCS (CAPS). The main results indicated that implementation of the amended NCS (CAPS) remains a challenge.*

Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry Theory, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement, Foundation Phase teachers, Qualitative research, Reflective Model

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide governments are confronted by the challenges of curriculum change to meet regional, national and global needs (Pienaar & Raymond, 2013). The question may be asked, why another change is needed to the NCS in the form of a Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement NCS (CAPS) (further referred to only as CAPS)? Is it because of a recent report published by the World Economic Forum (WEF) which has ranked the quality of South Africa's mathematics and science education last out of 148 countries (Wilkenson, 2014)? Poor results were also highlighted by Lekota (2014) when he described the quality of South African school education as mediocre. This statement was made after the announcement of the poor 2013 matric pass rate by Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga. According to the Department of Basic Education (DBE), CAPS is not a new curriculum, but an amendment to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). It, therefore, still follows the requirements of the same process and procedure as the NCS

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Grades R – 12 (2002) (Pinnock, 2011). The amendments were made to address four main concerns with regard to the NCS, as identified by the task team and reported in October 2009 to the Minister of Basic Education (Department of Basic Education, 2009). These four concerns were:

1. complaints about the implementation of the NCS
2. teachers who were overburdened with administration
3. different interpretations of the curriculum requirements
4. underperformance of learners.

The debate about CAPS is whether this is a curriculum amendment, repackaging or re-curriculation. If accepted that the NCS is being repackaged, it must be in a manner more accessible to teachers and for every subject in each grade. It is important to have a single, comprehensive and concise CAPS that will provide details on what content teachers ought to teach and assess founded on a grade-by-grade and subject-by-subject basis. These will include clearly delineated topics for each subject as well as recommended number and type of assessments per term. This means then that CAPS is an adjustment to what to teach (curriculum) and not how to teach (teaching methods). These adjustments will be evaluated in this research.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The researchers visited student teachers who were adhering to work-integrated learning, also known as teaching practice sessions at schools. The researchers learned from the mentor teachers as well as the student teachers that they experienced the implementation of CAPS as negative. Although many teachers received training with regard to the implementation of CAPS, they still struggle to appreciate the value thereof and some of them preferred the previous NCS. It was this concern that motivated the researchers to ask the following question: What are Foundation Phase teachers' perceptions and experiences of the amended NCS (CAPS)?

BACKGROUND TO THIS INVESTIGATION

There are different ways in which governments control curriculum decision making. Many countries have a highly centralised education system (Kuiper, Van den Akker, Letschert & Hooghoff, 2009). At government level a defined curriculum contains detailed regulations for objectives and learning content, school time, selection of educational materials, teaching standards and assessment. Currently there is little room for curricular input by schools and teachers. There have however, been periodic shifts and movements in curriculum policy towards either a more or less central or decentralised control in most countries (Kuiper et al., 2009).

Both forms of curriculum policy have strengths as well as weaknesses (Fullan, 2008; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). A centralised, detailed, prescriptive curriculum presents a clear view of the desired results and there is a perception that in practice it offers better learning results than a decentralised model does. However, the sustainability of achieving these improved learning results is a very complex matter.

In South Africa there is a centralised curriculum decision body. Without going into depth about educational and curriculum changes since 1994, we want to focus on teachers' perceptions and experiences whether CAPS (the amended National Curriculum), is an improvement on the original NCS or not.

In July 2009, the then Minister of Basic Education, appointed a panel of experts to investigate the challenges and problems experienced in the implementation of the NCS. Their task included compiling recommendations designed to improve the implementation of the NCS. The Minister's brief was in

response to written and verbal comments from a range of stakeholders such as teachers, parents, teacher unions, school management and academics, on the implementation of the NCS. There has been positive support for the implementation of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) or the NCS, but there has also been considerable criticism of various aspects of its implementation, e.g. manifesting in teacher overload, confusion, stress and widespread learner underperformance in international and local assessments. 'While several minor interventions have been made over time to address some of the challenges of implementing the curriculum, these changes did not have the desired effect' (UMALUSI, 2014: 11).

The report of the panel presented an understanding of the context, nature and causes of these pressure points. The Minister and the Department of Education (DoE) (now DBE) was presented with a five-year plan to improve teaching and learning via a set of short-term interventions aimed at providing immediate relief and new focus points for teachers. It also included medium and longer-term recommendations to achieve real improvement in learners' education within a five-year period.

Furthermore, the panel worked closely with the Deputy Directors General for the General Education and Training (GET) and Further Education and Training (FET) branches from the then DoE to identify key areas for the investigation. The panel based their identification of problem areas on the major complaints and challenges encountered since 2002, when the NCS was introduced for the first time. The key problem areas were identified as:

- a. curriculum policy and guideline documents
- b. transition between grades and phases
- c. assessment (particularly continuous assessment)
- d. Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) (particularly textbooks)
- e. teacher support and training (for curriculum implementation).

CURRICULUM POLICY AND GUIDELINES IN SOUTH AFRICA

The panel focused specifically on the development and purpose, dissemination and support, use and availability, adequacy, clarity, accessibility and workload with regard to policy and guideline documents for the NCS. Part of this research was a comparative study done by the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training (UMALUSI). The word 'Umalusi' means 'shepherd' in Nguni culture, the 'shepherd' who is the guardian of the family's wealth. The responsibilities of UMALUSI are to conduct research to ensure educational quality, as well as to develop and evaluate qualifications and curricula according to the expected standard, moderate assessment to ensure that it is fair, valid and reliable, accredit providers of education and training, and verify the authenticity of certificates (UMALUSI, 2007). To improve South African curriculum development processes UMALUSI compared the South African Foundation Phase curriculum with international curricula in countries with education systems that appeared to be working well, namely Canada, Singapore and Kenya, to improve South African curriculum development processes. Dimensions of each curriculum considered included: the aims, the organising principles, the content and skills coverage and depth, the time allocation, sequencing, pacing, progression, teaching approach, assessment integration, and ease of use of the curriculum documents. The main findings were that the design of the curricula of the three countries and South Africa was very different. Kenya and Singapore represented more traditional, subject-based curricula, with no integrations. The Kenyan curriculum provided the least specification and guidance, although the focus on content made knowledge specification more detailed than that of South Africa (UMALUSI, 2011). Both Canada and South Africa stressed integration and employed an outcomes-based framework, but in different ways. The South African curriculum emphasised skills and generic learning skills, while the Canadian curriculum

specified skills but provided detailed content specifications through concept overview maps, assessment indicators and performance standards. In short, the South African curriculum lacked a sufficient coherent and systematic theory of curriculum design related to a suggested pedagogical approach or set of pedagogical principles likely to be recognised and understood by teachers within their particular social and historical content. 'The NCS did not represent a curriculum that the average South African teacher would be able to use easily' (UMALUSI, 2011: 46).

Transition between grades and phases

Regarding transition between grades and phases, questions were posed to establish whether teachers and stakeholders thought there were problems. By identifying the problem areas, the panel could determine what the nature of the problems was; and what stakeholders thought should be done about them. Particular attention was given to the transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4 and from Grade 9 to Grade 10.

Assessment

The assessment aspect of the national curriculum received the most criticism. The panel questioned what the problems were with the assessment policies; whether there was sufficient clarity and appropriate use of assessment policies and guidelines. They tried to determine what stakeholders, particularly teachers; thought should be done to address these problems.

Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM) and teacher support

LTSM and teacher support were two critical areas that were brought into the panel's deliberations. These two areas were the most problematic and are also critical to successful curriculum implementation.

Challenges identified, suggested solutions and recommendations

An important finding of the panel review was that there is no clear, widely communicated plan for the implementation and support of the NCS. Many teachers and parents complained that they had no vision of the 'bigger picture' in terms of what education and the curriculum set out to do and achieve, specifically with regard to the learners of South Africa. Coupled with poor learner performance in local and international tests, this has led to pockets of distrust in the education system.

Recommendation: A clear, coherent, easily understood five-year plan to improve teaching and learning across the schooling system needs to be developed and adhered to; it must also be widely communicated to the nation. Offering support to teachers and the improvement of learner performance must be its central themes. Mechanisms to monitor implementation of the plan, through regular external monitoring to assess whether it has the desired effect on learner and teacher performance, need to be built into the plan (DBE, 2009).

Implementation dates of CAPS

The following implementation dates were proposed by the DBE for the different phases:

- The Foundation Phase (Grades R–3) and Grade 10 (FET) were implemented in January 2012.
- The Intermediate Phase (Grades 4–6) and Grade 11 (FET) were implemented in January 2013.
- The Senior Phase (Grades 7–9) and Grade 12 (FET) were implemented in January 2014.

Although CAPS only amended the original NCS, there have been some major changes that should be noted. This research will address some issues related to these major changes in the Foundation Phase.

NCS to NCS (CAPS): main changes

- CAPS Foundation Phase: instructional time will increase

- Numeracy will now be called Mathematics, and Literacy will be called Language
- First Additional Language will be added to the Foundation Phase (one language must be the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT))
- All grades will use a 7-point scale
- Learning outcomes and assessment standards have been removed (general aims) and are now called *topics* (content/themes) and *skills*
- Learning areas and learning programmes are now called *subjects*
- CAPS gives a week-by-week teaching plan
- Curriculum statements and learning programme guidelines are set out in one amended document called CAPS (DBE, 2011).

Against this background two theoretical frameworks are especially significant and important for the interpretation of the findings of this research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Two theoretical frameworks were used as a sounding board for data analysis of this research project. The researchers used these two theories to analyse and interpret data by focusing on both the positive and negative aspects and to use both aspects to make recommendations at the end. The first theoretical framework used as an epistemological guide to account for the knowledge that is produced in this study is the Gibbs Reflective Model (Gibbs, 1988). Reflectivity, according to Gibbs, is applicable understanding and thinking about a phenomenon. The Reflective Theory focuses on constantly gathering evidence about how effective or worthwhile actions are analysed, in order to learn from the experience. Thus, by reflecting on NCS and CAPS, evidence on the effectiveness of both curriculum models may be provided. Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle encourages a clear description of the situation, analysis of feelings and evaluation of the experience, to make sense of the experience and conclusion where other options are considered. Two of the principles of Gibbs' Reflective model focus on description and evaluation – principles that tries to understand what is happening at the moment and what was good and what was bad about the experiences. Questions like: 'How well did things go?' and 'Were things satisfactorily resolved?' may be asked. These principles were applied to the participants' positive and negative experiences regarding the amendment of NCS to CAPS.

The second theoretical framework, Appreciative Inquiry Theory, is particularly suitable within the area of education. Appreciative Inquiry practitioners based their methods on the initial set of four principles (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) which stated that inquiry into the social potential of a social system should begin with appreciation, should be collaborative, should be provocative, and should be applicable. The original method called for a collective discovery process using 1) grounded observation to identify the best of what is, 2) vision and logic to identify ideals of what might be, 3) collaborative dialogue and choice to achieve consent about what should be, and 4) collective experimentation to discover what can be. This theory is thus based on the postmodern constructionist theory namely that reality (curriculum change in this instance) is socially constructed. Appreciative Inquiry is a shift from looking at problems and shortages, by focusing on strengths and successes. It is a positive approach to organisational change. It is the cooperative search for the best in organisations, and involves the art and practice of asking questions to heighten positive potential. White (1996) says appreciative inquiry focuses on the positive aspects of a phenomenon in order to try to correct the negative. Appreciative Inquiry, which is a set of principles and beliefs about how organisations and systems function, attempts to support organisations to focus on their values, visions, achievements and best practices.

Hammond (2002: 23) identifies *inter alia* two basic assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry. The first assumption can be summarised as follows: societies, organisations and groups (the school) believe that what we focus on becomes our reality. This reality (curriculum change) is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities. Another assumption is that people have more confidence and comfort in their journey to the future when they carry forward positive parts of the past. Both positive and negative teaching experiences in the past are likely to be carried into the future. Appreciative Inquiry, according to Cooperrider, Whitney and Stravros (2003: 29), is a collaborative effort to explore 'positive and negative aspects of reality' (curriculum change) by encouraging and supporting their positive experiences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An exploratory research design was used. Two main characteristics of exploratory research are that it has a basic research goal and researchers frequently use qualitative data (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2011). These two characteristics are applicable to this research. The researchers wanted to gain insight into a specific situation namely, the perceptions of teachers regarding the curriculum change from NCS to CAPS, and therefore they viewed an exploratory research design useful (De Vos et al., 2011).

A qualitative approach was used. Individual interviews were conducted with 16 teachers teaching in the Foundation Phase, as CAPS was implemented in the Foundation Phase in 2012. The sample of the 16 participants was taken from two rural and two urban primary schools in Gauteng; two rural primary schools in Mpumalanga; two urban primary schools in North West and two urban primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal. Two teachers from each of the above mentioned schools were interviewed. These provinces are all in South Africa and were targeted for the research as the researchers had to visit student teachers doing their teaching practice in these schools. Therefore, the areas were determined by the student teachers' placement arrangements. The participants are all mentor teachers for the student teachers. A prerequisite for the participants was that they had to be teaching for five or more years. The reason for this was that the researchers needed the views of participants who have teaching experiences with regard to NCS as well as CAPS. The following research questions for the comparative analysis of NCS and CAPS were asked:

1. What were your positive perceptions and experiences of NCS? Motivate
2. What were your negative perceptions and experiences of NCS? Motivate
3. What would you consider valuable about CAPS? Motivate
4. What are your concerns about CAPS? Motivate
5. Do you think the repackaging of NCS to CAPS had more advantages than disadvantages with regard to content, assessment and skills which learners are expected to acquire and teachers to teach? Motivate
6. Do you think CAPS provides efficient guidance to teachers?
7. What suggestions do you have that can promote teaching and learning with CAPS?

Data collection was done by means of individual interviews, making use of semi-structured and open-ended questions. Coding was done as part of content analysis in three phases according to the questions set in the interview schedule. In the first phase keywords in the data received for each question were identified in order to organise the data. In the second phase the keywords in the data of every question were clustered into categories and in the third phase categories were consolidated into themes for every question in the interview schedule. The researchers did their best to evade bias by using different tactics, such as a maximum variety of participants, using multiple researchers and returning to interviewees when there was a lack of clarity about meanings. The researchers also resorted to continuous self-monitoring. Analysis of the data led to the findings presented below. The researchers aimed at reporting the participants' viewpoints, thoughts, intentions and experiences accurately by making use of direct quotations in the findings.

Ethical measures were respected. The researchers knew that they had to be competent, honest and adequately skilled to undertake the research. The research was conducted in an ethically truthful manner as the researchers were constantly aware of their ethical responsibilities. The self-presentation of the researchers in the initial contact and interviewing was essential to gain cooperation from the participants. The latter were informed beforehand about each individual researcher and the detailed reasons for the investigation. Furthermore, participant anonymity, as well as confidentiality, was maintained at all times. Participation was not compulsory and the participants could withdraw at any time without penalty. They were invited to review the findings. They all gave their consent to participate in the interviews.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings were consolidated into the following five themes identified from the participants' perspectives, judgements, and experiences, namely (1) content, (2) assessment, (3) workload, (4) training of CAPS and (5) the implementation of CAPS. Although the findings are limited to the South African situation, other countries involved in curriculum change may also find these findings valuable.

Analysis of the data by determining the positive and negative aspects of each theme as experienced by the participants led to the following findings. The researchers aimed at reporting the participants' viewpoints, thoughts, intentions and experiences accurately, by making use of direct quotations in the findings.

Content

Positive experiences of the NCS

The positive experiences regarding NCS content as perceived by the participants were that the teachers had the advantage of planning their work and taking their time to teach a theme until they were satisfied that the learners had mastered the content. All 16 participants indicated that the NCS gave clear specifications on what had to be taught and learned on a term-by-term basis. According to the participants they had more time to work through the syllabus and had more time to accommodate individual learners. They had the freedom to teach according to the learners' needs and select themes in collaboration with the learners' interest. According to the Inquiry Theory (Gibbs, 1988) they appreciated this freedom. Furthermore, on reflection of their teaching the participants felt that these aspects contributed towards job satisfaction.

Negative experiences of the previous NCS

Certain negative perceptions regarding NCS content were conveyed by the 16 participants. They commented that the NCS was too broad and therefore not specific to what teachers had to teach as there was 'no clear structure of the curriculum'. They also experienced overlapping and repetition of content from term to term and from one grade to another. Another participant mentioned that the many learning areas were confusing. The participants agreed that a gap existed between Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. Content also differed between schools and between provinces for the same grade. This had negative implications for learners moving from school to school in adapting or catching up with the new work since every region and school had their own interpretation of the curriculum – especially theme-based work. Furthermore, the NCS demanded a lot of learning material to be provided for school projects and class work as there 'were too many subjects' (learning areas). In schools with poor resources the teachers struggled to teach. A general feeling among the participants was that no prescribed books also meant there was no clear indication of learning materials.

Although we looked at these negative perceptions of the NCS, the Appreciative Inquiry recommends that we take note thereof. By gathering this evidence we are able to avoid mistakes from the past and rather convert the successes of the NCS to curriculum changes in CAPS (Gibbs, 1988).

Positive experiences of CAPS

According to 10 of the participants, CAPS attempted to address some of these negative aspects of the NCS. For example, one of the participants believed that CAPS concentrated on the formal planning and preparation of the curriculum by providing structured lesson plans. This guided teachers in their teaching activities rather than leaving the teachers on their own regarding content as was the case with NCS. Time was wasted when teachers had to determine what and how to teach. With CAPS lesson plans were available for teachers and textbooks and worksheets were given to learners. One participant felt that the 'use of textbooks gives some structure' and another participant confirmed that 'many resources are available; it makes preparation and assessment easier'. By reflecting on the teachers' negative experiences, it would help them to understand these experiences better and leave them with other options to consider (Gibbs, 1988) and what can be done.

CAPS promoted same content for learners, nationally and this content could at the same time '*be contextualised according to availability or non-availability of particular resources*', allowing teachers to personalise their own teaching. All 16 participants approved of the fact that CAPS gave content clarification by providing specific aims, skills and content areas, as well as recommended resources for lessons per grade. A participant said CAPS paid attention to the content and how the teachers plan, assess and teach during the time allocated for each subject. This is done by providing clear guidelines on pacing, sequencing and curriculum coverage. Hereby CAPS amended the NCS by considering other options and avoiding repetition of content in different grades and the over-emphasis of content in a grade (Gibbs, 1988). Furthermore, with CAPS implementation of the content was easier and CAPS provided more uniformity across the provinces, districts and schools. The participants applauded the fact that CAPS, by employing the Reflective Theory emphasised teaching and assessing the same content at the same time to a particular grade, unlike the NCS where everything was left to the discretion of the teacher. CAPS had the advantage of enabling all learners in the country to be taught and assessed on the same content as teachers are bound to teach what is specified per subject per term. Learners moving from a school or province can carry on from where they left off. 'This helps the learners as well as the teachers because less time is spent on catch up and more ... on the child's (learner's) needs to ... cope with change.' One of the participants also felt that CAPS addressed the issue of the learners' right to learn in their mother tongue. According to this participant 'there seems to be more emphasis on reading in Language for Foundation Phase, therefore it aims to improve the nation's literacy levels'.

Negative experiences of CAPS

The negative perception of CAPS among the participants was that it posed a challenge to the workload of learners in the Foundation Phase. A participant stated that it is 'a bit ambitious in terms of the amount of content that has to be covered each term'. This is due to the fact that each day has its own specific work. The participant is convinced that CAPS encouraged teachers to teach fast learners, leaving those who are slower to cope on their own. According to this participant this has practical implications when learners should be operating at the same level, with the same content at the same time. There is no time to cover skipped topics and, as a result, uncontrolled circumstances, like teachers' and learners' absenteeism, led to gaps and some content not being mastered. Another participant pointed out 'that there is more reliance on content rather than skills and thinking'. That basic requirements for resources were not always given or listed in all subjects, was pointed out as a shortcoming by one participant.

From these curriculum and transition changes, it is clear that according to the Appreciative Inquiry Theory, CAPS has been formulated to address the shortcomings experienced with the NCS. The NCS's shortcomings of allowing the teacher too much leeway and freedom in deciding what content to teach and when to teach it, was addressed by very specific instructions and guidelines prescribed by CAPS. At the same time the positive curriculum and transition aspects of the NCS has been further enhanced by CAPS.

Assessment

Positive experiences of the NCS

The second theme identified from the data was the question of how to assess the learners. All the participants agreed the NCS had positive aspects regarding assessment (in line with Appreciative Inquiry Theory). One participant testified that with NCS learners had the opportunity with each assessment moment to focus on exactly what was required of them and they could 'look back afterwards and establish where they had not met criteria'. Another participant stated that assessment methods were 'broad in focus' and teachers had the freedom to choose certain assessment standards and learning outcomes themselves. Four of the participants agreed that learners could help one another during group work, while project research tasks further enabled learners to learn from one another. This led to more continuous assessment, independent from test and examinations assessments. Regarding this issue, one participant remarked that a mark scaling (on a scale from 1 to 4) was user friendly and easy to use.

Negative experiences of the NCS

At the same time all the participants felt a negative aspect was that the NCS did not provide enough guidelines in the classroom for teachers on how to improve teaching, learning and assessment activities. As one participant said 'there was no clarity on passing or failing the learner'. Assessment tools were very general and there were too many assessment tasks, memoranda, recording sheets, and so forth. There were also too many outcomes to use as references, which had to be written out. This meant, according to the participant, 'too much administration with all the LOs (Learning Outcomes) and ASs (Assessment Standards) you need to know and achieve'. It was often difficult to find the right LO or AS for a particular activity. The participants experienced that the NCS lowered standards as even slow learners could progress to the new level. Generally there was 'too much emphasis on assessment, leaving insufficient time for actual teaching'. According to the Reflective Theory (Gibbs, 1988), making use of evaluation, these negative assessment experiences were addressed in the amended CAPS.

Positive experiences of CAPS

The participants' positive perception of CAPS was that it was comprehensive and very assessment-oriented. 'I think it is a good thing that formal and informal assessments, projects and investigations and assignments are planned and spread out throughout the year to continuously identify, gather and interpret the performance of the learners', as one participant summed it up. The annual teaching plan guided what teachers will teach and assess and what learners will learn. Even if it 'extends teachers and learners, it is quite specific or contracted', according to one participant. It provided better guidance to teachers, as well as assessment forms to guide the assessment process. It also guided teachers on the number of tasks for formal assessment. The available support did 'make assessment easier' for teachers and learners alike, according to one participant. By focusing on the strength of these assessment criteria, it is a positive approach to change according to the Appreciative Inquiry Theory.

Negative experiences of CAPS

Certain concerns were raised by two of the participants regarding assessment in CAPS, as they experienced a higher failure rate among the learners because of the system. One participant states 'the period is too short for the pace of the pupils' and another participant felt 'the level of the content is too high for learners'. Certain restrictions and limitations were noted by the other participant, for example the assessment was too structured and there was no leeway for the individual learning styles of the learners; assessment was also less frequent and more based on tests. The latter participant mentioned that 'in some learning areas only two assessments are needed – I feel that learners need more opportunities to get a well-deserved mark'. But mostly, by applying a positive approach, these assessment adjustments from the NCS to CAPS heightened the positive potential of these specific changes. This is supported by both the Reflective and Appreciative Inquiry theories on how organisations (schools) achieve best practices.

Workload

Positive experiences of the NCS

Nothing was mentioned by the participants.

Negative experiences of the NCS

The third theme that arose from the data was the workload involved. Six of the participants' views on the negative aspects of the NCS were clearly stated. One of the participants said that teachers had to develop work schedules and learning programmes which was a lot of work. Another participant viewed preparing lessons and involvement in other administrative responsibilities instead of teaching as 'time-consuming activities'. A third participant complained as follows: 'The paperwork for the daily planning was immense. It was cumbersome to use'. Three other participants indicated that 'keeping of portfolio files for learners' was time-consuming.

Positive experiences of CAPS

There was only one positive remark regarding the workload of CAPS. According to this participant, the Learning Standards and Assessment Standards have been regrouped, which has reduced the workload on the teacher's side. It has the aim of lessening the administrative responsibilities of teachers and ensuring that there is clear guidance and consistency for teachers when teaching.

Negative experiences of CAPS

Negative aspects regarding the workload of CAPS revolve around aspects such as more paperwork in CAPS than in NCS. More written work is needed to be done by teachers and more teaching aids are required, according to one of the participants. Another participant revealed that teachers with poor artistic skills struggled to make teaching aids. Moreover, another participant added that 'the number of topics to be completed for CAPS makes it difficult to successfully develop maths concepts and skills'.

The above-mentioned remarks of the participants prove that they agree on the heavy workload regarding both the NCS and CAPS, except for one participant who differed from the others on the workload for CAPS.

Training of CAPS

Five of the participants underlined definite positive aspects regarding CAPS training. According to them, 'teachers are well trained to implement their knowledge when teaching'. These participants were adamant that the training they received resulted in 'clearly understanding learning programmes and working schedules that guide teachers on what to teach and how to teach it'.

Regarding the negative reflections of the participants with reference to CAPS training, eleven of the participants testified that training was poor, and they were convinced that the 'lack of continuous training for teachers through workshops hinders the success of CAPS'.

The research findings provide valuable information concerning CAPS training. It is clear from the findings that a need for more training and guidance regarding implementation of CAPS was pointed out by other participants. More on-going, hands-on training is needed by teachers in order to address the dangerous gaps that still exist.

Implementation of CAPS

The fifth theme gleaned from the data deals with the participants' negative and positive experience regarding the implementation of CAPS.

Seven participants shared their positive experiences of the implementation of CAPS. They agreed that the guidelines were clear and useful and that the amended version of CAPS provided better guidance to teachers. Furthermore, the teachers were well supported by curriculum implementers. One of the participants acknowledged that 'workbooks will be provided for all learners from Grade 1 to 6. This will provide resource support for teachers'. Another participant pointed out that 'the annual teaching plan guides what teachers will teach'.

Contrary to the positive aspects, nine participants remarked negatively on the implementation of CAPS especially due to lack of training. They agreed that it was not easy to teach CAPS and therefore it is difficult to implement it. They are convinced that for CAPS to be successful it needed more thoughtful implementation. Possible additions or deletions, regarding aspects such as assessment and learning content to be mastered in one year, needed to be considered. One of the participants suggested that more school visits from curriculum implementers should be a priority to help and guide teachers to implement CAPS. According to another participant, facilitators lacked knowledge about CAPS and they imparted wrong knowledge and information to the educators. According to this participant 'you go to a workshop, you come out, still not understanding what was it about, simply because facilitators failed to deliver. Ask them questions about CAPS – they can't answer you'. Another participant added that CAPS was a 'top down implementation'. This is also alluded to by Ngubane (2014) where he stated that the DBE is tasked with leadership, policy-making and the monitoring responsibility of improving the quality of learning and ensuring quality sustained education, but fails to do it properly.

The positive and negative aspects identified in the themes that arose from the data regarding NCS and CAPS link with one of Gibbs' principles of reflective theory, namely, evaluation. This was done by making a judgement or evaluating what was good and what was bad about the experiences regarding NCS and CAPS and discussing them. Using Gibbs' principle of evaluation, this research project was able to consider what went well and what not so well. The purpose of Gibbs' principle of evaluation is therefore to make sense of, and to work on, the negative experiences. This attitude can be very valuable to address the challenges related to CAPS.

The findings are also in line with Appreciative Inquiry. Organisations and systems like the South African education system and its curriculum challenges demonstrate that what we focus on becomes our reality. This phenomenon (curriculum change) has multiple realities. The different themes that arose from the data, namely, positive and negative reflections on content, assessment workload, training support and implementation with regard to NCS and CAPS, underline the existence of multiple realities – each with positive and negative aspects.

Another assumption of Appreciative Inquiry is people's perception that they have more self-confidence when they carry forward positive and negative aspects from the past. Both positive and negative teaching experiences in the past are likely to be carried into the future. Appreciative Inquiry, according to Cooperrider et al. (2003: 3), is a joint effort to explore positive and negative aspects of reality (curriculum change) by encouraging and supporting positive experiences. It helps to discover what gives 'life' to a system (CAPS) when it is effective and functional.

Participants, suggestions to promote teaching and learning of CAPS

Six of the participants came up with the following suggestions. The training of teachers should be done on a continual basis, to assist those teachers who are not coping. The school visits by curriculum implementers should be done more regularly, to help and guide teachers on the implementation of CAPS. Schools should be provided with materials for making teaching aids. CAPS needed thoughtful implementation and possible additions or deletions – pitfalls were already pointed out in the latest UMALUSI report (UMALUSI,

2013: 1-5). The DBE should encourage independent thinking and get creative teachers to assist with training and implementation. Facilitators must be knowledgeable about the new curriculum.

CONCLUSION

To a great extent, CAPS guides what must be planned and taught against what must be assessed. It is well structured; it covers study areas, topics and sub-topics, examples, plans, annual teaching plans, assessment activities and resources to guide teachers. This means that teachers are able to plan effectively using these guidelines. Teachers are guided to use appropriate forms of assessment. Time tabling provides clear guidelines on the number of periods to be allocated for each subject. Creative teachers might find CAPS a bit restricting, especially in more forward-thinking schools. Teachers have little say in what they teach and when. Moreover, implementation and provision of textbooks remain a challenge.

This research highlighted areas that need attention by the DBE, like the amount of work that learners and teachers have to do in the Foundation Phase, provision of resources, a higher failure rate and poor performance of learners in Languages and Mathematics. South Africa does not differ from other countries, as all over the world school systems need continuously to revise, redesign and restructure. The findings of this research can, therefore, also be of value for other emerging countries involved in curriculum change.

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